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KERIM DOĞRUEL
FADEKEMI OLAWOYE
CLARA PODLESNIGG
CONFIGURATIONS
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Sticky Films

Sticky Films

edited by Kerim Doğruel, Fadekemi Olawoye, and Clara Podlesnigg

meson press

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meson press eG, Salzstraße 1, 21335 Lüneburg, Germany
info@meson.press

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Configurations of Film: Series Foreword

Scalable across a variety of formats and standardized in view of global circulation, the moving image has always been both an image of movement and an image on the move. Over the last three decades, digital production technologies, communication networks, and distribution platforms have taken the scalability and mobility of film to a new level. Beyond the classical *dispositif* of the cinema, new forms and knowledges of cinema and film have emerged, challenging the established approaches to the study of film. The conceptual framework of index, *dispositif*, and canon, which defined cinema as photochemical image technology with a privileged bond to reality, a site of public projection, and a set of works from auteurs from specific national origins, can no longer account for the current multitude of moving images and the trajectories of their global movements. The term "post-cinema condition," which was first proposed by film theorists more than a decade ago to describe the new cultural and technological order of moving images, retained an almost melancholic attachment to that which the cinema no longer was. Moving beyond such attachments, the concept of "configurations of film" aims to account for moving images in terms of their operations, forms and formats, locations and infrastructures, expanding the field of cinematic knowledges beyond the arts and the aesthetic, while retaining a focus on film as privileged site for the production of cultural meaning, for social action, and for political conflict.

The series "Configurations of Film" presents pointed interventions in this field of debate by emerging and established international scholars associated with the DFG-funded Graduate Research Training Program (Graduiertenkolleg) "Konfigurationen des Films" at Goethe University Frankfurt. The contributions to the series aim to explore and expand our understanding of configurations of film in both a contemporary and historical perspective, combining film and media theory with media history to address key problems in the development of new analytical frameworks for the moving image on the move.

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This book has been a collaborative project from its very beginnings and would not exist without our many sticky companions along the way. What began as the task of organizing a “final conference” gradually transformed—first into a Call for Papers, then into a conference and exhibition, and finally into this edited collection. Each stage left its residue on the next—a trail of stickiness that hopefully moves along in each readers’ hands.

The conference and exhibition Sticky Films. Conceptual and Material Explorations took place in Frankfurt am Main from 1-3 June, 2023. We warmly thank our organizing team: Sema Çakmak and Laura Teixeira for their tireless efforts and dedication to thinking through sticky matters with us, as well as Fenja Holz, Ronja Koch, Verena Mund, and Laura Woods—whose care and attention made the event possible. A special thanks to Tsvetelina Topalova for her support in preparing the exhibition and for keeping the Drosera binata well hydrated. Our gratitude also extends to the entire second cohort of Configurations of Film, who played an integral role in shaping the event and contributing to its special atmosphere.

We are deeply grateful to the generosity of the collections at Goethe University, who not only responded to our call but allowed us to work closely with their objects and supported the authors in preparing the “object interludes” featured in this volume. Our sincere thanks to Judith Blume for co-organizing the exhibition while simultaneously working on the Picturing History Atlas, and to the many collection specialists whose archives are represented with an object in this book: Georg Zizka and Susanne Pietsch of the Wissenschaftsgarten, Felix Giesa of the Comics Archive, Bettina Schulte Strathaus of the 16mm Film Archive, and to the Moulages-Collection of the Department of Dermatology. Thanks to Sebastian Burger for supporting the exhibition.

12 Our sincere thanks go to the two anonymous reviewers, whose generous feedback and provocative questions helped sharpen the theoretical stakes of this collection. We are equally grateful to Vinzenz Hediger for acting as intermediary throughout this process. Special thanks are due to Rebecca Albertelli for her guidance in getting this book project off the ground and for sharing her expertise as an editor of the previous cohort's conference publication with us.

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Sticky Films: Introduction

Kerim Doğruel, Fadekemi Olawoye, Clara Podlesnigg

Paste! Paste! Paste!
With a camel's hair brush and a broken cup,
He gathers the scatter'd paragraphs up,
And sticks them on in haste
John Brown, Song of the Editor (1845)

Editing—whether of text, film, or bodies of knowledge—is a sticky act. It requires both fragmentation and reconstruction. Editors work with pre-existing materials, cutting and joining, removing imperfections, and shaping meaning through assembly. The labor of editing is often invisible in the final product, yet it leaves behind traces—cuts, seams, and residual marks that speak to the hands that have shaped the work. Just as a book is not merely a collection of scattered paragraphs hastily pasted together, a film is not simply a series of images spliced into sequence. In fact, both demand a tactile engagement with materiality, an attunement to texture and friction—and an awareness of stickiness.

On the cover of this book, in a pile of loosely assembled photographs that portray different sticky materials, hiding behind a pink sticky note is a film splicer—also called a film joiner (fig. 1). This tool has two main functions: removing damaged segments of a film strip and rejoining sections with the help of sticky tape. The name film splicer hints at its destructive quality, while the name film joiner frames this tool's creative quality. Thus, the object contains both meanings and functions within itself.

The splicer's mechanics are grounded in the haptics of manual labor: its handles invite touch, its metal pins that align the

[Fig. 1] Film splicer/joiner at the conference (Source: 16mm Film Archive, Goethe University Collections).

perforation of the film strip guide precision, and its blades demand an exacting cut. Once opened, a film strip is placed into it, neatly held in place by small nubs that hold onto its perforated edges. A knife on the side produces a clean cut. Then, as the two severed ends of film are carefully aligned, transparent adhesive tape is drawn over them. Pulling down the lever secures the bond, while two additional blades trim away the excess tape, so

the seam doesn't fray on its edges. Yet, as our colleague Bettina Schulte Strathaus, head of the 16mm film archive at Goethe University, pointed out, this repetitive process leaves behind its own material residue—a tiny tower of discarded tape, a sticky accumulation of past edits, an archive of adhesion, excess and erasure.

Before this type of film splicer became a common tool in editing rooms, film editors cut and joined film strips by hand. In contrast to editing with a tape splicer, the surface of the film strip had to be roughened up with a knife by scraping off the emulsion layer before applying a liquid adhesive known as film cement to the exposed base. Pressing the ends of the two strips together—either manually or by using a cement splicer (also called a wet splicer)—would bond the film strips. Whereas splicing with cement is a chemical process that effectively melts the two strips together, tape splicing is a physical method that holds the strips together. The shift from film cement to adhesive tape allowed for greater flexibility: splices could be undone and reworked more easily with minimal loss of image material.[1] However, this transition also carried visible traces in the frame—adhesive tape could sometimes be noticeable within the frame, a technical characteristic that challenged the ideal of an uninterrupted, seamless cinematic illusion (Turquety 2018, 254). This desire for smoothness reflects a broader tendency in filmmaking to conceal its material process, maintaining an illusion of continuity that erases the labor of editing. However, there also exists the opposite tendency, especially in experimental practices that are disinterested in cinematic illusion. As Hans-Jörg Rheinberger explains, in experimentation the "split and the splice" are key

1 The documentary *Die kleinen Kleberinnen* (1980, Heide Breitel and Eva-Maria Hammel) portrays former "film gluers" who worked in the silent film industry. It includes a scene in which the women demonstrate the techniques of their previous profession during an afternoon coffee hour, splicing films with the use of scissors, knives, and film cement. See also Hennessy (2024, 5).

moments of assembly, where the joint remains visible, marking the linkage rather than erasing it (2023 [2021], 7). The splicer, as a tool, speaks of this material history: ubiquitous in film archives and projection booths. It quietly facilitates the work of splicing and joining while leaving behind its own residues. The film splicer/joiner featured on this book's cover is no exception. Though it lacks an inventory number in its collection, a small white sticker with the letters "T. F. M."—handwritten in black marker—anchors it within the institutional space of the Department of Theater, Film, and Media Studies, signaling its embeddedness in academic and archival histories.

The tensions between creative editing, material visibility, and ideological function are at play in the 1925 short film *Wenn die Filmkleberin gebummelt hat…*, which opens with women in lab coats manually splicing and joining strips of film together. Almost turning into a short educational film within the film, we see close-ups of the women's hands handling filmstrips, scissors, and glue according to the editing regimen at the time. While the glue is first shown in its practical function, we later see the eponymous *Filmkleberin* (a female film editor, literally "film gluer") briefly sniffing on the little bottle of glue, adding to her already visible distraction at work caused by daydreaming about a man. She then inadvertently mixes up two boxes of film material: one contains news reel clippings and the other material for a revue film titled *Blüten die im Schlamme treiben* (*Blooms Springing from the Mud*). Instead of keeping the materials separate, she assembles both into a chaotic, subversive montage. The resulting film, set to premiere at the end of her workday, not only disrupts narrative coherence but also provokes dramatic reactions from the cinema audience. They throw food at the screen and ultimately destroy it.

While the stickiness of the glue is a condition for visibility, the food sticking to the screen and tearing it apart is meant to hide the film from view. Here, stickiness is both generative and destructive—an intervention that reshapes meaning but also exposes the fragility of cinematic order. According to Mary

Hennessy the film further outlines "a feminist project of radical montage that places women editors—dawdlers included—at the heart of silent filmmaking" (2024, 22). Hennessy's reparative reading of the film helps us to understand the agency of the film gluer, yet there is more to say about stickiness and film beyond.

Two key observations about stickiness provide a generative starting point for exploring and further experimenting with sticky films. One allows us to think through questions of corporeality, contact and haptic encounters and the other focuses on media materiality. First, in relation to corporeality, stickiness is a question of how bodies and surfaces interact, how they touch and transform each other. Sara Ahmed describes stickiness as a matter of "what objects do to other objects," emphasizing that sticky things do not exist in isolation but produce "chain[s] of effects" that unfold across times and spaces (2014 [2004], 91). Stickiness, in this sense, is not merely a material property but a relational force—one that binds, clings, and transfers affect (11). Drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical reflections about slime in *Being and Nothingness* (1992 [1943]), and Elizabeth Grosz's reading of Sartre in *Volatile Bodies* (1994), Ahmed argues that the sticky signals both a point of contact and a threat to boundaries, evoking sensations that can be pleasurable or unsettling, desired or repulsive (2014 [2004], 82–87; 90–91). As such, stickiness provides a framework for understanding how bodies, media, and affects become entangled through haptic encounters, exposing the permeability of distinctions between self and other, subject and object.

Second, a focus on media materiality highlights the multiple meanings of what a film is. Film, in its most conventional sense, refers to moving images and audiovisual media. Yet its materiality extends beyond this definition (see Series Foreword). Giuliana Bruno, for instance, offers a radically materialist perspective: "A film is, above all, a material deposit. A film is what is left on the surface, and what is left over *as* surface. In this sense, film is an actual sediment. It is a residue, a remainder" (2014, 119, emphasis

in original). This understanding invites us to consider film not only as an image-bearing medium but also as a tactile and temporal accumulation—a site where physical traces, textures, and remnants shape experiences. While Bruno's perspective resonates with ours, we also see her statement as an opportunity to push further: What happens when the corporeal and material dimensions of stickiness are brought into close contact? The idea of *Sticky Films*, for us, serves as both an analytical tool and a figuration[2] (Braidotti 2011, 22), helping to navigate the interplay between sensation and substance, theory and matter.

Corporeality: Stickiness as Sensation, Affect, and Embodiment

Stickiness is a quality that is both material and affective, shaping how bodies, surfaces, and sensations interact—and how their boundaries become blurred in the process. In his 2020 book *The Viscous: Slime, Stickiness, Fondling, Mixtures*, Freddie Mason pointedly describes that touching something sticky sends one "into an indeterminate network of other sticky things—dog's noses, the walls of caves, slugs, toothpaste, sugar syrup, sweaty palms" (20). Mason explores these everyday "viscous encounters," in reference to Sartre to be "a power struggle between the for-itself and the in-itself," arguing that there are moments in which "the viscous can seem to take over" (Mason 2020, 21). Mason locates the viscous, of which stickiness is one of its many qualities, in a "liminal space between solid and liquid," where it congregates and becomes "a site of abundance" (24).

2 "A figuration is a politically informed image of thought that evokes or expresses an alternative vision of subjectivity. There is a real urgency to learn to think differently about the notion and practice of subjectivity. This entails the creation of new frameworks, images, and modes of thought, beyond the dualistic conceptual constraints and the perversely monological mental habits of phallocentric thought" (Braidotti 2011, 22).

Similar to Mason, Noam Gramlich conceptualizes stickiness as a "third figure between solidity and fluidity" (2018, 19). Their ecofeminist reading of encounters with oil—a substance that resists categorization—likewise engages with Sartre's phenomenological analysis of viscosity. Gramlich argues that stickiness disrupts dominant metaphors of fluidity in media theory (Thibault 2015), instead emphasizing "sticky relations and sticky media" (Gramlich 2018, 20). By capturing the double meaning of film as both a medium that exists within cultural industries, and as a thin viscous layer, Gramlich's work suggests that stickiness challenges the ideological assumptions of seamless media flows. Instead, it forces an awareness of friction, attachment, and resistance, provoking alternative ways of experiencing technological and aesthetic transformations.

Another ecological engagement with viscosity is Léa Perraudin's concept of the "Anthroooze"—a sticky and slimy blurring of the concept of the Anthropocene that suggests a messy and dripping entanglement between the human, worldliness, matter, nature, and culture (Perraudin 2024, 113–15). "Anthroooze" decenters the human from the Anthropocene and instead focuses on the entanglement itself. In her discussion of a mud interface, she shows how the messiness of the encounter between viscous, sticky matter and technology calls for a readjustment of binary thinking that draws boundaries between users and machines (265). Perraudin also draws from Sartre to conceptualize how a viscous, sticky, and slimy[3] substance makes the distinction between inside

3 It's important to note the different translations of Sartre's terminology. The English version of the book includes a footnote by the translator that hints at the difficulties to find a unifying translation: "French *visqueux*. This at times comes closer to the English 'sticky'~, but I have consistently used the word 'slimy' in translating because the figurative meaning of 'slimy' appears to be identical in both languages" (Sartre 1992 [1943], 604, emphasis in original). The German language version uses "das Klebrige" (Sartre 1993 [1943], 1033) instead, which is more akin to "stickiness." *Visqueux*, *slimy*, *klebrig*—if anything this shows the interconnectedness of the three concepts.

and outside collapse. Holding and being held fold back into each other, touching becomes being touched.

> The slimy becomes compressible. … [T]he softness of this substance which is squashed in my hands gives me the impression that I am perpetually destroying it. Actually we have here the image of destruction-creation. The slimy is docile. Only at the very moment when I believe that I possess it, behold by a curious reversal, *it* possesses me. (Sartre 1992 [1943], 608, emphasis in original)

The reversal Sartre describes—between holding and being held, control and loss of control—mirrors the ambivalent dynamics of stickiness we trace throughout this book: stickiness resists clean separations, blurs boundaries between subject and object, and lingers as both a material sensation and a conceptual tension. In the context of the "Anthroooze," this excess does not invite resolution but insists on the impossibility of detangling human and non-human, self and world.

The paradoxical sensations of stickiness—its simultaneous merging and resistance—also connect to affect and racialization. Amber Jamilla Musser links the concept of stickiness to Blackness, defining it as "the weightiness of being overdetermined, with ahistoricity, and with labor" (2014, 29). This "affective charge of race" (113) adheres to bodies, objects, and language, functioning as both a historical residue and a lived reality. Ahmed similarly explores "sticky words" in racist discourse, arguing that language's adhesive qualities work to bind subjects into social hierarchies (2014, 46). Musser, in analyzing a painting by Glenn Ligon, highlights how viscous, material paint gestures toward both past and future, emphasizing how stickiness operates across temporalities. Rather than being trapped in historical suffering, through the figuration of stickiness she calls for a "multiplicity of affects that extend beyond shame, guilt, and suffering into multiple modes of being" (113).

The film images in *Wenn die Filmkleberin gebummelt hat…* are sticky in this sense too, embedded in a colonial visual history: among the mismatched fragments are scenes that likely originate from travel shorts such as *Quer durch Afrika* (Kaes 2019, 208). By intercutting these ethnographic images as signs of "primitivism" with intertitles about and scenes from the contemporary politics and popular culture of Weimar Germany, the film reveals a mode of "parody" and "subversion" primarily concerned with the self rather than with whom and what is depicted (Schüttpelz 2005). Processes of racialization and depersonalization persist within the film's images as the residues of colonial pasts continue to adhere to our present.

Rebecca Schneider's work reinforces this idea, arguing that stickiness embodies a temporal entanglement—a tactile connection between history, sensation, and embodiment: "stickiness is a leaky, even fleshy descriptor suggestive of touch," and being "sticky with the past and the future is not to be autonomous, but to be engaged in a freighted, cross-temporal mobility" (2011, 36–37). This reading positions stickiness as an inherently corporeal experience, one that adheres affectively and politically.

Media Materiality: Stickiness as a Technological Concept

If corporeal stickiness highlights sensation and affect, media materiality focuses on how stickiness structures media practices, circulation, and reception. Media scholars Iris van der Tuin and Nanna Verhoeff (2022, 181) describe stickiness as a property that allows surfaces, bodies, signs, and images "to attract, associate, assemble, accumulate, and possibly absorb." They outline two dominant theoretical approaches: stickiness as "historical association" (Ahmed, Arun Saldanha, and Nancy Tuana) and as "transversal assembling" (Mieke Bal). The capacity of stickiness to bind disparate elements together connects to histories of adhesive materials—paste, glue, sticky tape—but also to the

conceptual processes of assembling, or "drawing things together" (Latour 1986). These material and conceptual dimensions intersect in media history through techniques such as collage and scrapbooking (Gruber Garvey 2013), which have digital equivalents in copy-paste practices (Parikka 2008). Stickiness therefore functions as both a physical and symbolic form of attachment, repair, and recombination.

Stickiness is also a visual and temporal feature of media reception. Mieke Bal's (2000) notion of "sticky images" describes how certain artworks demand prolonged engagement due to their excess, sheer size, lavish detail, or gravitational pull. They are impossible to experience in one look. In fact, she compares sticky images to film: "it scrolls by; like a film, it takes time. In a sense, even more time than a film would" (82). Unlike the flow of cinema, a sticky image requires viewers to "fall for its pull, take the time for it"—a durational engagement that Bal characterizes as "erotic" (83). This focus on stickiness as a mode of reception extends into digital media. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green relate the notion of "stickiness" to what they call "spreadable media." Sticky content, they explain, creates deep investment and prolonged attention, increasing its likelihood of circulation (2013, 5). Similarly, Pepita Hesselberth and Maria Poulaki track a shift from classical cinematic continuity to bit-sized media, corresponding to a transformation from "suture" to "stickiness." They argue that rather than maintaining continuity, sticky media "assure the viewer the possibility to glue (or be glued) to the screen"—a strategy driven by fear of missing out rather than narrative cohesion (2017, 7). Empirical research by Miriam Brinberg et al. (2022, 3) measures this effect, using the term "screenertia" to describe how certain content creates prolonged dwelling, implicitly critiquing the sticky screen's role in inducing inertia in people.

These sticky instances lend themselves to what Laura U. Marks has described as "haptic visuality" (2000; 2014), that is specific audiovisual properties that speak to a bodily relation with the

depicted. The way in which bodies relate to media or residual material is decidedly bodily as well. It's not simply a question of mediation, visual haptics, or embodiment, but also one of touch. Handheld or manually handled media devices touch us back. Sometimes a visual and tactile residue of this touch accumulates on remote controls, controllers, keyboards or touch screens in the form of wear, dirt or grime around the edges of the most frequently touched areas (Fisher 2004). For certain synthetic materials, the sensation and visible residue of touch is described as tacky or sticky and elicits various affective responses: from disgust to an almost fetishistic appreciation of the haptic qualities of the materials. As Tom Fisher shows, a positive affective response to clothes made from PVC lies in its properties, which are described as having a surface that acts similar to the body. PVC film acts in a way that "for some, the most enjoyable quality of plastic film when wearing it is precisely the sweaty stickiness that results from its imperviousness" (Fisher 2004, 27). Because the skin of the person wearing or handling the film is unable to breathe, it starts to sweat, resulting in a tacky and sticky sensation, as if the film material is sweating itself.

A material understanding of film also extends to the literal sticky materials that appear across film production, sometimes as an aesthetic and sometimes as a practical necessity. Kartik Nair explores the "sticky materiality of prosthetic effects" in cinema, describing how these effects create a "felt presence" and "perceptible *thereness*" (2021, 105, emphasis in original). Through their particular ways of being pasted or glued onto actors' bodies these things may become "disturbing traces of the material world of filmmaking," hinting towards what Nair calls "the sticky materiality of the thing that is cinema" (105, 128). Practical effects, costume, and makeup interact with bodies in ways that alter identity and produce sensory engagements with the sticky. Consequently, this materiality enables us to observe not only the process of our formation through repeated interactions with the objects we believe we can own but also the impact created by cinematic

doubling which unravels and disassembles this illusion. Shifting from the body as a site of stickiness, Marek Jankovic zeroes in on the often-overlooked role of adhesives on film sets, calling for a "media archaeology of gaffer tape" as a logistical tool (2021, 222).

As mentioned earlier, the shift from film cement to adhesive tape in film editing marked a fundamental change in film production practices starting in the 1960s (Turquety 2018, 253–55). This shift also impacted projection and archival work. Stickiness resulting from material deterioration poses significant challenges for archives—for example, in the case of "Sticky Shed Syndrome," where magnetic tape gradually sheds a sticky residue, slowly hiding away its content between increasingly sticky layers of material (Schüller 2014). Similarly, cellulose nitrate film stock can deteriorate under unfavorable storage conditions, making its emulsion sticky. As explained by Susan Dalton, "[t]he image then disappears entirely and the film becomes either a solid, almost glasslike mass or, sometimes, a viscous black sludge" (1991, 65). In analogue film projection, film prints are typically delivered in separate reels. To be projected using a single projector, these reels have to be physically joined before the screening and separated afterwards by the projectionist. Over time, adhesive residues from repeated splicing and projection accumulate on film prints, leaving behind a material—albeit often cryptic—trace of their projection histories. Such sticky remains can even hint at previous handling practices, revealing, for instance, whether a preceding cinema worked with care or left behind imprecise joins and residue. Moving into the new millennium and the film industry-driven shift from analogue to digital, film curator Jurij Meden notes how analogue film's association with the "sticky, sweaty, messy, awkward, difficult, potentially infectious, dangerous, and even deadly" contrasts with digital film's qualities associated with dryness, cleanliness, and a more sterile look and feel (Meden 2021,24). Experimental film in particular conveys a heightened perception of materiality, not only of the film material itself, but the everyday, which Juan A. Suárez calls "queer

materiality" (2024, 2). The creative and disruptive potential of stickiness seems to exemplify these types of queer materials, which "have acted as catalysts, conduits, or relays for sexual and corporeal dissent, prompting, inspiring, or invoking wayward bodies and behaviors" (3).

Stickiness also characterizes the material circulation of media objects. Marc Steinberg discusses the role of stickers in character franchising, particularly the case of Atomu (Astro Boy), whose recognizability across media forms was enhanced by its distribution as stickers. Stickers' "adhesiveness or *stickerability*" enabled characters like Atomu to move across surfaces, objects, and contexts with ease (Steinberg 2012, 79, emphasis in original). There's no hierarchy between the media, no history of "first" encounters, or dominance of one media format, but a type of character or brand franchising that allows for higher adaptability. Steinberg's analysis highlights how media stickiness operates not just in content engagement but in material mobility. Stickers can be put on personal belongings like backpacks, pencil cases, or playthings, but also furniture, clothing, or even on one's own hands or face. Wherever these stickers are attached, they signal a proximity between sticker and thing.

Lastly, stickiness also plays a vital role in activism. Jinsook Kim (2021) examines "sticky note activism" as a form of protest that relies on the adhesiveness of Post-It notes to attract participation and visibility. Extending Steinberg's "stickerability" (2012, 79) beyond character franchising, Kim argues that sticky note activism operates as both a physical and digital phenomenon, increasing the circulation of political messages. Similarly, "sticky activism" became a global phenomenon in 2022 when climate protesters glued themselves to streets, paintings, and TV sets, demonstrating how stickiness remains politically charged and materially consequential.

As this overview shows, stickiness is both a corporeal and a material force. It adheres to bodies, histories, and affects,

while also structuring media circulation, visual experience, and technological engagement. While the corporeal strand emphasizes touch, sensation, and political affect, the material strand reveals how stickiness organizes media formats, spectatorship, and mobility. Throughout this book, we explore how these two dimensions intertwine, allowing stickiness to emerge as a critical lens for thinking about film and media's conceptual and physical entanglements.

Structure of the Book

This book is structured around three formats: longer essays, conversations, and object interludes. The essays examine conceptual and material stickiness as part of moving image cultures, the conversations explore how stickiness as a mode of thinking informs pornography and sex work, scholarship and art criticism, and questions of archiving and curating, while the object interludes expand the scope beyond the medium of film to include wax models, plants, gaming devices, comic books, and sticker albums. The object interludes in particular stress the interdisciplinarity of this book project. In these shorter texts, aspects of sticky films become more pronounced than what the other contributions hint at. They focus on the meaning of film that is explicitly not moving images, but film as a layer, a sediment, and a coating. By incorporating these partially resisting and un-filmic objects, we engage film studies in dialogue with media studies.

The inclusion of those media objects emerged from a collaboration with Goethe University's collections, where curators and archivists contributed items to our project that spoke to, about, or through stickiness. The objects then functioned as prompts for the authors. This process highlighted interdisciplinary connections and underscored the often-invisible labor of collecting, archiving, repairing, and labeling—practices that themselves involve glueing, mending, and assembling. One such object, the before mentioned film splicer/joiner, has turned into a fitting

metaphor for this book's structure: like splicing and joining film strips to create a montage, assembling these contributions creates new connections while keeping the seams visible. The book argues that film-as-moving-image studies are entangled in a sticky history of layers, sediments, and sentiments, that bridge, blur, smudge, and mess up the edges of academic disciplines. Sticky films show that stickiness always also holds a threat and promise of collapsing the boundaries of one thing to being absorbed, morphed, fused, or melted into something else.

The contributions in this book are structured into three thematic clusters: *Feeling Sticky*, *Becoming Sticky*, and *Seeing Sticky*. *Feeling Sticky* focuses on the affects and emotions that stickiness evokes. *Becoming Sticky* examines how people, places or things are being attributed to being stickier than others. *Seeing Sticky* engages with the stickiness of diverse expressions of haptic visuality, and the ways in which stickiness is expressed in visual media.

Marie Sophie Beckmann's "Sticky Screens between Protest and Cooperation" leads us through events unfolding at screenings of underground films by US American filmmaker Richard Kern in Germany in the early 1990s. Beckmann zooms in on a particular screen at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, which student protestors threw red paint onto in protest against the "dirty" films that were about to be projected onto it. She reads this interaction between audience and screen as a form of "meaningful contact" and collaboration that disrupts the social protocols of cinematic experience yet simultaneously adds something to them by staining the screen and trashing the cinema space in acts of resistance to the screened films.

The Moulages Collection at Goethe University's Department of Dermatology contributed a wax model titled "Syphilis of the tongue (Syphilis de la langue)." In his paper "Collecting Contagion: Moral Narratives of Sex and Stickiness in Alfred Fournier's Wax Models," Silas Edwards historically situates this object and thinks about its many sticky qualities.

In “Notes on the Sticky Note: Gay Smut, Archival Desires, and Tactile Tactics,” Nils Meyn details how at a queer archive, sticky notes may do much more work than just functioning as an organizational tool to index collected items, such as VHS tapes and DVDs from personal porn collections. Sticky notes, according to them, conceal and reveal, they are part of an “archival and affective fabric.”

The Scientific Garden of Goethe University Frankfurt holds a living collection of plants used for teaching and research. A carnivorous sundew was chosen to represent the sticky in this collection. Emma Merkling explores the queer erotics of the sticky plant by looking into Charles Darwin’s attachment to, experiments with, and writings about his own precious *Drosera binata*.

The section *Feeling Sticky* closes with a conversation between film curator and programmer Fabienne Bieri and queer porn star Jamal Phoenix. Thinking about what stickiness means to them and how it comes up in pornography, their conversation revolves around “Pornography as a Sticky Film.” Rather than pinning down stickiness once and for all, Phoenix tells Bieri about his work in various porn film productions and how stickiness is not only a material quality but also linked to creating memorable images and to queerness.

Second, *Becoming Sticky* examines stickiness as a mode of (over-)determination. In these contributions, certain groups of people, places, or things appear, behave, or are attributed to being stickier than others. Stickiness becomes intertwined with ideologies of the nation-state, with processes of racialization, troubles seemingly stable concepts of the self, or becomes a form of political expression and protest.

Picturing History Atlas is a collection of collectable card and sticker albums, housed at Goethe University Frankfurt. The collection picked the *Afrika* Album by the Margarine-Union as their contribution to the book. This sticker album makes its users indulge in a neocolonial adventure journey by collecting,

trading, ordering, and glueing down images. Expanding on the implications of the album, Philipp Dominik Keidl thinks about intended and unruly practices of sticking stickers in public places, peeling them off, or overwriting them as political expression and activism.

In "Stuck on Slavica: Yugoslav Partisan Film and its Multiple Stickinesses" Olja Alvir analyzes the sticky imagery of Yugoslav Partisan film. By focusing on the female lead in the film *Slavica* (1947), she looks at the character–ground relations and what they imply about gender dynamics, national identity, and political symbolism. Through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotrope, she examines the cross-temporal and -spatial mobility of this kind of imagery.

Fenja Holz's text "Sticky Comics: Smudging the Gap" analyzes material stickiness in two comic books from the Comic Archive at Goethe University. Holz looks how the main character in *Sumpfland* (2019) by Moki melts into the surroundings of a swamp, literally blurring the lines between personhood and landscape. For *Alien* (2011), by Aisha Franz, Holz explores how touch brings about a change in body, focusing on the smears and smudges of graphite extending from the characters, to the page, to the artist's hand and back.

Julia Willms's essay on "Disgusting Films, Moral Panics: Material Explorations of Sticky Horror" hinges on how emotional and visual effects are used to create stickiness in horror films. The case study focuses on the film *Censor* (2021). The modality in which horror is connected to new technologies and how hard viewers try to recognize the difference between fiction and reality is investigated in the study.

"Sensing Stickiness" is a conversation between Amber Jamilla Musser and Kerim Doğruel, in which they talk about the sensual and affective politics of stickiness and how they are being expressed in various artworks or cultural forms. Musser's writings provide a framework for their conversation to think

about how stickiness is expressed in processes of racialization, but also how it is linked to affect, desire, or disgust.

The last section, *Seeing Sticky*, focuses on glueing, taping, cutting, pasting, splicing and mending as aspects of visual and material culture. Many of the texts center on tangible objects. This final section encapsulates a wide range of theories on stickiness together with varied conflicting temporalities. Although each contribution employs a different framework—shifting between production and distribution, the home and the archive—stickiness is considered through analyses of practices of montage and collage. Additionally, it also surfaces as both a problem and a solution within the archive.

Stickiness and film posters in Tel Aviv during the 1960s are discussed in Sigal Yona's work "A World Paper: Film Posters and the Transnational Imagination." The study concentrates on the manner in which film posters are paired together through cut-and-paste techniques.

The Astro- and TV-Lounge at Goethe University houses a collection of computer and video games, and allows the hard- and software to be used, researched, and played with. They submitted a Nintendo Gameboy Color, decorated with stickers, as their sticky object. In her paper "Doing Stickers," Alexandra Schneider takes up the device and thinks about the various uses of stickers and how these not only add visual but also tactile sensations when playing with the sticker-decorated Gameboy.

Miriam De Rosa and Andrea Mariani focus on splicing as an experimental film practice. Italian filmmaker Ubaldo Magnaghi's city symphonies function as a case study in "Creation by Destruction: Experimental Film Practices and the Art of Splicing." The text further examines how editing changes the way a film is put together and how splicing itself serves as an epistemological tool.

The function of film cans and reels, especially how they act as information carriers, is explored in Franziska Kohler's text about a "16mm metal film can." The eponymous film can is part of the 16mm film archive at Goethe University's Department of Theater, Film, and Media Studies. Kohler traces the partial, frayed and incomplete histories of the several layers of labels and stickers that have been put on the can during its life as an archival storage container.

Rodrigo Faustini's "No Ideas But in (Sticky) Things: Viscosity and Experimental Moving Images Practices" speaks on how viscosity is seen as a force that tends to be overlooked in technical mediation. The text relies on a corpus of experimental films and video works, motivated by the philosopher François Dagognet. Faustini applies Dagognet's "abjectology"—an ecological concept of stickiness—drawing out how it relates to various ideas and entities.

The book closes with a conversation between Jurij Meden and Laura Teixeira. They talk about film preservation in regard to analogue and digital formats. Beyond this, their conversation adds complexity to the ongoing discourse about the preservation of film cultures, particularly from the perspectives of film curators, which both Meden and Teixeira are, the latter also being a scholar.

Sticky Films, as a book and theoretical project initiates conversations about stickiness that will hopefully inspire further exploration and critique across various disciplines in the future.

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FEELING STICKY

UNDERGROUND FILM

PROTEST

PORNOGRAPHY

SCREEN

AUDIENCE

Sticky Screens: Between Protest and Cooperation

Marie Sophie Beckmann

Interactions between screens and audiences, including protests and scandals, have been a part of cinema since its inception. However, what does it mean for a screen to become "sticky" in its material, conceptual, and affective dimensions? This essay explores the notion of the sticky screen in historical incidents in which audiences, films, and screens come into meaningful contact, such as a screening during which student protestors threw red paint bombs at the screen in response to the "dirty" images projected onto it.

In the spring of 1991, audiences in German cultural centers, independent cinemas, and universities were confronted with a particularly polarizing strand of American underground film when Richard Kern went on tour to show his Super 8 films.

[Fig. 1] The "Invisible Cinema" tour poster, designed by Uwe Hamm-Fürhölter (Source: private archive of Johannes Schönherr).

Kern was known at the time in underground film circles and as a participant in the art, film, and music scenes of Downtown New York City, where he had lived and worked since the early 1980s. German audiences may have heard about Kern through the minor scandal that his film *Fingered* had caused at Berlin's international film festival, the *Berlinale*, in 1988. Shot on black and white Super 8 film, *Fingered* follows a phone sex worker as she and one of her clients engage in a series of erotic and often violent acts, the most harrowing of which is the rape of another woman. When the film had its last of three runs at the *Berlinale*, the festival's director interrupted the screening, admitting that, if he had seen the film in advance, he would not have allowed its presentation. The drama continued when the film subsequently screened at the Berlin off-cinema *Eiszeit*, where, one night, a group of masked persons stormed the cinema, knocked over the projector, emptied the cash box, and sprayed "Fight sexism" on the wall (Lukoschat 1988).

When Kern returned to Germany in 1991, he had a three-hour film program in store. Under the title "Invisible Cinema" (an allusion to the underground status of the films, meaning their absence from mainstream presentation and distribution contexts), he presented a selection of short films made between 1986 and 1991 (fig. 1). Often accompanied by noisy post-punk songs, these films all flirt with the proximity of sex and violence, albeit with varying degrees of graphicness. While *X IS Y* (1990) features shots of scantily dressed women handling bullets and machine guns while gazing provocatively into the camera, *Thrust In Me* (1985) stages a suicide followed by a necrophiliac sex act. Some of the films ironically address Kern's own voyeurism, such as *The Evil Cameraman* (1990). In this short, Kern plays the titular cameraman who attempts to manipulate his female subjects into submitting to his visions by undressing their bodies and tying them in bondage straps, only to be met with defiant resistance.

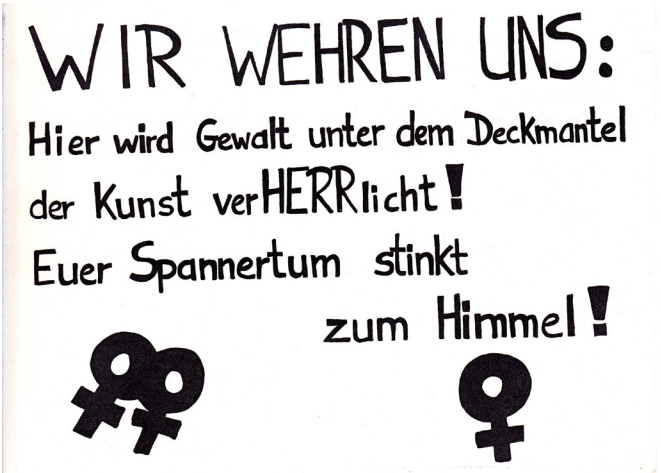
The poster for the film tour carried a quote from Kern: "If people are aroused by my films, they're in serious trouble." While for most of Kern's screenings in Germany the audience remained unflustered by his filmic transgressions, the people of the city of Mainz were indeed aroused and troubled, but not in the way Kern had sarcastically implied. His screening at the University of Mainz was interrupted by a group of student protesters who stormed the room and threw paint bombs onto the screen. Reading an account of the incident by organizer Johannes Schönherr, one phrasing stuck with me. He recalls how "the red paint on the screen—big jagged blotches spiked violently in all directions … —looked like blood over the black-and-white images of the film. … It was as if the white canvas of the screen alone couldn't bear the pictures projected onto it, the violent impact manifesting in a crimson ooze" (Schönherr 2002, 26–27).

The claim that the "screen alone couldn't bear the pictures" makes an interesting proposition. It implies that the projected images, the screen, the demonstrators, and the paint bombs worked not so much against but with each other—and that the

paint blotches, in their stickiness, matter. The audience's "soiling" of the screen, in response to the "dirty" images projected onto it, is certainly a testament to (gendered) outrage at the films' sticky subject matter. But it is also more than that: namely, a material, affective, tactile, and indeed mutual interaction that deserves closer examination.

Let Them Be Triggered

To say that the screening of Richard Kern's films in Mainz caused a stir is not quite accurate, as the announcement of their showing had already sparked a wave of protests and debates at the university. While the "Invisible Cinema" tour as a whole was arranged by Schönherr, an independent film programmer from Nuremberg, in collaboration with Uwe Hamm-Fürhölter from Artware, an alternative film and music distribution service in Wiesbaden, the screening at the University of Mainz was organized by the Cultural Office of the local AStA, the General Student Committee. The AStA placed an announcement for the screening in the student newspaper, featuring short texts on each film written by Schönherr and Hamm-Fürhölter. With suggestive phrases like "hard-hitting documentary flick about so-called nipple piercing, in which rings are pierced through a young woman's nipples" or "Lydia Lunch lives out her sexual fantasies and gets it on in all sorts of positions," the texts dared ambivalences, deliberately playing with the films' proximity to the rhetorical and visual techniques of pornography. Ultimately, the words were enough to cause an uproar, especially from other AStA members and feminist student groups. After a heated debate, the AStA's Cultural Officer resigned and the Student Council withdrew as organizer. The planned screening took place nevertheless, though only under the condition that the program would be shortened to give room for a discussion with the filmmaker. One hundred fifty students attended the screening in the AudiMax, the university's largest lecture hall. Only 15 minutes into the program, however, hooded figures stormed the auditorium, scattered leaflets, and



[Fig. 2] Protest leaflet (Source: private archive of Johannes Schönherr).

threw bags filled with a sticky red material. The leaflets read: "WE RESIST: Violence is glorified under the guise of art! Your voyeurism stinks to high heaven!" (fig. 1).[1]

According to Johannes Schönherr's recollection of the event, and somewhat fittingly, all this happened as the content warning for *Fingered* was running. Appearing after the title screen, it tongue-in-cheekily advises the viewers to "execute caution and discretion," as the makers of the film cater only to their "own preference as members of the sexual minority," a preference that others, so is the implication, might find "violent, sexist, and disgusting," and thus shocking, insulting, or at least irritating. Although the context of the screening in question is not exactly educational, a look at recent debates about the use of trigger warnings and content notes in university classrooms is helpful

1 The German word for glorification, *Verherrlichung*, includes the word *Herr* (sir or mister), which is capitalized in the protest poster to emphasize that the depicted violence is gendered.

here in thinking through the function of the content warning in *Fingered*. These debates have framed trigger warnings either as a sign of increasing neoliberalization and individualization of higher education, and as an expression of censorship, surveillance, and curtailment of academic freedom, respectively (Halberstam 2014; 2017), or as a renegotiation of what can reasonably be demanded of students, as a recognition of vulnerability, and a call for more caring teaching practices (Hilderbrand 2020; Michaelsen 2015; Dickman-Burnett and Geaman, 2019). The use of warnings in earlier fan cultures complicates both sides of the argument. For instance, in fan fiction, and particularly in so-called slash zines of the 1980s, which published homoerotic fiction involving pop culture characters, "warnings functioned as an author-led system of identification, flagging sexually explicit content with keep-out signs allowing the uninterested to avoid the uncomfortable, while also marking the entryway to secret worlds of erotic kinship" (Lothian 2016, 745–46). These notes thus served as implicit invitations to a particular kind of enjoyment, referring to content that can produce knowledges, affects, and economies that are distinct from those of commercial media productions and are therefore disturbing to some but, more importantly, serve others as sources of pleasure and on the level of community-building (Joyrich 2019, 191; Lothian 2016).

The note preceding *Fingered* seems to operate in a similar manner, as a self-conscious, quasi-promotional device, formulated from the position of a "sexual minority" aware of its own marginal(ized) desire. This group presumably includes not only the filmmaker, but also the other participants in the film, most notably its leading lady, Lydia Lunch. The musician, actress, and spoken word artist collaborated regularly with Kern and also wrote scripts for joint films such as *Right Side of My Brain* (1985), which negotiates desire and sexual taboos from Lunch's own (female) perspective. Kern and Lunch were part of Downtown New York City's cultural scene, in which, especially around the mid-1980s and in the realm of film and performance, artists

often explored themes and strategies of excess and transgression, notably against the political backdrop of neoconservatism at the time. Precisely because Kern's films were criticized as pornographic and misogynistic, as the protests in Berlin and in Mainz exemplify, it is important to note that Lunch's active participation in *Right Side of My Brain* and *Fingered* complicates the equation of male/female as active/passive, perpetrator/victim, or subject/object of the gaze attributed to heterosexual mainstream pornography geared towards male desire that the protests were directed against. Taking these aspects into account, the warning about the transgressive content may not so much prevent an engagement with the film as be considered as an invitation to the audience to explore scenarios of a sexuality previously unknown to them, testing or perhaps even exceeding their own boundaries.

It is therefore not surprising that a report in the student newspaper *Unipress* (Knappen 1991) found that the action was more reminiscent of a staged "happening" than a spontaneous disturbance—that is, something that did not oppose the film but deliberately interacted with it. Susan Sontag's description of happenings as they emerged in the Western art world of the 1960s proves instructive here (2013 [1966]). Such events not only lacked any kind of rational discourse but also often irritated or intentionally frustrated the audience. Happenings also exhibited a specific visual style that made them in fact more akin to painting than theater: materials were used expressively and excessively, just as in certain 1950s painting styles with their large canvases and expansion of the palette of materials employed when painting. Indeed, the description of the red paint bombs on the big screen in Mainz calls to mind the physical force and randomness of Jackson Pollock's action paintings, in which he "delegated a part of his process to matter [the viscosity of the pigment] itself" (Bois 1997, 28). In the light of the audience's reception, it becomes clear that the demonstrators and the paint itself are actors who cooperate with the canvas and the images shown on it to create the experience of this event.

And so, the Mainz audience applauded the protestors' expressive performance, and the screening continued. The red splashes, however, stuck to the screen, trickling down its vertical surface, catching fragments of the projected images along the way.

Dirty Protest, or: How to Keep the Screen Clean

And the debates too continued, especially in the student newspaper, *Unipress*, in the form of opinion pieces, statements, and readers' letters, but reports also appeared in the local newspaper, *Rhein-Main-Zeitung*. At the center were questions of taste, censorship, the limits of art, and power structures at the university, as well as exploitation, feminism, and pornography. In a sense, these topics reverberate a heated debate that had been going on since the 1970s, when certain feminist movements in the USA and Europe started declaring the pornography market their prime enemy.[2] At that time, the progressive "pornification" of Western culture, meaning the "increased visibility of hard- and soft-core pornographies, and the blurring of boundaries between the pornographic and the mainstream," became more and more tangible, in part thanks to media deregulation and changes in media technology (Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007, 8). In movie theaters, this led to very particular protests, as described in the German feminist magazine *EMMA*:

> Porn films like *The Story of O* are box office hits in the big halls. This is "hard pornography" which is actually still forbidden:[3] chains rattle and whips crack, women are nothing,

2 In the so-called sex wars, however, the anti-porn line was countered by a sex-positive one, which positioned itself both in activism and academia (e.g., Rubin 1992 [1984]) and in the field of art and pornography through the work of, for example, Annie Sprinkle and Candida Royale.

3 In Germany, the existing Section 184 of the Federal Act was reformulated in 1975 and thus liberalized; a distinction was made between "simple" pornography, i.e., "soft" pornography, and "hard" pornography, i.e., sexual

> nothing but an available hole, a submissive zero, just O. Now stink bombs are flying in Berlin and pig tails in Frankfurt. (1987a, 20, my translation)

Some demonstrators even urinated on cinema seats to protest what they perceived as the film's objectification and sexual submission of women (Volk 2021, 175). Interestingly, the action in this case was not directed against the screen as the site of presentation, but against the seats and thus against the recipients, even the possibility of reception itself.

While the 1970s saw a convergence of pornography and more established cinema culture, which turned box office hits like *The Story of O* (1975) and *Deep Throat* (1972) into spectacular cinema events (and protests), the 1980s brought a boom in pornography for the home video market (Haupts 2014, 294). According to Tobias Haupts, the emergence and affordances of this new media technology led to mass production, a wider but often opaque circulation, easier access both through official distribution and amateur markets, and thus to a further normalization but also a more clandestine consumption of pornographic images (2014, 291).

It is this situation, that is, the perceived omnipresence and simultaneous privatization and intangibility of pornography, that gave rise to the anti-pornography media and legal campaign *PorNO!* initiated by the German feminist Alice Schwarzer[4] and her magazine *EMMA* in 1987.[5] Aiming against any kind of pornographic

depictions involving violence, or the injury of children or animals. While the latter remained officially banned, access to the former was opened to adults through video and porn cinemas.

4 It should not go unmentioned that Alice Schwarzer has been heavily criticized in recent years, not only by intersectional queer feminists, for her generalizing and populist statements, e.g., on Islam (misogynistic) and transsexuality (a dangerous fad). See for instance Riese (2016) and Sanyal (2016).

5 The predecessor to this campaign was the 1978 court case against the German magazine *Stern* for its degrading cover images (such as a naked Grace Jones in chains) (Schwarzer 2020, 173–86).

depiction in print media, advertisement, and film, *PorNO!* bore strong affinities to previous efforts of US anti-porn feminists, particularly activist and writer Andrea Dworkin. In 1981, Dworkin published her seminal book on pornography,[6] in which she asks "how power, sadism, and dehumanization work in pornography … to establish the sexual and social subordination of women to men" (1989 [1981], xxxvii). This premise, which, as Gayle S. Rubin commented, "implies that sadomasochism is the underlying 'truth' towards which all pornography tends," (1992 [1984], 26) and which establishes a causality between depicted and actually enacted violence, was also at the heart of Dworkin's political and legal campaign. In 1983, together with Catherine MacKinnon, Dworkin came up with the Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance, which would have given those directly harmed by pornography a right to civil recourse, enabling victims to sue porn producers and distributors. The ordinance was never fully realized. It did, however, become a precursor for the German *Anti-Porno-Gesetz* (Anti-Porn Law).

In 1987, *EMMA* issued a draft of the bill, which expresses the general principle that pornography is not an instrument of pleasure, but an instrument of power, a propagation of women's degradation (EMMA 1987c, 20–1). Visual pornography was legalized in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1975, yet its classification and accessibility were still regulated by law. What was new about the *Anti-Porno-Gesetz* was that it sought a complete ban by redefining pornography as a violation of women's human dignity, rather than of "public decency." But while the campaign sparked extensive public discussion, the bill itself did not pass. So, what was left to do? *EMMA* advised to keep protesting, disturbing, interrupting—for instance, by going to sex cinemas and stores and laughing or blowing whistles at the male customers.

6 It was translated into German and published by Schwarzer's EMMA Verlag in 1987.

The slogan was: "Allow yourself the luxury of sensitivity and consistency" (EMMA 1987b, 17, my translation).

And that was the spirit; the loud and literally dirty protests of the 1970s continued well into the 1980s and 1990s, in both commercial and small art-house theaters. For instance, one year before Kern's screening in Mainz, his New York friend and collaborator Nick Zedd faced feminist headwinds in the Bavarian city of Nuremberg. At a local independent cinema, activists stormed the hall before his screening of underground productions had even begun, and threw eggs, garbage, and cat litter at the screen. Johannes Schönherr, who was also the organizer of Zedd's Nuremberg screening, drily commented that the protestors had "given the place a design appropriate for the dirty movies [they were] about to watch" (2002, 19). Again, the protestors' actions are framed as complementary to the shown films, adding another, not unwelcome dimension to the viewing experience rather than taking from it—and again, the audience is left confused about whether the incident was staged or not.[7] Schönherr phrased it as a moment of contagion or mutual activation happening between film, audience, and spatial setting: "Cinema should be a place for excitement and adventure, for surprises, shocks, … If the screen action happens to spill out into the auditorium—well, that's all the better!" (2002, 15).

Through their ethical and aesthetic opposition to pornography, and their messy means of expressing it, these protests invoke a sticky issue: the classification of purity and dirt in both the symbolic and literal sense. Naturally, this dialectic is implicated in discussions on the relationship between feminism, sex(-work), and gender, but it has also always surrounded cinema in one way or another, involving forms of care, maintenance, or touching of the screen.

7 "Was it all part a part of the show, planned by us beforehand, queried the audience, or were those whistling chicks protesting for real?" (Schönherr 2002, 19)

[Fig.3] Tabloidnews: "Nuremberg: Protest against sex films—women dump trash in the cinema" (Source:Nürnberger Abendzeitung, 10/11 March, 1990; private archive of Johannes Schönherr).

"An urgent and universal priority for much of the 20th century," writes Ian Christie, "was maintaining the whiteness of cotton muslin screens when the majority of cinema audiences smoked continuously, and ventilation was often minimal" (2016, 76). Before the gradual introduction of plastic screens in the 1940s, the notion of the "clean screen" was verbatim: the canvases had to be constantly wiped, washed, and re-stretched, because the audience kept leaving—albeit unintentionally—its mark on them. A few years later, the cinema screen is threatened by stains of a different kind. In 1963, the depiction of female desire, masturbation, and death in Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence* horrified German Christians so much that they banded together to form *Aktion Saubere Leinwand* (Clean Screen Initiative) (fig. 4). Their goal, in the face of the ever-rising tide of *Schmuddelfilme* (smut films), was to introduce strict censorship and control measures

[Fig.4] *Aktion Saubere Leinwand* on German television, 1965. (Source and Copyright: Norddeutscher Rundfunk).

to stop the sexualization of mass media (von Hugo 2006). The premise is simple (and, for once, religious conservatives and anti-porn feminists would agree): a "clean screen" is one freed of images deemed immoral, cleared of what in German one would call *Schandfleck*, a literal stain of disgrace.

Coming Into Touch

Physical interactions between screen and audience in general and the protests that develop into outright scandals in particular are certainly as old as cinema itself. Moments in which viewers shout in outrage, riot, or even attack the screen ultimately make statements about expectations, identification, and prevailing conceptions of value. Sometimes, these scandals are what makes a film known, becoming inerasably part of its cultural history. What is more, by crossing the boundary between screen and auditorium, between fiction and reality, these events break with the configuration of the cinematic dispositif and thus with

the habitualized consensus, at least in Western cultures,[8] that viewers should sit still in their seats, enveloped in the darkness of the cinema hall, eyes transfixed on the screen. However, in expanding the framework of scandal and protest to give weight to the intertwined material, affective, and tactile aspects of the screening situation at stake, another layer of significance comes to the fore. In adopting this approach, I am not least guided by recent suggestions to include in the study of screen media everything that surrounds it (Benson-Allott 2021), and to not "merely treat the screen as the location of the image but … consider the various ways a screen calls attention to itself as an architectonic and material form" (Zhou 2021, 159).

Let us return to the Mainz incident. First of all, the protesters' choice of red paint seems crucial. Unlike urine, garbage, pig tails, or cat litter, paint does not neatly fit into the realm of the abject. Traditionally, it is associated with creative-expressive or craft processes, but it is also an established feature of the activist's repertoire. Inside a sealable bag, colored paint becomes a projectile that, thrown at politicians or police officers, public buildings or fur coats, is as potent as its effects are penal. Additionally, red is not only historically a political color, known to feature in protests and revolutions, but also symbolically ambivalent. As the color of blood and fire, red has since ancient times signified both creation and ruin, offense and punishment, beauty and evil: in short, the dialectics of life and death (Pastoureau 2017). This proximity of pleasure and destruction is also at the core of Kern's films, which often play out sexual fantasies of domination, bloodshed, and self-mutilation. The paint's "crimson

8 For instance, Lakshmi Srinivas (2016) writes about audience behavior and viewing settings in Indian mainstream cinemas, describing how social interaction, mobility, interruptions, and general activity are central features of the collective viewing culture that fundamentally shape the film experience. In her study on film viewing practices in Socialist China, Chenshu Zhou (2021) provides accounts of how audiences physically and playfully engaged with the screen.

ooze" thus appears to turn the textual violence to the outside, as if blood was materializing and dripping from the screen itself.

The paint is neither completely liquid nor solid, but viscous and therefore sticky to anything it comes into contact with. In other words, the drips and splashes are inherently relational, performing "a quality of resistance and of flow" (Mason 2020, 32) and providing a "technology of mingling, of intimacy" and thus "the very possibility of connection" (Mason 2020, 31). The paint's stickiness, then, is not only its material but also its affective quality. Sara Ahmed has conceptualized stickiness similarly as an effect, as something that results from the "histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs" (2014, 90). One way in which these transmissions can unfold is through sticky feelings like disgust, which is "deeply ambivalent, involving desire for, or an attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent" (Ahmed 2014, 84). Ahmed writes that by "[p]ulling back, bodies that are disgusted are also bodies that feel a certain rage, a rage that the object has got close enough to sicken, and to be taken over or taken in. To be disgusted is after all *to be affected by what one has rejected*" (2014, 86, emphasis maintained). It seems even more significant now that the protestors did not boycott the screening by refraining from attending, but chose to come close to the film precisely by attacking the screen—instead of, say, the auditorium seats, the projector, or even the attending filmmaker. And this is not only because of the feeling of disgust provoked by the pictures, but also because the screen is, as per Laura U. Marks, that "point in a series of transmissions or unfoldings … where the film meets the viewer" (2016, 258).

Let us remember here that the screen is a somewhat precarious element of cinema's technical apparatus. Not only is it ideally of white color to allow for connotations with emptiness or neutrality, but since its existence depends on the moment of projection, it is also usually covered by a curtain before the projection begins, "appearing just when it has already disappeared as an empty surface" (Göttel 2016, 25, my translation).

In becoming soiled and sticky, the screen is freed from its supposed neutrality and hiddenness and becomes visible as well as tangible. And again, while the protestors do not literally touch the screen, they seek contact with it by aiming paint bombs at its surface. In this way, they highlight, even potentiate, the fact that cinematic experience is always already a decidedly material experience. Taking these violent, somewhat intimate—and in any case sticky—interactions with the screen seriously, then, not least means rethinking a visual medium like film in terms of tactility, and considering the screen, like Wanda Strauven, as an "interface for hands-on operations" (2021, 29).

"It was as if the white screen alone couldn't bear the pictures projected onto it." To bear something can mean to carry or to support the actual weight of another thing. But it can also mean an act of endurance or tolerance, the bearing of a burden. Johannes Schönherr's statement implies that the clean white surface in the tidy cinema hall could do neither alone. To keep the film running, the screen, the images, the protesters, and the paint bags had to work together. This interaction was ultimately characterized more by a spirit of cooperation than opposition, making the sticky splashes and stains an integral part of the screen, and thus of the film experience.

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Collecting Contagion: Moral Narratives of Sex and Stickiness in Alfred Fournier's Wax Models

Silas Edwards

> *I became a collector of syphilis just as whimsy or curiosity leads others to become collectors of paintings, books, Japanese trinkets, autographs or snuff boxes.*
> *Alfred Fournier, quoted by Jean Darier (1915, 16).*

This wax model of a tongue (fig. 1) with a syphilitic ulcer is just one of over 800 so-called *moulages* commissioned by Alfred Fournier, a French dermatologist and one of the most prominent public health activists in late nineteenth-century Europe. Made by casting the affected body parts of his patients in plaster, the models promised a true-to-life record of dermatological symptoms for Fournier to study, compare, and use in his teaching. As Mechthild Fend has described, *moulages* derived their claim to authenticity from the physical contact with patients involved in the casting process (Fend 2022). But in fact, the verisimilitude of *moulages* owed more to the skilled artistry of resident artists or *mouleurs* in the hospitals where Fournier was employed. After filling the plaster casts with hot wax, the resulting shapes were colored, carved, and even finessed with body hair to achieve hyper-realistic representations of human skin (Sánchez Ortiz and Micó Boró 2014). Since multiple *moulages* could be produced from a single plaster cast, renowned Parisian *mouleurs* such as Jules Baretta maintained a lucrative parallel business selling duplicates to other parts of Europe.

[Fig. 1] Moulage of a tongue with a syphilitic ulcer (Source: University Collections, Frankfurt am Main).

This particular example was purchased by the Frankfurt syphilis expert Karl Herxheimer, whose dermatological practice in Sachsenhausen was subsumed into the university clinic in 1914 (Altmeyer, Menzel, and Holzmann 1986).

Until at least 1910, syphilis was a disease without a cure.[1] Beyond prescribing mercury to slow the spread of infection, doctors in

1 The arsenic-based compound Salvarsan (often described as the first modern antibiotic drug) was synthesized in 1910 by Sahachiro Hata in the laboratory

the emerging disciplines of dermatology and venereology were mainly preoccupied with how to limit contagion. The central pillar of public health policy against transmission in France was the state regulation of prostitution, whereby sex workers—generally women from disadvantaged backgrounds—were subject to arbitrary medical examination and imprisonment (Harsin 1985). Responding to the rise of a vocal protofeminist movement to abolish this system, Fournier became one of its chief defenders (Corbin 1990). His collection of *moulages*—which remain on display in the Hôpital Saint-Louis—served to highlight the threat of the syphilis epidemic within medical and political circles by showcasing extreme examples of the disease's progression. In doing so, the exhibits underlined the right of the state and of medical professionals to detain and examine the female body (Hunter 2020). This power dynamic is dramatized in the many *moulages* that feature the prying hands of a doctor pulling apart the flesh of the vulva to reveal hidden syphilitic ulcers.

The moral urgency of the so-called crusade against syphilis had taken on new proportions in the wake of France's 1870 defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. A conservative strand of popular opinion blamed the decline of the nation on the excessive and deviant sexuality of France's expanding cities. Fournier contributed to this argument by overstating both the hereditary nature of syphilis and its effects on the nervous system (Obladen 2013; De Luca Barrusse 2009). His interventions in public debate identified extramarital sex as a cause of the physical degeneration of younger generations and French army recruits. In Paris' infamously voyeuristic Spitzner Museum, soldiers were admitted to a restricted exhibition of syphilis *moulages*—likely originating from Fournier's medical practice—to warn of the risks of extramarital sex (Palouzié and Ducourau 2017). The affective power of *moulages*—their power to provoke shame

of Paul Ehrlich in Frankfurt. The side effects and transportation issues associated with this drug meant that a safe treatment only became gradually available in Europe after the discovery of penicillin in 1928.

and disgust—was thereby instrumentalized to encourage sexual abstention and monogamy.

While shame was deployed liberally and universally as a weapon in the campaign against syphilis, some groups were made to feel it more acutely than others. The doctor's quip "on est puni d'abord par où l'on a péché" ("you're punished first where you sinned") drew on an understanding that during the first stage of a syphilis infection, ulcers tend to form at the site of inoculation (Fournier 1873, 17). In a discourse that remains strongly attached to sexually transmitted diseases (especially human immunodeficiency virus [HIV]), infection was thereby framed as karma for immoral sexual behavior (Tilles, Grossman, and Wallach 1993). Illicit sexual behavior could "stick" to individuals in the form of painless but highly visible ulcers emerging three weeks after the act, apparently marking the location of a misdemeanor. Accordingly, no patients were more stigmatized than those with symptoms in the anus or perianal region. As queer communities became publicly visible for the first time in Paris of the Belle Époque (Revenin 2006), Fournier's medical textbooks stated that infections which aroused suspicions of receptive anal sex incriminated people "at the very bottom of the ladder of shame … male prostitutes and pederasts" (Fournier 1897, 485). For wealthier male clients, however, alternative explanations could be found. In one such instance, Fournier attributes blame to the infectious tongue of a female sex worker who his patient accused of performing anilingus against his will (Fournier 1897, 488). Seen alongside their original paratext—Fournier's lectures and textbooks—the syphilis *moulages* re-inhabit their role as props in a high-stakes moral drama.

In 1899, Fournier took decisive action to increase pressure on lawmakers to resist abolitionist demands by founding the Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, an organization which explicitly portrayed public health as contingent on "moral" recovery. Alongside lobbying for the preservation of regulated prostitution through tweaks to existing legislation, the society

raised funds to educate the general public about the "social danger" of syphilis by spreading fear of the consequences of "debauchery," especially sex outside of marriage. Perhaps the most successful element of its propaganda campaign for sexual dissuasion was the hit play *Les Avariés,* penned by Eugène Brieux in 1901, which was dedicated to Fournier and in all likelihood secretly commissioned by the society (Wilson 2020; Wenger 2022). Dramatizing the story of a married woman infected unknowingly by her philandering husband, the play offered the middle and upper classes a new euphemism for syphilis sufferers as *avarié* (damaged), while popularizing a hierarchy of blame for the epidemic based on a distinction between "innocent" and "guilty" patients. The lasting impact of the Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis is reflected in the way that its mission and methods were first funded, and subsequently co-opted, by the French state after World War One (De Luca Barrusse and Praz 2015).

In an era where contagion was understood in principle but not in detail, wax models visualized the amorphous stickiness of sexually transmitted disease for medical practitioners and a wider male audience. By means of their hyper-realistic representation of extreme symptoms, the *moulages* triggered affective responses ranging from panic to shame. They not only served to increase the prestige of dermatology as a branch of medicine, but equally lent credence to Fournier's prescription for public health: the policing of women's bodies and of non-heteronormative sexualities.

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PORNOGRAPHY

QUEER ARCHIVES

VIDEO

COLLECTING CULTURES

ATTACHMENTS

Notes on the Sticky Note: Gay Smut, Archival Desires, and Tactile Tactics

Nils Meyn

This article takes an autoethnographic approach to the archive of the Schwules Museum in Berlin. Drawing on anecdotes and personal experiences as a volunteer archivist, the author explores the presence of sticky notes within the museum's porn film collection, alongside the author's own use of sticky notes in cataloging the films. The article shows how porn collectors repeatedly incorporated sticky notes into their tactics to index, organize, and access vast amounts of gay smut on VHS and DVD. Today, these notes resurface in the archive as traces of sexual lives, while archivists inscribe new layers of attachment by placing and labeling sticky notes themselves. Arguing

that sticky notes shape sensual relations and tactile encounters with materials, the article brings together theoretical reflections on queer archives, desire, the materiality of smut, and the notion of stickiness.

As a volunteer in the archive of the Schwules Museum in Berlin I catalog and take care of its extensive collection of gay and queer adult films on VHS, DVD, and Super 8. Within this role, I continually come across things and feelings that are sticky. These sticky components significantly shape my material interactions and felt experiences in the archive, which I aim to unfold in this article. Specifically, I want to spotlight a particular attachment of mine: the sticky note. The sticky note provides a peculiar, but unique venue for exploring subtle connections between archival practices and archival desires; even more so because not only porn collectors seem to value sticky notes, but porn archivists find them useful as well. Put another way, by studying sticky things like the sticky note I am able to map the nuanced ways in which porn archivists, myself included, just as porn collectors "are not only interpellated but also implicated by the pornographic object" (Florêncio and Miller 2022, 137).

Throughout the article, I theorize this perspective by incorporating anecdotes, personal observations, and subjective experiences from my work at the Schwules Museum, relating them to conceptualizations of queer archives, pornography, and the notion of stickiness. I do so because anecdotal forms of evidence allow us to examine what Arlette Farge has termed "the allure of the archives" (2013)—a cohesion of material textures and immaterial processes ingrained in archival practice and research that are often overshadowed by factual and textual paradigms but substantiate the enduring appeal of archives. Drawing on personal experience, I also aim to shed light on the broader intimate and affective dimensions of archival and volunteer

work at the Schwules Museum. I contend that the allure of the Schwules Museum lies within its existence as a queer space, one characterized by its own sticky, messy, and precarious dynamics. I will begin by describing two archival encounters involving "dirty" pornographic materials, which will underpin my approach to pornography and the Schwules Museum as sticky objects.

Tangible Smut

I become aware of stickiness in moments when it occurs in the most literal sense—when it is tangibly felt. One time, I opened a new entry that had arrived at the museum: a few moving boxes as well as a shoebox filled with gay porn films on DVD, formerly a personal home video collection that was donated to the museum as part of a gay man's estate after his death. It struck me that these boxes not only contained porn, but also a range of dildos, clamps, nipple suckers, and other sex toys possibly used by the collector (fig 1, left). It also struck me how each of the DVD cases felt when I touched them: they were slippery. I rubbed my fingers against each other as they now were slippery themselves. I also smelled them, and I realized it must be lube, probably used by the collector during a sex act that involved watching pornography. Personally, I can find lube a bit nasty despite its practical benefits, as it leaves a tacky coat on the skin when it dries and feels unnatural compared with spit, which dissolves more organically. This time, however, my contact with lube evoked a more sympathetic reaction. I found myself filled with admiration as the lube fueled my imagination: when the collector had reached out to the DVD cases, the lube took over. It first left its sticky mark on the plastic and then stuck to my fingers, letting me sense a sexual history. This might just be a fantasy.[1] Yet, in this moment I particularly admired the fact that I could, at least vaguely, connect to the sex life of someone who I never knew personally.

1 It is also possible that lube spilled over the cases during the boxing process of the estate.

[Fig. 1] A shoebox filled with dildos and DVD cases of porn, donated to the Schwules Museum (left). A commercial video copy of the gay porn film *Aftershock Part 2* (right) (Source: Schwules Museum, photo by Nils Meyn).

I could praise the archive for enabling me this experience, and I kept it in my memory long after I had washed the lube off my fingers.

The encounter I just described reminds me how crucial the leftovers of queer people's sexual and kinky lives are for the very archive I am finding myself in. Indeed, the Schwules Museum houses an "archive from behind," as coined by Katrin Köppert, hinting both at the museum's grassroots origin[2] as an "archive from below" and its close connection to deviant sexual cultures (2015, 72 translation my own). Another term that comes to mind

2 The Schwules Museum, along with its archive and library, was founded in Berlin in 1985 by five gay men—Manfred Baumgardt, Manfred Herzer, Andreas Sternweiler, Wolfgang Theis, and Egmont Fassbinder—who aligned their project with the West German gay movement. In the beginning, the museum was formally constituted as a public association and was temporarily housed in the offices of AHA – Allgemeine Homosexuelle Arbeitsgemeinschaft (General Homosexual Working Group), where it began compiling its collection through donations. In 1988, the museum moved into its own premises (Schwules Museum 2025).

is "archive of feelings." Famously coined by Ann Cvetkovich, this concept encapsulates "the idiosyncratic and queer nature of gay and lesbian archives, so often collected according to sentiment and emotion" (2003, 269). Importantly, the archive of feelings isn't confined to the physical archival space—it is also found "in more personal and intimate places, and significantly within cultural genres" (2003, 244). This includes pornography among a myriad of other queer texts, objects, and ephemera. Furthermore, it points us to the relevance of personal belongings as "archives of feelings," like, for example, privately compiled porn collections, which lay at the heart of the porn film collection that I am maintaining at the Schwules Museum. However, while Cvetkovich pinpoints trauma and historical loss as vectors of queer feelings, these may not fully reflect the affective registers spanning the "archive from behind." Tim Dean offers a more encompassing perspective: "*pornography archives pleasure*. … [It] is itself an archive—of sex, of fantasy, of desire, of bodies and their actions, and of pleasure" (2014, 9, emphasis in original).

In another instance, a sticky object triggered more caution than fascination for the sexual pleasure it might archive. For a long time, I hesitated to catalog a particular videotape, a commercial video copy of the gay porn film *Aftershock Part 2* (2002), marked with some kind of red-brownish residue. On the upper part of the cover, the residue had dried into a grainy and slightly tacky crust that smears and obscures Matthew Rush's pretty porn star face (fig. 1, right). When I touch this crust, a crumb of it sometimes sticks to my finger, showing slight resistance against my prompt attempts to pick it off. In addition, I notice a secretion that has run down the case, as evidenced by a streak in the middle and a sticky note that has been soaked and stained by it. Such sticky notes are attached to many porn films stored in the museum; they often come with handwritten notes, indexing the object's origin in a personal home collection. Only in this case, the note had somehow flipped and become attached to the case by the sticky ooze, not by the note's "natural," gentler glue. In contrast to

the glue, the ooze leaves nasty traces on the skin when I touch it. Stranger still, the ooze allows me to slide the paper over the case and slightly change its position without it coming loose. While the residue's tactility made the videotape undeniably interesting and exciting, it also left too many questions. Unlike the lube, the residue's origin remained a mystery to me, and I couldn't immediately ascribe it to some kind of sexual charge.[3] Thus, it lacked the thrill and perversion of the lube, but also its tactile familiarity. The tackiness and strangeness of the residue felt more undesirable. Unsure how to deal with the tape, yet vaguely planning to clean it at some point, I left it on the shelves, saving it for later. Or was I detaching myself from the filthy tape, secretly rejecting it instead of properly caring for it?

At times, it may be hard to shake off porn's cultural recognition as smut, which becomes palpable through this literal smut contaminating the cover of *Aftershock Part 2*. Porn historian Peter Alilunas has described video pornography as "smutty little movies" (2016). By that, he refers to its discursively low cultural value as well as its modes of commodification that helped to demarcate porn as something shameful and, paradoxically, reinforce its popularity as smut (2016, 197–200). Yet, as suggested by my descriptions, I want to add the sticky to the smutty to account for porn's tactile, emotional, tantalizing, and captivating aspects. In other words, while smut designates porn's material and media configurations, stickiness helps to consider what Susanna Paasonen calls porn's "affective intensities that attach bodies, images, and media together and pull them apart" (2011, 2). Paasonen links porn's stickiness primarily to its carnality, which has the power to captivate the viewer's senses and emotions

3 Various people suggested to me that the residue could be cum, or poppers that had corroded the case. Even though I cannot confirm their speculations, the association of cum and poppers—and spit, for that matter—with porn archives is unsurprising. Yet, I remain slightly disappointed as to why I haven't definitely encountered them during my time in the archive. For insights on semen and porn archives, see David Squires' discussion of semen stains left in books of anti-porn feminist literature (2014, 91–96).

(2011, 2–3; 26–27). Similarly, the material residue I encountered has taken hold of me and made me aware of the carnal capacity these particular pornographic materials may hold. In this reading, a connection emerges between emotions and the notion of stickiness. This link has been theorized most notably by Sara Ahmed, who claims that feelings such as disgust do not reside in objects or subjects. Rather, they are generated and circulate through "histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs" (2014, 90). In this model, feelings and their articulations are transmitted culturally, socially, and personally. They are sticky in that they "stick to some objects, and slide over others" (2014, 6–8). From this perspective, one can understand that my tactile encounters with the porn are not hermetic experiences: instead, they relate, and contribute, to the cultural impact of porn as smut.

My reflections on stickiness are inseparable from the actual archival space, which I want to align with Ahmed's analogy of the archive as a "contact zone" (2014, 14). While Ahmed uses this metaphor to describe one's own body as an accumulation of "histories of contact," I want to explore this idea in relation to the materiality of archives and collections and the subjectivity of the people maintaining them. On the one hand, stickiness occurs in a literal sense, such as when touching the dirty residue, or dust, on porn cases. Similarly, sticky may refer to the manual and crafty work of archives, for example, affixing a sticky note to boxes and items like VHS and DVD cases of porn. On the other hand, the term adheres to the emotional and metaphorical, and I specifically want to link it to the attachments and detachments that draw archives, collections, and the people maintaining them together or drive them apart. As emphasized by scholars researching queer archives, these spaces are often community archives where queer people may gather, come in contact with their communities' disregarded histories, and form emotional and sometimes elusive attachments to archival materials (Cvetkovich 2003, 243–51; Kumbier 2014; Stone and Cantrell 2015). The Schwules Museum in Berlin is notable for its degree

of institutionalization, its commitment to exhibition, and its transformation from a place centered on gay male culture to one that seeks to include all queer identities and perspectives. Like many people before me who came to work in this place, I felt drawn to its queer sensibilities.[4] I stuck to the museum as a form of activism tinged in self-discovery: I wanted to learn more about the filmic sexual histories of my own community and give something back in return. I started there as an intern and later continued as a volunteer. During that time, I found that cataloging work was the most fitting avenue for me. I derive pleasure from this routine-heavy task, even though it can be boring and tedious at times. Dealing with smut made it even more enticing, despite the occasional awkwardness. It is within this context that my interest in sticky notes was sparked.

Index of Desire

Turning now to the sticky note, a brief look at its cultural history may help to contextualize its striking relationship to archives of smut. The sticky note started as an accident, yet like most consumer technologies was first introduced by a major corporation doing business in chemical and technical engineering.[5] Since their launch in 1980, these supply products have been put to use in innumerous ways and contexts, entirely contingent on the creativity of their users and sometimes exceeding their intended purpose for bookmarking

4 Personal attachments to (archival) objects hold special significance in the social and cultural fabric of the Schwules Museum. For instance, both the exhibition *100 Objects – An Archive of Feelings* (2020) and the monthly interview series "*Darling of the Month*" have highlighted favorite objects chosen by employees and volunteers.

5 Initially, the company 3M struggled to market a "low-tack" adhesive that was accidentally developed during attempts to create a super-adhesive. The breakthrough came when an inventor suggested using the adhesive for bookmarks, leading to the successful launch in 1980 of the Post-It note, which became widely recognized for its trademark yellow color and name (Lemelson-MIT Program 2007).

and note-making.[6] As evidenced by the porn film collection at Schwules Museum, collectors of porn excel in using sticky notes to organize, navigate, and make sense of massive collections of smut. Sticky notes have also found their way onto the office desks and storage boxes of archival institutions.

Indeed, sticky notes are very prominent objects in the archive, though most of the time they are taken for granted and not discussed for themselves, in contrast to the materials they are attached to. This differs from my own, very conscious experience with them. In fact, I vividly remember the excitement I felt on my first working day at the Schwules Museum when I had the pleasure of unpacking nearly 60 boxes containing unprocessed porn films that had been left untouched for a long time. Caught up in what, at least to me, felt like doing foundational work, in box after box I came upon hand-labeled sticky notes attached to VHS and DVD cases that grabbed my attention. Apparently, these were left by collectors whose personal porn collections had been donated to the museum, and their written notes indicated various idiosyncratic manners of indexing and annotating contents as well as documenting the personal use of films (fig. 2). Early on, it was clear to me that I must catalog the content of these notes alongside the actual films, even though this can slow down the process and others might interpret the notes as purely incidental.[7] I argue that the sticky notes give distinction to the archival value of the porn films stored in the museum for two reasons. First, through attached objects like sticky notes, we become aware of the VHS and DVD copies as valuable artifacts of porn collecting and consumption, making them indispensable

6 Sticky notes are used as a means of protest in activism or participation in museums. In the field of art, the catalog for the exhibition of works by artist Martin Margiela for Lafayette Anticipations is notable for its inclusion of sticky notes, which express the breaks and flows of the creative process (Dercon et al. 2021).

7 It should be noted that, according to the conservation logic of archiving paper documents, sticky notes are typically to be removed or avoided, as their adhesive can leave residue and eventually cause the paper to yellow.

[Fig. 2] An array of porn film materials with hand-labeled sticky notes attached to them, including commercial VHS and DVD copies as well as extensive video compilations (Source: Schwules Museum, photo by Nils Meyn).

for inquiries into porn's media histories. Second, the handwriting, along with the meticulous placement of the paper sheets, imparts a personal and intimate feel to the objects, evidencing an affectionate relationship between the collector and the smut. This seemingly calls on others, including me, to emulate this labor of love towards these materials. More broadly, I believe that sticky notes help us recognize the universal archival value of gay and queer pornography.

Among the many collectors who handed over their porn to the museum, only a select few were formally documented by name, thus complicating notions of what merits preservation and what might be regarded as peripheral. One notable exception is Siegmar Piske, an avid collector whose extensive holdings, comprising vast quantities of gay porn on DVD and VHS as well as pornographic scrapbooks alongside artworks and various kinds of furnishings, were bequeathed to the museum before his death (Rehberg 2021, 91–9). I am drawn to highlighting Piske's method

of using sticky notes for indexing due to its distinctiveness and, importantly, its elusiveness, which I find quite alluring and fascinating. Piske meticulously kept tallies on sticky notes for every porn film he collected, noting down a date and line, presumably for each time he experienced an orgasm in response to the film (Fig. 2, bottom right). While this remains a theory, I cannot deny the temptation to make this assumption, a sentiment shared by those to whom I showed these notes. Piske's approach to porn seems excessive, messy, and lavish, which may easily affirm negative perceptions of pornography as a "low" genre. In addition, his tallies defy conventional notions of what constitutes textual evidence, complicating the factual paradigms governing archival institutions. Nonetheless, they evoke fascination, and it is precisely for this reason that I was motivated to further inspect such notes.[8]

The attachment of sticky notes appears to be a phenomenon particularly related to porn film collections and notably the VHS and DVD formats. Compared with the non-pornographic section of the museum's film collection, the quantity of sticky notes and the style of annotation seems distinctively associated with collecting smut. The porn collectors demonstrate a deep immersion not only in the workings of gay pornography but also in the archival practices of collecting, indexing, and organizing smut, all of which become pleasures in their own right. In Jacques Derrida's terms, the collectors appear to be gripped by the "Archive Fever" (Derrida 1998). The use of sticky notes is part of a feverish process, in which collectors impose organizational logics to discipline and homogenize objects, assigning new meanings while displacing previous ones (1998, 1–3). The sexual connotations of many of these meanings are apparent. Indeed, to use another term, the sticky notes reveal an "erotic index

8 Interestingly, Cait McKinney points out that academics may be more inclined to respond with fascination and affection to the elusive nature of archival ephemera than archivists (2015, 10).

of desire," like Whitney Strub observed for carefully organized indexes belonging to a collection of porn video bootlegs (2015, 126). These indexes not only reflect the collector's individual proclivities and sexual preferences but also signify broader affinities with cultures and identities (Strub 2015, 128). By referencing, and sometimes upending, canonic vocabularies of gay porn culture, porn collectors likely reveled in homosexual self-affirmation, as researchers of queer collecting and fan practices have suggested (Staiger 2005; Rehberg 2021); or, otherwise, they transcended fixed sexual-identity categories, moving beyond the queer/heterosexual binary (Strub 2015, 137; Dean 2014). Considering the stickiness of the indexes, it becomes evident how queer pleasures and desires depend on "histories of contact" that have come before them. Pornography and related subcultural practices contributed to the historical formation of gay subjectivities by educating on how to desire and feel pleasure in a gay way (Dyer 1985; Florêncio and Miller 2022). Hence, articulations of sexual feelings circulate as social and cultural practices that are absorbed, adapted, repelled, or reversed. The indexes and notes of porn collectors, elucidating a gay "sociality of emotion" (Ahmed 2014, 8), may help us to better understand such processes. Furthermore, the sticky note directs our attention to materiality and format, as it shapes an economy of desire: its limited space inspires brevity in language and expression; its adhesive property provides a sense of direct access to the meaning of images; and its replaceability enables the effortless adjustment of meanings. From this perspective, one can observe that the sticky note is not to be regarded as incidental: it may indeed play an integral role in the broader logics and logistics of queer desires, extending beyond the private realm of a collector's pornographic microcosm.

But then, what role does the sticky note play in the realm of the archival institution? After all, the archivists in the Schwules Museum, including myself, routinely use sticky notes to index the contents of a box or a drawer and to organize their work.

In this context, in what fashion might the sticky note still index desire? This question may seem somewhat far-fetched insofar as hobby collecting and archival work adhere to very different internal and external principles, demands, and social agreements, and have potentially divergent feelings attached to them. As Cait McKinney remarks about the "not-very-sexy" cataloging of sex-related materials, this work "is crucial and urgent even when it cannot capture the vitality or erotic energy" inherent to the materials (2020, 21). Bluntly put, while collecting smut in private is stimulating, cataloging it is just inevitable and can be downright boring. However, from my experience as a cataloger, I have found that this endeavor is far more ambiguous and cannot be easily categorized into binary notions of "sexy" and "boring." I emphasize this even though my usual experience slightly differs from the smuttiness offered by my encounters with the lube and dirt.

In cataloging, I use sticky notes after assigning a signature to a porn film in the database—a number intended to permanently aid in locating the film. To describe the process more accurately, I peel off a sticky note from a pad, accompanied by a soft rustling sound as the adhesive gradually releases its grip from the pad. I attach that note to the film I have just cataloged, requiring only slight pressure to fix it in position. Sometimes it joins the collector's sticky note that came before it, adding another layer of interaction to the object. Fittingly, I leave my own handwriting on the object by jotting down the signature that corresponds to the database. The sticky note's adhesive ensures that the number stays with the film; it helps me to remember it as I intend to eventually print out the label on the computer. I repeat this tactic with every film and with the same precision, peeling, pressing, and labeling sticky note after sticky note. Thinking about them more consciously, I realize that sticky notes have a firm yet gentle feel, thanks to the smooth adhesive and flexible paper. This contrasts with the messy and defiant touch of tangible smut, such as the tacky lube. In fact, the sticky note's adhesive doesn't leave any

noticeable residue when in contact with a surface. Additionally, I can reposition the note repeatedly without creating a mess or feeling the need to wash my hands afterward. Still, the note lets me gravitate toward the porn and makes me stick to it, and in this regard, it doesn't differ much from the residue.

Considering the tactics and tactility of using sticky notes, I gain a better understanding of the perspectives of porn collectors: the notes lend intimacy and precision to maintaining the collection through touch. However, the routine of using them can override some of the eroticism of the pornographic content itself. Interestingly, I had the impression that sticky notes, inadvertently—or intentionally, as I will suggest in the conclusion—conceal penises, buttholes, and other "indecent" parts depicted on the front covers of porn cases. As suggested by this phenomenon, the sticky notes indeed play a role in the disciplining of porn and its transfer into organizational logics. Simultaneously, they contribute to a tactic of accessing and making sense of its carnal intensities. This leads me to recognize a fundamental relationship between desire and access, which governs both the formal and informal processes of indexing and cataloging smut. I want to examine this relationship further by looking more closely at the sticky note's presence in the archival space of the Schwules Museum.

Desire for Access

Far from nostalgic anxieties about the sanitizing effects of archival practice, the sticky note is a useful organizational tool. It's no wonder we use it regularly in our daily, scholarly, and administrative lives for its virtues of compartmentalization and directionality. In times of archival excess and crammed storage spaces, the sticky note provides much-needed assistance in indexing the contents of a box, locating unprocessed materials, making sense of new accessions, and remembering open tasks. In her phenomenology of sticky notes, Yin Yin states: "The note

extends my memory; it is a 'prosthetic device'" (2017, 20). As such, the sticky note can enhance the archive's and archivist's capacity to fulfill their mission—as small as the gesture may be. At the same time, despite its promise of simplicity, immediacy, and efficiency, the sticky note may not solve the problem; rather, it might merely mitigate it. Precisely, it is for the sticky note's affordances and tactile composition that we keep on accepting its "sticky invitation to note-making" (2017, 19). Eventually, we cling to it. And thus, while pacing through the archival storage, one can assume that the sticky note has ultimately become part of the decor of the archives, their often yellow color sticking out against some surfaces like brown and gray storage boxes. This visibility also applies to other types of (computer-printed) labels. However, sticky notes are special in that they are intended to be temporary but can nonetheless become permanent. They signify what Ciaran B. Trace refers to as the "backlog" of archival infrastructures. The backlog denotes "a gap between a system's current and desired state … reflecting an interruption of the information flow" (Trace 2022, 78). Typically attached to unprocessed materials, sticky notes therefore emerge as the trace of the "failure to maintain … that haunts most archival institutions" (2022, 77). For the Schwules Museum, with approximately 97 percent of its holdings remaining unprocessed,[9] struggling with storage space, and as a queer cultural institution facing considerable cuts in funding,[10] the backlog is indeed a particularly sticky and unsettling issue. Admittedly, it's yet unlikely that anyone in the museum feels "haunted" by sticky notes; some may even sympathize with the archive's messiness. Nevertheless, based on my own archival uses of sticky notes, I am intrigued to

9 The archive of Schwules Museum holds approximately 1.5 million objects, of which about 3 % have been cataloged (Shukrallah 2024, 18).

10 Following the conservative shift in power in Berlin in 2024, severe cuts to the cultural budget were imposed, disproportionately affecting queer and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) cultural projects. Essential initiatives—such as efforts to advance the digitization of the Schwules Museum's archive—have been significantly delayed as a result.

acknowledge their subtle relation to the archive's infrastructural desires for access.

Considering porn collections and archival institutions side by side, a difference becomes apparent: while sticky notes in porn collections suggest abundance, in archival institutions, they conjure up a blank space—a fear of loss that might never be completely resolved. Perhaps inspired by porn collectors and their contagious sticky note fever, I want to attempt a less alarming reading of these tools in queer archives. According to Cait McKinney, lesbian-feminist grassroots archives have often used affordable media technologies like VHS and index cards to create makeshift, do-it-yourself solutions for the crafting of community-oriented information infrastructures, fostering what she calls "capable amateurism" (2020, 30, 166–7). Similarly, in the context of precarious and political archival labor, sticky notes can be of infrastructural importance due to their amateurish usability. I remember from a recent visit to Schwules Museum that I took up some work left undone by people who had once been active at the museum for longer or shorter periods and used their time and enthusiasm to make progress in cataloging the film collection. Because the museum does not have the budget to employ more than a few archivists, and has only been able to do so since it became publicly funded in 2009, it has relied throughout its history on volunteers or short-term interns to do much of the essential processing and cataloging work. This sometimes had the side effect of causing fluctuations in the museum's staff, which does not lead to a smooth transfer of knowledge. I was lucky and grateful, then, that former collaborators provided films with sticky notes revealing their intended destinations to me. I would have felt a bit lost without these notes.

Supposed to tame or contain the ephemerality of objects, the sticky note can be ephemeral itself. It evidences a fleeting moment: the capturing of a thought, a feeling, or important information pertaining to the intellectual and affective relation between archivist and object. This can be apparent even through

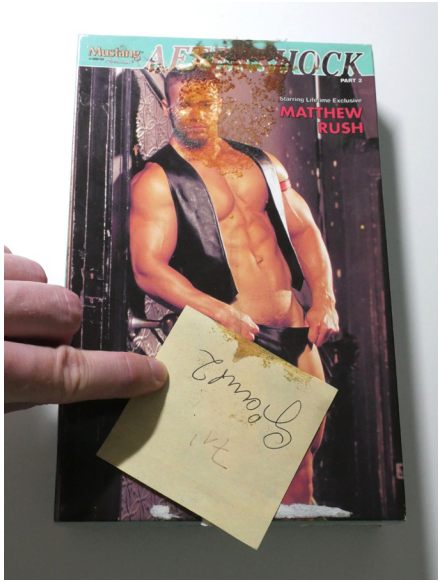
its errors—messy handwriting; the subjective, idiosyncratic nature of words evading comprehension; falling off due to deteriorated adhesion—or we ourselves overlook them as we often do, again adding to their ephemerality. These phenomena of sticky notes contribute, as I argue, to the archive's "aesthetics of access" (Hilderbrand 2009, 6). With this term, Lucas Hilderbrand primarily refers to the ways in which "we recognize videotape through its inherent properties of degeneration" (2009, 6). That is, repeated duplications and uses of tape, notably bootlegging, become inscribed in the video image. Similarly, sticky notes, which are another kind of media technology used in archives and collections, become recognizable as material traces of archival and collecting practice that sometimes integrate into the object itself. They point to an object's "process of creation and history of circulation" (2009, 61–2) that is fueled by a "desire for access" (2009, 6). Yet, due to their failures, errors, and temporal ambiguities, they may not always represent a smooth, firm, clear-cut approach to fulfill that desire.

Revealing and Concealing

Reflecting on my fixation with sticky notes, which was set in motion by handling lovingly compiled collections of gay smut, I always find myself coming back to one quote by Ann Cvetkovich: "The archivist of queer culture must proceed like the fan or collector whose attachment to objects is often fetishistic, idiosyncratic, or obsessional" (2003, 253). Cvetkovich suggests that the attachment and fetishes of the queer collector must move on to the archivist so they can act upon the pivotal role that the material evidence of fan and popular culture plays in writing queer histories. Did I become attached to sticky notes myself, to fulfill my own role as a volunteer archivist?

To deepen an understanding of the political and methodological questions arising from this associative essay, I want to conclude it on another anecdotal note. To be precise, I want to return to

porn, particularly the video case of *Aftershock Part 2* mentioned earlier. I flipped the sticky note back to its original state to read the inscription left by the collector. This simultaneously revealed to me what lay *behind* the note: the genital area of porn star Matthew Rush tucked in leather underwear (fig. 3). Unlike the video's hardcore content, the cover photo design avoids frontal nudity, echoing the sanitized marketing common in big studio productions of video pornography (Alilunas 2016, 96–105). Thinking more closely about the placement of sticky notes, I sensed that the collector must be somewhat aware of "the dialectic between revelation and concealment that operates at any given moment in the history of moving-image sex" (Williams 2008, 7). I questioned whether the collector deliberately covered body parts with sticky notes—perhaps as part of an inside joke. In a way, the paper hid or subdued the carnal force of the object, but it also teased me to peek behind the paper to unlock it. The flexibility of the paper came in handy, as it allowed me to respond accordingly and flip the note. Out of curiosity, I turned to more videos and flipped more and more sticky notes, uncovering both obscured and exposed penises, orifices, and extremities. Eventually, as I cataloged films, I strategically placed sticky notes where I believed the collector might have. Sometimes I took advantage of the adhesive's reusability by adjusting the note's position. Thus, I engaged with the films in a sort of play, intensified by the touch the sticky note facilitates. Though definite proof of the collector's intentions remains out of reach, I felt tempted to attribute my behavior to the routines and quirks of porn collectors. In any case, this experience speaks to the sticky tensions that porn evokes.



[Fig. 3] Commercial video copy of *Aftershock Part 2*, the sticky note flipped back to its original state (Source: Schwules Museum, photo by Nils Meyn).

I find this sequence intriguing as it mirrors, or rather contrasts with, the dynamics of another crucial phase of the cataloging process: viewing pornographic films. I usually do this at a media station in the library of Schwules Museum, outside its opening hours, when no external researchers or visitors are present. This is to prevent people who are not expecting it or are too young to legally view adult content from being confronted with pornography.[11] However, I'm still not always alone in the library, as this space is also shared among employees and volunteers. This puts me in situations where not only the explicit images can

11 For the same reasons, pornographic books are not kept in the public library but are instead stored in the restricted archival storage. This has been, for the most part, standard practice since the museum became institutionalized and began receiving more outside visitors.

be exposed, but also me as the viewer. Particularly when watching BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism) or extreme fetish porn, featuring, for example, needles and scat sex, these situations can potentially create a sticky, uneasy atmosphere. Mindful of my surroundings, I sometimes glance over my shoulder, or discreetly stop the video until I feel less exposed. Cataloging porn often places me in a detached, intellectual position, distancing me from the erotic power of the films—though as my experiences in the library suggest, porn's presence as an erotic object lingers on. As Susanna Paasonen notes about the seemingly contradictory emotions evoked by pornography, "[u]navoidably, the thing that disgusts and evokes shame also arouses, excites, and fascinates" (2011, 220). Thus, archiving pornography in an institutional setting requires navigating this intricate web of emotions encompassing disgust, shame, desire, and excitement that lies at pornography's core.

Sticky notes, then, stand as indicators of the emotional navigation prompted by archiving smut. Found in the archive of Schwules Museum, they reveal how gay porn's erotic forces have subtly been redirected or contained. Though easily dismissed as incidental, these small sheets of paper are among the few remaining pieces of material evidence of how gay smut, especially in its analogue forms, resonated with people in the rhythms of their everyday lives. For this reason, I argue that sticky notes, along with the notations inscribed on them, should be approached as archives of reception practices. At least in the case of those found at the Schwules Museum, they are two things at once: both indexing tools and mediators of queer desires. Even when these desires are not explicitly stated within the collectors' notations, they become recognizable through modes of attachment, that is, the intimate touches and methodical maneuvers the notes enabled.

This article is therefore a call for archivists, whether volunteering or otherwise, to take sticky notes seriously: to catalog them, preserve them, and maybe even hold them a little closer—alongside

the smutty movies to which they so often cling. For scholars engaged with porn archives, this means attending to the sticky tactics and tactility that make smut so valuable. Given the constraints of time, space, and political precarity that queer archives often face, recalling their smutty allure might offer some reassurance. Indeed, I want to underscore what may already be self-evident by this point: that archival work can be filthy, flawed, frustrating, fatiguing, and even contagious—yet it remains undeniably vital. The sticky notes are evidence of this, pointing to just how queer the practice can be.

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The Sticky Sundew: Plant Carnivory and Queer Erotics

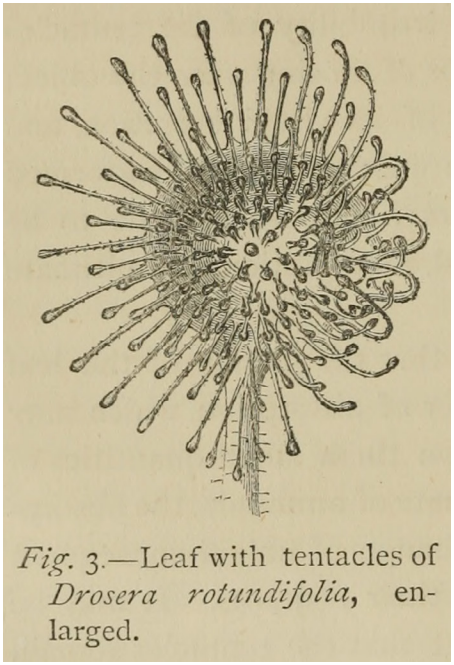
Emma Merkling

In 1875, Charles Darwin published *Insectivorous Plants*, a book whose origins lay in his long-standing fascination with the "insect-catching power" of the common sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) (Darwin Correspondence Project 1860a) (fig. 1). The first 12 chapters are devoted to the little marsh plant in all its varietals, and the great naturalist's "remarkable discovery," in his own words, that, when "properly excited"—usually by the insects trapped in its sticky tentacles—it secreted "a fluid containing an acid … closely analogous to the digestive fluid of an animal" (Barlow 1958, 133).

For Darwin, these animal properties ran deeper than analogy. For decades he had studied the surprising mobility and sensibility of plants, consumed by the notion that they might possess the same basic consciousness and intelligence as animals—even some form of "free will" (Darwin 1838, 72). He grew especially attached to the "extraordinar[ily] sensitive" sundew (Darwin 1875a, 3). Darwin wrote often about his "beloved *Drosera*," an "infinitely amus[ing]" and highly sensitive little "animal" whose responsiveness to his attentions verges on an ability to love back (Darwin Correspondence Project 1863; 1860b). He felt he could write a poem about it (Litchfield 1915, 170). "I care more about *Drosera*," he once wrote, "than the origin of all the species in the world … Is it not curious that a plant sh[oul]d be far more sensitive to touch than any nerve in the human body!" (Darwin Correspondence Project 1860c).

[Fig. 1] *Drosera binata*, one of the varietals of sundews discussed by Darwin in *Insectivorous Plants* (1875). This varietal is native to Australia and New Zealand (Source: Scientific Garden, Goethe University Collections, Photograph: Susanne Pietsch).

Darwin writes about his sundew like a lover. His dearest pleasure is to "excite" his "wonderful plant, or rather … most sagacious animal" into emitting its curious fluids (Darwin Correspondence Project 1863). The plant has a seductive agency of its own, one which inheres in its stickiness. It "secretes a glutinous fluid on its leaves so adhesive," a later popular account explained, "that when a fly once lights upon it there is no hope of its escape" (Buel 1887, 475). The sundew lures living beings into its clutches with the dazzling promise of sticky delights. Then it kills them.



[Fig. 2] Illustration from *Freaks and Marvels of Plant Life* (1882) showing the tentacles of the sundew closing around a fly. Image from archive.org, courtesy of New York Botanical Garden, Lu Esther T. Mertz Library (Source: Cooke 1882, 30).

Darwin was not the first to tease out the erotic agency of the sundew, seductive precisely for its "murderous propensit[ies]" (Allen 1884, 183). In 1866 Algernon Charles Swinburne published an ode to the plant in *Poems and Ballads*, controversial for the themes of sadomasochism and sexual deviance—"illicit passion of every conceivable sort"—it explored ([Austin] 1869, 468). In the poem, the would-be lover is in thrall to the sundew's lips, "pricked with tender red" (Swinburne 1866, 214). Sexual desire and violence intermingle; pleasure accompanies pain. A decade later, the publication of *Insectivorous Plants* generated a new wave of cultural fascination with what science writer Grant Allen

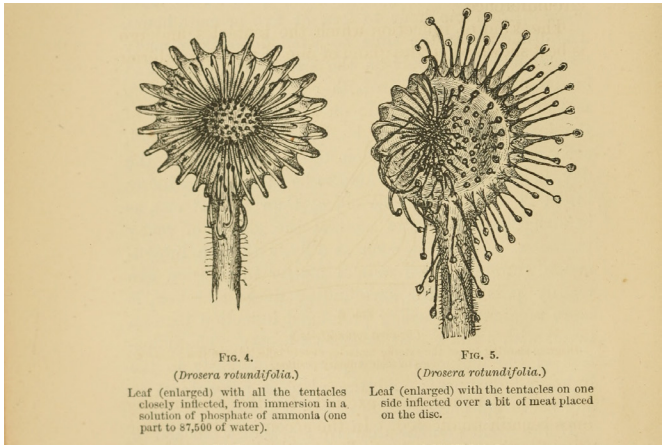


Fig. 4.
(*Drosera rotundifolia.*)
Leaf (enlarged) with all the tentacles closely inflected, from immersion in a solution of phosphate of ammonia (one part to 87,500 of water).

Fig. 5.
(*Drosera rotundifolia.*)
Leaf (enlarged) with the tentacles on one side inflected over a bit of meat placed on the disc.

[Fig.3] Illustration from *Insectivorous Plants* (1875) showing the sundew's tentacle closing around a piece of meat. Image from archive.org, courtesy of Princeton Theological Seminary Library (Source: Darwin 1875a, 10).

called the "atrociously and deliberately wicked" plant, collapsing the sundew's supposedly villainy onto its beguiling and, in his words, "queer" charms (1884, 183). When Allen says "queer" he mostly means "strange," but several Victorian artists and writers generated fantasies from Darwin's botanical writings that we can understand as "queer" in its expanded sense—from intimations of same-gendered, non-reproductive, and otherwise "deviant" erotic configurations, to explorations of non-heteronormative desire across species (Barrow 2021; Hughes and Merkling 2024; Smith 2003; Syme 2017).

To stimulate the sundew into its secretions Darwin enacts a range of perverse and tender pleasures we can also understand as queer. He places bits of meat on it. He pricks it with a needle. He drizzles it with milk, blood, saliva, piss. He watches carefully for its response—its trembling tentacles, its twitching glands (fig. 3). "One of the bits of meat excited so much secretion," he writes, "that it flowed some way down the medial furrow, causing the

inflection of the tentacles on both sides" (Darwin 1875a, 282). Gillian Beer has written about the erotics present elsewhere in Darwin's botanical studies; specifically, the sensual charge generated between naturalist and plant-subject in his careful, proto-cinematic registration of the plant's creeping motion over time as it extended its tendrils "in manifest relation to [its] wants" (Beer 2017, 30–31; Darwin 1875b, 202). I have previously called these erotics queer because of Darwin's figuring of these plants as agents in their own right, and because of the phallic quality he lends their "rigid terminals seeking and inserting themselves into holes" as he looks on (Merkling 2024, 156). But the queer erotics of the sundew, its own peculiar charm, inheres in its stickiness; in the specifically abject nature of its actions and bodily effluvia—and of those it seems to tease out of others. By "abject" I mean that which is associated with filth and waste, which socially engenders disgust and even horror, which exceeds or compromises the body's boundaries; many queer and feminist theorists have made the link to qualities of stickiness, viscosity, and sliminess here (Douglas 2002; Grosz 1994; Kristeva 1982). Others still have elucidated the points of contact between queerness, excess, and "waste"—the intermingling of "abject" bodily fluids like urine; the pursuit of non-reproductive erotic encounters; the subversive pleasures to be found even in disgust (Breckon 2013; Florêncio 2020).

These dynamics come together in the very literal stickiness of the sundew, Darwin's loving relationship to it, and Victorian queer responses to carnivorous plants broadly. It is with urine, blood, and spit, with flesh and with fluids, that Darwin stimulates the sticky tentacles of his beloved *Drosera* into response. These fluids mingle with the sundew's own lethal secretions, and the appetites of both are sated.

Though feminist scholars have—with good reason—looked on Darwin's models of evolution, nature, and biology with suspicion, recent work has recovered aspects of his writing that offer fertile ground for queer theory and ecocriticism today,

especially those aspects of his vision of "nature" which unsettle straight teleologies, reveal alternative—even "monstrous"—configurations of being, and disrupt imperatives to reproductive futurity (Grosz 2011; Morton 2010; See 2020). Darwin's *Drosera*, and the surprising erotic configurations it provoked, further makes visible forms of queer relation in which pleasure and pain, desire and disgust, life and death stick together.

I would like to thank Andrew Cummings for reading this essay so closely and generously.

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Pornography as a Sticky Film

A conversation between Fabienne Bieri and Jamal Phoenix

Jamal Phoenix and Fabienne Bieri discuss the sticky dimensions of pornography, both as a medium, a form of sex work, and as a ubiquitous theme traversing bodies and images. Jamal Phoenix is an Afro-Creole transmasculine porn star, dancer and sex worker currently based in Europe. His career revolves around his self-proclaimed "Neo-Masculinity," working to amplify transmasculine gay visibility through dance performances, films and educational workshops. Fabienne Bieri is a researcher, activist, artist and curator based in Switzerland. In this discussion, they use the concept of stickiness to explore the social embeddedness and transformative potential of pornography. The conversation took place before an event they held together on April 13, 2024 at Kino Xenix in Zurich, Switzerland.

Fabienne Bieri [FB]: Let's start with a brainstorm. What do you think of when you hear the word "sticky"?

Jamal Phoenix [JP]: I automatically think of glue. And spilled juice. And sweets, like candy, especially when they melt in your pocket as a kid. But the first thing that came to my mind were those sticky yellow fly traps. It's spring now, the sunshine is coming back and so are the indoor plant flies. So now the traps are everywhere in my house. It's ugly. I hate them. And they're so sticky.

FB: Your associations with stickiness are deeply sensory. You mention positive sensations like those from candies and sweets. However, you also emphasize how stickiness can shift and become bothersome—like spills or melting. You even mentioned something you hate, the fly traps. Stickiness can both attract and repulse, making it an ambivalent phenomenon we can both desire or try to avoid. Do you think stickiness can be used to explain how porn is simultaneously omnipresent and stigmatized in society?

JP: Definitely. Pornography is taboo primarily because it is forbidden and associated with sex work, which remains one of the biggest taboos in our societies. Despite being considered the oldest profession in the world, many people still refuse to accept it. Interestingly, some porn performers don't see themselves as sex workers, even though they are part of the sex work industry. Many of them try to distance themselves from the label by calling themselves "porn influencers," actors, or simply performers. However, this distinction doesn't change the fact that porn is connected to sex work, contributing to its taboo status. Porn is an integral part of modern culture. Although big corporations profit from it, at its core, porn is for the people. Pornography exists because people have a sexuality and a desire to see sexual content. Yet, there is a hypocritical reluctance to acknowledge that. In Europe, especially with its Catholic or Christian background, sexuality is often viewed as something not meant to be enjoyed but rather as a duty for reproduction. This influence shapes the way society views sex, often with a sense of disgust or shame leading to slut shaming and taboos.

FB: Do you think pornography is a sticky medium?

JP: Absolutely, because porn sticks to your brain. I think most people remember the first time they watch porn because it is such a taboo. I grew up in the 90s, and we had VHS tapes. Back then, the taboo was even bigger. I clearly remember stealing tapes from my parents; they were very real, raw, and unrefined. Porn is like forbidden fruit, making a big impression the first time you see it. We're used to seeing some kissing and blurry images in mainstream movies, but it's not full-frontal sex. That's part of why it sticks in your brain—it's so in your face.

FB: This has been called the hyper- or maximum visibility of porn.[1] Do you think hypervisibility of sex and genitals makes porn a particularly sticky medium?

JP: Yes, because we are attracted to what is forbidden. We live in societies where walking around naked is not the norm. Bodies, especially genitals, are considered very private and intimate. So, when you see this secret, hidden part of someone on screen, especially in such an intimate act as making love or having sex, it leaves a mark.

FB: From watching those first VHS tapes to where you are now: How did you get into porn?

JP: I started dedicating my time to porn in 2020, though I did some shoots before that. My first porn shoot was in 2011, and it was self-shot with a low-quality digital camera, since smartphones weren't common then. Courtney Trouble[2] asked people to send in amateur videos for $100 to create a collection of queer porn from around the world. I always wanted to do porn, so I made a video at a friend's place in northern France after returning from Australia. I had to wait to send it, as I was homeless at the time and traveling. I was in Berlin, where I had no access to computers, and then I went to Palestine, where all the porn websites were blocked. Courtney followed my journey through emails explaining my delays. Recently, I watched the video on one of my hard drives, and it's really cute.

1 Linda Williams understands maximum visibility as a defining characteristic of pornography ([1989]1999, 72–74). In a contribution on queer embodiment in pornography, Ryberg (2015, 267) discusses Williams' understanding of maximum visibility, explaining that "pornography builds on a principle of maximum visibility, where lighting, framing, camera angles, close-ups, body positions, and not least editing form part of the machinery that works to unveil the secrets about what sex is."

2 American porn performer and director (Trouble, 2024).

FB: You've come a long way since then. You've professionalized and you have a prolific body of work. What do you focus on in your films?

JP: It's important for me to have more transmasculine people in gay porn. Well, in porn in general, but I focus on gay porn. I've always wanted to do porn. But since my transition, my porn career has become more political—just by the fact of me existing. Black transmasculine people in gay porn are still a rare sight, especially in Europe. In the US, it's a bit different. That's one of the reasons why I do what I do.

FB: With your films, would you say you're aiming to create images that particularly stick to the viewer?

JP: I don't think I can control what sticks to the viewer. My focus is to create something meaningful. But "meaningful" can mean a lot of different things. Images can be meaningful because of an aesthetic, a message, or just because they are meaningful to me. I want to create material that is hot and that people want to masturbate to. But sometimes I want to create films that people will remember on a more political or social level. And then, if they stick to people's brains, great.

FB: I believe that when you create something that is meaningful to you, it also resonates with others.

JP: Yes, because people can relate to the sensations and feelings you experience. When something resonates with you, it touches your heart and stays with you.

FB: Speaking of meaningful work that touches other people, I would like to talk about your film *Mes Chéris* (2020), directed by Ethan Folk and Ty Wardwell (fig. 1). The film is about you bidding farewell to your breasts a month before your mastectomy. It won multiple awards—clearly, it resonated with the audience and "stuck" to people. Why do you think that is?

[Fig. 1] Jamal Phoenix in *Mes Chéris* (Source: Buttermilk Films).

JP: *Mes Chéris* is a docu-porn: part fiction and part documentary. In the documentary part, I'm 100% myself, because I'm talking about the process that I went through before my top surgery. I think that's why it sticks: it deals with very intimate topics that aren't usually shown or discussed publicly—identity, surgery, or my relationship with my body. I'm crying and showing my emotions. I've heard that in my movies, it looks like I'm showing all my emotions and that they feel very real. Maybe that's what people relate to. And, of course, a lot of people also told me that the sex scene was really hot, but I think it was mostly the documentary part that touched people.

FB: Have you ever heard or received feedback from festival visitors that one of your scenes particularly stuck to them?

JP: One thing that comes up regularly is that people tell me they like the connection between me and the people I'm performing with. What I also hear is that I seem to be genuine, authentic. However, I find the quest for authenticity in porn a little bit tricky. People want authentic sex, authentic feelings, authentic porn, authentic everything. I think that's hypocritical and it's not expected from other films. It's funny,

because in a lot of my movies, I'm completely acting. But that doesn't mean that I'm not authentic. Being a performer doesn't mean that you're not authentic. People want to have authentic real-life couples, but at the same time, porn performers are stigmatized for not being "real actors," when they actually are.

FB: What role does "stickiness" play in your relationship with your co-performers?

JP: It always depends on who I'm working with. My goal is to create work that resonates with the audience. In the porn industry, having a business mindset is crucial, especially since being a Black and trans performer is still very niche in gay porn. I have to carefully consider my collaborations to maximize the visibility I'll gain. While I've been attracted to every performer I've worked with, the working conditions haven't always been optimal. Despite this, I knew each project would enhance my visibility, potentially benefiting me in the future. That's why I choose to work with specific individuals and studios, or to create certain images, knowing they will contribute to creating "sticky" content.

FB: Let's talk about another one of your films. You told me you think your stickiest film is *Vice Versa* (2022) (fig. 2). Can you tell me a bit about that film?

JP: Yes, I love that film. It was a unique experience because it's a movie I made with Axel Abysse, whom I adore. Axel Abysse specializes in fisting videos, so we made a movie where we both fist each other. This was quite new for me. He's a professional at both fisting and being fisted, and while I'm good at fisting, I'm not as experienced at being fisted. However, I had complete trust in him. He creates tutorials about the safety around fisting and has a lot of knowledge on the topic. We used a lot of X-lube in the movie. But it's funny that I associated it with stickiness, because in reality, the lubricant we used was not sticky at all. Lube being sticky would be

[Fig. 2] Jamal Phoenix and Axel Abysse in *Vice Versa* (Source: Axel Abysse).

horrible, painful, and nothing would work. But I love this movie because I love X-lube. Actually, I love all lube, but I love X-lube particularly, because it's almost its own organism, its own living thing. It has a specific texture and the way that it looks is really beautiful. I find it super erotic.

FB: What's your relationship generally to sticky fluids in porn?

JP: Body fluids are a taboo, especially those that aren't sperm. There's a lot of body shaming around fluids like sweat, which is often seen as undesirable in porn, though it can be amazing. For me, porn is a platform to own and embrace your desires. Deconstructing body shaming, which is closely linked to slut shaming and sexual shaming, can be liberating. People are excited about various body fluids—pee, sweat, spit, blood, and more obscure ones. Owning your desires and respecting others', as long as they are not harmful, is healthy. Porn can help deconstruct shame and the acceptance of diverse sexualities, especially through fetish categories. I wish more straight people would watch queer porn to see the variety and feel less ashamed about their body fluids.

FB: I love the idea of embracing stickiness as a form of body and sex positivity. Speaking of queer porn, let's talk about two more of your films—*Brunch on Bikes* (2019) and *The Pizza Topping* (2019) (fig. 3), both directed by Ethan Folk and Ty Wardwell of Buttermilk Films. In *Brunch on Bikes*, friends feast over a special pancake batter, while in *The Pizza Topping*, you play the living pizza who orders a "hungry boy" to be eaten. They both play with humor, sex, and sticky food. Why did you choose to perform in these films?

JP: The weirdness and the fun. When I watched one of Ty and Ethan's earlier films, *Breakfast in Bed* (2016), I had never seen anything like it before. It stuck to my brain, creating a "stick-image." At that time, I wanted to be more active in porn, and it created a desire in me to do something similar. Before that, I didn't think I would want to play with food in porn or in my personal life. That's one of the ways porn is so sticky: it has this power of creating desires that you didn't even think of.

FB: In *The Pizza Topping*, you are the pizza. How did it feel to become the sticky object of desire?

JP: It's easy to be seen as an object of desire as a pizza because who doesn't like pizza? It's something that most people like and enjoy. I loved playing with the porn cliche of the pizza delivery. A lot of people know it and it's fun. But sometimes being an object of desire can also be alienating, because people dehumanize you: you just become a concept. Being seen or perceived as an object of desire is not something you can control. As a porn performer this is particularly tricky because you lose your humanity to people and you are reduced to this sexual thing, this ball of sexual energy, and people forget that there is a person behind that. So to be a pizza was interesting, because it plays with both the fun and erotic, and ambivalent dimensions of being a porn performer.

[Fig. 3] Jamal Phoenix in *The Pizza Topping* (Source: Buttermilk Films).

FB: When I first saw *The Pizza Topping*, I just thought it was funny, but the more we talk about it, the more I see how many layers it has. It's such a fun and subtle way of queering porn and sexuality.

JP: It is, and I think Buttermilk Films thought about that—it's what they play with. Food can be very fun and I think the beauty about queer porn is that there is this deconstruction about the politics of desirability, of what's considered desirable in porn. That can be about people, but it can also be about things: food, objects, concepts, and so on. Food is interesting because it is so common in erotic movies, like whipped cream, strawberries, and chocolate. But the way that food is used in queer porn is more interesting, because those scripts are changed. In *The Pizza Topping,* Ty and Ethan play with the traditional trope where the person ordering the pizza gets fucked by the pizza delivery guy. In this movie, the pizza is in charge: the pizza orders the "hungry boy" to eat him. That's why I wanted to be in this movie, because I like to play with different dynamics to subvert the status quo.

FB: That brings me back to the more structural and power-related aspect of stickiness. You already talked about the

dehumanization of sex workers. Do you think otherness is something that "sticks" to certain bodies?[3] Can this type of stickiness be reclaimed and played with in a medium like porn?

JP: Absolutely. That's a big part of why I do porn—because I'm being othered, and I'm not the only one. Always being categorized sticks to me. So I decided to take control of my image and embrace who I am. As a Black transmasculine, gay performer, being in charge of my sexuality challenges the norm, particularly in porn. In *Godasses* by Emre Busse (2022), I discuss how rare it is to be a Black transmasculine person in gay porn. My existence in these spaces, even outside of porn, is transformative. Transmasculine people in gay porn are changing perceptions of gay sexuality. The power lies in being visible, existing in the industry, being in charge of my image and challenging what is considered desirable, ultimately leading to change.

FB: I think that's a great note to end on, but before we leave, is there anything in particular from this conversation that you wish would "stick" to the reader?

JP: I think people should be more curious. There are so many different types of porn. Porn is not what you think it is. We have the internet. Everyone has a smartphone or a computer. If you sit down for a second and think about what your desires are and have the courage to own them, you can find inspiration online because of porn. So I say: go for it.

3 In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2004, 10; 49–50) uses the concept of stickiness to explain the processes by which people are "othered" by examining how negative affects or emotions are attached to certain bodies, identities, and attributes, producing social norms and boundaries. In *Sensational Flesh* (2014, 88–89; 114–16), Amber Jamilla Musser discusses the concept of "stickiness" in relation to blackness and racialization. See also Amber Jamilla Musser and Kerim Doğruel in this volume.

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Films

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Brunch on Bikes (DE 2019, Ethan Folk and Ty Wardwell, Buttermilk Films).

Godasses Part III (DE 2022, Emre Busse).

Mes Chéris (DE 2020, Ethan Folk and Ty Wardwell, Buttermilk Films).

The Pizza Topping (DE 2019, Ethan Folk and Ty Wardwell, Buttermilk Films).

Vice Versa (DE 2022, produced by Axel Abysse).

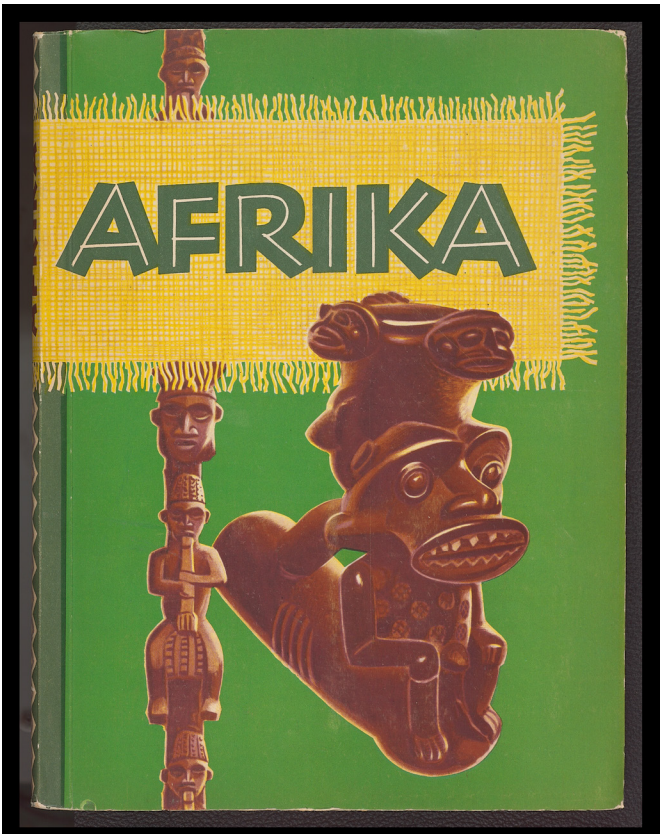
BECOMING STICKY

Sticky Politics Now and Then: *Afrika* and the Streets of Leipzig

Philipp Dominik Keidl

In June 2023, I visited an exhibition in Frankfurt that featured items from Goethe University's collections, including the collectible album *Afrika* (fig. 1). Published in 1952 by the Margarine Union and designed to promote customer loyalty, *Afrika* told the story of a young adventurer traveling the continent of Africa. The album came with the complete text, and consumers themselves would then add the small, colored pictures given out with each margarine purchase. Consequently, collectors were immersed in the neo-colonial tale not only through the story's content but also through the repeated engagement at various stages necessary to complete the album: buying margarine and discovering what images would be handed out with the product; collecting the cards and trading doubles with peers to complete the set; sorting images, finding the correct spot in the album, and appropriately gluing the cards on the page; preserving the album to avoid damage to the pages or straining the cards. However, *Afrika* is more than a relic of post-war popular culture. As the exhibition catalog emphasizes, in "the first century of brand advertising (from the Empire to the early Federal Republic), collectable cards were one of the most influential media for generating world knowledge in Germany" (Blume and Doğruel 2023, 7).

Afrika is only one example of the 2500 albums preserved in the "Picturing History Atlas" collection at Goethe University. Judith Blume, one of the exhibition curators and coordinator of the university collections, has written one of the most comprehensive histories of collectible albums in Germany. She positions the albums within debates on the potentialities and dangers of mass-produced popular visual culture and its ideological implications from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1950s.



[Fig. 1] *Afrika*, Margarine-Union, Hamburg 1952 (Source: Collection Politische Bildgedächtnisse, Goethe University Frankfurt, Inv.-Nr. SK 31310/1, Photograph: University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg).

Albums exploring topics such as history, geography, zoology, botany, film stars, national symbols, technical inventions, or the First World War helped to shape, practice, and solidify individual and collective identities operating within the logic of consumer culture, nationalism, and imperialism. However, the impact was

not from the individual images but from the albums as a whole. When collected and glued onto the pages, the serially produced images formed a "hyperimage" across two pages that encouraged repeated viewing (Blume 2019, 18–22). Yet, collectors should not be understood as passive consumers. Instead, post-war imaginaries about Africa were produced twice: first through the conceptualization of the *Afrika* album, and again by the album's owners, who, by visually completing the story, reaffirmed judgments, evaluations, and commentaries about nature, animals, geographies, and hunting techniques by placing collectible card by collectible card in their intended spots.

Since the 1950s, collectible albums have lost their popularity and, consequently, their influence on knowledge production in Germany. Today, the public is probably primarily aware of them around European or world football championships, when portraits of players from each participating national team can be collected during the tournaments. However, different yet related forms of political communication have emerged that demonstrate the persisting role and impact of small images and related practices as influences on the development of viewpoints on various issues or topics. While I was at the exhibition and looked at the album, my phone buzzed regularly with new messages from a Telegram group I had joined after a visit to Leipzig a few weeks earlier. Group members used the app to share images of sites in the city where they had found, covered up, or scribbled over far-right stickers, or where someone had done the same with stickers of the political left on lampposts, bus stops, street signs, or other public spaces where such stickers had been placed (fig. 2). Accompanying messages provided explanations and locations of stickers, asked for clarifications if political meanings and messages were not immediately evident in images and texts, or instructed where stickers were discovered but still had to be removed. As such, the activities of the group were an example of what Elizabeth Ritchie (2019) calls "sticker wars," Jinsook Kim (2021) "sticky activism," and Shawn Bodden and Hannah Awcock

[Fig. 2] Political stickers on a building's downpipe in Leipzig (Photo by the author, May 6, 2023).

"political stickering" (2024): sharing political standpoints and agendas, supporting or challenging specific policies, expressing solidarity or dissent with or against social groups, or reaffirming or disrupting prevailing narratives through various kinds of stickers or sticking objects.

One year before the state election in Saxony (and still ongoing while completing this essay less than one month before the election in September 2024), the stickers and related practices were a popular form of political expression and participation, one with low barriers in terms of budgetary and time constraints. Although some of the stickers are specifically designed and produced by activists across the political spectrum, the act of sticking up explicit political messages is easily countered by covering them up with random stickers received as freebies or add-ons. And unlike actions such as the organization of demonstrations or public debates, stickering can be easily integrated into everyday activities, placing and covering stickers on your way to work, while running errands, or during other activities in your leisure time. The activities in the group document the formation of "affective counterpublics" (Kim 2021, 40) that aim to capture attention and generate engagement among the city's citizens by mobilizing sentiments ranging from fear, anger and hate, to sympathy, hope and solidarity, to contemporary political discourse central to this election cycle, such as migration, climate change, energy policies, internal security, inflation, sexual orientation and gender diversity, and the distribution of wealth, among others. As such, these activities in the streets of Leipzig offer insights into the polarization of a city not on one topic but on a broad spectrum of issues that determine political campaigns and public debates.

In this regard, *Afrika* and the sticky activism in the streets of Leipzig show certain similarities, even though there is no direct genealogy between them. Both depend on affordable and accessible images that rely on an interplay of spreadability and stickiness (Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2013). On the one hand, the mass-produced images circulate widely, reach many, and depend on the practice of exchange. On the other hand, their material quality and their design, meanings, and intents stick. They generate and maintain the interest of individuals—on surfaces and in their minds—and encourage various actions,

such as collecting, sharing, completing, altering, or removing. Both are widely known and used but receive comparatively little attention. Collectible albums are often discarded when youth reach adulthood and are placed outside literary, educational, or artistic canons, remaining primarily of interest to private collectors (Blume 2019, 15). Similarly, sticking as a political practice receives less coverage in the media than activist actions, protests, or institutional debates (Bodden and Awcock 2024). Both practices generate their impact not because of individual stickers, but rather as "hyperimages" in the case of collectible albums or "palimpsests" of stickers that are material chronicles of argumentative exchanges by placing, removing, or commenting on them (Awcock and Rosenberg, 2023). As such, both show the importance and impact of everyday visual culture on how we think with and through images and related practices—from design to acquisition, to sharing, to use, to alteration, to removal, to commenting, or to simply viewing.

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YUGOSLAVIA

PARTIZANKA

WORLD WAR 2

SOCIALIST CINEMA

CHRONOTOPE

CLIMATE ACTION

Stuck on Slavica: Yugoslav Partisan Film and its Multiple Stickinesses

Olja Alvir

Sometimes, one just cannot get over it. Academically speaking, of course. In this instance, the cause for academic headaches is *Slavica* (1947), a Yugoslav partisan film with a fascinating eponymous female character. This article is a testament of its writer being stuck at the intersection of Yugoslav partisan film, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, and affect theory. It delves into the complexities of gender dynamics, national identity, and political symbolism within the cinematic narrative, drawing parallels between past and present sociopolitical movements—notably the Yugoslav liberation movement during WWII and the today's climate movement, who share sticky

imagery. It also illuminates the sticky nature of knowledge production and the transformative potential of being stuck as a catalyst for academic inquiry and innovation.

I hate you, but I love you
I can't stop thinking of you
It's true, I'm stuck on you
Stacie Orrico

I will just go ahead and say it: I'm stuck. For months now, I've been trying to figure this out, but, so it seems, I can't. I'm just stuck trying to develop a theoretical perspective on the gender dimensions of Yugoslav partisan film.

In this text, I will make these feelings of being stuck productive. I will collate the term of stickiness as conceptualized by Sara Ahmed and Rebecca Schneider with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope in order to contribute something to the field of sticky studies from a south Slavic perspective and vice versa. I will attempt to make these ideas and fields adhere. I will also, as you can already see, not refrain from the (at times excessive) use of puns and word games. Thinking through the lens of language and following the paths and associations language itself offers to the thinker is a key component of my methodology and theoretical understanding. So is silliness; and taking pleasure in it. According to Roland Barthes, pleasure in the text arises from a kind of writing against the grain, where the text becomes a site of enjoyment precisely because of its tangents and digressions (Barthes 1975). I believe this aligns with the academic process where the journey—as stuck or detoured as it may seem—becomes as important as the end goal. Following loose linguistic ligaments also allows me to connect my thoughts on Yugoslav

partisan film with today's political issues; and it also lets me think about academic knowledge production through the lens of stickiness, providing some thoughts on the relevance of the feeling of being stuck for the generation of knowledge.

In order to demonstrate what I am stuck on while also trying to make some ideas stick, I will build upon several key aspects of stickiness as it manifests in Yugoslav partisan film. First, I will address depictions of literal forms of stickiness, such as physical "ground adherence" (Jakiša 2011, 213), which is a recurring motif in Yugoslav partisan films. This is seen in scenes where partisans struggle through snowy or muddy landscapes, or in moments of great vulnerability and sacrifice, when characters are depicted barefoot. These physical acts of grounding become not just symbolic of the struggles faced by the partisans, but of their connection to the land and the resistance itself. Second, Yugoslav partisan film also acts as a form of "national glue," binding together a fragmented, diverse population through its portrayal of a unified, collective struggle against fascism. In these films, the shared experience of resistance becomes an anchor for a new national identity, and the films themselves serve as a vehicle for the cohesion of Yugoslavia's multi-ethnic society. The genre is imbued with what Jakiša terms a "telluric character" (2011, 213), a connection to the land that reflects their local embeddedness. This "septic contact" with the earth (Jakiša 2012, 114), as they wade through mud or march barefoot, represents not only the dirtiness and messiness of their resistance but also the creation of a collective space, where diverse ethnic groups come together through shared labor and struggle. This portrayal stands in stark contrast with other, "sterile" imagery of a mere side-to-side of nations within socialist aesthetics (2012, 114), and it emphasizes an embodied and messy engagement.

Third, I will explore the metaphorical stickiness of the films, particularly the way they adhere to the collective memory and national myth of Yugoslavia, while acknowledging how the topic of antifascist resistance and the legacy of the Yugoslav partisans

[Fig. 1] Partisans on their laborious foot march through the snowy landscape, with their feet sinking into the snow, are being thrown off balance in the cold (Source: *Daleko je sunce* [1953], Avala Film).

is a sticky subject in the successor states post 1992. These films create an emotional and ideological residue that continues to stick to contemporary audiences, affecting them, influencing how the history of the partisans is remembered, contested, and reinterpreted in a post-socialist context. And finally, I will delve into the conceptual stickiness tied to the intersection of gender and temporality in these films. An examination of gender roles—especially the revolutionary female *partizanka*—leads me to explore how these portrayals reflect ideas of modernity, time, and progress within the Yugoslav project.

A Timely Meet-Cute

It all started with *Slavica* (1947). I first saw her, or I should rather say, the film, in 2019, when I was a graduate student doing a course on Yugoslav partisan film. It was the first film in the

syllabus, and I volunteered to do a short presentation on it in order to get this part of the course workload over with as early in the semester as possible. So in the beginning, it was all just a matter of time. Little did I know, I was in for a ride, and more so, in for love at first sight.

Slavica is a film about a young woman from a small town on the Dalmatian coastline in Croatia who works at the sardine factory with her parents. Even though Slavica's family is poor, she refuses—much to the dissatisfaction of her parents—to marry the Baron, who is exploiting the hardworking fishers and villagers. Instead, Slavica joins a collective that is building their own boat. She also convinces others in the village to donate to the cause and to join the collective—notably the young and at first glance lazy, but on second thought class-conscious Marin, who will later become her husband after she basically proposes to him. As a nod to her dedication and motivational spirit, the boat gets named *Slavica*, after her, and she christens it during the wedding ceremony with Marin. However, the invasion of the Axis powers interrupts the celebrations, and life in the small village changes for the worse abruptly. When the Italian forces order for *Slavica*, the ship, to be confiscated, the collective hides it. As retaliation, the whole collective and many villagers are arrested and threatened with execution lest they disclose the location of the ship. They are rescued by a group of partisans hiding in the mountains in the hinterland, and after that, many join the movement, including the protagonist Slavica, who gets handed one of only three guns that the partisans have to distribute amongst the new recruits.

The film goes on to show various scenes from the antifascist liberation struggle while underlining Slavica's and Marin's (and the ship's!) development within the movement while they take up more responsibility. At the end of the film, when *Slavica*, the ship, protects a convoy of refugees evacuating from the city of Split for the islands, some of the last left-over Axis power warships—we are already reaching the end of the war, liberation being just at

reach—attack it. Marin, now commander, leads his comrades into battle and directs Slavica, his wife, to fix the damage in the ship's hull from the enemy encounter. Slavica does so with nothing but her bare hands, some rags and a hammer, until she gets shot and sinks into the rising water. Slavica thus heroically and tragically dies inside of *Slavica*. Really, Human-Slavica dies *for* Ship-*Slavica*. The woman and the ship, in their complicated intertwinement, become symbols for the socialist project of Yugoslavia.

Lured by Clumsy

It is a remarkable film, not for its artistic merits, but for something else, something that I've been struggling to pinpoint ever since. I'm not alone in this. In 1983 Petar Volk wrote as the first sentence of his review: "This film is weird and atypical" (127).[1] *Slavica*, the first film post WWII in the new socialist state, has been criticized as being rather "naive" (Ćolić 1984, 174), "theatrical" (Liehm and Liehm 1977, 125), and "simplistic" (Goulding 1985, 16) by contemporary critics as well as today's viewers. It's true: the film is certainly no feat of classical style, neorealism, or nuanced cinematic craftsmanship (all of which are represented by numerous works of early Yugoslav cinema). But there is something more to *Slavica*'s brashness and lack of dramaturgical cohesion—especially in combination with its overwhelming melodramatic dedication and its doubling-down on obtrusive symbolism. The film fails to make a mystery of its obvious constructedness. This gives it a certain fragile aura. It feels as if it's

1 The word used here is "samorodan." An exact translation is made difficult by the ambiguous use by the original author. The word can mean native, homegrown, or peculiar. Notably, the word is made up of the words for "self" and "born" and thus corresponds to the nature of the Yugoslav antifascist resistance during WWII as well as the state of Yugoslav cinema immediately after the war. Interestingly, this is also the very first sentence of Petar Volk's 1983 description of *Slavica,* pointing to the ongoing confounding effect this film has had on scholars.

fraying on all sides. It made me want to pick up one of these frayed ends and see where it leads me.

Maybe it is this, a certain clumsiness (Liehm and Liehm 1977, 124) in early Yugoslav filmmaking that came across to me as sympathetic, somehow even refreshing. Perhaps I was drawn to it because I read it as representative of partisan irregular warfare: you make do with what you have. The shooting of *Slavica* was certainly somewhat of a "training camp" for the pioneers of Yugoslav socialist cinema (Wurm 2015). Now that I am writing out the word *camp*, I do also wonder to what extent the term as used by, for example, Susan Sontag can apply to Yugoslav partisan film (Sontag 1964). Nebojša Jovanović has written about the queerness of early Yugoslav film, and even though he does not explicitly use the term, many aspects he analyses might be interpreted as campy (Jovanović 2016). That is one reason why I am interested in these movies and what they are doing: I am convinced that there is more to it than setting them aside as propagandist, socrealist or as representatives of a national cinema's infancy, a time before Yugoslav film finally settled into its purported full glory in the 1960s. There's something that connects the notion of scrambling to make a film with scrambling to make a country: the cracks are showing. I came to the conclusion that I like my films when they are clumsy, when they are a little rough, hands dirty with the labor of image production. In one word: sticky.

I will now articulate a perspective on Yugoslav partisan film that delves into depictions of literal stickiness—such as muddy feet—as well as conceptual stickiness, particularly as affective power. I will demonstrate how the former feeds the latter and explain how these notions of stickiness are intertwined with local space-time, revealing the specifics of Yugoslav modernity as expressed in *Slavica* and its successors.

[Fig. 2] Slavica can't wait to get her hands on a gun. Who wouldn't fangirl her as she's standing on the karst mountaintop, tucking the revolver into her skirt, wind in her hair, absolutely beaming with joy? (Source: *Slavica* [1947], Avala Film).

"Slavica Before the Revolution"

An obvious reason for a certain fascination with *Slavica* is the character of Slavica herself, an outspoken, emancipated woman, a "willful subject" (Ahmed 2014)—a woman with a gun.

But there's more to it, and it's got to do not just with the iconic status of the *partizankas*, the real women that fought between 1941 and 1945 in the National Liberation Army in Yugoslavia in the tens of thousands (Wiesinger 2008, 32). The film posits Slavica at the beginning of revolutionary action and thus as a driver (or should I say steerer?) of the plot: it is the emancipated woman who changes minds, who updates worldviews, who plants ideas for collective action and raises desires for revolutionary struggle. Who problem-solves, agitates, and mobilizes. "It is 'Slavica' before the communist revolution," writes Maja Bogojević (2013, 203). Everything that the Yugoslav socialist project promised to

women—independence, autonomy, mobility, employment—seemed already realized in the character of Slavica in the film's first part, depicting scenes from 1941. But it was also rightfully remarked that even though partisan films initially present emancipated women, it seems like they either deny these characters to see the fruits of their labor by killing them off in the end, or that they still make sure to tie these women to traditional gender roles by way of compulsory love plots or representations of traditionally female qualities like being nurturing or emotionally vulnerable (2015, 214). In *Slavica*, too, Slavica is seen much less in the second part of the film as her now husband Marin as well as the partisan leader Ive Marušić gain more screen time and relevance. It's as if the film surprised itself with its overt feminism and decided to correct course a little bit. Natascha Vittorelli has put it this way: "[S]he oscillates between fighter and medic. She adopts masculine attributes, but is thrown back on her femininity. A revolutionary gender order is insinuated but not established" (2015, 119). This means that in the depiction of gender relations, early partisan films create a kind of *time warp*, where the promises of the socialist future—particularly in terms of women's emancipation—are presented as already realized in the past. The film constructs a scenario where gender equality, autonomy, and revolutionary progress are depicted as though they had already been achieved, even as it simultaneously reinforces traditional gender roles. This tension within the *past envisioned future* is a key characteristic of the *chronotopos* of partisan cinema, where time is folded, layered and compressed, offering both a reflection of revolutionary ideals and a confirmation of the ways those ideals were constrained by the very structures they sought to overcome.

Time Warp

Mikhail Bakhtin proposed to view literary works through the lens of what he called the "chronotope" in an essay first written from 1937 to 1938, though it only gained wider recognition in

the late 1970s and 1980s. The chronotope as he conceptualized it is a form of analysis that takes into consideration aspects of time and space and how they are connected, intertwined, and/or substituted for each other. Bakhtin's initial thesis was that choronotopes can be used to discern literary genres, and he provided convincing examples for specific conceptions of time-space in different stages of the development of the novel throughout history (Bakhtin 1981 [1975]). His definition of the chronotope, though, is admittedly vague. But vagueness has only made this theory flexible and open, which has given rise to creative and insightful additions and redevelopments in the humanities, social studies, and more.

I argue that Yugoslav partisan film exhibits its own peculiar chronotope, its own conception of space-time. This conception is marked by several things. First: the invasion of the Axis powers in 1941, the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–1941), and the following occupation of territories is depicted as a historical incision, the force and overwhelming character of it akin to natural catastrophe. The Yugoslav partisan narratives and films make clear that 1941 is a historic break. It is a break that is also an opening, though. The collapse of the old order brings rise to new, revolutionary possibilities. Philosopher and partisan scholar Gal Kirn calls this delicate state—with the fragile, but promising visions of a different future that rise out of it—the "partisan rupture" (2020, 22–3), and I argue that the films reflect this notion. Second: the socialist belief in progress is reflected in the hopeful yet somber collective marching scenes in the films, which, rather curiously, seldom reach a fixed destination.

These scenes are more about constant motion and departure than about arrival or settling down. The focus is on leaving, moving forward, or even wandering aimlessly (Jovanović 2015). This reflects a broader thematic undercurrent, where the partisan struggle, as portrayed in the films, is linked to an ongoing process rather than a conclusive resolution. The constant need for negotiation and adaptability within the partisan

[Fig. 3] Slavica struggles to contain the overwhelming force of the water. Notably, since she is barefoot in this scene, she is in direct skin contact with the ship named after her, with both Slavica and the ship serving as symbols of the Yugoslav nation (Source: *Slavica* [1947], Avala Film).

ranks mirrors the internal conflicts and unresolved tensions within the broader Yugoslav project (Jakiša 2012). The partisan chronotope, as seen in these films, becomes a symbol of an ever-evolving, fragile state of becoming, rather than a clear, finished product.

I argue that these spatializations of time, the partisan chronotope and the before-her-time-ness of Slavica, the character, are connected by a common notion throughout Yugoslav partisan film: the idea of a form of anti-modern modernity.

In *Slavica's* death scene, she desperately tries to stop sea water from entering the ship, an image that can be interpreted as an attempt to halt the flow of time itself. Her hands grow weaker with each passing moment, and, in the end, they slip off the wooden hull. As her body sinks into the water, a striking detail emerges: Slavica is suddenly barefoot. This emphasis on bare feet

[Fig. 4] The camera lingers on the shoes left behind by peasants who walk to their executions barefoot (Source: *Na svoji zemlji* [1948], Triglav Film).

is not unique to this film and recurs in other Yugoslav partisan films. For instance, in *Na svoji zemlji* (1948), the peasant woman Angela Gradnik removes her footwear just before her execution by Axis forces: "I will take this off because it is the last time that I am walking on our land." Inspired by Angela, others who are about to be executed do the same. This is an affirmation of her groundedness and resistance. Similarly, in *Noći i jutra* (1959), Vera, the pregnant wife of a partisan who urges her husband not to betray the revolution as he is about to be executed, falls to her knees and loses her shoes in the process. Vera is also later executed, and the image of her standing against the wall barefoot as she is about to be shot as well as her comrades later picking up her shoes carries huge affective power in the film.

Tim Ingold, in his essay "Culture on the Ground," explores the cultural significance of the hand and the foot, emphasizing how the hand has come to symbolize human mastery over the world,

while the feet, often marginalized, remain tied to the earth and its materiality. Barefoot imagery is often linked to uncivilizedness and backwardness. He argues that the foot's role has been overlooked in favor of the hand's association with civilization and progress (Ingold 2004). However, in the context of Yugoslav partisan film as established by *Slavica,* walking, marching and barefootness appear from a perspective of resistance. They affirm the telluric formation (Jakiša 2011) of the partisans, the righteousness of their fight, and their connection to their land.

When I connect these notions of marching, ground adherence, gender, and the symbolism of bare feet, I arrive at the conclusion that Yugoslav partisan films uniquely engage with modernity. These films consistently explore the tension between the desire to move towards a socialist future and the need to preserve grounded, local elements. Yugoslav partisan cinema often portrays modernity as something to be embraced and/or moved towards, yet at the same time, it seeks to reject certain destructive forces, such as colonial, capitalist, or fascist systems. The compromise, then, is the image of ground adherence—whether it's through marching, walking, or the depiction of bare feet. This imagery imbues the characters with both vulnerability and humanity, while still conveying ideals of socialist progress and resilience. Yugoslavia is constituted by and travels on resistant feet.

A Sticky Subject

But there is another interesting time–space relation to be sketched out here. One could even posit that Yugoslav partisan film deals much less with the theme of partisanship and war than with societal and political debates of the era that the films were made in. Film "goofs"—for instance, the appearance of fashion that is recognizably not from the 1940s—serve to connect the platform of partisan narratives with contemporary Yugoslav reality (Jakiša 2013). The partisan narrative also becomes a vehicle

for the discussion of contemporary societal questions (Jakiša 2013). This corresponds with Bakhtin's assertion that readers (in this case viewers) are also in a "chronotopic" relationship with the works of art that they consume (1981 [1975], 252–53).

Moreover, the way these films were made was also a testament to, as Rebecca Schneider calls it in her book on war re-enactments, "tangled temporalities" and "crisscrossed geographies" (2011, 3). I found Schneider's remarks on time the most precise descriptions of the complicated, layered, sometimes contradictory times in partisan film. Apart from serving national constitutive functions, this cinema is of course also a form of memorizing historical events, as some films were released on the anniversaries of crucial WWII battles, for instance.

> It is certainly possible to argue that any approach to history involving remains—material *or* immaterial remains—engages temporality at (and as) a chiasm, where times cross and, in crossing, in some way touch. For surely, to engage a temporal moment *as past and yet present in varied remains* is to engage across as well as in time … To find the past resident *in* remains—material evidence, haunting trace, reiterative gesture – is to engage one time resident in another time—a logic rooted in the word "remain." Time, engaged *in* time, is always a matter of crossing, or passing, or touching, and perhaps always (at least) double. (Schneider 2011, 37)

To apply this view, one would need to regard partisan films as the "remains" of a lost socialist Yugoslavia. Scholar Jurica Pavičić does compare them to "gothic cathedrals in medieval Christianity," (2016, 40) albeit in a slightly derogatory sense, since he mostly finds them to be bombastic, propagandistic altars for Titoist Yugoslavia. Still, these films can certainly be understood as the material remains of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, of an overcome conception of time and space, or chronotope, reflecting what above, Schneider calls "time, engaged in time" (Schneider 2011, 37). But that would also mean

that these films gain at least some of their time-complexity only after the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s—a daring thesis. Certainly, the phenomenon of partisan film is part of Yugoslavia's antifascist legacy. This legacy has undergone a process of marginalization and erasure after the wars in the 1990s and the dissolution of the socialist multi-ethnic state (Kirn 2020, 211–13). Today, to some extent, partisan film and art with partisan themes are therefore sticky subjects in the post-Yugoslav sphere, laden with controversy regarding their merits, ideology, and aesthetics.

As a viewer from today, I am of course influenced by this discourse. Perhaps as a feminist, I also over-identify with the *partizanka*'s struggle. Surely, I am in a chronotopic relationship with the material myself, and my view on this material is heavily influenced by my experience as a refugee, my family having to flee during the Yugoslav dissolution war in the 1990s. My view is also certainly informed and somewhat tainted by a condition probably specific to some second-generation immigrants, which consists of a feeling of loss of something that one has never really had nor really experienced, something one can neither put one's finger on nor name: a lost home(land), heritage, or origin that one never truly had.[2] I am looking at the complexities of partisan film's warped time from my own point of having fallen out of time at the exact moment in history where terms like the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992) and "holiday from history" (Krauthammer 2004) are being floated in a truly dizzying fashion.

As the affective economy of this film corpus has been underresearched (Jakiša 2011, 211), I will now attempt to tie together my observations of *Slavica*, the partisan chronotopos, and their affective power under the umbrella of the affective theory of stickiness.

2 Svetlana Boym has pointed out that nostalgia is a chronotopic condition, as "it appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time" (Boym 2007).

I think that the affective power, the stickiness of partisan film, is connected to its chronotope, that is to say, its specific conception of space-time. The intricate display of disturbed, troubled but at the same productive and generative space-time is one of the characteristics of this genre that generates a rippling affective force. At the same time, other affective strategies (melodrama, self-sacrificing heroism, music, and yes, the depiction of partisans as "telluric" warriors) contribute to this sense of warped time. What is sticky about partisan film is not just its deliberate impact on viewer's emotions, though. The stickiness is a product of the histories and the time concepts that are already present in its making and existence. Sara Ahmed has famously made this connection in one of the founding documents of sticky studies, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*:

> Rather than using stickiness to describe an object's surface, we can think of stickiness as an effect of surfacing, as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs. To relate stickiness with historicity is not to say that some things and objects are not "sticky" in the present. Rather, it is to say that stickiness is an effect. That is, stickiness depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object. (Ahmed 2014, 90)

Partisan films are, paradoxically, a "Memory of a Past to Come" (Jakiša 2012, 111) and, at the same time, a reminder—or remainder—of a future that once was. So what partisan films do is to stickily resurface a "memory of hope" as conceptualized by Ann Rigney (2018). By presenting revolutionary efforts and the sacrifices made for a better future, the films transform the memory of struggle into an active, generative force, encouraging past and contemporary viewers to engage with those same ideals in their own time. This sticky memory of hope allows these films to transcend their historical context, offering viewers a vision of progress and a reminder that the fight for justice and social change is not over.

This is a part of Yugoslav partisan films' popularity and effectiveness in socialist times, and it is why today, despite (or maybe even moreso due to) the shifting political landscape and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, these films continue to resonate. They persist as cultural touchstones because they structurally connect past struggles to present challenges. The legacy of hope these films carry transcends their original political and historical context, becoming a reservoir of possibilities for reimagining the future. This enduring hope, transmitted through cinematic memory, is why partisan films remain relevant and continue to stick around and affect viewers in the post-Yugoslav world, constantly viscifying and complicating different notions of time, space, and time-space.

The Return of the Partisan

Writing this in the spring of 2024 in my city of residence, Vienna, I could not help but notice the headlines about protests from the young climate movement, which is pointedly and derogatorily called "Klimakleber" (climate gluers/climate stickers) in the media of the German-speaking sphere. After harassment by authorities and manufactured outrage by mainstream media, the movement has had to evolve their tactics and strategies. In April 2024, climate protesters put blindfolds on important Viennese monuments and sculptures, like that of the composer Johann Strauss in Stadtpark, economist and "father of free market capitalism" Adam Smith's monument before the Handelsakademie (the former k.u.k. Academy of Trade, now a business school), and icons of the conservative and social democrat parties of Austria, Leopold Figl and Adolf Schärf. Vienna, of course, being a city with an almost hypertrophic amassment of history, whose historic attractions and self-fashioning as a grandiose display of the (supposed) glory days of Habsburg rule contribute much to its tourist appeal, the local economy, and Viennese as well as Austrian identity.

The protesters' action can be read as drawing lines between the past, the present, and the future. The blindfolds are symbols of the blindness of politicians, but also the blindness of scientific and cultural elites to the looming threat of climate collapse. It is also a clever way of generating media attention in a city and country that is constantly gazing into its own historic navel.

Today, young people, children even, are at the forefront of a fight for a livable future on this planet and ecological justice, sometimes fighting for a different economic system altogether as well. One of their most interesting practices, certainly the one that has garnered most attention and ire, is sticking themselves onto the frames or protective glass of famous paintings in museums or gluing themselves to the concrete in order to disrupt fossil-fueled transportation and blockade streets.

In 2011, in her treatment on partisan ground adherence, Miranda Jakiša wrote about the "return of the [partisan] figure" (222). She points out a certain renewed interest for the partisan as seen in music, pop culture and internet phenomena, and also theorized that "telluric" logic and ground adherence are in some ways returning in the figure of the ecological protester who becomes a global "earth defender" (223). In the conference presentation preceding this article, I referred to Yugoslav partisan film as "national glue" due to its constitutive and cohesive properties, unifying a heterogeneous people under one common goal and master narrative. Ulrike Bergermann has also very recently pointed out that climate glueing stands for "a connection with 'the earth', sealed as it is, and for a connection with one another" (2024, 72).

This is sticky action. Not just literally, but also in terms of the spatio-temporal aspects of stickiness that I tried to outline in this essay. The method of sticking oneself to the past in order to influence the future: exactly what Rebecca Schneider calls "tangled temporalities" (2011, 3). The climate crisis and the backlash against climate awareness and action can be described as a

clash of chronotopes: "high time meets the day after tomorrow" (Goschler 2023). It is also clearly a certain time-logic that this movement wants to convey through the choice of the name "Last Generation."[3]

Coming from this perspective, it is clear to me that this form of sticky climate action involving bodies literally glued to objects or the ground is not just an effective way of generating media attention and controversy. It is a form of time-work. Making time work. Working with time. Through adherence in space, sticky climate action is speaking about time. Making time to think. Pointing out that time is running out. Or that we are too concerned about protecting and conserving the past and not concerned enough about protecting and conserving the future. It is remarkable, really, how effective (and affective) this kind of time-space work is.

> The stickiness of emotion is evident in the residue of generational time, reminding us that histories of events and historical effects of identity fixing, stick to any mobility, dragging … the temporal past into the sticky substance of any present. To be sticky with the past and the future is not to be autonomous, but to be engaged in a freighted, cross-temporal mobility. (Schneider 2011, 36)

When climate activists stick themselves onto streets, they stop the flow of individuals, automobiles, and capital. They are costing time by inhabiting space. They are attacking the infrastructure and therefore time-space logic of the current moment. Bergermann points out that sticky climate action is a form of structuring time and making narration possible, but that it is also a

3 "Last Generation" (German: *Letzte Generation*) is a climate activist group founded in 2021 and active in Germany. The name refers to the idea that the current generation may be the last with the opportunity to prevent irreversible climate collapse. The group is known for its use of non-violent civil disobedience, including road blockades and acts such as glueing themselves to public infrastructure and famous artworks.

"rearrangement of time," reconfiguring planes of time through the incorporation of past and future generations and imagining alternative flows of history (2024, 74). Bergermann surmises that sticky climate action relates to time narratives and is a result of a clash of times, and that climate gluing is an affective strategy because it aims at evoking viewer's images of their own hand (2024, 73–74). In partisan film, it's the feet—but the logic and effects are similar. Should one then go so far as to call this time warping guerrilla tactics? Or conceptualize Greta Thunberg as a modern ecological *partizanka*? Certainly, then and now, women or girls not doing what society expects them to be doing and instead championing a political cause is seen as especially disruptive to every kind of order, time included.

Stickiness and Knowledge Production

At the end of this text, I want to come back to the feeling of being stuck for a second. In some ways, being stuck is the prerequisite to moving forward. This makes it a necessary step for knowledge production. We can reconceptualize the feeling of being stuck, a sticky feeling, as an important part of knowledge production. Being stuck is not (just) a stopping point. It is a launching point. Just as good boots or cleated soles help us adhere to the ground and, paradoxically, propel us forward. Stickiness is fundamental to locomotion, and thus, I argue, a necessary component of knowledge production.

We are trying to contribute something to the conversation, to academic discourse, but we feel like we are not getting anywhere. I argue that this feeling of being stuck might already be one small step into the direction of a contribution, because it might point to an unexplored aspect, a research gap, an interesting new perspective. It can constitute a redirection of attention, maybe even against the usual flow. This (re-)direction, this affliction, this awareness of affect, can open up space and time for inquiry. One

can go a long way while being stuck. Hopefully, I demonstrated this in this text.

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Sticky Comics: Smudging the Gap

Fenja Holz

There's a thrill in this moment before an object touches another object. Fingertips gently move toward the other, suggesting anticipation. With delicate lines, *Sumpfland* by Moki (2019) shows us a world where nature seems to take center stage. In one of the storylines the reader follows *Ocre*, a wild creature roaming through the swamp lands and appearing to fall in love with the wilderness. Trees and flowers emerge like hands from the ground, and *Ocre*'s touches are marked by sensitivity and desire. Initially cautious and curious, she seems to examine everything. Slowly, she caresses the delicate grass beneath her body and absorbs the unfamiliar scent, not hesitating to touch, lick, and taste the stones with her tongue. Her fingers glide between small hills from which a stream begins to flow, and gradually she touches the wilderness like the body of a lover. The plants and moss become curious fingers, enclosing *Ocre's* flesh from all sides. Her hand plunges into the water, and forms seem to blend into each other. The water, once fluid, clings to her fingers like glue and wraps around her skin. Even as *Ocre* emerges from the swamp, the liquid sticks to her, and the film that wraps around her flesh glows and creates a new form. The body seems to become the wilderness, and the wilderness becomes the body (fig. 1, left).

Sumpfland challenges the assertion that "[h]orrifying things stick, like glue, like slime" (Miller 1997, 26). In *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Miller describes how the link between disgust and fear is reflected in the feeling of horror, characterized by the inability to escape or distance oneself from what causes disgust. The fear arises from the impossibility of escaping or shedding something, as what triggers disgust is often already within us or clings to us and cannot be removed. This explains the deeply rooted revulsion towards stickiness. When something sticks to us, it ultimately leads to the terror that there is "no way to save oneself except by destroying oneself in the process" (Miller 1997, 26). The comics

[Fig. 1] *Sumpfland* (left), *Alien* (right), and a finger holding the pages down (Source: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Scan: Kerim Doğruel).

seem to further this assumption, as *Ocre* also changes through interaction and no longer seems the same; the boundary between the wilderness and herself appears to blur, at least momentarily. *Ocre's* touch, born of curiosity, may harbor an undercurrent of fear fueled by uncertainty about the touched object and its consequences. However, the presence of eroticism, which clings to both the protagonist and the reader, is also undeniable.

Alongside touches or interactions between objects, bodies, and thoughts, something adheres and brings about a change. This can evoke feelings of disgust or, as demonstrated along the sensual interactions, be experienced as something positive and desirable. In the exchange or touch, a space of possibility unfolds, where transformation becomes a tangible reality. In this moment, the origin of touch or the activity itself seems secondary; what matters is what sticks and thereby triggers a change. When we touch something, the boundaries between ourselves and the other inevitably blur.

Alien, by Aisha Franz (2011), also unveils moments of connection and transformation, yet within a less erotic realm. Instead, it reveals a vivid exploration of the subject through material and form. *The story* centers on three women: a mother and her two daughters. Each of them faces challenges that seemingly stick to them, revolving around desire. The comic's artwork is rendered in black and white, following strict formal rules. What's intriguing, however, is how this strictness is subverted and questioned by the material itself: in most images, the graphite of the pencil that was used for the drawing extends beyond the borders of the panels. On one page, the youngest daughter's finger curiously reaches toward another body. Her nail presses into foreign skin, trailing down the arm with gentle pressure. A moment charged with both tension and release. Then, the hand retreats, reluctant to leave, as if each particle clings, before they finally resolve from each other or in some cases stay and stick together. The fascination with the unfamiliar body, the curiosity, and perhaps even desire can be sensed in this brief exchange. The unfamiliar body in this narrative is that of an alien: depicted with large, strange eyes, a body reminiscent of a human, and two antennae—it appears just as a young child might imagine an extraterrestrial being. *Mädchen* examines the alien meticulously: pulling its skin, testing its elastic arms, and wiggling the antennae. What's particularly compelling is the moment when the girl seemingly causes the lead of the pencil to stick to her finger. Disturbed, she looks at it, and after wiping over the face of the alien multiple times, the edges of the alien's face appear somewhat faded (fig. 1, right). *Mädchen*, who touches the alien in excitement, projects her own needs, wishes, and sexual curiosity on to something external: the alien. And even if she doesn't know this consciously, it becomes visible in the exchange and sticks to her. The seemingly impermeable boundaries become smudged, opening up to something new. What was previously invisible becomes obvious through interaction and exchange.

[Fig. 2] Screenshot of Aisha Franz's Instagram (Source: Instagram, Aishathesheriff 2016, Screenshot: Fenja Holz).

Whenever a touch or exchange occurs, it brings a transformation. It might be subtle, or unfold gradually, but its impact resonates with everything involved. In the comic, this is directly evident due to the smudged finger of the girl, the faded face of the alien, or further extended into reality with the graphite-stained hands of the artist. On Aisha Franz's Instagram feed, there's an early image showing Franz's hands, presumably created during the process of drawing *Alien*. The hands are proudly presented to the camera, covered in graphite, and captioned with "#graphithand #pencilaction #handmakeup" (Aishathesheriff 2016) (fig. 2).

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CENSOR

SNUFF

CULTURAL IMAGINARY

HORROR

Disgusting Films, Moral Panics: Material Explorations of Sticky Horror

Julia Willms

Horror has a unique capacity to stick with viewers on both an individual and collective level. This article explores the emotional stickiness of horror, grounded in the genre's ability to touch and profoundly affect its audience. It begins by discussing the construction of stickiness on the level of media effects and their critical reception within public discourse. Here, the idea of an emotive stickiness is reinforced through its reiteration both in media criticism and aesthetic mediations by the films in question. The focus then shifts to the British horror film *Censor* (2021) as a case study to illustrate these arguments. *Censor* is examined through the lens of material aesthetics, analyzing how

its narrative and visual elements contribute to the sticky *cultural imaginary* of Snuff, which connotes a medial phenomenon that embodies technological anxieties and moral panics. The film's interplay between different diegetic levels, the manipulation of visual formats, and the portrayal of media control reflect horror's intimate relation with evolving technologies and the viewer's struggle to distinguish between fiction and reality. Ultimately, the article argues that the relationality and persistence of horror's emotive impact is what makes it so profoundly sticky, both on an individual and cultural level.

Horror films are sticky—on an emotional level. I allege that every horror fan can recall that one film they saw too soon, that one scene that stuck with them ever since (for me, it was *Silence of the Lambs*, even though I can also empathize with my generation's shared trauma over little Georgie's fate in the original *It*). While that is part of what makes horror so iconic, it is perhaps also why some people turn into foes of the genre. Horror's stickiness touches its viewers quite literally, their feelings and affects, which can never be separated from their bodies because of horror's "intensified multi-sensory appeal to the viewer" (Nair 2021, 4; Sobchack 2004, 53–85).

As I explore in this article, the specific nature of horror's stickiness therefore lies in its ability to touch and stick to us on such a profound level that not only enables individual sticking, but manifests itself in forms of shared *cultural imaginaries*. I will illustrate these dynamics through Snuff, an intermedial horror phenomenon that has been blurring ontological baselines of

fact and fiction for more than 50 years. Snuff serves as a illustrative backdrop to show how horror's emotive stickiness can be constructed individually and collectively through a mix of disconcerting media effects and cultural devaluation that is turned into artistic reflection. To show this sticky symbiotic relationship between media criticism and filmic mediation, I will turn to the British horror film *Censor* (2021) and illustrate how it contributes to Snuff as a lasting *cultural imaginary* through the use of material aesthetics.

Disgust and Panic: Elements of the Construction of Stickiness

The stickiness of horror films is fueled by their framing within the classifying system of the genre. Its images cross-reference, pay homage, and intentionally differentiate and evolve from one another within different medial settings. They thereby meet Catherine Shelton's understanding of genres as a process of variation and successive modification (2008, 110), not only utilizing prominent generic conventions but also intentionally suspending and diverting them to "disturb the category distinctions between the diegetic and the non-diegetic, image and infrastructure" (Nair 2021, 15). Shifting between generic familiarity and disruption, horror films evoke unsettling and disconcerting media effects that reference and make use of media beyond film. As an intermedial genre (Rajewsky 2024, 169–70), horror film's sights and sounds display a sense of melancholia (specifically for analogue forms of production and reception) using, as I argue, material aesthetics (but more on that later). Horror films' intermedial nature marks a fundamental emphasis on the notions of relationality and contact. Relations can be seen everywhere in horror.

For instance, Adam Daniel has recently noted horror's prevailing relationship with technology as "horror as a genre is often the first site to interrogate evolving technologies, both within the

narrative and through the formal properties of the medium in which it exists" (2020, 3). Horror is not only in itself a genre appearing in a multitude of medial settings, it also frequently makes use of different media both formally and aesthetically, illustrating its intermedial nature. Its referential relationship with media has been described as "parasitic … preying upon the fears" (Daniel 2020, 1) that emerge from them. But how do such fears of media emerge in the first place? Psychologist Amy Orben argues that specifically within phases of technological innovation, collective and public forms of panic emerge in recurring patterns that are directed towards the media that arise from new technological possibilities. According to her, these patterns are often triggered by the notion of technological determinism, as

> … the idea (a) that the technologies used by a society form basic and fundamental conditions that affect all areas of existence and (b) that when such technologies are innovated, these developments are the single most important driver of changes in said society. (Orben 2020, 4)

According to Orben, "[t]his coincides with the belief of little or no control and the assumption that technologies affect all people in the same way" (2020, 4). In effect, Orben argues that technological innovation often leads to rapid increases in public concern with media, which can be accounted for in terms of horror's countless references to the frightening potentials of technology. Especially in phases of technological innovation, media can appear as an excess of what is to be ordered and therefore as threatening, because "technological and human embodiment are co-constitutive, for the former redefines the shape of the latter" (Denson 2014, 183).

It is important to emphasize that media play a focal role in these dynamics: different medial systems such as cinema or television are often pivotal in amplifying media-critical discourse by communicating about other media through imagery and sound. The resulting idea of a moral panic therefore needs to be

understood as a discursive phenomenon consisting of individual anxieties that are materialized and re-mediatized into a collective phenomenon. In this dynamic, moral panics often serve to isolate the presumed problem by an immunological logic: particularly vulnerable groups are identified (in the case of film or games it is often children and adolescents) who might be especially susceptible to media effects (Venus 2007). Particularly in the case of horror films, dynamics of medial control and censorship (Keiderling 2024) are put into place, which illustrates a relational connection towards censorship in which both function symbiotically and influence each other. So far, so common. Instead of engaging in a much-needed critique of the implications of this immunological logic (Lorey 2015), I want to underline the part that feelings play in these dynamics.

Sara Ahmed introduced feelings as cultural practices as opposed to subject-bound psychological states (Ahmed and Schmitz 2014, 98). As cultural practices, feelings involve attributions towards other subjects and objects in instances of contact (Ahmed 2004, 28). Thinking through the idea of contact takes us back to my emphasis on relationality when talking about the horror genre. Collective contact with media that evolve from technological innovation can elicit negative emotions such as anxiety or panic. In this sense, the emotions are relational, if not reactive. They are *about* or *towards* something, they involve attributions that, in turn, often move on a spectrum of esteem and disdain. These attributions simultaneously serve to attribute value or worthlessness towards whatever or whomever they are directed at. Curiously, even though feelings are part of this dynamic, a perceived over-emphasis of them or even loss of control over them is deemed negative. In this vein, horror has been conceived as a culturally "low" genre, as Linda Williams (1991) has shown.

Here is where disgust as a relational feeling gains relevance. Generally, I argue that it is in the relationality of disgust and moral panic that the specific stickiness that I am outlining constitutes itself both individually and collectively. Regarding disgust,

Ahmed specifies the idea of attribution as a "designation of 'badness'" (2004, 82) as well as a deeply inherent ambivalence of attraction and repulsion (2004, 83). Sianne Ngai acknowledges that "[d]isgust both includes and attacks the very opposition between itself and desire," and adds that "disgust is never ambivalent about its object" (2005, 335). She goes on to state that while "disgust explicitly blocks the path of sympathy … there is a sense in which it seeks to include or draw others *into* its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability" (2005, 335–36). There is a lot to unpack here. First, the relationality between disgust and moral panic is deeply performative. As mentioned before, moral panics unfold in a reactive way and involve dynamics of isolating a presumed problem. One of the dynamics of isolation lies in the attribution of disgust as a performative act, highlighting it as a "designation of badness" in Ahmed's sense. But that is not where the stickiness of the relation lies. It can be located much more aptly in Ngai's observation of a drawing into the exclusion of disgust—here on the part of horror.

Horror films have frequently made use of this figuration of disgust, thereby actively contributing to its emotive stickiness. They use images and sounds to trigger disgust and moral panic both formally and aesthetically to subvert critique and media-critical discursive attributions, thereby attempting to turn critique into aesthetic effect (Düwell and Pethes 2022, 7–8), and co-producing sticky *cultural imaginaries* by repurposing an already established form of critique into a collective socio-medial phenomenon. I will now proceed to illustrate the construction of the specific *cultural imaginary* labeled Snuff to then analyze how the film *Censor* partakes in the stickiness of it using material aesthetics to comment on the evocation of disconcertion that is at the sticky heart of this.

When I use the notion of a *cultural imaginary,* I am suggesting the existence of a *shared idea* within a culture (Hall 1997, 2) that gets sticky through its persistence over time. The sources of this collectively accumulated idea don't need to necessarily all be rooted in facts or *truth* in the epistemological sense—rather, they are fueled with contingency due to their diversity: processes of mystification, narrativization, and unreliable narration are all part of a *cultural imaginary*. And, of course, feelings.

A pressing example for a *cultural imaginary* is Snuff, an elusive phenomenon that has, at least for a while, been aptly subsumed as a technological rumor-panic in Orben's sense. Primarily, the term denotes "amateur motion pictures involving an actual murder that is enacted solely for the purpose of the movie" (Brottman 1997, 95), but stopping there would overlook the genesis of Snuff as a *cultural imaginary* and exclude much of its excess meaning. This surplus of meaning springs from Snuff's predominant use as an element within narrative and fictional genre film, in which it has frequently been recontextualized: sometimes as a narrative or aesthetic element, sometimes to heighten a film's authentic appeal in the form of aesthetic effect, which, in some cases, even leads to a momentary blurring of spectatorial consciousness (Kavka 2016, 54). This blurring of ontological baselines can also be observed regarding the formation of the term Snuff. Many scholars point to author Ed Sanders, who used the term in 1971 to insinuate that the Manson Family had recorded some of their crimes on video (Stine 1999, 31; Petley 2000, 205). Even though this claim cannot be verified, the crimes of Charles Manson and his followers exerted permanent influence on the discourse surrounding Snuff.

Its influence is traceable through the seminal genre film *Snuff* (1976), a slightly changed version of a film called *Slaughter* from 1971. *Slaughter* originated from a sociocultural climate that had been influenced highly by the Manson Family and

depicted the murder of an actress by a cult (Kerekes and Slater 2016, 6). *Slaughter* was re-distributed as *Snuff* in 1976 after the addition of a five-minute final scene that establishes another level to *Slaughter*'s diegesis. The scene is located at the film set of *Slaughter* and displays sexual violence directed at one of *Slaughter*'s actresses and her subsequent brutal murder for the camera. Through the placement of the murder at the set of the film, ultimately establishing an authenticating additional diegetic level, most of the academic reflections concerning *Snuff* focus solely on the effects and implications of the final scene. It ended up serving as a precedent for several films that have used or thematized Snuff fictionally ever since and have, as a result, contributed to the power of Snuff as a *cultural imaginary* that "is dependent upon its vagueness; its enigmatic force stems directly from its nebulousness as a concept" (Heller-Nicholas 2009, 10).

The cultural functionalization of Snuff within fictional genre settings has not only influenced the collective understanding of the term. Even more so, these genre film settings have contributed to making Snuff sticky in the emotive sense that I have outlined before. What must be acknowledged, however, is that the sticky *cultural imaginary* Snuff contains diverse and normative meanings and by now functions more as a catch-all term for all sorts of phenomena that trigger technological anxiety for two main reasons. First, Snuff refers to the camera's and the images' simultaneous ability and necessity to make visible whatever is recorded and depicted in order to manifest phenomenologically (Mersch 2014; Laner 2016, 275). Because the technology and the image do not contain a concept of care for what they are depicting, the display of violent murder lies within their range of possibility, which is why the potential display of it through human actors signifies a source of anxiety. Secondly, Snuff is characterized by a frequent transgression of fiction and non-fiction as frames of orientation, partly also because of the different functionalizations it has undergone in fictional settings. Many fictional genre films have frequently attempted to make fictional

murder look as authentic as possible, making it difficult to discern between fact and fiction on an aesthetic level. This, in turn, refers to the recording technology's uncanny ability to contribute to an authentic impression, placing responsibility for categorizing and contextualizing the images onto the viewers.

From the mid-1970s on, Snuff has repeatedly been defined as misogynistic because of its invoked parallel between sex and violence directed particularly against women (Johnson and Schaefer 1993, 56). By both contemporary voices within the discourse surrounding Snuff (LaBelle 1980, 275) and academic reflections, this definition has been expanded by including the commercial intention behind the production of Snuff (Kerekes and Slater 2016, 5). In this notion of Snuff, the marketability of real murder on film and its entertainment value are taken into focus. These ideas are expanded upon when Snuff is defined as a form of violent pornography, as supposedly authentic films, in which rape, torture, and murder are documented for sexual stimulation (Dworkin 1989, 311; Stiglegger 2007, 653). Here, Snuff is situated as hardcore pornography that evokes a focus on the medial effect of sexual arousal and expands the field of graphic depiction towards torture and rape.

What should be clear, however, is that these positions are based on fictional representations of Snuff within the horror genre. At the time of writing of most of these definitions, not one black-market-distributed analogue video depicting the rape and murder of women and children for sexual stimulation was secured in official investigations (Petley 2000, 205). Rather, they are based on films like *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Mondo Cane* (1962), *Last House on the Dead End Street* (1977), *Faces of Death* (1978), *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), *Videodrome* (1983), *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), *Benny's Video* (1992), *Strange Days* (1995), *Tesis* (1996), *8mm* (1999), *Vacancy* (2007), *Život i smrt porno bande* (2009), and *Srpski film* (2010), which, for over a time period of half a century, have used different notions of Snuff to turn fears about the possibilities of medial production into aesthetic effect.

They contribute to a collective confusion about the ontological basis of the phenomenon, since most of these fictional films intentionally evoke a degree of disconcertion about the indexical status of their images through aesthetic appeals to authenticity. And they seem to be successful in doing so: "… every time that snuff films are mentioned in modern fiction and cinema, they are giving credence to the rumors, playing on the reader's or viewer's assumptions that they are real to begin with" (Stine 1999, 2).

The definitional and ontological blurriness therefore turns Snuff into a perfect gateway for a broader criticism of more abstract logics of representation (Brottman 1997, 96), which is why it functions as a *cultural imaginary* whose sticky persistence can be explained through its positioning right between media criticism and media effects. Additionally, it sticks because of its ontological uncertainty: both in criticism and aesthetic experimentation on Snuff, processes of narrativization, mythologization, and fictionalization are at work that position Snuff as a disconcerting *cultural imaginary*. I will now proceed to illustrate these dynamics using the recent British horror film *Censor* (2021), which contributes to Snuff's stickiness by making use of material aesthetics, thereby relating intermedially to preceding films and forms of production. The film not only exemplifies emotive stickiness through its protagonist—it also aesthetically undermines comforting cinematic and generic conventions such as fictionality and thereby references and contributes to Snuff as a *cultural imaginary*.

Material Explorations of *Censor* (2021)

Censor revolves around Enid Baines, who passionately redacts films for the British Board of Film Classification to shield susceptible audiences from the possible effects of genre films during the peak of the "video nasty" controversy of the 1980s (Petley 2013). By situating its narrative in the context of this historic controversy, *Censor* directly adds to Snuff as a *cultural*

imaginary because the video nasties serve as one of its formative components. In this, Enid's fervor for her work as a censor is fueled by her isolated private life. She is haunted by the guilt of the disappearance of her sister Nina, who went missing as a child. She opposes the films she censors and treats them with disgust and disdain, ultimately embodying a schematic stance of medial control, which is highly critical of the possibly harmful effects of media reception. She meticulously and rationally dissects and cuts the films, thereby demonstrating a rational form of control and mastery over them. When Enid encounters a film that mimics the circumstances of Nina's disappearance, it leads her to believe that her sister is still alive and being kept against her will as an actress in Snuff films. This belief leads to a loss of control for Enid, as she starts to investigate the director and producer, ultimately leading her to a film set where she believes Nina to be. During the filming of a fictional horror film, Enid kills another actor and the film's director in the hope of freeing Nina, thereby producing somewhat of a Snuff film herself. Ultimately, Enid abducts the actress, who turns out to be a stranger.

I will now outline examples of some of the levels on which material aesthetics operate within *Censor* to generate emotional and affective effects that stick in a sense that contributes to Snuff as a *cultural imaginary* because it emphasizes its intermedial relations. The construction of material aesthetics in *Censor* works on several levels. They include material differences within the images, the display of recording and receiving devices as well as videotapes, transgression of diegetic levels, transgressions of object and subject distinctions, and the frequent use of intradiegetic references and indices.

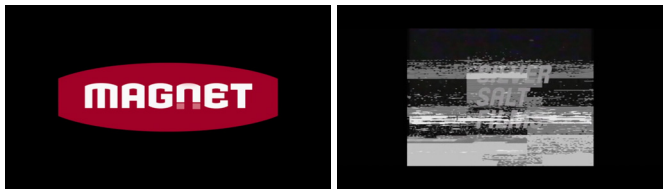
When I refer to material differences within the images, I specifically intend the evocation of a notion of "haptic images," which foreground their own materiality and "invite the viewer to respond to the image in an intimate, embodied way, and thus facilitate the experience of other sensory impressions as well" (Marks 2000, 2). They create a viewing experience of "haptic

visuality," heightening viewers' inclinations to perceive the images' materiality (Marks 2000, 182). Haptic visuality, according to Laura Marks, serves as an opportunity for critical intervention towards the attribution that film is first and foremost an optical medium which allows for a distinction between haptic and optical visuality:

> Haptic visuality is distinguished from optical visuality, which sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space: in other words, how we usually conceive of vision. … Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze. (2000, 162)

This distinction can be illustrated using *Censor*'s images. Not only are both forms of visuality used repeatedly during the film, but they are also introduced within the opening credits, whose function has been highlighted as being the entryway of the spectator into the fictional diegesis. As a space of transition between the viewing space of the spectators and the diegesis of the film, the opening credits can serve to cue viewers to assess an adequate mode of reception (Odin 2006, 34), functioning to establish a solid mode of guidance. Several modes of reception can be taken, so understanding a mode as adequate refers to the ability or inability of an image to evoke a certain mode that will be accepted by viewers. At the same time, this view also accounts for cases in which proposal and acceptance are not in line, positioning the idea of viewing conditions and perceptions as highly fluid, and ultimately claiming that the perception of a film as fictional or factual, comedic or horrific, to be a "matter of labelling and processing or framing and reading" (Hediger 2022, 14).

The possibility of an instability of perceptual categories is illustrated by *Censor*'s opening two minutes. First, distributor Magnet's white lettered logo on red background appears:



[Figs. 1 and 2] Logos of Magnet and Silver Salt Films illustrate the haptic difference between sleekness and abrasiveness (Sources: Magnolia Pictures/Silver Salt Films).

HD-ready, exhibiting a connotation of smoothness and sleekness as a haptic quality (fig. 1). Several seconds later, the next images suddenly show two aesthetic changes: first, they now appear in a quadratic format, framed by a large black widescreen background; second, within a black background within the square, they now display several white image disturbances and an audible white noise that are both reminiscent of VHS footage (fig. 2).

The logos of the production companies are also marked by this haptic difference, closely followed by a very short insertion of an image disturbance that only lasts for a second and fadingly displays the dark silhouette of a woman. Through its quick (dis-) appearance, the insert claims to be a glitch "indicating a relatively rare moment of unplanned, unprogrammed mediation" (Kane 2019, 15). Through its appearance as a glitch, the haptic visuality takes on additional meaning because it presents itself as a quick malfunction, leaving a disconcerting impression regarding the stability of *Censor's* narrative and aesthetic construction.

This preempts what is to come later within the film's narrative, which, in turn, is again interrupted by the opening credits. Undisturbed by any haptic glitching, they break again with the ephemerally established VHS aesthetic by being plain white HD-ready text on a black background. At the same time, they are audibly accompanied by the sound of wind whistling. So, which is it? Where are we? In the age of digital filmmaking or in times of analogue VHS footage? In the forest or still on our phones waiting for the credits to pass and the film to begin? Abruptly, we go back

to the quadratic image format displaying a woman in a dark forest in the middle of its grainy focus. She faces away from the camera, her back is illuminated by an intense pink light, the surrounding forest is lit in violet. The sound of wind continues. The camera moves closer to her, when suddenly the sound of growling is audible very close to the camera, suggesting the camera's viewpoint to be the perspective of someone stalking. She suddenly turns around; through a cut, the camera's perspective switches as it pans over trees and branches. Is this her perspective? Who is the camera aligned with after all? As we witness her starting to cry in a close-up, the growling becomes louder. She runs. Cuts and perspectives get hectic. Disorienting. She falls. And is ultimately pulled away from the camera, which captures her frontally, by an unseen force. Freeze frame. "Hang on," goes a voice off-screen. In a freeze frame?

The voice establishes a second level of diegesis, marked by the absence of any visual or auditive disturbances and the switch to 16:9 image format. The next shot shows her hand on a remote, stopping the hectic quadratic stalking in the woods, turning a switch to rewind the images and to look at them again. Control is taking over after the highly disorienting first two minutes of the film. The hand belongs to Enid, the film's protagonist, whose eyes become visible as she stares at a display that weakly reflects the violet lighting of the forest onto her glasses. The quadratic images of the first diegetic level are suddenly framed in a TV set. The remote that Enid is operating lays on a notebook that contains her assessment of the film while she continues to rewind.

Censor accomplishes several things within the first two minutes. Firstly, it stresses awareness of its internal differences through haptic images, in effect establishing two different diegetic levels. As opposed to the construction of a seamless entry into the fictional suspense of disbelief, *Censor* alerts its viewers to its constructedness. The hectic and disconcerting effect of the images of the woods is enclosed by the second diegetic level through media practices such as stopping, rewinding, and eventually dissecting

the images through the censorial cutting out of certain parts. Media control in action, one could say.

This is where the second level of *Censor*'s material aesthetics becomes relevant, with the frequent display of recording and receiving devices as well as other forms of legacy media. Apart from stressing a material omnipresence of media, a sticky reiteration of images within everyday life, they serve to authenticate the fictional narrative by referring to a historical reality. For instance, Enid repeatedly witnesses others reading the news with headlines such as "Crime on the rise: video nasties to blame," (*Censor* 00:14:32) "Censors to blame? Video nasty inspires gruesome murder," (00:19:57) or "Censor's depraved video nasty habit" (01:02:21). The first headline refers to the historical debate surrounding the video nasty controversy and therefore signifies an index that connects the fictional narrative of *Censor* with the socio-historical climate of the 1980s, rooting the fiction within an environment of socio-historical fact. The other two headlines are fictional, because they directly deal with a public controversy that Enid and a colleague cause. A film that they had cleared for distribution is said to have inspired a killing for which they are being held publicly responsible. The inclusion of newspaper headlines not only accomplishes an effect of indexicality that serves as an extension between the fictional narrative of the film and a non-diegetic discourse, as the following fictional headlines are being authenticated through this dynamic, accomplishing something akin to a "reality effect" (Black 2002). Even more so, it signifies an aesthetic re-appropriation of the sticky relationality between different media systems that I outlined in the beginning: the newspaper articles contribute to the discursive evocation of a moral panic within the film through their use of media criticism regarding a failed form of medial control by Enid and her colleague. The criticism here is deeply emotive through its use of attributions such as "gruesome" or "depraved," which serve to signal towards forms of morally charged condemnation.

Generally, the frequent display of recording and receiving devices oscillates between threat and control: almost every time a TV set or film screen is shown, violence is displayed in a variety of forms that serves to insinuate the impression of an omnipresence of violent content and Enid's obvious disgust for these depictions. While Enid repeatedly displays a skillset of media competency as she rewinds, forwards, stops, plays, and critically assesses the content, the notion of the omnipresence of medial violence keeps surrounding her. After she suspects she has seen her sister Nina in one of the films, her critical ability to differentiate between the all-encompassing forms of violence begins to deteriorate, which is precisely what is at the core of the *cultural imaginary* of Snuff.

Censor reflects on this narrative development aesthetically by starting to transgress not only diegetic levels, but also object/subject distinctions that are established in the beginning, thereby creating "categorical uncertainties" (Nair 2021, 15). The starting point for the transgression can be located within the second diegetic level of optical visuality, when Enid starts to daydream about her sister after seemingly recognizing her in a film. The trauma of her sister's disappearance resides within Enid's unconscious, repressed, ready to appear again, illustrating a well-known horror trope (Wood 2018). It also signals back to the root of sticky horror outlined in the beginning: the uncanniness of horror touches us on an emotional level. Its potential to develop into an uncontainable and possibly harmful media effect, possibly spreading into dreams as manifest forms of the unconscious or transpiring into a propensity of viewers to use violence themselves, has been a common trope of criticism directed at the genre. *Censor* fleshes this criticism out. That Enid's trauma is being triggered again by the reception of a horror film points towards the possibility of harmful media effects; a suggestion that is emphasized by the fact that Enid acts increasingly paranoid and continuingly loses the ability to distinguish between her daily life, her daydreams, and the images she sees on screens.

[Fig.3] Enid staring into the white noise of her TV set (Source: Silver Salt Films).

This can be illustrated by a scene in which Enid falls asleep at home, which we witness in a close-up shot of her face. Seconds later, a haptic image of white noise appears, as she slowly wakes again from her slumber. A tilted camera angle shows her walking down her hallway to the living room to find her TV set displaying the white noise (fig. 3).

Her living room is lit in violet, a combination of the red and blue light that accompanied the introductory scene. As the next shot displays the white noise fully, the camera slowly moves closer, seeming to move into the white noise, only to slowly crossfade and to reveal a new mise-en-scène in the woods. Now, the white noise serves as an entryway, but to where? On which diegetic level are we? Still, no VHS glitches, no quadratic format. Only Enid as a young girl in the woods, which we recognize from her earlier daydreams, calling out for Nina. As she is seeing a menacing male figure growling in the woods, she finds a strand of red hair and a note in her hand saying "*Don't go in the Church* by Frederic North" (*Censor* 00:34:38), spelling out the title and director of the film that seemingly stars Nina. As young Enid looks up from the note,

she is suddenly framed in the TV set in Enid's living room, facing the camera. Young and current Enid face each other for a second, not only collapsing the diegetic levels established prior, but also the subject/object distinctions. The idea of media control and competency starts to deteriorate.

This is accompanied by Enid's increasing inability to differentiate between dream, fact, and hallucination while she radicalizes the idea that Nina is being held hostage on a film set. In her search for her sister, Enid ends up killing a film producer before going to the film set where she suspects Nina to be. In this final sequence, the collapse of the diegetic levels, frames of reference, and established distinctions is taken to the extreme.

On set, Enid is mistaken for an actress and is subsequently taken to a trailer to get into costume. During the scene that displays the preparation, the image frame slowly starts to shrink to a quadratic format over the course of about six minutes. The process of shrinking the image format develops so slowly that it almost goes unnoticed because the haptic quality of the image stays the same. When Enid arrives on set in a dark forest, the change of format has come to its completion. Only director Frederic North is on set and as Enid starts to question him about her sister, he mistakes her as an actress and starts verbally abusing her to get her to "access her darkest impulses" (*Censor* 01:06:48). As she starts crying out for her sister, North seemingly sees Enid as "being in character" and starts filming her. Two levels are re-established: the image quality swings between the optical HD-ready and the grainy haptic quality of the images that North captures with a Super 8 camera. Both are in quadratic format now.

As Enid enters a complete state of illusion, a crossfade intercuts two seconds of unused analogue film reel and Enid enters the film scene, covered in red light. Her costume, hairstyle, and the mise-en-scène are now reminiscent of the scene Enid censors in the introductory scene. She encounters the woman she believes to be her sister as well as the menacing male figure repeatedly

[Fig. 4] The abducted actress in a state of terror (Source: Silver Salt Films)

appearing in her dreams. Enid tries to save Nina from the man by killing him with an axe. Throughout her violent outburst, the scene is strained repeatedly by both visual and auditive distortions that serve to manifest a tangible difference between Enid's perception and the perception of all others present. As everyone is horrified by her violence, the quadratic format vanishes. As the actress that Enid believes to be Nina flees from the set in terror (fig. 4), Enid beheads the director and follows her. After an unsuccessful pursuit through the dark forest, Enid ends up on the ground, crying. While lying on the ground, she finds a remote and by the click of a button, the quadratic format frames her again, as a bright light appears on her face. The actress who had been in terror seconds before reappears, extends her arm towards Enid smilingly, and says: "Come on, let's go home" (*Censor* 01:15:20).

As they drive to the house of Enid's parents, all her desires seem to have come true, as she is reunited with her sister and able to return Nina to her family. Nevertheless, the distortions don't stop. This visual manifestation of Enid's desires is infused by even more glitches that show contrary images for mere seconds: the actress still in terror in the car and her disturbed parents in

front of their house. While the glitches seemed to signify fictious scenarios dreamt up by Enid before, they now seem to glimmer up inches of reality that Enid cannot conceive of any more. The initially established and seemingly stable distinction between fact and fiction has not only collapsed, but its components have also been inverted.

Conclusion

Collapse, inversion, transgression, relationality. Everything not only seems to stick together in *Censor*, the film's aesthetic, narrative developments, and twists more broadly contribute to the emotive *cultural imaginary* of Snuff and serve as multipliers for its sticky persistence as a horror phenomenon. *Censor* does so by evoking disconcertion about the reliability of its protagonist, the (in-)difference of diegetic levels, and object/subject distinctions. Even more so, *Censor*'s material aesthetics splice onto Snuff's, and more broadly, horror's, stickiness because they reflect the relationship between horror and technology on a larger scale that situates it within an intimate relation between the two. Not only does the omnipresence of TV sets, VHS recorders and screens signal toward a threatening omnipresence of sticky images, but their emotive power to touch is also furthermore reflected in the film's material aesthetics that point towards an unreliability of the fictional diegesis that is topical for Snuff as a *cultural imaginary.* Enid embodies this unreliability: even though she initially incarnates a rational stance of medial control that devalues violent imagery, she is ultimately affected by their generic stickiness in a way that confirms the moral panic tale of harmful violent imagery. In that, *Censor* also gestures back: both on a narrative and an aesthetic level the film acknowledges its generic predecessors that have contributed to the configuration of Snuff as a *cultural imaginary*. Snuff's stickiness becomes a question of its persistence over time, but also of its heterogeneous emotive shapes. In different ways, these films turn technological anxiety into aesthetic effect, thereby pushing

the boundaries of viewing habits and the comfort and orientation that standardized generic conventions offer. *Censor,* as I have shown, operates specifically on a level of material aesthetics, thereby foregrounding the materiality of the technology that triggers anxiety about the images that (can) possibly arise from it. The film thus specifically realizes media critical attributions by turning them into aesthetic effect, thereby partaking in Snuff as a sticky *cultural imaginary*. The intentional play into devaluing media criticism on the part of films like *Censor* signals toward the ambivalent relationalities and contacts that constitute this idea of stickiness, a "condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with, [which] speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored, or uninvited" (Nutall 2009, 1) and cannot be resolved simply; which is precisely what makes horror so sticky.

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Sensing Stickiness

A conversation between Amber Jamilla Musser and Kerim Doğruel

Amber Jamilla Musser was an invited keynote speaker to the Sticky Films conference, which precedes this book project. She presented on "*The Stickiness of Threat: Black Femininity and the Uncanny in Jordan Peele's Us*." After a few months, she travelled to Berlin, which provided an opportunity to reflect on, see, and feel what stuck with us. The following conversation took place on January 25, 2024, at the café of *Das Kleine Grosz Museum*. The transcription has been shortened and smoothed over to make it more readable. Some references or quotes have been added to provide context. They were deemed necessary to understand the framework of some of the questions and answers and where to refer to if the reader wishes to do so.

Kerim Doğruel (KD): In *Sensational Flesh*, you describe stickiness as this feeling or weight of being overdetermined in terms of racialization.[1] Do you feel like this still holds up, or did it take on a different meaning?

Amber Jamilla Musser (AM): I feel like it's a concept that always holds up. Because I think there are always going to be either people or objects that are just so freighted with meaning, and many different kinds of contradictory meanings. It's not necessarily always the same object. It's not like you could just say, *this* word, or *this* thing, is always going to be *that*. It really shifts depending on what else is going on. What I like about it as a concept, is that it's not something inherent in the object itself, but society makes it sticky. So, it's useful in

1 "In linking becoming-black with what I term 'stickiness,' or the weightiness of being overdetermined, with ahistoricity, and with labor, I analyze the work of Glenn Ligon as illustrating how race has been understood as affective labor and as offering a model for moving beyond that space" (Musser 2014, 29).

terms of thinking about what kind of thing stickiness is. It's sort of transient in a weird way or becomes less ontological.

KD: There are two things to pick up on. First, as the conference organizers we were going back and forth between things being ascribed to being stickier than others, versus things that behave in sticky ways. We thought about plants, in particular *Drosera binata*,[2] that has this stickiness to it to feed itself. But we agree that when it comes to conceptual stickiness, like with the concept of racialization, it's a different thing. Second, what you said about the transient state is what we related to Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, where stickiness is an in-between thing that can be both negative and positive. It's a possibility of relation.

AM: Exactly. When I think about it, a lot is about what Jasbir Puar says in *Terrorist Assemblages*, when she describes what an assemblage is. It's the material things, the affects, the different discourses. When she's talking about the turban, for example.[3] There's nothing about the turban that is sticky. But after September 11, 2001, in the USA it became this sticky type of object. And so, I think for me, it's a lot about the thickness of possibility, that is always relational. That's why Ahmed is useful and so many people were referencing that. It is about the affect. I'm thinking about the presentation on the sticky

2 See Emma Merkling's text on Darwin's obsession with his *Drosera* (in this volume, 89–95).

3 "This would be one difference (among many) between appendage and assemblage: thinking of the turbaned man as a man with an appendage and thinking of the turbaned man as an assemblage that cuts through such easy delineations between body and thing, an assemblage that fuses, but also scrambles into chaotic combinations, turban into body, cloth into hair, skin, oil, pores, destabilizing the presumed organicity of the body. … The turban is thus always in the state of becoming, the becoming of a turbaned body, the turban becoming part of the body. In all its multiple singularities it has become a perverse fetish object … a kind of centripetal force, a strange attractor through which the density of anxiety accrues and accumulates" (Puar 2007,193–4).

notes on the pornographic tapes[4]—that is a really great way to think about the affect and how it materialized in these sticky notes. It really was all about the relational qualities and the affective types of things which you attach them to. I mean, there was no way to know with the sticky notes what specific affect or sensation was or is attached to them, but it marks that there is *something*.

KD: *Schwules Museum* where Nils Meyn worked on the presentation is around the corner! [laughs]

AM: I know!

KD: But there's also two things in what you said that I want to pick up on. First is this relation to the erotic and its connection to the second point that I thought of while reading a more recent text of yours, which is a text about sweat and the *Fenty Beauty* body makeup.[5] Makeup is a type of application of an extra film or a layer to make your skin or body appear different. Especially with the body makeup, there's a kind of dewiness or wetness, signaling visually that the skin behaves more—I don't know—viscous? That question of makeup is something that also came up in your introduction of *Sensual Excess*.[6] There's a similar thing with citing Billie Holiday

4 Find Nils Meyn's text based on the presentation on p. XYZ of this volume. They engage in the way that sticky notes are used to organize queer porn archives, while the notes also hold an additional charge of queer desire that cannot be contained by the archive.

5 "Between Shine and Porosity: Toward a Fleshy Analytic of Sweat" (Musser 2023).

6 The introduction of the book discusses the photograph (and the cover image) *Billie #21* by Lyle Ashton Harris. It's both a self-portrait of the artist, and a portrait of Billie Holiday. "His explicit invocation of black femininity and its fleshiness challenges the assumed (and impossible) gendered and raced neutrality upon which becoming-woman relies in addition to illustrating the particular affects that cohere around black femininity. This is why it is important that Harris's transformation exists on the surface—enacted through gloss, make-up, and surgical tape. This is not a performance of becoming. Harris does not become-Holiday; he cites her—positioning his

through makeup and face tape, through adding additional layers onto oneself. Maybe there are two questions. One is about the makeup or body modification as such, that is achieved through stickiness of tools, paint, and materials. And the second one might be this visual quality that is highlighted through the body makeup in particular, a visual expression of wetness and dewiness of the skin.

AM: Yeah, I mean, I think that question around makeup gets at some of the dynamics around the stickiness and racialization. It's not about "Oh, the stickiness shows us what the authentic object is." But it shows us how something is appearing in culture, right? The same happens with makeup. One can attach all the colors, eyelashes, or whatever to produce a particular appearance, but that's not an internal truth. It's interesting to figure out what that says about what representation is and what kind of representation one wants, and then it also introduces the cleavage between what something is on the outside, and what something is on the inside. They're not necessarily the same, right? And so, it's like stickiness is a web of connection between the inside and outside. But not necessarily. You know what I mean?

KD: I'm not sure if I do, especially with the "internal truth" that you mentioned?

AM: I don't know that there is necessarily an internal truth—I think it's the highlighting of artificiality that puts that idea of internal truth into question. It doesn't necessarily mean that there is one, but it makes it impossible to be like: "Oh, yes, I suddenly see that, that must be the internal truth."

KD: What I liked so much about the Billie Holiday example is that it finds a truth in the quote which I felt that you wouldn't have achieved without this layering of meanings and

body alongside hers so that we might read the image to understand their mutual investment in black femininity" (Musser 2018, 3).

histories. Maybe I'm just too cautious with "truth." You didn't specify if there is one or not, if it's better or worse. But I feel like in this example you gave, because of the adding of layers and attachments, things become something else. It produces something very, very productive, something meaningful.

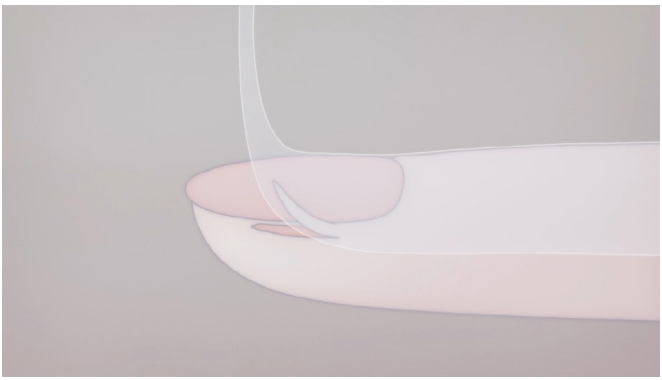
AM: I guess it's not really about if there is a truth or not, but what expressivity means gets complicated.

KD: With the porn archive of *Schwules Museum* you've mentioned, there's also a link to the erotic. To me, it was also interesting, because it is usually described through this idea of the affect of stickiness. For some it disgusts them, or it arouses them, or draws them to it. It's an inherently personal thing and it reveals through affect the attachment people have to the thing.

AM: I mean, that's the thing, stickiness is such an interesting concept, because it's around the affective qualities, the discursive qualities, and then the sensational ones and they don't all operate in the same ways. It's not like one continuous type of thing. When you get into that sensation, some people like that, that feeling of… I guess what feels like a sticky substance. Stickiness slows the separation of flesh, you're in contact for longer.

KD: Would you say it intensifies certain sensations? The slowing feels to me like a magnification of a feeling or an intensification.

AM: I'm not sure what adjective I'd use. Intensified doesn't specify what gets intensified, but I think it makes perceptible certain types of dimensions that otherwise might get lost. Sometimes because something is sticky… like you can hear when flesh separates right? It seems slower. There's an after-sensation. Of course, the same things can happen without stickiness. The same actions are happening, but you don't notice them the same way.



[Fig. 1] Film still *Anxious Body* (2021, Yoriko Mizushiri) (Source: https://www.miyu.fr/production/en/anxious-body-en/).

KD: But it seems to be a very charged sound. I'm thinking of the short film that we screened, that also magnified sounds. You remember the one with the finger? It holds true, I think. Maybe that's the quality of it, that it's difficult to grasp, because you're never holding on to it—it's always in relation to something. That's also what makes it so tricky to talk about. Because it's only in between other things and in relation.

[Kerim refers to the short animation *Anxious Body* (2021, Yoriko Mizushiri) that was screened during the conference. One scene teases a slow-motion removal of a hangnail with transparent sticky tape, which made several people in the audience shiver—Amber and Kerim included (fig. 1).]

AM: I guess in some ways that goes back to the erotic. It's *in* relation. But perhaps it's intensifying the vectors of a relation already at work. It's like, if you want to feel attracted to that, that's exciting. If it's disgusting, it becomes even more disgusting, or anxiety provoking, or even more like *Aaahhh.*

KD: For me, it holds true in relation to the covers of the VHS tapes Nils Meyn discussed, where you have another layer on top of something and it intensifies the excitement of what could be beneath. The sticky notes become part of a striptease. And so, it holds true conceptually, but also materially.

AM: Stickiness is a possible quality of so many different kinds of things, which I think makes it so fascinating. When you study it in isolation, and really think about what it does, what is it suggesting about this relation? And it's not going to be the same thing because it means different things. There were so many presentations around the literal stickiness of films and what that means, when film melts together.

KD: Let's shift the conversation to the topic of studying stickiness. In relation to practices of archiving or storing it's usually described as a problem. At the same time, it's incredibly difficult to maintain viscosity because the archive is a dry place. In the archive, it's usually too excessive, there is either too much or too little, but it's very rare that you can maintain something sticky temporally, to keep it in the state—that's what makes it so interesting. That also means a challenge in historicizing it. How to approach these things with a temporal gap or delay? It points to the absence of the flesh in the archive, and its quality of wetness, or liveness. I think that stickiness has a similar quality to it.

AM: I was thinking about where it shows up the most. People are talking about it a lot in relation to sex and pornography, right? In some ways, it's because it's an archive that has been so visually focused, so one looks at evidence of stickiness and thinks about that. In film, it's also representing or capturing moments in time. But other media, other genres, I guess, are less oriented around temporal capture, and I think it's harder to index, what is happening with stickiness.

KD: What do you mean, with being less oriented to temporal capture?

AM: Like paint is sticky when you first put it on, but then it dries. It's a very different thing to talk about, stickiness in a painting. I mean you definitely could, if someone was going to make highlighting that their project—it would just show up in different kinds of ways, because that's not around the medium. Or if you're thinking about stickiness of history. Like in historical context, we had the fly presentation.[7] We knew it was sticky, because we know now that flies stick to things. But it's sort of reading around the stickiness.

[...]

AM: I'm not usually as explicitly in conversation about film studies, so having that as part of the conference made me think a lot about the materiality of film, in addition to the representational things that are happening. So, I enjoyed thinking about what stickiness meant in both of those different ways. Especially around *Us* (2019, Jordan Peele), the movie that I was talking about[8]—it made me really think about how that argument still carries forward into some of those other material dimensions of stickiness as well; I hadn't really been doing that type of thinking before.

KD: That's nice to hear. *Sticky Films* holds the double meaning of film already—it's like another layer on top and it has this material quality to it. Sometimes it's expressed in representational films as well. But it's always expressed materially. The film splicer—the editing tool that cuts and mends, or glues together strips of films—expresses these meanings. One of my own interests was highlighting these multiple meanings of the word *film*, that move beyond film as a synonym for moving images, like the makeup dimension

7 Amber refers to the conference presentation by Lena Trüper "Fly Paper" (2023).

8 A version of Amber's keynote lecture has since been published as part of *Between Shadows and Noise: Sensation, Situatedness, and the Undisciplined (*Musser 2024).

that it holds, or in regard to effects of the body like with sweat.

AM: That's what I was going to say. Everything has some surface.

KD: Yeah, totally. For me it does away with the fantasy of complete transparency—you always also see it as a layer of a film. You cannot only see through it, you cannot ignore the materiality. The fantasy of full transparency doesn't hold up and doesn't need to. I guess that's why I really related to the Billie Holiday example, where expression becomes a question of layering. Of course, the layers or the films can be partly see-through, but there's a back and forth between the different layers that are not concealing anything—they are all a surface. As you mentioned Puar's description of assemblage, there's also this explicit bodily dimension. You don't lose or immerse yourself in the film or something like that, but you relate to it bodily.

AM: Yeah. I mean, it makes me think that when Deleuze is talking about assemblage, the thing that holds them together is desire. So, it's that kind of bodily dimension.

KD: To be honest, I don't know what you're referring to—can you tell me about the context?

AM: He has this note where he was writing to Foucault, or was in conversation with someone else about Foucault, I can't exactly remember.[9] He was talking about the difference between genealogy and assemblage. They're basically very parallel structures, but the difference is that assemblages are held together by desire. Which is why there were so many talks about affects, right? It's hard to put it into other types of words, but I always found that very useful. What he means by desire is not a psychoanalytic concept. It's different

9 The mentioned text is "Desire and Pleasure" (Deleuze 2016 [1994]).

from that kind of "I want that," but you can see a kind of a projective stickiness.

KD: … or attachment? I'll have to look into it—it echoes so many of the things that we already touched on.

[Every table at the café is now taken. When yet another group enters, they carefully inspect every table to see if someone will be getting up soon, making Amber and Kerim pay attention to them. The conversation shifts again.]

AM: After the conference I actually got one of those carnivorous plants. I do have a sundew in my house, and I love it. Although I feel like mine isn't doing that well right now—it's hard in the winter. They need a lot of sun.

KD: And the dry air from the heater is also not the best. How does it sustain itself? Do you feed it?

AM: No.

KD: [laughs] So it doesn't sustain itself?!

AM: There are bugs in my house! But I don't know how it's doing… When I first got it, it was beautiful and every morning I could see the dew on the leaves. I could really see the visual appeal of stickiness. There was a moment it did get a fly and I could see it curl around it and express more liquid. So, it made me think about how multisensory stickiness is.

KD: What I like about your fascination with the plant, that it's also about ingestion. It's eating, it's like a food thing. I mean, this is something fascinating about stickiness as well. The sundew was very popular—we got a lot of comments about it.

AM: I think it's also just so fascinating to think about. I mean, I love it! I hang out with some kids and the children are always so excited by that plant—it's just so counterintuitive. A carnivorous plant? How is this a thing?

KD: But weirdly, I think it also played so well together with the fly paper presentation, for two reasons. One is the obvious reason of the fly trap, but the other is the idea of digestion, because flies digest their food outside of their body, before ingesting it.

AM: But I think that that's sort of going back to how stickiness can reorient what's the internal and external. It sort of signals that there's some porosity.

KD: That's true, it signals the border, the transition from inside to outside.

AM: Which again, if we're going back to pornography, that's what people are talking about.

KD: Yeah, I remember the pancake film that Fabienne Bieri presented on…

AM: Oh yeah. [laughs]

KD: That was very much about ingestion, about inside outside. And then also the affects of hearing that story.[10] [laughs]

AM: Well, I guess you think about the stickiness and sticking to racialized bodies. It is like, that's what's coming from inside other people.

KD: That's true. It's nice to hear that there were some things you could pick up on, that also made some connections clearer for me. Now I'm just curious, I know your new book *Between*

10 In her conference paper "The Affective Politics of Queer Pornography," Fabienne Bieri presented on the film *Brunch on Bikes* (2019, Ethan Folk and Ty Wardwell, Buttermilk Films) in which a couple delivers a pancake order by preparing the batter at home, injecting the batter into one of their rectums, then biking over to their friends who placed the order, until they finally prepare the batter and eat the cooked pancakes all together. You can find a conversation between Jamal Phoenix—one of the film's performers—and Fabienne Bieri in this volume.

Shadows and Noise is just about to be published, and it includes a chapter on tamarind. Is it also about ingestion?

AM: It sort of is. What holds each chapter together is that it's exploring different bodily modes of sitting with different works of art. So it is kind of about that inside outside thing. It's not always about the process of ingestion. With the tamarind, I was really interested in this sculpture that has a little bit of tamarind in it. The sculpture is also about the transatlantic slave trade, and I was interested in what tamarind means in that context. In contrast with sugar and sweetness, I was interested in tamarind and bitterness, and how in herbalism bitterness is about rest and relaxation, as opposed to sugar and productivity. So it was not *not* about ingestion exactly, but it was a little different.

KD: Now that you mention the link or opposition to sugar,[11] it becomes clearer to me.

AM: But yeah, if you wanted to say it like, stickiness intensifies the border zones.

KD: Or it marks them or hints at them or something. Like with the wetness of the syphilis tongue,[12] which was produced to be educational but also disgusting. To elicit a fear of the illness.

AM: It wasn't even there—it was just the picture!

KD: Yes! It was too hot for it. It's wax, which is one of those materials that is very delicate in storage, and since it was in the summer, there was no way of exhibiting it. The temperature would have made it too soft or malleable.

AM: Which I guess goes back to it, right? There is like an aspect of deformation. Like inside outside.

11 Amber wrote about sugar and sweetness in chapter one of *Sensual Excess* (Musser 2018).

12 See Silas Edwards' text on the wax tongue (in this volume, 57–62).

KD: I feel like I'm repeating myself, adding example after example. There were some interesting connections that appeared without anticipating them, which was part of this experiment, but it turned out to be difficult to put it into a clear conclusion.

AM: Well, I don't think this is the kind of thing that can have a conclusion. It can shift your perspective a little.

Many thanks to Johannes Meiterth for transcribing the conversation.

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SEEING STICKY

FILM PROMOTION

FILM PARATEXTS

TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA

VISUAL CULTURE

TEL AVIV

A World on Paper: Film Posters and the Transnational Imagination

Sigal Yona

This essay offers to place transnationalism as an organizing horizon for the study of film posters. It proposes a conceptual and methodological framework for analyzing film posters, based on the premise that posters for imported films are multilayered. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's notion of stickiness, local film posters are compared with their source material and their various layers are unraveled. Through this process, persistent elements are analyzed in light of their historicity, while new additions illuminate underlying sentiments. As a case study, it examines selected film posters produced in southern Tel Aviv during the 1960s, a period when global film posters blossomed.

Lea Aini's novel, *Rose of Lebanon* (2009), recounts a curious cinema memory. In this autobiographical work, the historical Zohar Cinema in southern Tel Aviv is gradually revealed as the narrator strolls down the streets of the immigrant neighborhood of Shapira. Her walk concludes in the bustling, noisy theater, where an eager audience awaits the start of an unknown film. Within the theater, conversations fluctuate between Hebrew and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), reflecting the dominant presence of the newcomers from Turkey and Greece who have resided in the area. Disappointment, however, fills the air as the film begins. The Israeli actress on the screen, the narrator explains, "is easily outshone by Salma Türkan, a beauty in the gold-framed posters at the entrance to the hall … Salma's cheekbones climb until the port of Istanbul, and her almond-like gaze, coming from the poor village, Yuzrum-Yudrum, makes the throat thirsty" (2009, 54).[1]

In Aini's recounting, the center of attention immediately shifts as the film begins. From the events occurring in the theater and on the screen, the focus moves to a fantastical realm conjured by the film poster. A compelling case for the affective power of the poster can be made here, gaining additional dimensions when considering Shapira's status as an immigrant neighborhood and the Zohar Cinema's specialization in screening Turkish films. The admiration for the actress (whose altered name connotes the renowned Turkish actress Türkan Şoray) is an emblem for the yearning that drew the audience to the theater. This redirection of attention, from the film to the film poster, vividly illustrates Charles R. Acland's assertion that "The historian and critic might best stand several paces away from the cinema" (2023, 264).

Film posters have historically received little scholarly consideration. Emma French points out that "Although a neglected media for academic analysis, they demand attention as complex cultural artefact with a range of unstable and variable meanings dependent on context, audience and the historical moment at

1 All translations from Hebrew are by the author.

which they appear" (2006, 26–27). Posters offer a unique visual record of the appeal of films to viewers at a specific location and time, accentuating the value of historically situated research. As Emily King suggests, "The history of the film poster is the ongoing story of the link between cinema and society" (2003, 6).

In this respect, King further notes the particular interest in the "global variation in the reception of cinema" (2003, 8). Specifically, she addresses the distribution of 1950s and 1960s Hollywood films abroad, where local designers sometimes illuminated hidden aspects of the films in their interpretations. Curiously, national elements have been emphasized in historical studies on such posters for imported films. In Poland, for example, Frank Fox observes that Polish film posters for American Westerns have included "a fascinating Eastern European commentary on the myth of the American West" (1999, 110). These designs are situated within the history of Polish poster design, which began its way incorporating folk themes and fostering national identity (1999, 97). Another example is the evolution of the film poster in Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s, which Eladio Rivadulla, Jr. views as a form of "authentic art" that has characteristically undergone transformations over the course of its historical evolution, blending innovation with "faithfulness to tradition" (2000, 42).

This essay presents a different approach, focusing on the film poster as a privileged arena for analyzing transnationalism. The design of film posters for imported films may be seen as inherently transnational, shaped by the circulation of images as well as by the kinds of subjectivities it addresses (for example, diasporic subjectivity, as suggested by the novel discussed above). Nevertheless, film historiography currently lacks established methods and concepts to explore the transnational dimensions of the film poster. Methods and concepts of this nature should, I suggest, be guided by John Downing's argument that posters are one of the media forms whose "communicative thrust" does not necessarily depend on "closely argued logic" (2001, 52). To this end, he points out that suitable analytical

approaches should not "fall into the trap of segregating information, reasoning, and cognition from feeling, imagination, and fantasy" (2001, 52).

In what follows, I propose a conceptual and methodological framework for the analysis of film posters, structuring my argument around the idea that local film posters are multilayered: they typically consist of persistent elements—such as reproductions of imported visuals—(re)arranged and enhanced with newly added components. In the first section, I provide a brief overview of the history of posters, emphasizing what has been described as their ephemeral nature and revelatory quality. In the second section, I focus specifically on the film poster and its localization through layering, drawing on Sara Ahmed's notion of stickiness. In the third section, I present a historically situated case study, analyzing film posters from southern Tel Aviv in the 1960s. Through this analysis, I demonstrate how local film posters have facilitated a transnational dialogue through "sticky" and newly added layers, with the aspiration of enabling feeling and imagination to be considered.

Enduring Ideas on Ephemerality

The global poster, a distinctive form of visual communication, came into prominence amid what Elizabeth E. Guffey describes as "the noisy excitement of the late nineteenth century" (2015, 22). She recounts how posters emerged in the capitals of Europe and North America, notably Paris, London, and New York, in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. This emergence was linked to significant social and economic shifts (such as rapid urbanization), coupled with technological advancements: mass production and the widespread use of chromolithography occurred as artists began to elevate "illustrated posters from curious ephemera to become things of beauty" (2015, 8). A confluence of circumstances has led posters to be contemporaneously perceived as "frescos, if not of the poor man, at least of the crowd" (Mellerio 1978 [1898], 97).

As posters flourished, they drew both acclaim and criticism. It is noteworthy that both opponents and proponents emphasized the ephemeral nature of the poster and its implications. Ruth Iskin exemplifies the critical approach through the argument of the French journalist Maurice Talmeyr, who contended in an 1896 essay that "Like these modern developments, the poster is the epitome of instability: it breeds incessantly, keeps changing, and lacks substance" (quoted in Iskin 2014, 5). Nevertheless, it is this very instability, or adaptability to the changing environment, that made the poster significant in the eyes of its proponents. In Iskin's words, the poster was believed to capture "an aspect of the history of the time that may not otherwise be accessible" (2014, 120). As an example, she quotes the British collector Joseph Thacher, who in 1894 suggested that the poster acts as "an unconscious and unimpeachable witness" (quoted in Iskin 2014, 120).

Nonetheless, by the early twentieth century, posters had become "a rapidly ageing form," according to Guffey (2015, 19). Advertising budgets were being competed for by new forms of mass communication such as mass-market magazines, newspapers, and radio, all of which were quickly gaining traction (2015, 22). In Western capitals where it first blossomed, the poster had lost its allure, seen as having entered a "dreary middle age" (2015, 22).

A New Mystique

A significant shift in the history of posters occurred in the 1960s. During this time, poster popularity experienced a resurgence comparable to that of the first flourishing period seven decades earlier, exhibiting both changes and continuities in their features. According to contemporary critic John Barnicoat, the 1960s' posters revived many of the decorative elements of their turn of the century predecessors, yet in a way that was "brighter, slicker, and more accessible" (1972, 60). Furthermore, Barnicoat points out that the "more widespread effect" of the 1960s' poster was not only stylistic, but also a product of "the technical revolution in

printing: the development of typesetting machines and the use of offset lithography" (1972, 65).

Guffey's account also links technological advances to stylistic shifts. Observing how changes in print drove this new phase differently, she suggests that "the flashy physicality and trashy disposability, once looked at as detriments, now formed an intrinsic part of their newfound popularity" (2015, 29). Guffey notes that posters emerged during this period as a low-tech and alternative form of communication to screen-based media, thereby maintaining "a vibrant underground currency" (2015, 30). In these circumstances, she explains, constructed "as markers of social, cultural and psychological spaces, posters in the 1960s become revelatory" (2015, 126).

In recent studies, posters have been shown to retain their revelatory quality. This interpretative potential of posters can be tapped in a particularly valuable way when combined with the study of marginalized communities, which often have fewer resources. An example of such an approach can be found in a recent study of music publicity posters in 1980s Black districts of Washington, D.C. by Natalie Hopkinson (2020). These music posters, she suggests, represent "a series of semiotic etchings that reveal the textures, rhythms and seasons of how life was lived in … They reimagine spheres of public life in which black Americans have been otherwise misunderstood or invisible" (2020, 291).

Film Posters: Layers and Localization

With technological and stylistic changes in posters in general, and influences from the film industry, film posters have emerged as part of posters' evolution. According to Gary Don Rhodes, early film posters were already present in the US at the start of the twentieth century, and they began flourishing in the second decade (2007, 229). He explains that due to high costs, independent production of film posters was rare, and film

companies became increasingly involved in the process (2007, 233). By 1915, as film studios worked closely with lithographic companies, film posters went through a process of "standardization" (2007, 243). Robert Marich describes how, in the first half of the twentieth century, distributors commonly produced poster templates with blank areas for theaters to simply complete with their names and schedule details (2013 [2009], 40).

In the 1960s, film poster design was a significant part of the poster revival. Marich highlights that during this era, "the landscape for modern movie-creative advertising business started to take form" (2013 [2009], 40). He attributes this transformation to two factors. Firstly, advancements in printing technology enabled the widespread use of photographs in film posters. Secondly, the evolving media landscape, including the rise of television advertising and diverse print media, compelled studios to collaborate with external agencies instead of relying solely on their in-house teams (2013 [2009], 40–41). The 1960s thus marked a departure from the earlier era of standardization and centralization, ushering in a phase of destandardization. Film posters transformed into creative pieces often designed by specialized agencies, where designers sought to express artistic and thematic visions.

The creative energy of 1960s' poster production extended beyond the major film capitals. In Tel Aviv, standard text-based film posters evolved into imaginative designs that included photography, illustrations, a variety of graphic elements, and texts in various languages and typographic styles. Film posters became a ubiquitous form of communication throughout the city, and since only a small number of cinema theaters were affiliated with major American studios, exhibitors had creative freedom in producing posters independently.

Utilizing various material practices and prominently featuring cut-and-paste techniques, these film posters were typically composed of two layers (as will be demonstrated hereinafter).

In the first layer, film posters displayed paper reproductions of imported publicity images, thereby sharing representational vocabularies with the films' original places of origin. In the second layer, these images were (re)arranged and complemented with the usage of graphic elements, color, and text, chosen to evoke fantasy and emotion. Through various layered combinations, film posters both carried and constructed meaning.

These layered combinations, composed of separable elements, align with the definition of collage. Richard Dyer describes collage (stemming from the French word "coller," meaning "to stick together") as a two-dimensional visual work that can incorporate a variety of materials. He notes that while collage is recognized as a product of both Modernist and Postmodern art, it also characterizes much work produced outside the institutions of art (2007, 12). The wide application of collage is further articulated by Charlie White, who describes its emergence in postwar popular culture as a "natural impulse for all media" (2009, 211). White also highlights the analytical potential of collage, referring to it as an "invisible force that reorganizes histories, logs, and lineages to be more readily accessible" (2009, 211).

As scholars have recently observed, collage has long served as an expressive medium beyond formal institutions. In nineteenth century England, women who created albums were engaging in an activity intended to denote refinement, aligning with their roles as arrangers of the domestic interior. However, their creations often produced unexpected outcomes that were "not only visual, but also gestural: collage at once cuts and repairs, fragments and makes whole again" (Di Bello 2016 [2007], 3). Meanwhile, in North America, making newspaper clipping scrapbooks became a burgeoning trend, transitioning "from writing with a pen to writing with scissors" (Garvey 2012, 16). According to Ellen Gruber Garvey, reading these scrapbooks involves deciphering "the codes of any scrapbook and any kind of scrapbook" (2012 ,18).

What are the distinctive codes of local film posters? How can the particular ways in which elements were displayed and (re) arranged on film posters be analyzed? What senses and impressions did the choice of colors and design differences stir? These layers of images and their sticking together, I suggest, can be interpreted through Sara Ahmed's notion of stickiness, which defies a clear-cut separation between material and metaphorical. Ahmed explores how stickiness is developed as a quality, noting that "stickiness depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of an object" (2014 [2004], 90). Consequently, she suggests "to relate stickiness with historicity," or in other words, to think of it "as an effect of surfacing, *as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs*" (2014 [2004], 90). Accordingly, it can be argued that film posters for imported films gained their effectiveness in relation to already existing sentiments, or conversely, that they materialized "sticky" sentiments. In the instance of Tel Aviv, Ahmed's observation is especially pertinent when considering the diasporic context in which films were exhibited.

Tel Aviv Film Posters: A Case Study

The 1960s were a time of exceptional diversity in film exhibition in Tel Aviv. The wide range of films shown cannot be separated from the mass migration that occurred in the country in the previous decade, prominently from the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe. Historically, the city has embraced the heterogeneity spurred by immigration, thus fostering various environments of cultural familiarity that provided immigrants with a sense of belonging (Shavit and Biger 2001, 47). In southern Tel Aviv, cinema venues specializing in Egyptian, Indian, and Turkish films clustered together, creating a center for what Hamid Naficy terms a "horizontal" film culture (2011, 183). Naficy applies this term to describe the flourishing of cinephilia beyond the first world, particularly in countries where audiences consumed films

[Fig. 1] An Egyptian poster for *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Source: IMDb)

from countries with "regional, cultural, and historical affiliations with others" (2011, 183).

The Zohar Cinema, appearing in the novel discussed above, was established as a community initiative by residents of the Shapira neighborhood, which at the time was predominantly composed

[Fig. 2] A poster for the 1967 screening of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* at the Zohar Cinema (Source: Tel Aviv Municipal Archive)

of immigrants from Turkey, Greece, and the former emirate of Bukhara. In the 1960s, the cinema featured a variety of European and American films, as well as a growing number of Turkish, Greek, Indian, Egyptian, and, to a lesser extent, Iranian films.

One of the films successfully showcased at Zohar Cinema was the Egyptian film *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Salah Abu Seif, 1963), an adaptation of the novella of the same name by Stefan Zweig. The Egyptian poster (fig. 1) features large, hand-drawn portraits of the leading actor and actress, a typical design element in Egyptian posters. The color scheme includes white, gray, and black, with a bold red title positioned prominently at the center. The Arabic typography used in the title aligns with the overall lettering style of the poster.

The poster created for the screening of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* at Zohar Cinema in 1967 features a similar color scheme and Arabic typography, yet in a completely different way (fig. 2). Instead of the brush strokes of the original, it features a striking

symmetric design with a bold stripe pattern, using gray, black, and red colors against a plain white background.

Gray shades dominate the publicity images, while black and red text elements alternate. In red, the name of the film is prominently displayed in a Hebrew title at the center; the original title in Arabic, using the same typography, is centered below; and on the sides, the names of the leading actor and actress are displayed (in matching Arabic typography) along with the number two, indicating the second screening week. In black, the screening details are listed at the top in Hebrew (with weekends on the left and weekdays on the right); there is promotional text on the film in Arabic at the bottom; and details of the two leads are presented in Hebrew below the red title: Lobna Abdel Aziz is described as "the exciting actress," while the star musician Farid al-Atrash is presented as the "idol of the audience."

In this multilayered poster, the gray images and red Arabic text form a layer of imported materials, and a second layer is created by adding text and (re)arranging the different elements. The symmetrical design features Hebrew and Arabic text, male and female stars, and even information about weekday and weekend screenings that are mirrored images of each other. The eye-catching symmetry creates not only a sense of harmony but also repetition, which pertains to the emphasis on the second week of screening and the description of "exceptional success." This repetition may draw from, or contribute to, a broader sense of familiarity or continuity.

Egyptian films were also screened at the Eden Cinema, which historically became known as the first cinema theater to open in Tel Aviv. Established in 1914, it featured an 800-seat cinema hall as well as an 800-seat open-air theater. During the 1960s, the Eden Cinema screened, along with Egyptian films, a program that was devoted to Indian, Turkish, Iranian, and Greek films.

The original poster for *The Beloved Diva* (Helmy Rafla, 1967), one of the films screened at the Eden Cinema, can be compared with the

[Fig. 3] An Egyptian poster for *The Beloved Diva* (Source: IMDb)

previous Egyptian poster in several ways (fig. 3). The large hand-drawn portraits of the leading actor and actress are featured prominently in the poster, with a bold red title positioned at the center. Despite these similarities, there are differences in tone and design. Textual details on the film are presented in a colorful mix of black, blue, and red, and the poster includes small illustrations of scenes and interactions, along with decorative flowers. A plain white backdrop surrounds all these elements.

[Fig. 4] A poster for the 1968 screening of *The Beloved Diva* at the Eden Cinema (Source: Tel Aviv Municipal Archive)

The poster created for the screening of *The Beloved Diva* at Eden Cinema in 1968 presents a bright and engaging composition (fig. 4). The two hand-drawn portraits remain in place and are overlaid with a second layer featuring a vibrant, bold color palette. On this second layer, a prominent Hebrew title appears in plum purple, surrounded by the actors' names in red with matching Hebrew

[Fig. 5] A poster for the 1964 screening of *The Lost Flower* at the Eden Cinema (Source: Tel Aviv Municipal Archive)

typography. Additionally, the Arabic film title and actors' names appear in black, utilizing the same typography as the original poster. At the top of the poster, the screening details are presented in blue. The colorful text is set against a hand-painted blue background that enhances the overall attractive aesthetic.

The Iranian film *The Lost Flower* (Abbas Shabaviz, 1962) was screened at the Eden cinema in 1964. The local poster features a combination of Hebrew and Persian text along with a photo-montage of heightened dramatic moments (fig. 5). The most prominent textual element is the Persian film title, displayed in large red letters against a dark background at the bottom. The smaller Hebrew title, in matching red, is placed on the opposite corner on top. The placement of the second layer opposite the first layer is reminiscent of the symmetrical design of the poster for *Letter from an Unknown Woman* discussed previously. In this poster as well, repetition is evident: most characters appear in pairs, and one image appears twice (the second and smaller

one is framed by a tunnel, appearing as a kind of visual echo). In this case, the designer creatively arranged imported photos from various sources, making them the primary focus alongside the Persian text.[2] In contrast to both Tel Aviv posters discussed above, the Hebrew text here plays a mere secondary role. This created a predominantly (new) Iranian design in a diasporic setting.

Conclusion

In the novel discussed above, a narrated cinema scene is thrown into disarray by a film poster. As events unfold both in the theater and on screen, the narration shifts, influenced by the fantastical realm evoked by the poster. The poster seems to act as a "social agent in itself," a characteristic that Mieke Bal describes in her explanation of "sticky images." According to Bal, these are "images that hold the viewer, enforcing an experience of temporal variation" (2000, 80). The scene takes place in an immigrant neighborhood largely inhabited by newcomers from Turkey, shifting from the tangible streets of Tel Aviv to the imagined "port of Istanbul."

Film posters may be "sticky" in more ways than one. While this cinema memory recounts a way in which a poster was experienced, film posters also often comprise various layered combinations where images are stuck together. These collages may employ cut-and-paste techniques, over-drawing, over-writing, and various additions such as graphic elements, color, and text. By comparing local film posters with their source material and deconstructing their layers, it becomes possible to see which elements "stick." Drawing from Ahmed's terms, their stickiness can then be understood in light of their historicity.

2 A blog dedicated to Iranian popular cinema presents the original publicity materials for the film. See Iranian Film Poster, 2014.

Such a comparison may reveal, as in the examples discussed above, the lasting appeal of the films' spoken languages—highlighted through original title designs— and of their stars, as expressed through descriptions and the prominence of their portraits. Through (re)arrangement and new additions, underlying sentiments such as familiarity or a sense of harmony are illuminated. In Tel Aviv in the 1960s, film posters were poised at the seam between past experience and inventive experimentation; in their adaptability and creativity, they drew on enduring continuities from across geographies and time, while also shaping new transnational imaginations.

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Doing Stickers

Alexandra Schneider

I still remember the stickers in in my and my brother's childhood bedroom. We put stickers on our Lego storage container, on our bunk bed (though hidden from sight), on our cupboard, and also on some of our toys. I guess that I still remember those stickers so clearly because my mother was against them and generally tried to keep us from putting stickers on things. Now, as an adult and a parent myself, I understand her ban better. But because of my mother's ban, I have always associated stickers with a potentially illicit form of pleasure and a promise of transgression. It is such a temporal interval that "doing stickers" opens up.

To put a sticker on objects that one cherishes creates a feedback loop. The object is improved by being decorated with a cute sticker, and the sticker itself gains value and achieves its destiny by being put on a beloved object. Sticker and object mutually tag and personalize each other in the transaction: in combination, a generic sticker and an indifferent object become unique personal accessories and a heightened form of personal property.

The fun of putting stickers on beloved objects is only matched by the pleasure of nibbling them off again. To undo the stickering without damage to either sticker or surface and without hurting one's nails requires a high degree of dedication to both objects and a particular skill (there are even tutorials on how to remove stickers and glue: LGR 2017). It is a much more challenging, but ultimately also more potentially rewarding, occupation than other harmless forms of compulsive behavior like nail biting or scraping up the cuticula.

According to Iris van der Tuin and Nanna Verhoeff, "[t]here are two main ways in which cultural theorists have written about [stickiness]. One pertains to historical association, the other to transversal assembling" (2022, 181). As the authors point out, the latter "has its origin in the notion of 'sticky images' that … Mieke

[Fig.1] Atomic Purple Game Boy from the Color series (1998) (Source: Astro- & TV-Lounge, Goethe University Collections, Frankfurt am Main)

Bal has written about. Such images are performatives that intervene in conceptions of, and experiences within, linear time" (van der Tuin and Verhoeff 2022, 182). A sticky image intervenes as it gives room for a "temporal interval, a no longer and not yet" (van der Tuin and Verhoeff 2022, 182).

The object depicted in the figure above (fig. 1) raises the question of both the temporal interval and the pleasure of doing stickers. This handheld video game was first advertised and sold by Nintendo in 1998. The innovation was that the device came in different colored cases but, more importantly, with a color screen that gave the series its name. The one depicted here is one of the transparent "colors," the "Atomic purple" one, from the Game Boy Color series. As one can learn from the manufacturing sticker placed on its back, this specific device was produced and sold in 1998.

Nintendo's first handheld game devices, however, are from 1980 and were called "Game & Watch." They allowed players to play games they would have normally experienced at the arcades—now they became available at any location and given time. We first had the single screen Parachute from 1981 at home, but for whatever reason my favorite was the Donkey Kong Vertical Multi

Screen Edition from 1982. Both devices only offered one game (usually in two different playing modes, A and B)—different to the Nintendo Game Boy that came with interchangeable game cartridges and was started in 1989.

Official manufacturing stickers usually blend into the surface of the device. In the case of Nintendo handhelds, they not only moved from the front to the back of the device but also underwent a transformation. The Game & Watch logo was not yet directly printed onto the device but came as a front sticker. Like the manufacturing sticker on the back, they are very thin, often of a metallic texture rather than paper, and placed in a milled-out section to make them as seamless as possible.

Stickers added by the user-owners of devices are never so seamless and as such they are more vulnerable than the manufacturing stickers. Whenever a sticker is spotted, a scratching-off compulsion might kick in. This is also true for the four little heart stickers on the back of the Nintendo Game Boy Color pictured above (two of them are put on top of the manufacturing sticker). When you play with this device, you can always feel the little additional stickers on its back. As much as sticky images are produced in an act of seeing, stickering on the other hand involves acts of touching: peeling of the protective paper, positioning the sticker on the destined surface, and, most importantly, the final rubbing to make sure that the sticker does not wrinkle or bubble.

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MONTAGE

FILM CEMENT

AMATEUR FILM

EDITING

MODERNISM

Creation by Destruction: Experimental Film Practices and the Art of Splicing

Miriam De Rosa and Andrea Mariani

This text focuses on a specific phase of analogue film postproduction, namely splicing, with a particular emphasis on splicing as a gesture in experimental film practices in the interwar period. Our central concern is how splicing can serve as an epistemological tool. By looking at the films by Ubaldo Magnaghi, a member of the Milan Cine-Club and an official Agfa collaborator in the 1930s, we claim that splicing works as a reconfiguration driver acting on the film. In the case of amateur/experimental cinema, we can assume the filmmaker splices the film, and when it happens the conjunction that this implies is made technically possible by using cement (tape came later in history); however,

using cement implies emulsion or even frame loss. We then stress splicing as a "gesture of destroying" (Flusser 2014). Guided by glueing and slicing, destruction becomes not only a gesture of dismissing, dismantling, disposing, and displacing but also a productive, creative move—from within the editing practice—that allows the displaying of the film material in its full surface, thereby shedding light on a new way to think of it.

Splicing and Modernity

As Charles Baudelaire wrote in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1859), "Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, which make up one half of art, the other being the eternal and immutable" (1992, 403). Expanding on this notion, David Harvey, in his influential account of postmodernity, interprets the transitory nature of modernity as not only a dramatic rupture with previous historical conditions, but also as an ongoing process of internal fractures and fragmentation. At the heart of this dynamic is the avant-garde, which acts as a powerful force driving discontinuity—"interrupting any sense of continuity by radical surges, recuperations, and repressions" (1989, 12). Accordingly, the Nietzschean "image of creative destruction and destructive creation" assumed the value of a *leitmotif* of the progressive project of modernity (Harvey 1989, 17). Aesthetically, montage and collage stand as the central modernist practices that most directly confronted the challenge of inscribing historical change within the chaotic, fragmented, and transitory conditions of modernity. Through print media and the moving image, they "provided one means of addressing this problem, since different effects out of different times (old newspapers) and

spaces (the use of common objects) could be superimposed to create a simultaneous effect" (Harvey 1989, 28).

By exploring the experimental film practices of Italian filmmaker Ubaldo Magnaghi, through the lenses of Vilem Flusser's media theory, we seek to shed a different light on the modernist "image of creative destruction" (Harvey 1989, 17). In particular, we intend to stress the inner creative potential of splicing in film editing as a technique that reveals the modern impulses towards the transitory and the ephemeral, discovering the creative and reflexive features of this "tacit" (and transparent) material practice (Boguska et al. 2024). Furthermore, by excavating the practice of film splicing in the amateur sphere, we want to stress the elemental and yet pervasive qualities of this technique. A splice joins sections of film together. Splices may be required as part of the editing process. Historically, we can observe two types of splicing: tape splicing, where the whole splice is held together across its width by splicing tape and tape splices do not overlap and are merely butted together (butted splice); and cement splicing, characterized by the film overlapping across its width in a strip a couple of millimeters wide (Temmerman 2008, 327–62). The latter kind of splicing, particularly, will be discussed, by taking Magnaghi's 16mm films as case studies: the cement splicing process he employed often required partial removal (a few millimeters) of film emulsion on the overlapping area (fig. 1).

Moreover, when the cement was too sticky and splices needed to be removed for a new assemblage, the two cemented frames were cut off. Considering this, we argue that destruction is an inherent part of Magnaghi's splicing procedure. Like many other practices involving gluing, taping, or pasting, splicing is one of those cultural techniques that bridge material[1] and visual culture (Rheinberger 2023). It draws attention to the paradoxical nature of stickiness, oscillating between visibility and invisibility.

1 Physical objects, artifacts, and technological achievements created by a certain social group, reflecting its values, beliefs, and way of life.

[Fig.1] Scanned film strip from *Ten Synthesis* (*Studio n. 10* is an alternative title) by Ubaldo Magnaghi. Details of emulsion removal in preparation of slicing. Supposedly 1934, original print from Cineteca Italiana archive.

Ironically, this very "invisibility" has rendered splicing itself largely overlooked in scholarly literature. Often subsumed under the broader category of editing, splicing has been (con)fused with montage or simply taken for granted as an implicit step within

the editing process.[2] Splicing has remained an invisible media practice, particularly when considering the finished product of a film. It has rarely been examined in scholarly work as a fundamental process with its own epistemological significance. This text aims to bring that overlooked dimension to light.

Ubaldo Magnaghi belonged to the Cine-Club of Milan and can be considered an *enfant prodige* of 16mm filmmaking in Italy (De Rosa and Mariani 2023). He made at least five films using Agfa equipment, which was rigorously declared in the film's credits. As a matter of fact, Agfa Mailand had involved independent filmmakers to stress-test their technology and promote the technical possibilities of their stocks and film equipment since at least 1932 (Mariani and Schneider 2025). While these films may now resemble canonical avant-garde works, with their symphonic structures and easily recognizable cinematic influences, what stands out is the filmmaker's attempt to push the physical limits of the technology—particularly the film stock supplied by the Agfa company for experimental use: a 16mm Isopan Reversal film. Reversal film stocks gained popularity among amateur filmmakers in the 1930s, as they enhanced the filmmaker's autonomy in the development process. These stocks allowed filmmakers to produce a positive image directly from the original footage, eliminating the need for a separate printing phase. In fact, reversal film stock processing starts with revealing a negative image (Powers 2023, 40). This leaves the unused silver halide untouched, but it is not fixed, as it will be used later to form a positive image. After the negative image has been developed, it is totally bleached away using an acid bleach. Accordingly, the remaining silver, which is light-fogged and then re-developed, produces a positive image (Ramey 2015, 179).

2 Arguing that splicing has been taken for granted, we mean that it was conceived as a process that had to be transparent—better yet, it has not to be noticed or seen; it was designed to make smooth and invisible transitions from one frame to another.

On one hand, this technology enhanced filmmakers' independence by freeing them from the network of customer services typically responsible for film development and printing. On the other hand, it underscores the ephemeral and transient nature of amateur film: the original negative was lost by default, as the process involved removing the negative image to produce a positive one in its place. Here is a first degree of where the tension between creation and destruction can be retrieved. The reversible film stock technically works on an implied loss, which is the *conditio sine qua non* for creativity. As a matter of fact, as Kathryn Ramey stressed, the use of bleaches—implied in the reversal film processing by default—became a common technique of emulsion removal for creative purposes in avant-garde and structural films too (Ramey 2015, 179).

As we are discussing, splice reversal film in amateur film practices reveals multiple intertwined theoretical implications; let us briefly explore them before delving into Flusser's media theory.

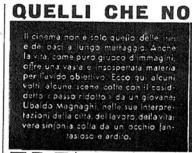
Film Ephemerality and Creative Thriftiness

Reversal film for amateurs encountered large favor by emancipating the independent filmmaker both economically—less costs for positive transfers—and aesthetically: the amateurs could supervise by their own the entire film development process, adjusting film bath formulas and intervening in the revealing process. A classic account of economic constraints and creative editing in amateur filmmaking is Maya Deren's 1947 essay on "creative cutting." Unsurprisingly, Ubaldo Magnaghi also emphasized the link between the amateur's economic anxieties and their creative freedom in a 1934 article dedicated to 16mm film (Magnaghi 1934, 10) (fig. 2).

Splicing in Deren's essay assumed a tactical value that precedes montage. Thriftiness is reflected in a sharp mental predisposition of the amateur towards a rational balance between the splicing and the organization of actions and movements in the film by

QUELLI CHE NON HANNO BISOGNO DELLE DIVE

Il cinema non è solo quello delle riprese dal vivo o il lungo montaggio. Anche la vita, come puro gioco di immagini, offre una vasta e insospettata materia per l'avido obiettivo. Ecco qui alcuni voli, alcune scene colte con il cosiddetto «passo ridotto» da un giovane: Ubaldo Magnaghi, nelle sue interpretazioni della città, del lavoro, della vita, veramente colta da un occhio fanatico e ardito.



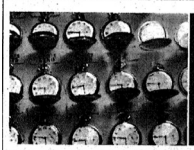
TRENTACINQUE m/m E SEDICI m/m

Cinedilettanti? Forse. O forse, per qualificare, la parola non è la più adatta. In primo, perché *cinematografare* costa molto, ed il giovane che si accinge a scoprire i misteri della *camera da presa* va incontro a spese di solito non solite ai giovani. Poi, la qualifica *dilettante* non è appropriata: sarebbe come chiamare dilettante un pittore che fa acquerelli in luogo del quadro ad olio su commissione.

Il cineasta che fa in proprio, adoperando pellicola dal formato ridotto (16 mm. e non pellicola di piccolissimo formato), non sufficiente di certo a dare un sicuro rendimento, gode di una assoluta libertà di azione. Non è soggetto, come di solito il professionista, a tutte le strettoie che hanno fini commerciali. Può fare, se ha

quadro, dell'inquadratura e di seguirla in ogni spostamento. Dà al giovane la libertà assoluta, dà al giovane il mezzo di poter giudicare se stesso. Se questo sbaglia vede i suoi errori. Comincia a studiare le maschere, i piani, il ritmo, a fare del montaggio. Accorcia, cuce, sopprime ed aggiunge. Comincia a capire ciò che significano le luci, a vedere *cinematograficamente*. Comincia a sentire una sceneggiatura, a far l'occhio esperto ed a cogliere quanto è di cinematografabile in un brano scritto, in un panorama, in un movimento, in una espressione.

Attraverso l'occhio della piccola *camera da presa* egli vede tutto. E se il cineasta ha doti di intelligenza, di sensibilità, ama l'arte nostra, dopo non molto sarà pronto per diventare un buon



doti, arte. La sua opera, quindi, va presa in considerazione, va studiata e seguita attentamente. I suoi film sono gli unici dove l'elemento attore non impera. Ombre, i giochi delle ombre hanno modo sicuro di aver ragione.

I nostri professionisti disprezzano il passo ridotto. Il produttore, poi, quando deve assumere, quali assistenti, dei nuovi registi, si guarda ben bene dallo scegliere tra il vivaio dei giovani che con i loro piccoli apparecchi fanno del cinematografo. Va dal vecchio professionista che ha sbagliato mille volte, re del mediocre, maestro dei vecchi usi, ed i due fanno assieme un film gramo.

* * *

La critica, salvo pochi censori milanesi (vedi, il *Corriere della Sera*), i quali al giovane hanno dato tutta la solidarietà, dei giovani

tecnico, un buon regista. Gli occorrerà (forse sì, forse no) qualche giorno (dico qualche giorno) di *apprentissage* in un grande teatro di posa: ma questo, o critici che di già avete sgranato tanto di occhi perché è il punto sul quale usate attaccarvi, non per impazzare a fare del cinematografo, come voi dite, bensì per apprendere le usanze ed abituare un poco gli occhi alla luce troppo abbagliante dei diffusori di un grande teatro.

Non per altro, mi si creda.

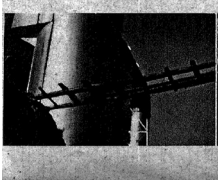
E poi, per rinnovare i quadri della nostra cinematografia, dove si potrà attingere se non nelle schiere di questi cosiddetti dilettanti? Che sono tutti giovani, come hanno dimostrato i Littoriali della Cultura di Firenze dove alcuni elementi hanno dato prova di reali disposizioni? Paolucci, Damicelli, i primi che ci vengono

non si occupa. A Milano ed altrove ogni volta che in quei *clubs* dove sono gli amatori del cinema, viene proiettato un film dei giovani, la critica bada ben bene dall'intervenire alla visione. Questo, contrariamente anche al volere dei nostri Gerarchi, i quali hanno voluto che ai Littoriali dell'Arte ci fosse una sezione cinematografica, che alla Biennale Veneziana i nostri giovani fossero rappresentati in giornate dedite al passo ridotto.

Il passo ridotto (16 mm.), giova ripetere, è vera scuola per chi voglia fare del cinematografo, per chi sente il cinematografo. Da modo in primo di far conoscere ai giovane i misteri della fotografia, di far imparare bene ciò che significa bianco e nero attraverso tutta la gamma delle tonalità. Da modo al giovane di vedere nella *camera da presa*, di essere padrone immediatamente dei

alla mente. Per i produttori, diciamo un'eresia, ma certo danno più da sperare gli esperimenti, se volete chiamarli così, di Matarazzo in «Treno popolare», in «La borsa o la vita», di Carlo L. Bragaglia, invece degli elementi nostrani che hanno già sulla coscienza più di una trentina di film. Blasetti stesso, cui non si può non riconoscere dei forti meriti, viene proprio da questa incubatrice privata. Ricordo di aver visto su questo stesso giornale una foto in cui si vedeva Francisci, un altro giovane, al lavoro con una macchina piccola come una mosca. Il colto e l'inclita avrebbero riso: noi vediamo il segno di una passione, di una fede, senza le quali non si farà mai nulla di buono.

Ubaldo Magnaghi



[Fig.2] Original article from Ubaldo Magnaghi (Source: 1934, digitized journa from Digital Library BibliotecaLuigiChiarini, CentroSperimentalediCinematografia, Rome).

researching the optimal sequence duration. A clear example of this is the "transition" of action and movements "across the splice" in *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1943) (Deren 1947, 204), where the splice is not juxtaposing two frames but lets the movement continue in a long duration shot across two pieces of film stock. Magnaghi interpreted the amateur's thriftiness and the tactical recurse to splice in a way that dates back to the practice of *compilation film* in the origins of newsreels. Nevertheless, Jay Leyda, in his theory of the compilation film, stressed that:

> A technological advance in 1926 also speeded the popularization of the compilation as a commercial form: both Eastman and Agfa engineers found satisfactory methods of making duplicate negatives, achieving a "theatre quality" even with neglected negatives and worn prints. (Leyda 1964, 33)

Leyda put *duplication* at the core of a modern impulse to compile and re-assemble pre-existing material. In Magnaghi's practice, it is not the duplication but rather the uniqueness and transience of the reversal film print that inform his personal approach to re-assemblage and compilation. This makes him a surprising and quintessentially modern(ist) filmmaker, powerfully and innovatively reverberating the two sides of Baudelaire's formulation opening this text. Let us stress this point further. A key point to note is that by introducing reversal film stocks, maufacturers prioritized flexibility, speed in image processing, and filmmaker autonomy—often at the expense of the film's longevity. In fact, reversal film typically existed as a single print, lacking standardized preservation conditions. This material precariousness threatened the survival of such films from the outset. Consequently, reversal film became emblematic of a practice oriented more toward experimentation—and thus cinema in the future tense—rather than memorization/preservation, which contrasts with the expectations commonly associated with home cinema's memories. In 1937, this sense of loss is made eloquent, in quasi-poetic tones, by filmmaker Domenico Paolella, who

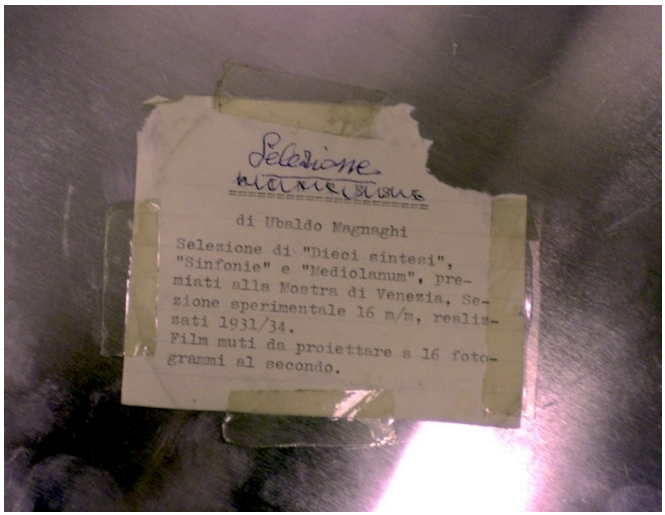
wrote these lines as introductory notes for a book about amateur cinema:

> Of [the filmmaker's] youthful anxiety, entrusted to the frail lightness of the film base, which soon turns yellow, which soon breaks down, there will be no trace but a secret pain. To the injustice of this destruction, may they at least oppose the illusion of a greater longevity by documenting their passion through a written paper. (Paolella 1937, 8)

The precariousness and transience of the film material become even more apparent in the case of Magnaghi's film symphonies. Between 1930 and 1934 Magnaghi filmed three films, sponsored by Agfa: *Mediolanum* (1933), *Dieci Sintesi* (*10 Synthesis*, 1934), and *Sinfonie del lavoro e della vita* (*Symphonies of Work and Life*, 1934). These films were discovered in a single film can, accompanied by a piece of paper including these lines:

> Selection of *Dieci Sintesi*, *Sinfonie* and *Mediolanum*, as projected and awarded at the Venice Film Festival, amateur film international contest 1934. They are silent films to be screened at 16 frames per second. (fig. 3)

The film features an original montage created by interweaving fragments from three separate films (unique prints) through mixed editing. This version, presented in Venice, blends the films into a single composition. A close analysis reveals that all three include sequences shot in Milan during the same period. As a result, *Mediolanum*—a city symphony dedicated to Milan—contains scenes whose actions continue seamlessly into those found in *Dieci Sintesi* or *Sinfonie del lavoro e della vita*. This close thematic and visual proximity is further emphasized by repeated mixed assemblies of the three films, with the Venice version likely being the most recent of these recombinations. The format of the compilation film of these symphonies is certainly favoring modularity and interchangeability between frames and sequences. Beside interchangeability, in this practice of re-use we can observe the sharp mental predisposition of the amateur towards



[Fig.3] Original label signed by Ubaldo Magnaghi, stuck on the metal can (Source: supposedly 1936, original can from Cineteca Italiana archive).

a tactical use of splicing to render the film material in a renovated shape—at the expense of the original editing scheme.
What we wish to emphasize is that, because the films were shot on reversal stock, every intervention—each cut or omission made on the original print or on earlier assemblies—was irreversible. In other words, the original film was deliberately sacrificed and is now permanently lost. As a result, the Magnaghi film fund takes on the form of a fragmentary cloud—a mass of film frames and sequences from each work, repeatedly broken apart and re-assembled whenever the filmmaker chose to create a new edition. That stated, how we can interpret the destructive re-assembling technique by Magnaghi as an inherently modern creative impulse?

The reflection we would like to propose moves precisely from such a technical feature of the film stock. In particular, our proposition is that splicing can serve as an epistemological tool. Looking at Magnaghi's work, we would like to contend that splicing works as a reconfiguration driver acting on the film. In the case of an amateur filmmaker like Magnaghi, we can assume he operates as editor as well, and when he splices the film the conjunction that this implies is made technically possible using cement (tape came later in history); however, to potentially re-use the film sequences and/or re-edit a fragment with another, the glued frames need to be cut and disposed of (Caneppele 2022). In other words, using cement allows one to create new conjunctions and juxtapositions, but at the same time such a gesture of gathering implies frame loss. This means that the gesture of splicing is a "gesture of destroying" and yet it is a particular kind of destruction.

According to Vilém Flusser (2014), who notably addresses "destroying" in his study devoted to gestures, destruction is in fact to be analyzed as a two-fold concept. Taking its cues from German language, he explains that destruction can be evoked to hint at both a disruption, and a dismantling and displacement action. Whilst the first meaning goes under the term *Destruktion*, the latter is in effect *Zerstörung*. The difference between the two is determined by an intention, which in this case, in Flusser's view, can be read in two distinct ways in turn. First, if we embrace an ethical perspective, destroying brings in the issue of evil insofar as destroying may spark from the "motivation" to make something existing disappear (Flusser 2014, 56). Instead, if we adopt a pragmatic perspective, the gesture of destroying may well express a decision to alter the state of things with a new state of things as a pursued outcome; in this case not evil but rather work is brought into the equation.

> Work is a gesture whose motive lies in the decision to make something different from what it is, because it is not as it should be. Both destruction and work decide that something is not as it should be. Unlike work, destruction decides not to make it differently but to get rid of it altogether. … Work is revolutionary. It replaces that which should not be with something that should be. Destruction is not revolutionary: it says no, but not dialectically. The being expressed in the destructive gesture is less radical in the world than one articulated in gestures of work. (Flusser 2014, 56)

In our view, destruction and work are not mutually exclusive: looking at the filmmakers as they splice the film, this operation becomes a gesture that bridges destruction as *Zerstörung* and work: if the former always has "a minus sign" because the operation proceeds by subtraction, the latter re-channels the negative position back into positive by bringing back to existence and thus offering a plus sign. Put differently, if destruction indeed implies a loss motivated by the fact that "something is not as it should be," at the same time it proposes a solution to fill the gap. This replacement is deployed via work, that is, via another subsequent gesture that assesses, albeit temporarily, how something should in fact be.

The way the filmmaker operates on the film material is worth looking into. We propose to identify three steps forming the filmmaker's workflow that inform the destruction framework emphasizing its creative potential. These are dismantling, displaying, and displacing. All of them, as the *dis-* prefix clearly shows, encapsulate a sense of disposal; however, what is literally cut is not simply disposed of: it rather stands for an opening that makes room for something new to come. This echoes the potential that any gesture notably entails (Agamben 2000). In this vein, the three gestures we listed are no exception to that. We suggest that the peculiar potential deriving from disposal that we envisage is one of creation. The filmmaker takes the risk of disposing of a frame as they splice the film motivated by the

creation of a new, open form. The sense of freedom allowed by destruction becomes then the acknowledgment of the nature of the film as an open media configuration. Dismantling, displacing and displaying can indeed be seen in light of this fundamental freedom that constitutes the basic condition for any creative gesture to be unfolded. More specifically, the gesture of dismantling is a way to force the fixity of things, disturb the state of existence as it is given in the world. As Flusser comments on such an action of disturbance, "[d]isturbers … are not necessarily destructive spirits. On the contrary they can have a constructive effect" (2014, 57). Dismantling, then, ultimately leads to a work of construction, for it poses the conditions for the latter to occur. That is how dismantling is bridged with the gesture of displaying.

The second step in the workflow we are trying to analyze, the process of displaying, is conducive to operating on the dismantled film material: once the film is spliced, the filmmaker needs to view the frames to be able to order and re-arrange them. To do so, the filmic time is manipulated through a process of exhibition, taking the shape of a visualization either on a retro-illuminated table or through hand-scrolling. It is quite apparent how such a passage is essential for a gesture of displacing to occur. Technically speaking, the process of displacing is located within the phase of gluing. From a conceptual point of view, instead, the process of displacing is where the highest degree of openness and freedom lie, because it is where new assemblages are envisioned. This is possible thanks to the modular and mobile nature of frames and filmic fragments, which is obvious in Magnaghi's film practices and his use of the various film fragments such as *Mediolanum*, *Dieci Sintesi*, and *Sinfonie del lavoro e della vita*: playing with them enables new conjunctions between the visual materials to appear and this, in turn, enables new relationships to be created (De Rosa and Fowler 2021). The outcome is ultimately a set of associations aimed at producing new meanings. In this regard, Magnaghi embodies the typical approach of the avant-garde insofar as his systematic re-use and re-assemblage practice

echoes the process at the basis of compilation film. In effect, Magnaghi's multiple re-contextualizations of the same original footage tell of his profound awareness of the film material both in terms of the content and of the affordances of the film stock. Jay Leyda discusses the same aspect in his study on compilation film:

> You cannot rearrange the elements within a piece of newsreel, though you can manipulate them in relation to other pieces—but only if you have studied their whole content. It is from such study and manipulation that the art of the compilation film can grow. (Leyda 1964, 22)

The author refers to newsreels and the use of them to build up a narrative once the original context of the sequences is lost. However, we posit that the same logic—the results of which were rather innovative in the early 1930s—applies to Magnaghi's film as well: removing his own footage from a film to compose another, he meticulously excerpts the sequence, splicing it off the previous arrangement to create artistic effects and meanings. Again, with Leyda:

> In the cutting of past newsreels to present historical concepts or to "agitate" an audience into thinking, it has become obvious today that to neglect the formal content of each piece weakens its informational content and leaves the audience groping for the purpose of the sequence and the idea of the whole. But in 1927 this necessity for studying the whole content of each newsreel piece and building from its formal elements a carefully engineered bridge to convey information to the audience in the strongest possible way was a totally new idea. (Leyda 1964, 23)

Think of the sequences entitled "good and evil" and "life" that close the film *Sinfonie del lavoro e della vita*: in the former we see images of joy that resemble Magnaghi's light and close-up tests. Multiple characters enter the frame without really carrying out any actions—they are in the same indoor context, well illuminated, and filling the screen while talking, posing, and

having fun together. The *mise en scene* shows that the images could be part of the test reel and they could have been taken out and inserted in the *Symphonies* film. Similarly, the merry-go-round that we see in the "life" segment might have been shot in Milan in the frame of the shooting for *Dieci Sintesi*—no full action is given to see, instead a fleeting image fills the screen. It is the image of the playground, of the sky seen from the merry-go-round when this is in action, of the carousel seats and its chains floating in the air. These glimpses have a deep poetic quality and convey an atmosphere of dynamism tinted with nostalgia. Yet, they can produce affects and meanings thanks to their use as blocks edited together, rather than showing actions in and of themselves, because they have probably been spliced off the rest of the footage shot by the filmmaker. In light of this, the gesture of displacing represents the heart of the tension between destruction and construction that we are focusing on. Further, it highlights the modularity that Magnaghi implicitly attributed to his sequences. Almost echoing the concept of *format* that will come many years after his films were produced, his sharp mental predispositions as regards the multifunctionality of his footage betrays the conviction that, to him, the spliced sequences are thought of within "programmatic relationships between individual elements and their organizational logic" (Jancovic, Volmar, and Schneider 2020, 8).

Dismantling, displaying, displacing his sequences into new films, Magnaghi uses splicing to mobilize the image and basically create a new filmic configuration. In this sense, and bearing the above-mentioned three steps—dismantling, displaying, displacing—in mind, we believe that splicing is revealed in its liberation potential: the film is mutilated but such a frame loss frees it from a fixity that makes it an open artefact. Cutting and sticking become intertwined creative gestures giving birth to new media configurations. A host of different artistic practices employing the same processes serve as an assessment and a demonstration of this statement: analogic collage, embroidery, textile art, stitching

and other areas of crafts such as goldsmith art all entail, in their own peculiar fashion, the same tension. Papercuts in collage and collage-based animation reply upon the destruction of the publications and illustrations where the images are taken; only by dismantling them in their original form, displacing and rearranging them, are we given the final collage or film. Bracelet or necklace links in jewellery are commonly cut off if damaged or to re-design the piece: again, only by dismantling the jewel as it was at first and intervening in the (dis-)placement of its units can it be fixed or refashioned by the goldsmith. Reversal film stock like the one used by Ubaldo Magnaghi works exactly the same way. The use he makes of it, which we have discussed, sheds light on splicing as a technique with artistic and creative value, able to unfold relevant cultural effects. His way of conceiving reversible film sequences as modules, nearly as formats, illuminates his experimentation with the medium as a key moment that shall be seen within a dynamic phase of research and development.

Splicing, in conclusion, sheds light on what can be studied in film beyond representation and, with David Joselit, *against* representation. "The artwork" he suggests:

> almost always contains vestiges of what might be called the roots—or infrastructural extensions—of its entanglements in the world. These might include the means of production of the image, the human effort that brought it into being, its mode of circulation, the historical events that condition it, etc. The artwork's format solidifies and makes visible that connective tissue, reinforcing the idea that the work of art encompasses both an image and its extensions. (Joselit 2015)

Splicing invites us to consider the roots and vestiges of small-gauge filmmaking. It helps us observe what could be done with the film stock and how far practices determined by the materiality of the medium, like splicing, could be stretched and pushed.

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16mm Metal Film Can

Franziska Kohler

The 16mm film archive of Goethe University's Department of Theater, Film and Media Studies contains a not insignificant number of film reels. We know where a lot of them came from because we know who gifted their (private) collections. The film reels are stored in plastic or metal film cans. As any sort of boxes and containers generally do, they exist first and foremost to protect their contents. Though in the case of film cans at least, they are also important carriers of information. Most of the film cans come with a neat and correct description on what films they contain. They are often little handwritten notes that are pasted on the top and sides of the cans. Sometimes there is even extra information about film length and year on them. In this way film cans can be seen as paratexts. They are more than just containers; the sticky notes transform them into prefaces, introductions, dedications, ex-libris-like declarations of ownership (Caneppele 2014, 89).

Sometimes though, film cans appear from the depth of our archive where the descriptions either do not exist or are just plain false. The contents do not fit the words written outside, and no one seems to know where they might have come from. Maybe somebody mixed them up, put them in a wrong can, or just forgot to put a new label on it.

A 16mm metal film can that we found in the archive, for example, contains a short educational film about ichneumon wasps and European beewolves. It's an old black-and-white copy—dusty and moldy. The material is partly discolored and when watched at the editing table it makes a sort of flapping noise because the material sticks to the rollers. But the film can itself doesn't make any note of any wasps or beewolves. It has several stickers and papers pasted on top of each other. They are tattered and torn off, and the handwritten inscriptions are sometimes barely legible (fig. 1).

[Fig. 1] 16mm metal film can with layered paper labels (Source: 16mm Film Archive, Goethe University Collections).

Still, the stickers and papers sticking on top of one another tell a story about the can, which appears to have been well used. They offer information on its origin, its age, and what other film reels it might have contained before. Trying to get through the different layers of paper is a bit like detective work, or an archaeological endeavor, although figuring out what the notes say and filling in the blanks where the paper was torn off turns out to be more difficult than anticipated.

The material of the can tells us that the can might have existed before the 1960s as metal was the preferred material until then (Caneppele, 2014, 83). The first sticker at the bottom confirms that, even though there are only bits and pieces left. Words in Spanish ("latas bien verradas"), "Made in Germany," and a cryptic "DRGM" is all that is left. Luckily, I found a picture of the whole sticker online. It says in German "Films have to be stored always in tinboxes" (but advises the same in English, French,

and Spanish as well) (Rheinische Post Online, 2009). "DRGM" is the abbreviation for "Deutsche Reichs-Gebrauchmuster," a utility model that was mostly in use from 1891 to 1945. It tells us that the can was probably already in use at that time. Above this first sticker is another yellowed piece of paper. It seems to be an official paper where someone filled the blanks in neat handwriting to inform what the can once contained: the words "Tragödie" ("tragedy") and "Inse" (maybe "island", or the name Inse?) are unfortunately the only words left as the other half of the paper is torn off. The half of another piece of paper that was stuck onto the can is by contrast barely legible. I pretend to decipher the words "-huhn" ("chicken") and "-sumpf" ("swamp"). It is possible that the can once contained another film reel that was dedicated to teaching about nature.

The film can illustrates how film containers are prone to change, to mutate, and have the potential to become anew with every new sticker. The layering of the stickers helps and obstructs tracing the history of the film can at the same time. Thus, the can becomes a palimpsest that reflects the different periods of its life as a container for different film reels (and maybe other things).

A note at the end: since my last trip to the archive in mid-March 2024 someone else has held the can in their hands. Fittingly, there is a new piece of paper pasted on top of the others. A note in scrawling handwriting informs us that this can now contains a film about ichneumon wasps and European beewolves. So it continues.

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COLLAGE

DÉCOLLAGE

MASHUP

EXPERIMENTAL FILM AND VIDEO

No Ideas but in (Sticky) Things: Viscosity and Experimental Moving Image Practices

Rodrigo Faustini dos Santos

Inspired by François Dagognet's "abjectology," this essay turns to viscosity as metaphor for repressed dynamics in technical mediation, as the latter typically favors an unimpeded flow of contents and the dissolute passivity of its supports. Drawing from a repertoire of experimental film and video works that reclaim *collage* (and *décollage*) despite dominant principles of *montage* and signal flow, practices that jam transmissions and inspissate mediation are discussed. An (inter)active materiality, recalcitrant to fluency, creeps into the foreground of experience.

When an image is created it secretes a secret image.
Gil Wolman

Stickiness hardly evades perception. An imposing attribute, its crude material recalcitrance is usually responded to with repulse—unless it has been properly mastered and rectified into a product, as in cosmetics, or refined and pasteurized into a delicacy, like honey. Unpacked, out in the wild, the sticky is assigned to the realm of the formless and ignoble, as highlighted by philosopher François Dagognet (1997) in his proposal for an ecology of abject substances (or "abjectology") as he turns his attention to the more general category of the viscous. Qualifying it as that which sticks to whoever seizes upon it, Dagognet sees it repelled under aesthetic or sanitary but ultimately metaphysical reasons, framed by default as pertaining to lesser entities, relegated to formless indignity.

In physics, viscosity is precisely a property of "non-ideal" (real) fluids, interfering with their transport properties and bringing friction to the theoretical fiction of perfect, inviscid, flow. As Dagognet (2007) elaborates, viscosity manifests itself in the interaction and interference between medium and form: described as a "micro-drama" within flow, this molecular interaction is informative, for example, of a fluid medium's internal frictions as it resists traversing a fixed passage—i.e., filling up a narrow form, such as a capillary tube in a laboratory. Upsetting unrealistic expectations for effortless transport, perfect transmission, and unimpeded circulation, for Dagognet viscosity emphasizes mediality as it pertains to the impure qualities of real substrates and actual relations. A counterforce within flow, it "orients us towards the appreciation of the internal energies"[1] and constituents of

1 Author's translations for non-English sources.

processes (Dagognet 2007, 22) otherwise latent, suppressed or ignored if an observer values only formalized, fluent behavior.

Reappraising messy substances for their physical affordances, in tandem with strands of materials science which investigate mixed, impure, and unstable bodies, Dagognet (1985) stresses the affinities his "abjectology" has with certain arts practices—such as those of Jean Dubuffet, Bernard Réquichot, Kurt Schwitters—in which raw substrates and base matter, usually eclipsed in favor of the fluent articulation of ideas and forms, are brought into the foreground of aesthetic experience, surfacing as viscous agglomerates and miscellaneous textures. Through this poetic gesture that is here of interest, one is confronted with a mediation which is both troubled and emphasized as an admixture of disparate substances, presented as a sticky and chaotic *mélange* instead of a seamlessly conformed *Gestalt*.

By following up on Dagognet's abjectology, especially in its analogy with artistic practices, this article turns to viscosity as both poetic device and conceptual metaphor that emphasizes material dynamics and conditions of mediation, as a productive disturbance which puts media under stress. This potential troubles systemic ideals of communication and mediation, specifically what Niklas Luhmann, when reflecting upon the "medium of art," named as the capacity for "dissolution" (and resolution) of media (1990, 223).[2] That is, their "readiness for and dependence on the imprint of form," the ability of eclipsing themselves to allow for frictionless, inviscid transmission of "rigid" forms (Luhmann 1990, 223).

As Sybille Krämer (2015) further stressed, the standard (meta) physical demands of interference-free transmission require media to sustain paradoxical bodies—as they must be active but imperceptible, self-effacing supports. In this *cupio dissolvi*

2 In German, Luhmann (2008) uses the rather loaded term "*Auflösung*," whose polyvalence was a component of Hegel's dialectics.

syndrome of technical media, not only noise and distortion must be filtered out but any trace of materiality that impedes clear and smooth information transfer. Thus, just as technical mediation becomes more dissolute and transparent, the more filtering and clearing its interfaces require, under a growing backlog of artifacts and anomalies that do not go with the flow.

A notorious instance of such technical predicaments is found in philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's discussion of cinematic norms. As he stated, along with moving images' quest for reproducing reality comes "a real oppression of orders" (Lyotard 1994, 58): norms calibrated to exclude what is not deemed good form, gatekeeping only slick articulation and steady movement on the screen. Under this regime of media dissolution and increasing regulation, non-idealities or viscosities of mediation—the "dirty, troubled … poorly framed, shaky" images that jam transmission (Lyotard 1994, 58)—only surface via technical slipups or leak in through lapses of control. While refraining from "claiming for a raw cinema, like Dubuffet did for an *art brut,*" Lyotard (1994, 58) noted how these abject technical images may still be pursued against prescriptions, as manifest in experimental film and video, which he termed "acinema."

Moving image practices that admit non-idealities of transmission into the mix, making its interfaces thick with abject viscosities, can thus embody material and conceptual alternatives to communication technology standards, allowing mediation and reception to occur otherwise, through jammed (re)solutions and attritive relations between message and medium. The sticky poetics of experimental film/video and its inspissation of transmission therefore appear as an object of "media abjectological" interest, which this brief study will address via practices that adopt *collage*, a mixed-media technique that brings media dissolution and abject viscosity into creative friction. Audiovisual *collage*, it will be argued, affords both reflexive and disjunctive qualities, as its layered, glutinous materiality foregrounds how media "consist of very many elements" in interaction—without

"resolving" this heterogeneity by "disciplining" it with unified, articulate forms (Luhmann 1990, 217).

First, to fully appreciate this subversive capacity, it's important to underline the deprecating effect that cinema itself had on *collage*, by revisiting the practice's modernist development—as, per its own pioneers, *montage* and *photomontage* emerged as a sublation of the rough messiness of *collage* and *photocollage* into articulate cinematic fluency. Alternative practices, whose approaches debase *montage* and bring the abject viscosity of the technique back onto the screen, will then be addressed as a reversal of this pushback against *collage*.

Finally, acknowledging a shift in experimental moving image practices after the advent of video, I will argue that *collage* and its variant *dé-coll/age*[3] are preserved in poetics that welcome a viscous mixed-media approach as a means to counter a loss of tangibility of images, while also exploring a gain in variability of supports. Through this discussion, a shift from the stickiness of analogue media to stickiness as poetics and an alternative form of mediation ensues, dispensing with clear reception and thick with non-idealities.

Relegating *Montage*: *Collage* and Sticky Experimental Films

While Dagognet's repertoire of poetics that "reconcile" with matter and waste material refers back to the artworks of Schwitters, by the early 1910s this attitude was already proposed in the writings of art critic Vladimir Markov, who celebrated textures, *patina* and surface imperfections in artworks, referring to these qualities as *faktura.* Fellow painter Vladimir Burliuk went as far as smearing still wet paintings on muddy soil to enhance their texture and debase their figures (Markov 1968, 34), while

3 I opt here for Wolf Vostell's original spelling for this art style (Vostell 1978).

his brother David Burliuk's published manifesto on *faktura* would revel even in the "moss" growing on a Monet (Barron and Tuchman 1980, 131).

Connecting it to the use of "new materials" in art, Burliuk also spoke of *faktura* to qualify his enthusiasm for the *papier collées* of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Developing this procedure, by the late 1910s Hannah Höch began her series of *Klebezeichnungen* (glue drawings) and *Klebebilder* (glue pictures), employing terms which brought the techniques' stickiness into relief (Boswell and Makela 1997). Her *dada* partner Raoul Hausmann (1992) even adopted the name of a glue brand, *Syndetikon*, to sign his *collages*.

This poetic validation of glue would nevertheless be provisional. While *photocollage* disseminated as a practice and was claimed as a blending of material *fakturas* (not abstract signs) by constructivist Gustav Klutsis, the jagged textures of Cubo-futurism and Dada soon gave way to the synthetic and semiotic style of the 1920s and 1930s *avant-garde*, as *montage* and *photomontage* replaced previous terminologies. Klutsis later asserted that *photomontage* could only "be compared to cinema, which combines a multitude of frames into an *integrated* work" (Fundación Juan March 2012, 117, emphasis by the author). Eschewing stickiness, the artist Max Ernst would assertively claim that "it is not glue that makes the *collage*" (Lippard 1970, 127), with his *collage* graphic novels venturing into cinematic flow by displaying more blended-in rather than incrusted-on compositions.

Aware of these distinctions, *avant-garde* filmmaker (and *collage* practitioner) Stefan Themerson asserted that, for the film technician, the cutting and joining of negatives was "but a necessary evil," a means to an end—fluency, jumping through shots without missteps—while as an artist he stubbornly preferred practicing "temporal *collage*" (1983, 35). Indeed, as *montage* and film techniques developed, visible splices, and any spilling of glue, were meticulously hidden from view, with cement paste

[Fig. 1] Carlo Carrà's *Inseguimento* (1915) [39x68cm, tempera and collage on cardboard] (Source: courtesy of Gianni Mattioli Collection 2025).

eventually retired in favor of adhesive tape and optical printing, which made "gluing" film a virtuality.

The very pioneers of *collage* were to sublimate the stickiness of the technique with their aspiration towards formal, disciplined *montage*. By the 1930s, Hausmann would no longer sign his *photo-collages* as *Syndetikon*, adopting *photomontage* as a terminology to name artworks he now promoted as juxtapositions of shots, "static films." Abandoning glue, the "whirling viewpoints" of *photo-collage* were traded for simple darkroom superpositions and the "disciplined" *montage* of square-format photographs on a flat surface, as Hausmann claimed to have reached the form's "constructive … simplification" (Hausmann 1992, 49–50).

Already lurking within *collage* ever since Carlo Carrà pasted a film program into his *Inseguimento* (1915, fig. 1), cinema's influence thus appeared to dissolve the technique's rough edges and jammed agglomerates into articulate, symbolic juxtapositions. Hiding the marks of its embodied mediality, cinema provided a clear image of a consistent, seamless flow, presenting images as if in a stream of consciousness—be it in the American movies admired

by the *avant-garde,* as Jennifer Wild (2015) demonstrates, or in Soviet cinema, where Vsevolod Pudovkin maintained that "clear selection" had to be provided for "ideal observers" (1954, 63). Even Sergei Eisenstein's approach wouldn't allow errant elements to jam the chains of association, as he took *montage* (even that of "attractions") to be ultimately a mental activity.[4] Poignantly, when referring to his contemporaries, Eisenstein praised Max Ernst's narratives, calling him a "master of *découpage*" (2010, 180)—of cutting things out of the way rather than keeping them in.

From *collage* to *montage*, such a withdrawal from the viscosity of substrates is exemplary of a semiotic ideation of poetic expression, wherein blending in and accommodating meaningful forms are qualities to be expected of a technical medium—its capacity for dissolution or unobtrusive materiality, as previously noted. Information "channels," already named as such in R. V. L. Hartley's 1928 paper "Transmission of Information," refer to this "fluid" expectation of media, as the terminology alludes to waterway canals, associated with unobstructed movement, the same that cinema aspires to (Hartley 1928). With the goal of achieving picture and television transmission, Hartley's "information" also aspired to be cinematic, while its symbols had to be protected from distortions and interference.

Early on, film engineers similarly employed a tight policing of media viscosities. This ranged from the control of impurities and instabilities of gelatin emulsion to the hiding of splices, the attuning of exposure and shutter speeds to avoid smudgy light trails, and avoiding any friction during projection. Tight frame lines, sprocket holes, and a standardized streaming of the strip

4 Dziga Vertov is an exception, not so much with his montage of intervals—which "reduced" frictions between shots to a "simple visual equation" (Michelson 1984, 91)—than through his interest in "irritants" to perception. Dense with *faktura*, superimpositions in his films "thickened" the screen with layers of images, while he described his sound film *Three Songs for Lenin* (1934) as a work that "develops through the combination of many channels … now smoothly, now by jolts" (Michelson 1984, 118).

further averted visual smears, as early technicians had to figure out and formalize. "Smooth and beautiful reproduction" was essential for this "new art," Thomas Edison wrote in a letter to the Society of Motion Picture Engineers (Richardson 1925, 65), emphasizing how certain movements had to be avoided under the (silent film) standard of *16* frames per second. Sound technology would soon make "speed fluctuations" noticeable, to be suppressed by "systems for reducing irregularities in film motion" (Fielding 1967, 188).

Still, in contempt of such standards lie a range of sticky film poetics that incorporate non-idealities of transmission, operating without such filters and suppressions as they revert (and relegate) *montage* back to *collage* and its *fakturas*. For a start, an appeal for (re)mediating viscosity manifests itself in the animation work of Douglass Crockwell, especially in a scene from his 1947 *The Long Bodies*—its title already reclaiming the extension of matter instead of the abstractions of form—in which the *faktura* of the viscous and the photographic collide as a cut-out of a woman's portrait flashes around a globular goo, appearing as a *photocollage* cut loose.

Crockwell would get very tactile for his animations, working with clay, squeezing blotches of paint between glass, or fingerpainting to generate abstract shapes and textures, often reminiscent of internal tissues and *viscera*. In a variation on stop-motion techniques now termed strata-cut, he hacked slices out of loaves of wax and gelatinous material (containing elongated shapes) and sequentially photographed each remaining layer, resulting in odd shapes and errant movements secreting on the screen. Once impressed into film emulsion, this viscous animation emphasizes the interface as a gelatinous plastic medium, while the agglutination of diverse textures and techniques within Crockwell's films grants them the aspect of a motley ensemble, dispensing with articulate *montage*.

This style was extrapolated by Robert Breer, a painter drawn into film for its capacity for *collaging* images and actions—going beyond the dryness of action painting, as was his stated intent, along with attacking cinema's continuous one-way flux (Breer 2018, 14–40). Breer would pursue this both by evading continuity, radically varying shapes, textures, colors, and compositions for each frame of his film *Blazes* (1961) and by exploring sticky *textures* in *Form Phases 3* (1958), filming viscous dispersions of paint that spread over surfaces, commingle and spill over boundaries.

Breer honored film adhesives both in the title of *Rubber Cement* (1976) and by including a cartoon of it leaving sticky tracks within the film's disparate images—crayon drawings, rotoscoped figures, *collaged* color Xerox cut-outs, newspaper clippings, and rubber stamps—standing in for the eclectic creative agency that, he stressed, allows one to "encompass heterogeneity better on film than on canvas. It's the *collage* nature of film that permits this" (Beauvais 1983). Through the collision of divergent frames in quick succession, in his works one experiences not only cut-up discontinuity, but also illusionary movements and metamorphosis as sequential elements seemingly adhere or transfer into others, accumulating visual artifacts.

Another approach to film *collage* was pioneered by Stan Brakhage, who notoriously stuck hundreds of moth wings onto perforated, 16mm splicing tape to then print them onto film for *Mothlight* (1963). Later, he probed the limits of what could be printed by sticking various plants onto 35mm splicing tape for *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981). Once projected, these compositions resulted in magnified organic textures, along with its discontinuous figures that stimulate apparent motion effects and compound afterimages. Vision itself was a kind of *collage* for Brakhage: commenting on how his nervous system seemed to make up for "poor eyesight" with rapid eye movements, the filmmaker described his visual perception as a patchwork, which his films mimicked (Still 2015).

Investing in the animation technique of painting directly on film, Brakhage made it messier: using films with residual emulsion rather than starting from a clear strip, he lacquered them first with spray paint or only partially removed black emulsion before mixing in dyes, melted wax and even mica, besides experimenting with different types of glue, pasting them onto film and welding them with a hot iron. At that period, the filmmaker adopted William Carlos Williams' motto "no ideas but in things," even suggesting doing away with the "in" (Brakhage 2007, 73).

Writing on film splicing, Brakhage mentioned his intentions of strategically not hiding splices at all so that noticeable cuts and jolts would break the images' flow. Detailing these and other direct animation experiments, he declared how knowing "names of glues would be worth thousands of words of aesthetics" to him (Brakhage 2001, 102). This peculiar obsession seemed to derive from the fact that viscosity for Brakhage was not only a property of adhesives and dyes but an important component of his style of embodied abstraction. As he claimed in an article, "*Geometric vs. Meat Ineffable*," after all, "whether there are, or are not, straight lines in Nature is beside the point: we are too viscous to receive them as such" (Brakhage 2003, 71). Ideas, specifically visual ones, are always turbid in this perspective, embedded in a sticky corporeality.

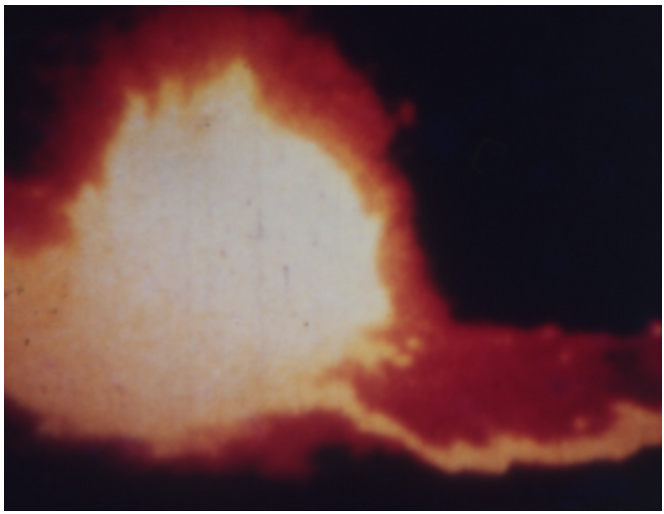
For these "carnal" interventions, Brakhage acknowledged the influence of a work in which a hands-on approach to film was advocated as a subversive gesture: *Traité de Bave et d'eternité* (1951), by Letterist artist Isidore Isou, aka *Venom and Eternity*—or, literally, *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity*. The ignoble substance is not arbitrarily evoked in the title, as this was a manifesto for Letterism's hacking and deprecation of cinematic form: what Isou called *montage discrépant* and the *ciselure* of images. He described the first, the attachment of an autonomous soundtrack to unrelated (mostly repurposed) images, with a slimy metaphor: his film should feel like "two serpents advancing towards the audience on opposite sides" (Isou 1999, 70). Along with *ciselure*,

 a practice of tarnishing film's gelatin layer with paint and scratches, Isou expected to jam cinematic form and thus make an immaculate "God die on a lake of blood on the screen" image (Isou 1999, 70).

Letterism advocated for narrowing in on and liberating the constituents of art forms by diverting them from their surrogate roles. In cinema, this meant reclaiming photograms and film emulsion as elements that should be diverted from what Isou claimed to be the false essence of the medium: its steady visual outflow [*écoulement*] (Isou 1999, 65). Eternity and slime, message and medium thus manifest discrepantly in his film, for example in its sequences of black strips haphazardly painted over with white brushstrokes, projected as one hears aphonic, grunted Letterist poetry. If Isou's material debasement of *montage* demanded that artists should "incrust themselves … over this virtuality" (Isou 1999, 88), through direct intervention on the filmstrip, one could also leave it up for grabs and abandon it to natural contingencies, as the 1980s Super 8 film collective *Schmelzdahin* (*melt away*, in translation) explored.

Their chosen name already carried the idea of sticky dissolution—often achieved by exposing found filmstrips to the elements, hanging them in trees, burying them underground, or having salts and chemicals corrode their surface. If Isou only speaks of blood and slime, abject forms and textures abound in *Schmelzdahin*'s works, as goriness and viscosity appear both in the content and material of their Super 8 films: for *Schildmeyer Darlaten* (1988) the group re-shot scenes from body genre movies shown on TV, treating segments of emulsion with corrosive chemicals to alter their appearance. The film closes with molten images of lava (fig. 2), emblematic of their "alchemical" poetics of transforming pre-formed material into saturated masses of color.

Sticky poetics thus proliferate in experimental films: besides chemical baths film can undergo other impure submersions, as



[Fig. 2] Still from *Schildmeyer Darlaten* (1988) by Schmelzdahin (Source: licensed by Light Cone 2025).

artist Jennifer West explored with her "film soup" series, whose titles enumerate the hodgepodge of materials she marinates filmstrips in, only suitable for screening after digital transfers.

In *Tar Pits Film* (2006), content and medium slimily enmesh: as the full title describes, a 16mm color negative was "thrown in the La Brea Tar Pits, ridden over hot tarmac by a motorcycle, soaked in kitty litter, lighter fluid and body lotion," resulting in a film blend of abject *faktura*. Further into the ignoble, for *Bird Shit Studie #3* (2003–2009), filmmaker Colin Barton directly exposed discarded film to aviary waste, projecting the compost-stained results with only minor adjustments (such as taping in any residual bird feathers). Rather than abstracting images, West and Barton induce new visual formations through these raw, sticky interactions and frictions.

This emphasis on debased materials, decaying into syrupy base matter, brings us from *collage* to its obverse, *dé-coll/age*. Here the worn out, fragmented, and barely consistent persist as sticky media residues, rich in texture, inviting an aesthesis of abject configurations. The capacity of film to be torn apart and reassembled, of images to melt on the emulsion, and for the strip to accumulate hair, dust, and debris while still transmitting some image, were the basis for *Rohfilm* (1968) by Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. A recording of dirty, dilacerated and pasted up remains being projected, *Rohfilm* overflows the cinematic medium with its material dissolution, while still providing footage for further remediation, a tension amplified by its noise soundtrack of sonic detritus as the images flicker, tear, and jam in the light of projection.

From this "negative assertion" of sticky scraps in film *dé-coll/age*, a final step is to assume sticky viscosity itself as a valid substrate for poetics, a task undertaken by Gil Wolman, a former Letterist who asserted stickiness as his medium—as analytical and synthetic as cinema, but without hiding its material (re)constitution. Using Scotch tape and printed media, in a sort of reverse engineering of *collage*, Wolman created what he termed *art scotch*, recomposing found images by sticking and striping pieces of adhesive tape onto them, then diluting the emulsion out of the tape in order to glue it to a new surface.[5] "Glue is worked on as … if it were a brush" (Wolman 2001, 179): with this "viscographic *dé-colla/ge*," Wolman repurposed mass media signs (and textures) as base materials.

For the first iteration of *art scotch* in 1964, Wolman exhibited his palimpsest images on large sticks, as if presenting them as filmstrips. Cinema and *collage* enmeshed into a novel amalgam of *worn out faktura* within these pieces, as one exhibition carried the title "dissolution and reconstitution of movement," playing with

5 Film also affords such emulsion lifting techniques, as explored by Cécile Fontaine's works.

the fact that Wolman's process involved diluting of Scotch tape for the release of its adhesive base and also on the aesthetic and political resonances of the word "movement" (Wolman 2001, 146).

On a slippery margin between the abstract and the concrete, here one found viscous adhesion manifest as both form and medium, subverting its surrogate role as an "object of objects," as Dagognet (1997, 135) says of the shadow existence of glue. Meanwhile, at the dawn of video, *art schotch*'s simulation of film through other supports echoed its mimesis through emerging media, further entailing new dissolutions but also new medium viscosities—which, arguably, still find expression through experimental practices.

Remixing Viscosity: Video *Collage*, *Dé-coll/age*, Mashups

Could experimental film's "sticky" interactions still hold for video? *Plazmatik blatz* (1990), a Jeff Keen video (*dé*)*collage* piece, provides a strident affirmative example, forwarding a "protoplasmic" imaginary that quickly attached itself to electronic, and later digital, video, as a stand-in for their labile, formless plasticity. In it, Keen mixes *graffitti*, *collage*, scratched filmstrips, sound art and video, making chaotic media detritus encrust all over the screen as a barrage of interfering signals, inspissating the transmission channel.

If, as Mark Fisher claimed about Keen's earlier film work, "everything that is solid melts into *montage*" (2009, 22), with his rapid-fire assemblage of sprayed and painted over images, melting plastic, accumulation of waste, noise, superimposed shots, and layers of electronic effects, Keen more properly saturated than dissolved his media: everything morphs into *faktura*. As Jean-Paul Fargier concluded from the similarly destructive video distortion work of Wolf Vostell, "in video the cubist concept of *collage* (and even the cinematographic one of *montage*) is inoperative. In turn,

décollage … is pertinent" (Fargier 1986, 12). In video, more noise than signal, one went from "visual magma" to images (Fargier 1986, 6)—and with Keen's *dé-coll/age*, back to magmatic visuals.

If video "dissolved" filmic materiality, tangible instances of technical mediation in fact multiplied: interlaced scanning, circuits, buttons, tapes, cables, transmitters, and heavy display sets—mechanisms to ensure a steady signal flow that also created opportunities for parasitism, distortion, and blackouts. Due to the opacity of videotape, artists would no longer encrust an image strip but the receiving end itself, as Isidore Isou did with the mixed-media *La télevision déchiquetée ou l'anti-cretinisation* (1962), a television set painted with letterist graphics. Be it *Drawing TV* (1976) by Ewa Partum, Lynda Benglis' *Collage* (1972) or Cheryl Donegan's *Practisse* (1994), video artists drew and painted onto television screens, explored the grimy visuals of generation loss by retaping video and aliasing by re-shooting video on film, activating the plural *faktura* of mixed-media *collage*.[6]

Video mashups (or remixes) further kept audiovisual *collage* sticky, as seen in Raphael Montañez Ortiz's video re-edits, made via joystick controls. In them, videoclips and their subjects seemed as if caught up in quicksand, due to loops and interpolations making the images go back and forth in one step forward, two steps back variations. This is the fate of a couple in *The Kiss* (1985), sourced from a black-and-white movie on Laserdisc, whose delayed embrace becomes a viscoelastic push-and-pull choreography as Ortiz broke down the source's *montage*, straining and stretching each minor movement.

6 Objections to television could also get sticky: Brazillian artist Telmo Lanes smeared toothpaste, milk, and buttered bread on a TV set for his photo series *Transmissão Mexida (*1975). Also making a mess out of the mass medium, Sonia Andrade taped herself having a lone meal in a kitchen while an episode of *Tarzan* played on the background (*Untitled*, 1975)—a set-up that turns chaotic as she starts eating with her hands, pours food onto her body, and finally splotches beans all over the lenses of the video camera, obfuscating the recording.

As film, video and digital coalesced into a mixed-media environment, filmmaker turned videoartist Malcolm Le Grice (2002, 307–309) saw it embodied as a many-headed "Hydra"—aquatic, but monstruous—multiplying the serpents which Isou earlier compared technical signals to. The modernist endgame of enchanting the serpent (mastering the medium) or chopping its head off (denouncing illusion) seemed disavowed in the "hybrid" information age, he speculated. Yet, turning to the question of how media themselves are plastic, reconfigurable materials, to "abandon media coherence" and make "selective combinations" of properties persisted as a creative strategy: multi-channel mashups, rather than *montage*.

For *Digital Aberration (2004)*, reworking his poetics into digital video, Le Grice created an audiovisual mishmash suited to the "hydra-headed media" age: repurposing a "free software from a cornflakes packet" for the soundtrack, he piled up and blended "every cheap visual effect from the editing package" (including many "dissolves") atop of colorful, abstract, and geometrical digital imagery (Le Grice, 2024). With frames that proliferate and drag across the screen, interlaced with glitches and kitsch music, the work is a good example of "spatial effects," the reflexive devices Yvonne Spielmann (1999) related to digital images' plasticity. *Collage* and morphing became avatars for a generalized proliferation of "mixed images," which take on high density through "clustering"—or, more simply, cluttering—layers upon the screen, Spielmann (1999, 139) noted.

Stacking up and enmeshing hundreds of layers has also been the method of moving image *collage* artist Takashi Makino. While forms and figures ultimately dissolve in this technique, they are traded for atmospheric, dynamic visual noise, in compositions that oscillate between concrete, organic, cosmic, and artificial textures as Makino carefully mixes his sources, adding in temporal viscosities by speeding up and slowing down segments. For *2012* (2013), Makino layered all the images he shot that year, mixing film and video footage into dense all-over textures that

can be viewed in depth via the Pulfrich effect (filtering the input of one eye during viewing), instilling a dense web of remediation.

Meanwhile, in the *datamoshed* B-movies of Takeshi Murata, who forced pixels to smear and seemingly melt as video files break down, digital images spread viscous trails on the screen. In *Escape Spirit Videoslime* (2007), the artist glitched a nature documentary clip until the image itself became an ectoplasmic, morphing pixel swamp—a pulsating, rainbow-colored landscape in which a residual identifiable figure, a monkey, traverses as a primitive of a new era. Further venturing into a digital ecology, besides *datamoshed* clips it is the junk of lo-fi graphics, dithered .gifs, compressed .mp4's, *Microsoft Paint*-style animation and web spam that clutter up the screen in Jacob Ciocci's color-saturated videos, where slime animation is a staple layering material. As his works, like 2008's *Booty Melt*, clog up the screen with viral digital trash and user-generated content not unlike "YouTube poop" mashups, the artist qualifies the source for his imagery, the internet, as an "infinite, gross, disgusting, sticky maze" (Ciocci 2017). Fragmentation, incoherence, simultaneity, glitch, noise, and clutter, indeed, qualify these viscous mixed-media mashups as well as the current media environment—leaving the guarantees of coherence, orchestration, and organic unity of *montage* behind.

For Inspissate Medialities

Concluding these *media abjetological* remarks on sticky moving image poetics with these examples, suggestive of new forms of *collage* but also continuities within the practice, abject viscosity is thus reintegrated as media *faktura,* retaining the material and symbolic potential we have noted experimental practices attribute to it: an operational capacity to trouble the expected fluency of forms through indifferent media, jamming any passive transmission and reception of contents. Mediality, with its obstacles, residues and distortions, is made more palpable even

as media try to blend in further with our perception with each tech update. As argued here, if the glutinous glue of *collage* first seemed to dissolve into cinematic *montage*, the technique found its countertype in video *dé-coll/age* and resurfaced through the cluttered layers and smeared pixels of digital mashups,[7] a mutation which still displays previous attachments to earlier practices and experimental film's emphasis on the viscosities of transmission.

While broader discussions on viscosity, such as Freddie Mason's (2020), have brought it in dialogue with the framework of new materialisms, my media abjectological approach (deriving from Dagognet) stresses viscous agglomerations against dissolute ideals of mediality, via the sticky poetics of experimental moving image practices. In audiovisual media, even as a "poetics of fluids and flow" has been proposed by Térésa Faucon (2017) as an approach to model and discuss *montage,* the recalcitrant role of viscosity is not addressed as a creative potential, a gap which an emphasis on the sticky, mixed media poetics of audiovisual *collage* allows us to bridge.

Recently addressing the deficits in assuming inviscid data flow and dissolute media as universal principles, one also finds Rosa Menkman's call for a "rheology of data," keen on "leaky and unstable" transmissions (Menkman 2020), as well as Noam Gramlich's (2018) "sticky media" speculative approach for foregrounding ecological communication infrastructures (such as oil). The poetics of experimental film and video, especially through the viscous remediations and mutations of *collage* and *dé-coll/age*, further suggest strategies for more inspissate modes of mediation and active display of mediality.

7 While space limits here the possibility of addressing the morphing, sticky figures that result from generative AI (artificial intelligence) videos, this is a technical artifact of temporal coherence that each system update attempts to rectify. Artists like Guli Silberstein purposively exploit such anomalies in videos where artificial bodies constantly melt and reshape.

A stand-in for recalcitrant yet resourceful materiality, surfacing as a plastic instantiation of the noise and "non-idealities" that permeate data channels, these glutinous viscosities which attach to the transmission of moving images refuse to be smoothed out and drained away to make room for (dissolute, abstract) ideals of seamless, controlled, semiotic flow. As a poetic device, stirring the senses as it gives us a glimpse of other possible dispositions, viscous embodiments and motley assemblages for our messages, stickiness presents us with internal frictions between the shaping up of materials and their dissolution in technical media, transmitting raw plasticities, and layered *faktura*.

As manifest in experimental moving image practices, this media viscosity invites creative reconciliations, alternative (re)solutions of medium and form, matter and information, substrate and symbol, the abject and the prestigious, found here in the assemblages and frictions of *collage* and in the emphasis on processes and artifacts in mashups and *dé-coll/age*. For film *collage* enthusiast Devon Damonte, "we live smack dab in the Golden Age of Adhesive Tape" (NWFF 2019), allowing for yet unseen agglutinations—stressing material interactions, these sticky poetics make of their medium a support for heterogenous, inspissate configurations, mediating sensually, beyond dissolution.

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In Praise of Stickiness: A Few Thoughts on Moving Image Preservation and Exhibition

A conversation between Jurij Meden and
Laura Teixeira

In an effort to expand academic boundaries, the organizers of the conference "Sticky Films: Conceptual & Material Explorations" (June 1–3, 2023) at Goethe University Frankfurt invited Jurij Meden to hold a keynote lecture. The curator at the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna gave a talk titled "Film Fermentation – A Film as an Object in Spacetime," which covered some of the topics presented here. The following conversation with Laura Teixeira, researcher and curator who was also a member of the organizing committee of the abovementioned conference, resulted from an e-mail exchange in April 2024.

Laura Teixeira (LT): First of all, thank you again for your participation as a keynote speaker at the "Sticky Films" conference last year, and for now agreeing to this conversation for the publication. In your talk, you brought some examples of how stickiness and decay could be seen as part of the ongoing life of film as organic matter. Indeed, one of the great insights that you delivered was the idea that film preservation (particularly from a Western perspective) could be dealing differently with the concept of *loss*. Film is subject to change and decay, for example due to stickiness. Embracing change could open up new ways of looking at film material, not constantly struggling with one unique way of fighting deterioration. "Film fermentation" seems to be an important idea in this context. How does that concept help us deal with certain anxieties relating to inevitable transformation?

Jurij Meden (JM): Thank you again for inviting me to participate at the conference. Thank you also for your wonderful first question. I never before thought about this, but you are right. Anxiety appears to propel a lot of our efforts to preserve

moving images. We get anxious at the thought that what we are trying to preserve is so ephemeral and fragile, especially compared to several other forms of human expression. We get even more anxious at the thought that the shift from analogue to digital technology has, in fact, radically complicated and not simplified matters for film preservation, the way it has simplified them in the areas of film production, distribution, and viewing. We have successfully preserved cave paintings older than 45,000 years and stone inscriptions older than 5,000 years but have a very hard time predicting what will happen with most of the digital-born moving image works in the next couple of decades.

The root of our anxiety is three-fold: we believe that material cultural heritage *could* and *should* be preserved *intact*. As soon as we take a few steps back and look at the big picture—in both the temporal and political senses—we realize that we can only benefit from questioning all these three beliefs. We know that we have already lost up to 90% of films made in the silent era and we are probably losing more today. In this context, I thought that it would be useful, but also humbling, to remind ourselves that we have already resolved this dilemma. We realized that a way to preserve food without any technologies (such as pasteurization or refrigeration) was to chemically transform it to a more stable form through a metabolic process called fermentation. We realized that a way to preserve a poem or a tale without any technologies (such as writing or recording) was to spread it among people and let it transform in the process of passing from mouth to ear. The operative word here is transformation, something that we apparently keep trying to resist, while forgetting that we have already realized that resistance is futile.

Of course, I am not trying to suggest that we suddenly abandon all our film preservation efforts and simply let our kilometers of film stock acquire a "fermented taste"—I

am merely trying to suggest that we need to rethink and challenge the very idea of preserving the past as a moral value. Is it really that terrible that we lost 90% of all silent films? And is it really that terrible that of all films made today, perhaps also 90% will be lost in the next 100 years? Terrible for whom and why exactly? Embracing transformation—and ultimately decay—not as an exception that we are trying to avoid, but as an unavoidable norm, will perhaps help us shake some of the anxieties and give us a clearer idea of what we trying to preserve, why we are doing it, and who we are doing it for.

LT: That is really thought-provoking and opens up many possible roads. Dwelling firstly on this idea of accepting transformation as part of the preservation process, which seems contradictory at first, I was wondering how much of this transformation is not only unavoidable but maybe even in a certain way desirable or necessary? I am thinking about the preservation of digital moving images which, as you already said, is still a big challenge. In this field, the upgrading to new formats of storage is part of the "preservation through transformation," if you will. As long as the zeros and ones are being preserved in a certain order, the carrier might—and must—change. Do you think there is any fermentation potentially going on there as well?

JM: Transformation is unavoidable, that much is a fact. The questions of desirability or necessity don't change this fact. But what can and should change, if we embrace this fact, are our expectations and long-term planning. We desire immutability and pretend it is necessary, interpreting any transformation as an anomaly, thus increasing the anxiety from your first question. I find the invention of digital moving images fantastic and very moving in a way, because I see it as part of a larger process that goes on in our relationship to moving images.

To simplify matters, the first "artificial moving images" we ever "saw" were our dreams. We dreamt moving images long before we first found a technical method to trap them outside our brains and imprint them onto celluloid, just like we dreamt about flying for centuries before we discovered technical means to fulfil our dreams via air balloons and airplanes. A digital image is an image that is always only temporarily attached to any material carrier; it can exist as a wave spreading across the electromagnetic field or change carriers theoretically forever. One could say that the artificial moving image has liberated itself from the early technology that first delivered it into the world. It has turned into something more dreamlike again. And yes, in theory you are absolutely right, as long as the string of digital information is preserved intact—and there should be nothing simpler than preserving a series of zeros and ones—and as long as the carriers frequently change, our job should be done. But the reality is infinitely more complex and the first problem we immediately encounter is the reality of our economic system. Celluloid film manufacturing technology was "open source"; in theory anyone could fairly easily manufacture their film projector, camera, and film stock. With digital film, we are entirely dependent on licensed technologies, competing in a quickly evolving market with a single main goal: profit. Not preservation of memory or any sort of value that film preservation community believes, just profit. So, this very simple idea—constant migration from one carrier to another—becomes something terrifying and ultimately impossible, because it requires us to constantly follow all the market changes and endlessly upgrade both our hardware and software. I once made an argument that the job of preserving anything actually goes against the very foundations of our dominant economic system, capitalism, which requires us to instantly forget what we have consumed (seen, heard, eaten, worn, played, etc.) yesterday, in order that it can feed us a new version of the exact same thing tomorrow.

But to conclude my answer by returning to your last question. The situation that we have described above—constant migration of a digital string of data across a theoretically infinite number of carriers—is very much complicated by the fact that more often than not our digital data does not only migrate but is also being constantly converted from one format to another. Constant software and hardware changes imply also constant changes in data container formats and compression codecs, and each such conversion, unlike migration, changes the digital data string, which consequently and inevitably translates into a different visual experience when this data is played. We could call this digital fermentation if you will.

LT: Analogue video is one good example of a format that had to go through the "digital fermentation" you describe, otherwise magnetic tapes may suffer from "sticky-shed syndrome" and other illnesses, and the content be lost forever. This is also not unrelated to the implications of capitalism and profit-search for the technologies of moving image preservation, as you rightfully propose. If we think about how this capitalistic need for forgetfulness is also incorporated by *planned obsolescence*, it's one reason why part of our cultural heritage is disappearing depending on market interests in one format or the other.

Ideally, we could reclaim the agency to propose ourselves which shall be the otherwise inevitable gaps in (film) history and not leave them only for corporations to decide. Therefore, and to extend the questions you have asked above: Maybe it is not only about what and why we are trying to preserve, but also what should we actively forget? Could you give any examples of how we can make peace with those gaps in film history, perhaps as long as we define the gaps ourselves?

JM: Thank you for mentioning planned obsolescence, an idea that is paradigmatic for the ultra-short-sighted "thinking" of a kind that propels and characterizes capitalism. The most widely accepted opposition to forgetfulness and to erasure of history that must necessarily follow in the steps of planned obsolescence is the idea that heritage needs to be preserved in its entirety—an idea that has been elevated to the level of a moral value. I first encountered the idea of "active forgetting" when reading David Rieff's 2016 book *In Praise of Forgetting,* which basically argues that communities far too often abuse their collective historical memories to justify further resentment and violence, as opposed to using history to learn from past mistakes and to envision a better future. I find several implications of this idea very intriguing, perhaps even necessary for the future of film preservation, since—in a certain way—it absolves us of that old archival mantra that we should preserve everything (which is, in fact, impossible) for future generations to sort things out, since they will know better what was important for us and what not (which, likely, they won't). I also like the implication that we should become infinitely more proactive in our approach to history and more boldly deaccession something from our collections, or more boldly update film history if we deem that necessary. A smaller vault will also be a necessary step forward in the future, when we adopt the value of economic degrowth as the only thing that can stop the planet from overheating.

LT: Those are very interesting points, and I would like to pick up on your mention of "future generations" in order to move from a material to a human aspect of what we are discussing. Otherwise, what would be the point in keeping anything at all without people interested in watching it? I know that you also consider film preservation as part of a broader preservation of film culture, including film audiences. Is convincing new generations to care about what we deem important also

a task of film curators? How do you see the state of such audiences today?

JM: You are absolutely right. Whatever we do as guardians of international film heritage, we should not lose sight of the core reason behind all our efforts. We are preserving and restoring films only so that they can ultimately be seen, in one way or another, but preferably screened on the big screen. Not because there would be anything inherently more authentic in this manner of film exhibition, but simply because the task of preserving films necessarily implies also preserving the historical ways in which films were seen. And a very important part of this history is an idea of people coming together and forming a temporary community to undergo a collective experience. In the early days of 2020's first global shutdown it struck me how quickly various institutions devoted to exhibiting cinema, from cinematheques to film festivals, transformed themselves into streaming platforms, which made me understand just how important the idea of audience is, and how our efforts to preserve film heritage should necessarily go hand in hand with our efforts to preserve the audience. But we can only do that if we commit ourselves to a constant process of both learning and unlearning, a constant process of reevaluating film history and inventing new ways to communicate with the audience. Our societies are transforming, and our values are changing, today more rapidly than ever, which is something film preservation should necessarily acknowledge. When we are throwing around words like "future generations" and investing a certain importance into this notion, we should be aware of what we are really saying. What we are really saying is that we care about the preservation of our species—which actually puts us in direct opposition with the current global economic system that by definition and default caters to short-term narrow interests.

LT: In this context I find it important to acknowledge, as you certainly know, that this format of collective film viewing that you bring up was not necessarily always in the cinema or movie theater as we know of today. As shown by Haidee Wasson in her 2020 book *Everyday Movies*, but also by Jie Li's *Cinematic Guerrillas* (2023), portable projectors and improvised screenings of small-gauge versions of films was sometimes the only access to moving images for many people, from the US to China, for a good part of the twentieth century. I believe this opens up a more complex understanding of what it is that we want to preserve when thinking of preserving the audience, which I find an extremely inspiring concept. Perhaps it's not just about "bringing the audience to the cinema," as one could superficially interpret it, but also about making film (heritage) available while adapting to a diversity of contexts that the audiences are confronted with. Given that—and speaking from a position of love for the movie theater (experience)—I wonder how many other moving image experiences—in community centers, in museums, in universities, even at home—should we also take more seriously when facing the task of preserving the audience (and consequently the species and ourselves)?

JM: Allow me to thank you most sincerely for bringing Haidee Wasson and Jie Li's books to my attention. I was not familiar with them, but they both sound incredibly interesting. And what you are saying is absolutely correct. We should pay more attention to what you call other moving image experiences that have today, of course, completely overtaken the traditional experience of seeing films on the big screen in terms of sheer numbers. Many ideas that we have about film preservation or film exhibition are inherently related to privileges that we are enjoying in the Western society, and more often than not we are too narrow-minded or in love with our way of life to recognize them as such: as privileges. We like to believe that the only proper way to experience

film history is to see films projected in their original formats and from the best available film prints. This is, of course, a huge privilege that only a few of the richest film museums and cinematheques in the world can afford. A privilege that was never afforded to the majority of people interested in film history. The same obviously applies to the idea of an organized audience that gathers beneath a silver screen for two hours of peaceful contemplation—it is a privilege that not everyone in the world has today, especially if you happen to live in a war zone—and they are unfortunately spreading these days.

All recent statistical studies show that the vast majority of all film viewing is happening at home today and the trend is irreversible. Instead of bemoaning it or taking shelter in the comfort of our old values ("big screen!" "communal experience!"), we should—as you suggest—take very seriously this new multitude that is establishing a new norm of experiencing moving images today. We should also be aware that a gigantic portion of all global film viewing today happens thanks to piracy and seriously consider all implications beyond our knee-jerk reactions ("piracy is evil!") that serve only the economic interests of major copyright holders. I think piracy is tremendously important both for dissemination of film culture and for film preservation. Whoever claims anything opposite is only speaking from a position of power and authority that tries to protect power and authority.

LT: Bringing in piracy and home-viewing is a strong and necessary statement to be made in our field. Those are indeed aspects that cannot be ignored any more when we talk about film culture. I also believe that recognizing the immense privilege of certain large institutions is paramount to thinking of a more realistic approach to preserving, exhibiting, and even researching moving images, which I think should not forget the human side of it: the people making, preserving, sharing,

and watching those images under the most different conditions worldwide.

Now to wrap up our conversation, I would like to go back to the topic of the conference last year: "stickiness." Did any of the aspects discussed there—from the gluey side of film material to different kinds of tapes and bodily fluids, or maybe the more abstract approaches to stickiness of memory and feelings—have a longer effect on you after the conference? Were there any valuable inputs for your work as a film curator after that experience in Frankfurt?

JM: I am very pleased to hear that you agree with the proposal that we should rethink piracy. And yes, I agree with you, we should certainly check our Western privileges before we start implementing any rules or guidelines that concern film preservation, exhibition, or research. It is interesting that even the official European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) last year recognized piracy not only as a "serious legal and economic problem," but also openly admitted that "economic and social factors such as the GDP [gross domestic product], inequality and the population structure influence piracy." I am quoting from their latest (2023) biannual report on "rising copyright infringement in the EU." They counted that Europe alone today sees about five billion accesses to pirated material per month—we can only imagine how these numbers explode in the Global South for example. Of course, the idea of piracy being an economic problem today can only be ridiculous, since it assumes that all the people who access pirated material would have legally obtained it otherwise. They would not. Also, anyone who thinks that video piracy today is still a profitable business for anyone lives deep in the twentieth century. Today it's all about sharing. In this respect, I like to quote William Gibson, who once allegedly said that the future is already here—it is

just not very evenly distributed.[1] Piracy is simply making sure that everyone gets their share of the future, without really affecting the profits of commercial studios or budgets of public film sponsoring bodies.

All that said—and to wrap up our conversation by returning to the original subject of your conference, as you suggest—I remain a huge fan of your very open, almost poetic approach to film research, which resulted in so many vastly different subjects being covered by such a vast array of perspectives. I actually tried hard all the time not to let any "stickiness" dry and consolidate into anything resembling a definition, instead preferring to see your topic as an endless source of inspiration. It still keeps surprising me—I just had a thought this very second! You are not the only one to mention bodily fluids and their sticky properties, but isn't it fascinating that bodily fluids are actually both sticky and extremely slippery? Now I wonder how that duality would translate to the dominion of memories or handling film material…

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1 This quote from the 1990s has different possible wordings and is attributed to Gibson even though it only later appeared in print (O'Toole 2012).

Authors

Olja Alvir is an author and researcher based in Vienna. She studied Comparative Literature in Vienna and Zagreb, and her interdisciplinary work spans literature, film, cultural criticism, and political essays. Her dissertation, *Liberation afoot*, examines early Yugoslav partisan cinema and its depiction of movement as a symbol of political resistance. Alvir received the Ingeborg Ohnheiser Prize for her master's thesis and worked and taught at the Department of Slavic Studies, University of Vienna, from 2022 to 2025. Currently, she is a Junior Fellow at the ifk International Research Center for Cultural Studies, University of Art and Design Linz. Her debut novel *Kein Meer* (Zaglossus, 2016) was followed by the award-winning poem *Pomelo* (2021) and international poetry publications, including in *The Kenyon Review*. Her trilingual poetry collection *Spielfeld/Špilfeld/Playground* appeared in 2022, and in 2025, Alvir was awarded the Prize for Literature in Exile in the Category of Poetry.

Marie Sophie Beckmann is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Art and Visual Culture at Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, where she currently works on the interplay of screen media and protest cultures. She completed her PhD as part of the DFG Research Training Group "Configurations of Film" at Goethe University Frankfurt. Her texts have been published in *Cinéma&Cie*, *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, *montage AV*, and several anthologies. She is co-editor of *Sub(e)merging: Experiences, Practices and Politics from Below* (Diaphanes, 2025) and author of *Films That Spill: Beyond the Cinema of Transgression* (Rutgers University Press, 2025).

Fabienne Bieri (she/they) is an artist, photographer, filmmaker, researcher, and community organizer based in Switzerland. She is completing her PhD at the Institute for Gender Studies at the University of Geneva. Both her research and artistic practice focus on themes of gender, sexuality, queerness, sex work and pornography. She is interested in understanding forms of

repression and exclusion, but also exploring strategies of resistance and imagining new and utopian ways of relating to one another.

Miriam De Rosa researches and teaches film theories and media archaeology at Ca' Foscari, University of Venice, where she leads the MA in Economy and Management of Arts and Cultural Activities and serves as an Associate Professor in film and screen media. Her most recent publication is the monograph *Grosse Fatigue* (2024). Miriam is also active within IMACS, NECS and as an independent film curator.

Kerim Doğruel is currently a research fellow in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Bayreuth. In his dissertation, he looks at and through transparent plastic cases of electronic devices, analyzing the contexts in which they appear: in museums, as design objects, in U.S. prisons, and at fairs and trade shows. His research and teaching interests include media theory, infrastructure studies, animation, and game studies.

Silas Edwards is a doctoral researcher in visual history at the Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture in Gießen. He previously worked at the Frankfurt University Collections, and his research continues to center on collections and museums as resources to develop critical perspectives on visual, social and environmental history. His doctoral project examines the role of industrial color printing in popularizing butterfly collecting around 1900, both by aiding classification and by facilitating the colonial trade in 'exotic' insect specimens.

Rodrigo Faustini dos Santos is an independent artist and researcher based in São Paulo, Brazil. He holds a PhD in Film Studies from Universidade de São Paulo (USP), and has published on experimental film and video, the poetics of noise and ruins, and the materialities of film, video, and digital moving images. His films and videos have screened at Ars Eletronica, Annecy Animation Festival, Anifilm, Images festival, Bienal de la Imagen

en Movimiento, Festival de Habana, Beijing International Short Film Festival and Stuttgarter Filmwinter, among others.

Fenja Holz holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a master's in Film Culture from Goethe University Frankfurt. She lives and works in Vienna.

Philipp Dominik Keidl is assistant professor of Screen Media in Transition and co-coordinator of MI3: Media Industries, Infrastructures and Institutions at Utrecht University.

Franziska Kohler is a student at Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main. She is currently doing her MA in Film Culture.

Andrea Mariani is associate professor at the University of Udine, teaching Media Theory (BA), Philology of Cinema (MA) and Exhibition Design (MA). He is PI of the PRIN2022 project, Film-BaseMatters: A Material Approach to the History of Small-Gauge Film in Italy, funded by UE-PNRR of the Italian Ministry of University Research.

Jurij Meden is a curator at the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna. Previously, he worked as head of the program department at the Slovenian Cinematheque in Ljubljana and as curator of film exhibitions at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York.

Emma Merkling is lecturer (assistant professor) in British Art at the University of Manchester. Emma teaches and writes about the intersections between nineteenth-century art and history of science. Recent publications have explored materials ranging from Spiritualist painting and physics to Victorian photography, ecology, and plant-human erotics.

Nils Meyn is a research associate at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and is currently pursuing a PhD in the research training group "Configurations of Film" at Goethe University Frankfurt. They previously completed the master's program Film Culture: Archiving, Programming, Presentation at Goethe University

Frankfurt and later received a research proposal scholarship from the Gutenberg Graduate School of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Mainz. In their dissertation, Nils explores the material and affective history of the porn film collection of Schwules Museum in Berlin, framing the collection as an index of queer desires. At the museum, they conduct research, volunteer, and co-facilitate archival workshops focused on the porn collection. In addition, Nils works in a project that catalogs and provides access to the archive of AIDS-Hilfe Frankfurt, a health service organization that played a pivotal role during Germany's AIDS crisis.

Amber Jamilla Musser is a professor of English, Africana Studies, and Black, Race, and Ethnic Studies (BRES) at the CUNY Graduate Center. She writes and researches at the intersections of race, sexuality, and aesthetics. In addition to writing art reviews for *The Brooklyn Rail*, she has published widely in queer studies, black feminism, psychoanalysis, and critical theory. She is the author of *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (NYU Press, 2014), *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (NYU Press, 2018), and *Between Shadows and Noise: Sensation, Situatedness, and the Undisciplined* (Duke University Press, 2024). Her collaborative projects include co-editing *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies* (NYU Press, 2021) and co-hosting its accompanying podcast *Feminist Keywords*; special issues of *Signs: A Journal of Feminist Theory* on "Care and Its Complexities" and *ASAP Journal* on "Queer Form;" and the series Elements in Feminism and Critical Theory for Cambridge University Press.

Fadekemi Olawoye obtained her PhD from Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany. She holds a master's degree in Performance Studies from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and a bachelor's degree in English Language from the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Her forthcoming co-authored article, "'Bollywood be like…': Imagined Worlds and Cross-Cultural Fandom of Hindi Media by Zee World Fans in Nigeria," will appear in *Global Screen Worlds: Conversations across Cinema Cultures* (Bloomsbury, 2026).

Her research interests include Nollywood studies, costume and makeup, cultural studies, identity formations, gender and popular culture.

Jamal Phoenix is an Afro-Créole FTM (transmasculine) pornstar, dancer, sexworker and sex-educator currently based in Europe. Jamal's career centers on his self-proclaimed "Neo-Masculinity/ High-Masc" identity. He works to amplify Transmasc-Fag visibility through stage performances, films and educational workshops, while also contributing to the creation of archives. He is a professional Afro-contemporary dancer, poledancer, gogo-boy, as well as Fetish performer and pro-Submissive. His artistry blurs the lines between sexuality, performing arts and fetish practices.

Clara Podlesnigg is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer in Digital Film Cultures at Goethe University Frankfurt. Her forthcoming monograph *Holograms in the Platform Era* (Amsterdam University Press) unpacks how holograms today embody promises of a futuristic medium while serving to probe, commodify, and shape the social and political present. She is a section editor for the journal *Open Cultural Studies*. Her research interests span everyday cultures, celebrity studies, educational media, gender and technology.

Alexandra Schneider is professor of Film and Media Studies at Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz. Her research focuses on amateur media, decentered film histories, and format studies. She co-authored *Children Reinventing Cinema. Snapshots from the Early 21st Century* (meson press 2025).

Laura Teixeira is a curator and researcher based in Berlin and Frankfurt am Main, Germany. She is writing a dissertation as part of the Research Training Group "Configurations of Film" (Goethe University Frankfurt) about the presence of moving image art in Global South Biennials. She works as a film programmer for the DFF Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum and is also the director of the festival of Latin-American cinema "Días de Cine" in Frankfurt.

Julia Willms is a film and media studies researcher. Her work focuses on moving image culture and its interference with public discourse, the portrayal of violence in the media, documentary film theory, popular culture, and digital media cultures. She holds a doctorate from the University of Cologne, where she currently works as a postdoctoral researcher in the interdisciplinary research training group "connecting-excluding". ORCID: 0000-0002-1139-4733 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1139-4733, https://julia-willms.de.

Sigal Yona is a fellow at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, where she is currently working on a project entitled "The Longue Durée of the Eden Cinema in Tel Aviv." Her research interests include language and cultural mediation, transnational studies, cinema memory, and film history and historiography. Her work employs an interdisciplinary approach, combining archival and oral history methods. She has previously taught at Vassar College and Middlebury College.

Kerim Doğruel, Fadekemi Olawoye, and Clara Podlesnigg (eds.)

Sticky Films

Stickiness is ambiguous. As a conceptual framework, it speaks of modes of relations and implies a strong affective charge between arousal, lust or disgust. In film and media production, sticky tools are both a material reality or the basis for metaphors of connection, repair or attachment in cut-and-paste or split-and-splice practices. Sticky Films brings the material and conceptual dimensions of stickiness into conversation, looking for intentional and sometimes unwanted sticky residues in film and media cultures. The chapters explore the feelings of stickiness, sticky modes of being, as well as representations or traces of stickiness in audiovisual media.

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