

**Space Oddity: Exercises in Art and Philosophy**

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# Topology of Scrapbooking Browsing Through a Space in Constant Transformation

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**Abstract** The essay sheds light on the practice of scrapbooking promoting a spatial reflection. Topology is used as a tool for exploration and stimulates an investigation in terms of movement and morphological deformations. The topological references, along with three examples of artist scrapbooking, enable tangent reflections that depict a multifaceted contemporary scrapscape with profound design, cultural, and media value. Scrapbooking emerges as a metamorphic threshold practice between the private and the public, capable of empowering the ephemeral and questioning ever-moving constructions such as culture and identity, both visually and materially.

**Keywords** Scrapbook. Scrapbooking. Topology. Ephemera. Material culture. Visual culture. Isa Genzken. Eline Mugaas. Elise Storsveen. Hudinilson Jr.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Poaching Topology, Gleaning Culture. – 3 Narcissus, Make Yourself Pretty! Why Does the Gay Version Always Look Better? – 4 Conclusions.

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The space of experience is really, literally, physically  
a topological hyperspace of transformation  
(Massumi 2002, 184)

## 1 Introduction

*Mach dich hübsch!* is a scrapbook by Isa Genzken, filled with playful and layered collages in which she reflects on life in the metropolis, media culture, sexual identity and her own biography. (Genzken 2015)

This reads on the back cover of the scrapbook published as a facsimile for Genzken's exhibition of the same name at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 2015.<sup>1</sup> These few lines attempt to recap in verbal form an editorial and artistic exercise otherwise devoid of explanatory text. Also in Eline Mugaas and Elise Storsveen's *ALBUM* (2014), another publishing venture this study takes into consideration, the back cover verbally sums up a project that would otherwise be visually cryptic.<sup>2</sup> Such an analogy is indicative of a scrapbooking practice that uses the image as a privileged tool of interrogation, knowledge, and interpretation. The image is given an autonomy of meaning and space that provides it full agency.

Both projects base, each with their own peculiarities, their narrative on visual collages. These recycle, reframe and rewrite existing materials, mostly ephemera. But not only that, because through this montage operation these materials trigger surprising new visions and semantic shortcuts. This aspect is well highlighted by another scrapbook author, Brazilian artist Hudinilson Jr., who states:

Although I'm appropriating, I'm always creating images, both through the selection and, consequently, the grouping, as well as through how I "cut" those images, either maintaining their "original" aspect, or stressing / removing certain details. (Resende 2016, 403)

The aforementioned projects provide an initial testimony to the vast horizon of scrapbooking. Likewise, they invite reflection on the tools with which to interpret this ephemeral space, where double pages inherently preserve that state of eternal draft that ensures them to be continuously modifiable and expandable. Then, how is it possible to theoretically accompany the movement that characterises a

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibition was held from 29 November 2015 through 6 March 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The volume collects the first ten issues of the fanzine of the same name, created in 2008. In the back cover are summoned the themes of the single fanzines.

space that by its very vocation is visually cryptic, temporary, and metamorphic?

The analysis chooses to turn to topology, as a metaphor, a vehicle for understanding and movement. This means to privilege a method that analyses objects more in the extension of space than in the becoming of time (Vitiello 1992, 84), and to think about elements in terms of continuous transformation and invariance, flows and inter-connections, embodied gazes, non-orientability and morphological deformations.

All this in a scape where culture itself has recently started to be thought in topological terms.

We no longer live in or experience 'movement' or transformation as the transmission of fixed forms in space and time but rather movement – as the ordering of continuity – composes the forms of social and cultural life themselves. (Lury et al. 2012, 6)

It is then from the possibility offered by a space capable of repeatedly deconstructing and reconstructing imaginary heterotopias and always open to new interpretations by the reader, that the study will seek to understand what it means to think about scrapbooking topologically, as a subaltern space of cultural critique and subjectivation based on constant transformation.

A space that has actually been little studied so far. Research on scrapbooking has indeed always suffered from a certain academic distrust, justified in part by the difficulty of framing the topic at the disciplinary level, in part by the complex retrieval of original material and the micro-histories contextual to the artifacts, and in part by its eminently private dimension. Thus, while aesthetic, artistic, and architectural theories have long been concerned with the atlas as a peculiar device of knowledge and mapping (Bruno 2002; Didi-Huberman 2010), and while it is the ephemera that has attracted the gaze of scholars, in epistemological (Muñoz 1996; Halberstam 2011), design (Farias 2014; Pecorari 2021; Salvaneschi 2021), and media terms (Grainge 2011; Comand, Mariani 2019), the scrapbooking practice has remained in the shadows, despite offering fertile reflections not only on the cultural, artistic and design levels, but also on gender and feminist issues. Today, the interest of the humanities in scrapbooking seems to focus precisely on the latter issue, deepening the role and of the narrative promoted by women in this practice (Downs 2007), reactivating non-dominant and sometimes subversive narratives (Garvey 2012), and considering scrapbooking as a potential feminist methodology (Walling-Wefelmeyer 2021).

The choice to medially and editorially appreciate the practice of scrapbooking and the space it fosters from a topological point of view intends to bring all these experiences together and finally find a way

to connect space, gaze and motion, three key elements to convey the multilayered complexity of the practice. This choice, however, requires some premises and entails some consequences.

## 2 Poaching Topology, Gleaning Culture

Topology was developed in the late decades of the nineteenth century in modern mathematics as a general theory of space.<sup>3</sup> Initially born as an understanding of space in terms of the properties of connection and invariance of figures in transformation, within a few years many disciplines – as psychoanalysis, architecture, art, philosophy, and the humanities – began to use topology as a conceptual tool for understanding dynamicity, intensity, and transformation as other logics of relations and dynamics of structures, thoughts, science, and culture. Indeed, space, in topological terms, from a stable container becomes the object of a much more complex articulation that makes movement and metamorphosis of forms its hallmark.<sup>4</sup>

There are mainly three topological references on which the analysis intends to insist in order to better introduce scrapbooks and the practice in discussion. Three examples of a quite different nature that highlight the extreme semantic and disciplinary elasticity to which the topological matter lends itself.

The first – in a journey from theory to practice, from the most recent to the most dated – is a study of “new media and techniques of reproduction” in contemporary art by philosopher and media theorist Boris Groys (2008, 73). Groys seeks to understand the time and space of contemporary art by situating it in its “relationship to the Modern project and to its Postmodern reevaluation” (71). Taking up Walter Benjamin’s insights that “mass reproduction – and not the creation of the new – constituted modernity” (72), he tries to understand what function reproduction operates in contemporary art, ultimately arguing that it implies dislocation, deterritorialisation, and “networks of topologically indeterminable circulation” (73). According to him, the original-copy dualism preserves an essentially topological difference, respectively between a “closed, fixed, marked, auratic context” and an “open, unmarked, profane space of anonymous mass circulation” (73). This serves to show how contemporary art is no longer interested in producing copies from an original, but

<sup>3</sup> The term topology was first coined by the German mathematician Johann Listing in 1847. But modern topological science is more commonly linked to the research of French mathematician Henri Poincaré and his study *Analysis Situs* published in 1895.

<sup>4</sup> The Tate Modern, London devoted a seven-month symposium to topology between 2011 and 2012 (<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/34687/topology/>). For a broader discussion of topology and its various applications, see Bursztein 2019; Lury 2013; Rosen 2006.

instead to produce an original from a copy with “a technique of topological relocalization of this copy” (74).

The topological trope thus serves Groys to reflect on the installation aesthetics of contemporary art and likewise problematise the original-copy relationship that has nurtured art, production, and information since early modernity. A relationship also central to the practice of scrapbooking, constantly in between clippings, reproductions of pre-existing materials and the quest to make new sense of elements and develop new narratives. The tension between original and copy moves scrapbook compilation from the very beginning. Suffice it to say that when it developed in the United States in the mid-1850s, scrapbooking reflected the brand-new newspaper editors’ practice of exchanging, which involved recycling newspaper articles from one to another, so that a single article in a local paper would potentially reach millions of readers throughout the country. This form of recycling was not seen as an editorial failure but rather as a virtue, a mechanism to unify information across the states (Garvey 2012, 213).

The intimate and often solipsistic practice of scrapbooking could not be effectively understood without keeping in mind that it developed within a prospering system that feeds on exchange and constantly moves images, capital, and data. Indeed, the medium could be read as a litmus paper of the evolution of the capitalist system, making fully manifest some of its structural features, such as consumerist accumulation, the intensive circulation of information, and the crucial role played by the image (Sontag [1977] 2005, 119).

Composed almost exclusively of ephemera from the paper heaps produced by mass media society, the scrapbook uses the imaginary of objects and representations of the past to compose a new object that, never more so than in this case, is both the product of a given imaginary and the producer of a new one composed of the same elements from which it seeks to emancipate itself. This is how the scrapbook topologically rewrites the role and meaning of what is copy and what is original. And it is not uncommon, especially in scrapbooks compiled by subaltern people or artists, for the tool to trigger the cultural imaginary as a practical counter-weapon to attempt a reconfiguration of communicative and identity dynamics and an unveiling of hidden meanings present in advertising and mass information.

The subversive and privately emancipatory potential of this practice leads to the second example useful for framing topology alongside scrapbooking. Indeed, considering the practice as a tool for personal and cultural rewriting brings the analysis to a consideration that places its creator, also known as maker or compiler, at the centre. To understand its role, the study mobilises the second topological reference, Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* ([1980] 2002), and the “poaching practices” enucleated therein. In reference to scrapbooking, the theoretical task that moves de Certeau analysis

appear insightful. Indeed, his interest lies not in the cultural products offered by the market, but in the uses that are made of them. Central to de Certeau's attention is reading – not as a passive practice, but an active one – as a way of creating everyday life. It is compared to a form of poaching. Using de Certeau's words, it could be said that the scrapbook stands out as a form of silent production in which:

The drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance. ([1980] 2002, XXI)

As a daily exercise of collecting, archiving and resemantising cultural imagery, the scrapbook presents itself as a paradigmatic form of rereading everyday life. De Certeau emphasises the subversive and meaningful role that reading takes on in people's lives. Readers are compared to travellers, to nomads poaching their ways. The page becomes a place of transit where the things that enter are the indices of a passivity of the subject in relation to a tradition; those that leave are the signs of his power to manufacture objects and develop narratives. From this perspective, the scrapbook 'writing through clippings' takes on a value that goes beyond the archival one. The new narratives it produces appear relevant also from a cultural and critical point of view. Quoting de Certeau, one could argue that this type of narration, as opposed to the map that cuts up, cuts across:

The space of operations it travels in is made of movements, it is topological, concerning the deformation of figures, rather than topical defining places. (129)

Topology enters the domain of narration. The scrapbooker seems to possess at least some key characteristics of that narrativity that de Certeau named 'delinquent', namely that which is able to rewrite the logic of narration and space, and make it personal, against the norm, any form of external discipline, and "characterized by the privilege of the *tour over the state*" (130; emphasis in the original).

The metaphor of poaching to describe the appropriation of texts by readers for their own uses and meanings can be particularly interesting because it is able to highlight the condition of continuous movement and transformation that the activity entails in spatial, identity and cultural terms.

Ellen G. Garvey (2003), in an extensive study of American scrapbooking, also takes up de Certeau's fitting metaphors for talking about this practice and proposes a shift in meaning. Resuming a concept developed by media theorist Henry Jenkins (1992), Garvey moves from the figure of the poacher to that of the gleaner.

Like the poacher, the gleaner does not own the land, does not produce the crop or livestock, but steps in when it is ready, takes what is available, and puts it to her or his own uses. Gleaning shifts from the implied masculinity of shooting game, engaged in a kind of warfare with the landowner, to a model of gathering that is not passive or compliant, and is decidedly open to feminine participation. (Garvey 2003, 208)

Abandoning the predatory and abusive metaphor of the hunt and entering the more agricultural and functional metaphor of the life cycle allows Garvey to leave behind a logic of collision, and to conceive of scrapbooking not only as an exercise in contesting the present, but as a practice intrinsic to the recycling system that feeds it.

Together these two spatial and practical metaphors explain not only the role but also the socio-cultural and productive context in which scrapbooking evolves. If it is Garvey's intention to highlight the relationship between the practice and the capitalistic society, de Certeau tends instead to emphasise possible strategies for actively reappropriating an increasingly chaotic, alienating, and numbing everyday life.

The denunciation of the increasing passivity and alienation caused by consumerism leads the analysis to deal, in this backward path, with the third topological example, a Situationist one. As Giuliana Bruno notes (2002, 264) the legacy left by Situationism should not be reduced to a critique of the society of the spectacle, but is articulated primarily in spatial terms, rethinking urbanity and geography with radical, psychic, and labyrinthine cartographic thinking. The importance of wandering is fundamental in the Situationist framework. Walking through reveals the possibility of losing oneself, of rethinking a space that until then had only been perceived as immutably fixed.

The fascination for the ruptures and scraps of Situationism anticipates and introduces a new post- era marked by a disenchanting reinterpretation of ideologies and the grand modern Western narratives, informed by the reuse and free citation of the past, and an epistemological relativism. Within this context, a publishing experience highly significant and experimental at the edge of the Situationist International deserves mention. It is *The Situationist Times*, a magazine published by Dutch artist and editor Jacqueline de Jong between 1962 and 1967, consisting of six issues.<sup>5</sup> From issue 3, the magazine introduces topology as its focus of investigation, delving into a wide range of topological forms such as knot, labyrinth, ring, and chain. Issues 3, 4, and 5 present an eccentric visual archive of illustrations and

<sup>5</sup> All issues are available digitally via *Monoskop* ([https://monoskop.org/Situationist\\_Times](https://monoskop.org/Situationist_Times)) and by video description with the author through the *Institute for Computational Vandalism* platform (<https://vandal.ist/thesituationisttimes/>).

photographs cut out, traced by hand, or xeroxed from other sources and books. Like a scrapbook, the magazine chooses to republish mainly existing materials and compare them, through a morphological study of cultural forms.

The topological *derive* and *détournement* of *The Situationist Times* is interesting for several reasons. Primarily because it reveals the subversive and ludic side of topology. De Jong explores it thanks to Asger Jorn, a multifaceted, avant-garde artist and thinker who, in a broader effort to comprehensively reinterpret the logic of modern scientific thought (Rossi 2022), approaches topology to playfully rethink mathematical laws not as guarantors of a stable and normed universe but, on the contrary, as revealers of a complex and agitated world (Pollet 2011, 108).

Once beyond the apparent scientificity produced by the succession of topological figures and texts by renowned mathematicians, physicists, and art historians, *The Situationist Times* is indeed underpinned by a playful framework, continually poised between the serious and the facetious. Topology is used to overcome the limitations of Euclidean geometry, which appears inadequate to understand an increasingly chaotic world and to take into account the observer's point of view (Rossi, forthcoming).

In *secundis*, de Jong's magazine is useful as it shows what it means to organise space with topological forms. Topology not only fills the pages but seems to inform the very logic of the magazine, where a single potential figure in constant motion unfolds homeomorphically in infinite deformations. Namely, it offers the possibility of conceiving a project on paper by means of continuous metamorphic movement that affects both the forms that inhabit it and the medium that enables it.

Finally, it is important because it provides a way to conclude and bridge a journey that from the eminently theoretical thought of Groys led the analysis through the intellectual but equally practical insights of de Certeau to an editorial design manifestation capable of embodying theoretical thought in sensible form. In other words, it allows the reader-traveller's point of view to appreciate the different planes of fascination that topology can exert on scrapbooking.



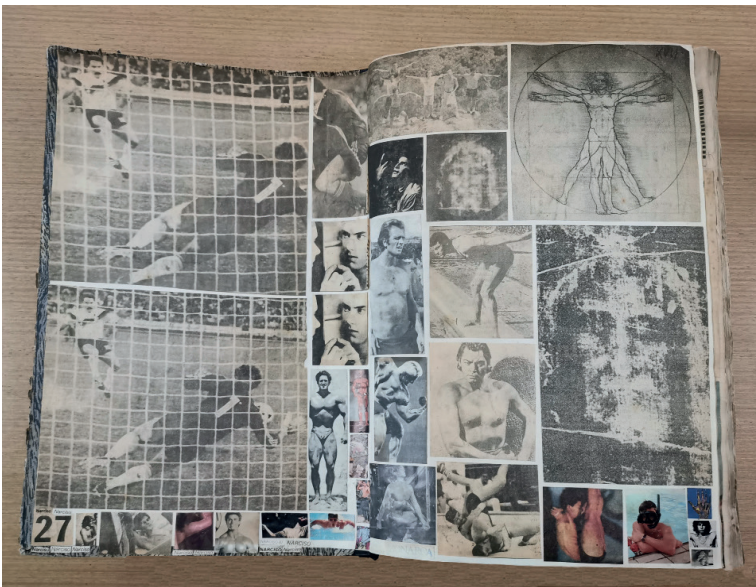
### 3 Narcissus, Make Yourself Pretty! Why Does the Gay Version Always Look Better?

Isa Genzken's *Mach dich hübsch!*, Eline Mugaas and Elise Storsveen's *ALBUM* and Hudinilson Jr.'s *Cadernos de referências* represent three significant examples of a rather layered contemporary scrapbook scenario. From the topological reflections, practices and *derives* of Groys, de Certeau and de Jong respectively, it is possible to appreciate their space and design from renovated light.

The tension between original and copy is evident, for example, in Hudinilson Jr.'s scrapbooks. These absorb clippings and ephemera from magazines and newspapers over a span of more than thirty years of cultural and media production. Found images are not simply pasted into the *Cadernos* but are replicated countless times and each time they are edited, cut, xeroxed, altered in resolution [figs 1-2]. Each copy becomes an original in the context that hosts and enhances it. The artist's attention to reproduction techniques and the layout of elements on the double-page space is a fundamental aspect of the construction of a topology of the self. The *Cadernos*, which number more than 120, as a whole seem to delineate an image of the male that unfolds homeomorphically in infinite variations. The deformations of this single metaphorical body in constant motion entirely fill the double pages that leave no room for the medium to emerge. There is no space outside this figure that fragmented, torn, and readily re-assembled interrogates the nature of the image and challenges its status as a copy.

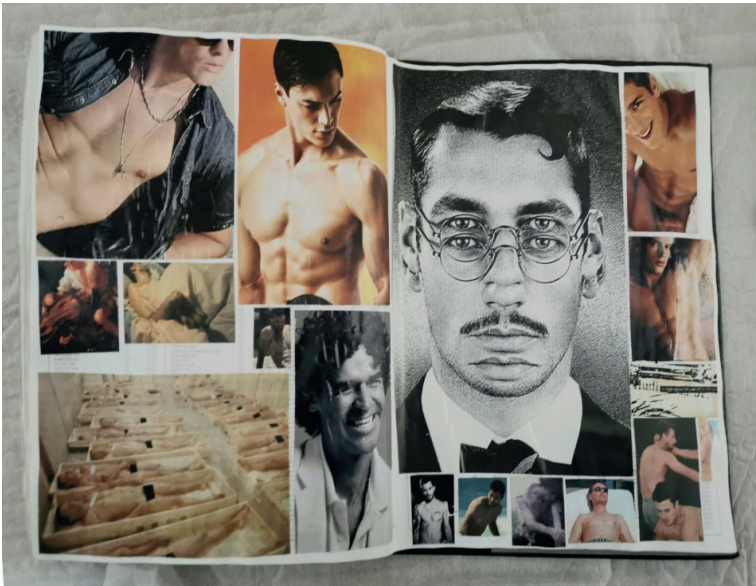
The male body is investigated topologically and pornographicaly. Narcissus is the mythological figure the artist constantly refers to (Stigger 2020), renewing its meaning and role in the image-consuming contemporary world. The pages present themselves as a mirror. More than objects of vision, they are voracious eyes scrutinising a helpless reader, who immediately perceives the objectification to which they are destined [figs 3-4]. This continuous and silent questioning of what is original and what is copy, of what is object and subject of vision, produces a pervasive non-orientability. This, rather than generating stillness, stimulates an incessant flux and metamorphosis of gaze and space that are the very essence of this illusion of desire on paper [fig. 5] (Rossi 2021).

The practices of poaching and gleaning proposed by de Certeau and Garvey - capable of highlighting not only the context of circular exchange in which scrapbooking evolves but also enucleating strategies of reappropriation of an increasingly dysfunctional everydayness - may instead shed new light on the fanzine *ALBUM*, by artist Eline Mugaas and Elise Storsveen [fig. 6]. Created entirely from found images taken from etiquette manuals, cookbooks, travel and fashion magazines, and sex manuals circulated in Scandinavia between



**Figure 1** Hudinilson Jr., *Caderno de referências XX*. 1980s. Prints, newspapers cutouts, magazines cutouts, documents, photocopies, prints on paper. Unique. 22 × 33 × 7 cm (closed). Courtesy Galeria Jaqueline Martins (São Paulo/Brussels) and Hudinilson Jr. Estate. Photo Simone Rossi

**Figure 2** Hudinilson Jr., *Caderno de referências XVII*. 1980/2000s. Photographic prints, newspaper and magazine cutouts, photocopies and documents on paper. Unique. 23 × 32,5 × 10 cm (closed). Courtesy Galeria Jaqueline Martins (São Paulo/Brussels) and Hudinilson Jr. Estate. Photo Simone Rossi



**Figure 3** Hudinilson Jr., *Caderno de referências 125*. 2000s. Photograph prints, newspaper and magazine cutouts, photocopies and documents on paper. Unique. 22 × 28 × 5 cm (closed). Courtesy Galeria Jaqueline Martins (São Paulo/Brussels) and Hudinilson Jr. Estate. Photo: Simone Rossi

**Figure 4** Hudinilson Jr., *Caderno de referências IX*. 1980s. Photograph prints, newspaper and magazine cutouts, photocopies and documents on paper. Unique. 22 × 33 × 4 cm (closed). Galeria Jaqueline Martins (São Paulo/Brussels) and Hudinilson Jr. Estate. Photo Simone Rossi. Courtesy





**Figure 5** Hudinilson Jr., *Caderno de referências XVII*. 1980/2000s. Photographic prints, newspaper and magazine cutouts, photocopies and documents on paper. Unique. 23 × 32,5 × 10 cm (closed). Courtesy Galeria Jaqueline Martins (São Paulo/Brussels) and Hudinilson Jr. Estate

the 1960s and 1980s, *ALBUM* reflects in retrospect on the popular imagery present in Scandinavian households during that period. It offers a refined and sharp meta-narrative on the human body, sexuality, and social life of images that shows how the media act and create stereotypes and, at the same time, how the reader can transform these streams of information into elements of cultural critique [figs 7-8]. Scrapbooking, habitually used to reframe the present, becomes a propaedeutic tool for a mocking and biting, but no less serious, rereading of cultural history. Indeed, the hilarity that exudes from the pages of the fanzine takes no time to reveal itself for what it actually is: a sincere and superficial questioning of a series of taboos and clichés on which Scandinavian, and more generally, European culture has been culturally and sexually erected. The chosen images are neatly displayed, always in their entirety and never overlapping, and the reading is organised into a series of heavy themes expressed in the form of ironic questions, such as “on heterosexuality, or why does the gay version always look better?” Or “on the condition of the lonely man and his search for meaning and love” [fig. 9].

Another intriguing detail of *ALBUM* is that its medium appears to be continually in metamorphosis. The original images undergo a series of reproduction and layout processes that continually and topolog-



**Figure 6** Eline Mugaas and Elise Storsveen, *ALBUM*. 2014. Courtesy of the artists, Primary Information, and Teknisk Industri AS

ically alter their use value. In 2014, both an exhibition<sup>6</sup> and the publication of a facsimile of the first ten issues of the fanzine take place. A year later, at Harvard University's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, another medial shift occurs. In the showcase dedicated to the project, pre-xeroxed original collages are displayed along with facsimile posters and some of the fanzine's most iconic pages.<sup>7</sup> Exploiting the permeability of the practice, artists Storsveen and Mugaas thus manage to work on multiple levels simultaneously, for an elastic and medially impure understanding of the scrapbooking space.

Finally, Isa Genzken's scrapbooking practice also seems to suggest a topological understanding of its space.<sup>8</sup> In this case, rather

<sup>6</sup> The show was held at White Columns, New York from 11 June to 26 July 2014. <https://whitecolumns.org/exhibitions/primary-information-album/>.

<sup>7</sup> More info can be found at <https://carpenter.center/program/album> and at <https://jamesvoorhies.com/projects/display-case>.

<sup>8</sup> *Mach dich hübsch!* is the second scrapbook published as a facsimile by the artist. The title can be translated as 'Make yourself pretty!'. It follows the publication of *I Love New York, Crazy City* (2006) published within an artists' books series edited by Beatrix Ruf, also co-curator of *Mach dich hübsch!* exhibition at Stedelijk in 2015-16. The two facsimiles are similar in terms of composition techniques and large format.



**Figure 7** Eline Mugaas and Elise Storsveen, *ALBUM*. 2014. Courtesy of the artists, Primary Information, and Teknisk Industri AS

**Figure 8** Eline Mugaas and Elise Storsveen, *ALBUM*. 2014. Courtesy of the artists, Primary Information, and Teknisk Industri AS



**Figure 9** Eline Mugaas and Elise Storsveen, *ALBUM*, 2014. Courtesy of the artists, Primary Information, and Teknisk Industri AS

than the male body as in Hudinilson Jr.'s example, it is the metamorphic becoming of seductive references and spatial representations that informs Genzken's narrative, which invites a fast-paced scrolling where the single element becomes significant only in the formal and conceptual relationships it establishes with other elements in space (Thürlemann 2019). Different coloured adhesive tapes frame, censor, divide, and layer content on the page. Their function from paratextual becomes the absolute protagonist and makes explicit the meticulous work of sedimentation, layering, and research accomplished. Under the tapes an entire submerged psychogeographical narrative moves as if in watermark, and only sometimes emerges, as if after an apnea [fig. 10]. The movement of the narrative seems intrinsically linked to the emotion that grips the artist when confronted with certain content. Recalling the etymological affinity linking movement to emotion (Bruno 2002, 6), Genzken's feelings shape a visual framework that makes its own the principle of Situationist *détournement*, namely that the most effective way of representing reality today seems to be the appropriation and free manipulation of its fragments. Fragments that are not manipulated statically but cut up and reconstructed through movement.

Genzken's facsimile also allows to note how private scrapbooks, when published, often are released as rare and very expensive editions, more like a precious coffee table book than a notebook of experiences filled with clippings and scraps, with ephemeral value. Such formalisations completely overturn the use value of the materials, which now appear musealised. Transformed into objects to be admired in their sacred stillness, they thus risk losing that predisposition to transformation that analysis seeks, on the contrary, to renew.

If one examines the facsimile of *Mach dich hübsch!*, it becomes immediately clear that such a reproduction prevents one from moving the stickers, lifting the paper, flipping through the images, and especially from highlighting the pages in which the play of overlapping and intertwining is deliberately disassemblable. The reading returns to favour a two-dimensional horizontal scrolling that the design of the scrapbook had originally intended to elide, working not only superficially, but also vertically, down to the bottom of the page. While revealing structural and conceptual limitations, however, the facsimile in any case makes it possible not only to recover ephemeral materials that would otherwise be much more difficult to approach, but also to broaden the audience and the meaning of that operation, which from being eminently private now becomes of socio-cultural relevance.





Figure 10 Isa Genzken, *Mach dich hübsch!*. 2015.  
Courtesy the artist and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König

## 4 Conclusions

The essay attempts an interpretation of scrapbooking capable of highlighting its space in mobile and deformative terms. The medium is thought of not only as a fixed object made of forms in constant transformation, but as a space of movement itself, which can be continually distorted and deformed without gaining or losing its actual properties.

Enhancing the scrapbook's own space of enunciation, the analysis offers an initial overview of a practice continually evolving. Scrapbooking can be read as a way of being and communicating, a practice in which the boundary between the personal and the social becomes blurred, in which projection and absorption collide, and the imaginary takes power, designing and channelling a person's lifelong gaze and desires, as in Hudinilson Jr.'s case; or the scrapbook can renew and reinvent its value by getting printed in facsimile and thus entering fully into the publishing system, as in Genzken's example; or, eventually, scrapbooking can inform the design of magazines, fanzines, and a wide range of publishing projects that absorb its typical techniques of composition and use of materials, as *ALBUM* demonstrates.

Contrary to what one would expect, paper scrapbooking is not actually disappearing as the digital age advances. As it dematerialises in blogs (like Tumblr), social media (like Instagram) and other platforms (like Are.na), it continues to stimulate and inform numerous paper-based projects, renewing forms and modes of consumption.

Many scrapbooks by prominent designers and artists are being published as facsimiles.<sup>9</sup> Major exhibitions dedicated to the art scrapbook have been organised,<sup>10</sup> and curatorial actions that operate on museum space in an editorial way are taking shape.<sup>11</sup> A growing number of publishing experiments are also emerging that explicitly mimic the practice of scrapbooking to develop objects that are difficult to catalogue but nevertheless created for publication, thus reversing the original marginality and privateness of the tool.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Among the many, in Western culture only, worth mentioning are the ones by Cecil Beaton, Walter Pfeiffer, Wendell Castle and Albe Steiner.

<sup>10</sup> The curatorial and editorial work done by American rare book collector and curator Andrew Roth is here inspiring, particularly the exhibition *Paperwork: A Brief History of Artists' Scrapbooks* held in New York at the Andrew Roth Gallery in 2013 and at ICA London in 2014.

<sup>11</sup> *Museum for Preventive Imagination*, the three-year program envisioned by curator Luca Lo Pinto at Macro, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome, is for example conceived as an exhibition project articulated by imagining the museum as a three-dimensional magazine, developed around themes and formats that function as columns to accommodate heterogeneous content. <https://www.museomacro.it/institution/museum-for-preventive-imagination/>.

<sup>12</sup> In this regard, of interest are the *FAUND*, a magazine conceived by graphic designers Daniel Pianetti and Renato Zulli, made entirely of material found on the In-

Overall, the practice seems to problematise some fundamental binarisms of Western thought, such as private and public, social and identity, high and low culture, imaginary and real, original and copy, proposing a new space of experience and counter-narrative with both personal and cultural value. It also triggers issues such as the heterodox construction of identity, the deep relationship that binds modern people to mass media information, and the reader's not only passive-contemplative position in the spectacle of the world. Likewise, it allows to emphasise some more purely design issues, such as the conversion of the primordial use value of the medium that host the practice, and the further transformation that the medium undergoes when it enters the publishing system; or, even, the 'amateur professionalism' that empowers a single person to invent a complex editorial role where multiple editorial tasks have to be fulfilled, ranging from material research to graphic design.

The use of a series of examples using topology to reflect on notions of space, medium, original, reading, and culture is thus intended to suggest a possible lens for studying a practice that spatially transforms and resemantises the elements and the medium it recycles. Concepts such as homeomorphism and non-orientability, never used scientifically but much more 'superficially', can nevertheless help develop trajectories of understanding the constantly moving forms and labyrinthine space that scrapbooks display. These references, along with three examples of vastly different artist scrapbooking, allow tangent reflections that attempt to depict a multifaceted and vast contemporary scrapscape.

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