LEAKING THINGS
MEDIA TRANSFORMATIONS OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE INTO TWO-DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Marie Reichel

FROM PALIMPSEST VIA GLITCH TO SCULPTURAL PROCESSES

When I as a sculptor want to present my sculptures to a wider audience (beyond spatial exhibitions), I am often required to render them in two dimensions. This is usually done in the form of photographic documentation, for example, for presentation online or in print publications. For sculptors, this method of rendering is often unsatisfactory, as it precludes all spatial experience. My personal motivation for offering the course "Between handle and spout" (German: Zwischen Henkel und Schnabel) was to work out with the students a different and more suitable method for bringing three-dimensional objects to the two-dimensional plane: through media transformation.

What insights can be gained from media renderings of the three-dimensional in two dimensions as an artistic method? I approached this question by using this text and a kind of media transformation: I begin my thought experiment with a *palimpsest* (2D/analog/text); from there I mentally slide through various media to *glitch* (techy/digital/image/sound) and then to *sculptural processes* (3D/analog/physical/material), to finally arrive at the title of my essay, "Leaking Things" (German: Undichte Dinge).
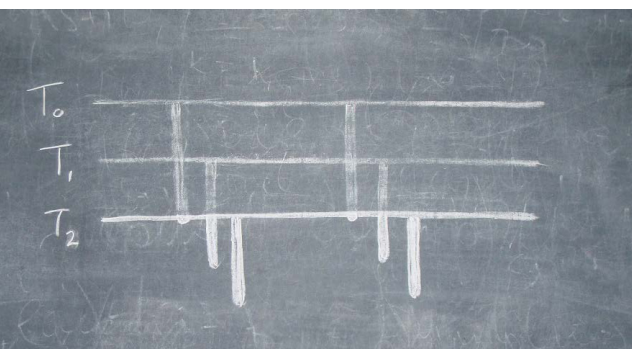
FROM PALIMPSEST

"A palimpsest theory of objects needs to consider how each imprint is not made in isolation but rather has a relationship to the ones before and after it—and this relationship can be generative in bringing something new into the relationship." (Colwell, 2022, S. 134)

This quote from anthropologist Chip Colwell aptly describes the essence of a *palimpsest theory of objects*, which is central to my thought experiment. Originally, the term *palimpsest* refers to a manuscript written on parchment
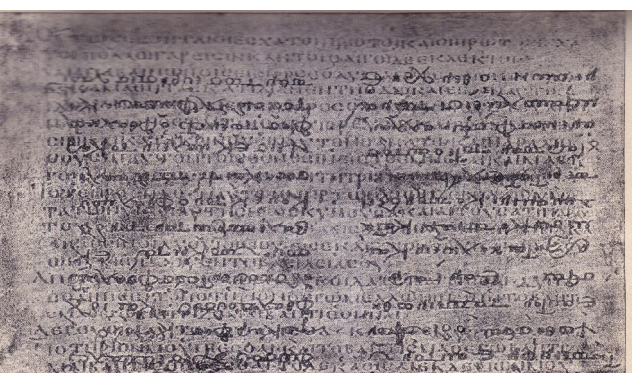
FIGURE 87 Cross-section of a palimpsest showing layered writing. (From "Strikethrough and wipe-out: Tactics for editing the past" by Tim Ingold, 2021, Disparidades. Revista de Antropolgía 76 (1), p. 6, CC BY)

FIGURE 88 Example of a palimpsest: Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, fol. 60r. (At Grec 9, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palimpsest, CC0)

where the text has been carefully effaced to make room for later writing. Since parchments are highly absorbent, it is not possible to completely erase what was there previously. It can also cause the individual texts to blend into each other, making them difficult to read. With this interplay between careful erosion and layering, the term also emphasizes how this change is a physically demanding process that requires conscious reformulation (Ingold, 2019). When sculptors shape their material, they generally do so in a physically demanding interaction characterized by careful removal and layering—an allusion to the term *sculptural*[1] *processes*, which I will elaborate on below. My interest is based on the *anti-stratigraphic principle* from anthropologist Tim Ingold: "In it, traces of the past rise to the surface even as those of the present sink into the depths." (Ingold, 2022, p. 184) Ingold hinges this principle on precisely this absorbent property of parchment. With every erosion, the traces of earlier events slowly rise to the surface, while the newly added penetrate the deepest. In this way, palimpsests allow us to reverse the chronology of time. That is, they allow us to think differently about established structures and reformulate ingrained narratives. They bring to the surface what we believe is deeply hidden. Palimpsests turn the world on its head. They disrupt in a way analogous to a glitch:

> "Herein lies a paradox: glitch moves, but glitch also blocks. It incites movement while simultaneously creating an obstacle. Glitch prompts and glitch prevents. With this, glitch becomes a catalyst, opening up new pathways, allowing us to seize on new directions. […] Thus, glitch is something that extends beyond the most literal technological mechanics: it helps us to celebrate failure as a generative force, a new way to take on the world." (Russell, 2020, p. 30)

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1 I use *sculptural* here in its contemporary sense, to include both the subtractive and additive methods in the plastic arts.

VIA GLITCH

Although there is some debate, the general consensus in the literature on the etymology of the term glitch is that it derives from the Early Modern High German *glitschen* (to slide, to let slide) or from the Jiddish *gletshn* (to slide, to slip away). In recent decades, the term has been used most often in the field of technology. These days, however, its meaning has been expanded to describe any sudden, often temporary malfunction or disruption in general. The above quotation from author and curator Legacy Russell extends the modern conception of the term to the socio-political realm, calling for *glitch feminism*. According to Russel, glitch can help overcome binaries and ingrained categorizations that determine social gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Russell, 2020). While my interest in this topic is based on Ingold's *anti-stratigraphic principle* of *palimpsests* mentioned above, in addition to Russell's understanding of glitch, I will slide on at this point, as a closer examination goes beyond the scope of this paper.

In her observations on aesthetic forms of failure (Maithani, 2016), art and media theorist Charu Maithani concludes that errors or faults are an interruption that offer a space onto which various forms of expression can be projected (Maithani, 2016, p. 105). Maithani continues: "[…] in various forms of error and glitch, failure confronts the medium with its limitations. It destructures the system of power and control behind the medium by exposing its gaps and faults." (Maithani, 2016, p. 105) In her observations, Maithani cites the Shannon-Weaver model, a model of communication by which a sender transmits an encoded signal to a receiver, who decodes it. The signals are transmitted via a communication channel (such as eye contact or touch) that is highly susceptible to distortion. Charu Maithani cuts to the chase by seeing these distortions as necessary for challenging existing values: "The error makes other ways of seeing not only possible,

ABBILDUNG 89   Detail von *ab und um* von Laura Lieb, KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)
FIGURE 89   Detail of *to and from* by Laura Lieb, KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

but necessary. The event created out of this encounter invents a space-time arrangement that leads to re-evaluation of existing values." Maithani, 2016, p. 106) Comparable to a translation of a text from one language into another, a media transformation is no less informative for not being the original. It is often impossible to translate a term 1:1, and so we are forced to circumscribe; this results in glitches that allow for other perspectives.

TO SCULPTURAL PROCESSES

The result of a media transformation of a three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional plane is part of the *sculptural process*. I see physical materials as being in constant flux. Thus, sculpture is an ongoing process, and I therefore prefer the term *sculptural processes* over *sculpture*. As people, we mold material meanings and create material identities. Materials shape our everyday world and engender material realities. *Sculptural processes* are a model of communication that show the path from the sculptor as sender to the public as receiver. When a sculpture is shown in a physical space, the signal is transmitted on a relatively direct path via the exhibition (the receiver) to the public. Distortions in the communication channel are mainly of a physical nature, determined by the material as well as the space and the environment.

In this way, *sculptural processes* constantly operate between the inside and the outside—in addition to their form, they communicate primarily through their surfaces. Their surfaces are located between theory and practice, content and form. They are the communication channels of *sculptural processes*. My thought experiment is based on a dialogical principle, which is also the source of the ambivalence of surfaces: thinking of media in material terms, surfaces are the medium of perception between object and subject in

ABBILDUNG 90　　Fragmente der Intervention *War lange da. Möchte mitgenommen werden.* von Marcel Schmitz, TU Wien, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)
FIGURE 90　　Fragments of the Intervention *Been here a while. Take me with.* by Marcel Schmitz, TU Wien, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

that they convey perceptible effects through their material presence. The focus is on this side of the surface. Thinking of media in semiotic terms, surfaces can be understood as the carriers of signs, which convey meaning. The focus goes beyond the surface. The dichotomy between these two conceptions of media is essential to the appearance of a surface and its suspiciousness (Rathe, 2020, p.16) and constitutive for media transformations in *sculptural processes*. We are accustomed to viewing surfaces as superficial, believing that we need to look behind them to find any real meaning. In digging deeper, we constantly create new surfaces that lend themselves to further investigation (Rathe, 2020, p. 12), which brings me to the main title of this essay.

ABBILDUNG 91   *Der Rest, in die Hand!* von Aleksandar Klopić, Intervention im KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)
FIGURE 91   *Take the rest!* by Aleksandar Klopić, intervention at KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

LEAKING THINGS

Robert Rauschenberg once referred to his white paintings as "clocks", saying that if one were sensitive enough to the subtle changes on their surfaces, one could tell what time it was, what the weather was like outside, and even how many people were in the room (Rauschenberg, 1999). The prerequisite for this is that their surfaces are permeable. Tim Ingold rationalizes that all things in the world are permeable with reference to what he calls *the generative flows of material* (Ingold, 2023, p. 18). This means that things need to leak in order to live and let live. When it comes to plants, animals, and us humans, this seems an obvious insight. But, as mentioned above, non-living physical materials are also in a state of constant flux. Similar to our skin, their surfaces are their channels of communication with the outside world. In order to communicate, they must be permeable. And, as is the case with a palimpsest, anything that affects them along the path of their signal is a kind of glitch. What role do media transformations play in *sculptural processes*, and what can we learn from it? In the model of communication for *sculptural processes*, the receiver is not the physical space (e.g. the exhibition), but the two-dimension surface (e.g. the publication). As a sculptor, I remain the sender; the sculpture, the transmitter. Since disruptions in the communication channel depend on the environment, they must be something else. The sculpture's

signal, however, has the same intention as the physical space, demanding that I as the sculptor must consciously add the disruption. This disruption is the media transformation, which through the means of a palimpsest causes glitches, adding new perspectives to the resulting signal. *In the manner of a palimpsest-like glitch*, the *sculptural processes* that arose as part of the course "Between handle and mouth" can also be viewed in this publication.

ABBILDUNG 92   *Synchronisiertes Wasser* von Jan Wucherpfennig, Zeichnung, KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)
FIGURE 92   Sketches for *Synchronised Water* by Jan Wucherpfennig,media transformation, KunstQaurtier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

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