

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Hybrid Palimpsests: Torn Posters and the Re-Materialization of Communication in the Digital Age

From Primitive Plates to Scanned Matrices: Circus Posters as Urban Palimpsests

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This commentary responds to the theme ‘From Primitive Practices to Digital Futures: Communication as a Force of Change’ through an art-based, practice-led reflection on how visual art itself can operate as a communicative medium. Centred on the hybridization of analogue and digital printmaking processes, the work explores how material and immaterial traces intersect to form what is described as ‘hybrid palimpsests’. Using found circus posters from the Medrano Circus—originally designed by Jovan Andric and re-encountered as both physical remnants and digital archives—the project examines a cyclical flow of communication between the tactile and the virtual. By translating found materials into 3D scans, laser-cut fragments, and re-materialized prints, the study foregrounds communication not as transmission but as transformation across media.

Keywords: art-based research; printmaking; collage; urban memory; analogue-digital hybridity; communication

1. Introduction—Communication through Materiality

In an era defined by accelerating technological mediation, the relationship between primitive artistic gestures and digital processes demands renewed attention. The thematic frame ‘From Primitive Practices to Digital Futures’ invites not a binary reading but a continuous dialogue between traditional craft and contemporary digital innovation. Within this continuum, art-based research can function as a mode of mediation in its own right—one that does not transmit information linearly but reshapes it through material engagement and sensory exchange. This text is positioned explicitly as a commentary grounded in practice-led artistic research, offering a reflective account of process rather than a conventional empirical study.

This commentary situates itself within a practice-led inquiry exploring how analogue printmaking and digital technologies coexist and interrelate as systems of material articulation

(Nelson, 2013, p. 9). By focusing on the language of making—layering, tracing, printing, transforming—it argues that communication in visual art emerges through the very negotiation between medium, material, and process. These gestures, whether performed by hand or by machine, constitute an evolving syntax of marks, traces, and reconfigurations that exceed verbal discourse. The project thus positions artistic practice not as the illustration of ideas but as their material unfolding.

The term 'hybrid palimpsest' is proposed here to describe this ongoing translation between the tangible and the virtual. Borrowed from the materiality of the printed surface and the temporal layering of the urban wall, the palimpsest functions as both metaphor and method. Each act of inscription or erasure becomes an event of mediation—a moment where meaning is neither fixed nor transmitted but continually reconfigured. Within such a framework, the hybridization of analogue and digital printmaking is understood as a re-materialization of communication: a cyclical flow in which data and matter, archive and imprint, circulate and transform one another.

The commentary will therefore examine how this logic of transformation operates through a specific artistic case study: the reworking of found circus posters from the Medrano Circus into new print matrices. These posters, initially ephemeral objects of public spectacle, have been reimagined through a process that traverses scanning, cutting, and reprinting—each stage producing a new layer of mediation. In tracing this journey, the work proposes a broader reflection on the material conditions of communication today, where the analogue and the digital no longer oppose but complete each other in an ever-renewing cycle of making and meaning.

2. Torn Posters and the Ghosts of the City

The story of this project begins at the edge of the city of Ioannina, Greece, where an abandoned kiosk stood as a quiet relic of pre-pandemic life. In December 2024, I removed from its façade a single weathered circus poster—a Medrano advertisement for performances that were scheduled from 23 October to 9 November 2020 but never took place. Fear of contagion, cancelled gatherings, and the sudden suspension of public spectacle left this image stranded in time. For four years it remained *in situ*, fading under rain and sun, a silent witness to both the absence of the circus and the altered rhythms of the city (see **Figure 1**).

When I finally detached it from the kiosk's aluminium roller shutters in December 2024, it felt less like collecting a poster than like uncovering a fragment of the city's evolving skin (see **Figure 2**).

Unlike the layered *décollages* of metropolitan poster walls, this was a singular survivor—one surface that had endured, its paper wrinkled, its colours dulled, yet still legible. Its persistence turned it into what Walter Benjamin might call a 'material memory of modernity' (1999, p. 417): an object in which time accumulates not through addition but through exposure. The poster had become a ghost image, a relic of a performance that never happened due to the pandemic, embodying what Michel de Certeau (1984, pp. 91–93) describes as the *spatial stories* inscribed by everyday life. The kiosk itself, a marginal architectural remnant, operated as an urban palimpsest—not through multiple layers of paper but through the slow inscription of weather, neglect, and duration.

Within this context, the circus poster resonates with a double affect: nostalgia and renewal. It evokes nostalgia for the unfulfilled promise of collective experience—the lights, animals, and acrobatics that symbolized pre-pandemic freedom of movement. Yet it also carries a sense of renewal: a faint hope that public joy, once deferred, might still return. As a visual trace, it bridges the psychological distance between the world before and after lockdown, between the tactile exuberance of street spectacle and the mediated isolation of the digital screen.

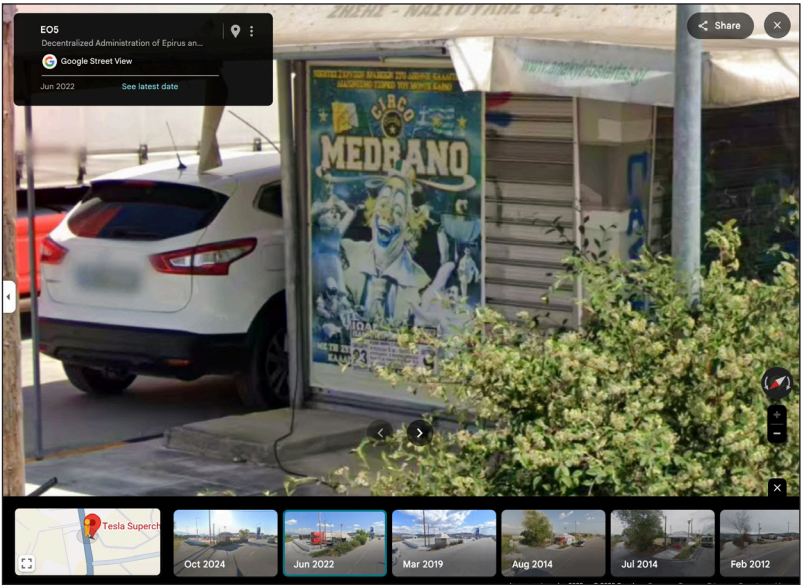


Figure 1: Medrano Circus poster in situ on the kiosk façade, Ioannina, June 2022 (Google Street View screenshot).



Figure 2: The Medrano poster on the kiosk façade prior to its removal and conservation, Ioannina, December 2024. Photograph by the author.

In artistic terms, the Medrano poster aligns with the lineage of Mimmo Rotella, whose *décollage* practice in post-war Italy transformed torn circus posters into cultural archaeology. Rotella's 'excavations' of urban walls, as Germano Celant (2004, p. 56) notes, were not acts of destruction but of revelation—each tear exposing the temporal strata of mass communication. Yet the contemporary condition differs: while Rotella had to physically strip the poster from the wall, today the image can also circulate as a digital file, shared across networks and archives. The Medrano poster, retrieved both materially and digitally, thus becomes a hybrid artefact—its ghostly aura sustained through new forms of mediation.

Ultimately, this encounter with the poster was less about preservation than recognition. Removed from the city's surface and carefully preserved in its fragile state, the Medrano poster was kept almost untouched—as a spatial and temporal fragment of a suspended era. Its material endurance stands as evidence of the city's halted rhythm, of communication interrupted yet still visible. Later, the search for its digital counterpart led to contact with its original designer, Jovan Andric, who shared the poster's digital file from his personal archive. This exchange—spanning geographies from Greece to Canada and media from paper to pixel—opened a new phase of artistic inquiry. The physical survivor and the digital file now coexisted as parallel traces of the same cultural image, each revealing different forms of temporality and mediation. Through this dialogue between analogue endurance and digital circulation, the work extends the poster's communicative potential into a broader reflection on how images travel, persist, and transform across the shifting thresholds of material and virtual space.

3. Hybridizing Analogue and Digital: From Found Fragments to Print Matrices

The artistic process that followed the recovery of the Medrano poster unfolded through a dialogue between analogue printmaking and digital mediation—a cyclical negotiation between touch and code, ink and data. The work sought to understand how the communicative essence of the poster could persist through transformations of medium and material, allowing the analogue and the digital to act not as opposites but as collaborators.

Three interconnected procedures structured this exploration. First, a series of traditional printmaking plates were digitized through 3D scanning (see **Figure 3**).



Figure 3: 3D scanned relief-based collagraph printmaking plates (Agisoft Metashape). Digitization of analogue matrices as topographical data.

The resulting digital models captured the tactile irregularities of the relief-made surfaces—plates based on mixed-media of printmaking and collagraphs—translating depth and pressure into topographical data. These scans were then re-materialized by printing the models onto linoleum, producing new physical matrices for further inking and pressing. The process established a circular trajectory: from analogue plate to digital model and back to analogue imprint. This reciprocity echoed what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999, p. 45) term *remediation*—the continuous re-inscription of one medium within another.

Second, the 3D models were reprocessed to generate digital topographic maps, revealing the matrix as a fragmented terrain of marks and voids, a condition that enabled its reconfiguration into new material supports (see **Figure 4**).



Figure 4: UV map derived from the 3D scanned matrix and laser-cut wooden fragments used as supports for further printmaking interventions.

These maps were then transferred to wood and cut using a laser cutter, producing tangible fragments that functioned as supports for further printmaking interventions. Onto these digitally fabricated pieces, traditional printmaking techniques—dry point and collagraph plates, inking, and manual pressing—were re-applied. When reassembled, the fragments formed puzzle-like compositions where digital precision and analogue gesture coexisted, each amplifying the other's presence. As Tim Ingold (2013, p. 24) argues, making is a 'process of correspondence' between hand, tool, and material; here, that correspondence expanded to include the algorithmic tool and the digital surface.

Third, a digital file of the original Medrano poster—shared by its designer Jovan Andric—was printed on vinyl and subsequently overlaid with hand-carved or relief-made matrices. This encounter between the intangible archive and the handmade trace reactivated the poster's semiotic potential. What once circulated as a .jpeg image, detached from place and time, was re-embedded in material process. Multiple and successive printing of various plates embedded new traces of an emboss and relief organic process into the flat and apparently detached outcome of the printer. Through layering, pressure, and touch, the digital image regained a physical voice. In this synthesis, the digital operated not as simulation but as a generative catalyst, extending the tactile language of printmaking into a new communicative domain.

Across these procedures, the notion of inscription remained central. Whether rendered as pigment residue, digital map, or laser incision, each imprint registered a migration of memory between media. The cycle from analogue to digital and back again materialized what Joanna Zylińska (2014, p. 18) describes as 'a politics of mediation'—a continuous negotiation of presence and absence, where technology becomes an extension of human touch rather than its replacement. This circularity also recalled Walter Benjamin's idea of the 'afterlife of images', in which every act of reproduction carries a transformation of aura (Benjamin, 1999, p. 221). In this sense, the hybrid process was not merely a technical experiment but an aesthetic and epistemic inquiry: a way of understanding communication as a living system of material translations.

The resulting body of work formed a series of 'hybrid palimpsests', each revealing the continuity between material and immaterial forms of making. The digital trace did not erase the hand; it reframed it, allowing the analogue return to emerge as a 'ghost image' of the original poster—one that foregrounds erosion, residue, and temporal decline rather than representational fidelity (see **Figure 5**).

From the engraved or relief-made plate to the scanned model, from the laser-cut fragment to the reprinted surface, the work charted a new topography of dialogue—one that binds together the physical residue of the city and the intangible architectures of the screen.

4. A Dialogue of Practices: From Rotella to Jovan Andric

The dialogue between Mimmo Rotella and Jovan Andric—separated by more than half a century and by radically different technologies—reveals how artistic communication evolves through the transformations of its medium. Both artists, in their distinct ways, work with the *trace* as an expressive and communicative force: Rotella through tearing, Andric through design and digital composition. Their practices embody what Rosalind Krauss (1986, p. 170) called the 'indexical sign' in art—the mark that signals presence through absence, a residue of contact that points to what once was.

For Rotella, the act of *décollage* in 1950s Rome was both an aesthetic and political gesture. By stripping circus and cinema posters from city walls, he enacted what Germano Celant (2004, p. 56) described as an 'archaeology of communication': an excavation of the visual sediment of consumer culture. Rotella's works, such as 'Marilyn' (1954) or 'Manifesto lacerato',



Figure 5: Collagraph-based relief matrix derived from the Medrano poster and resulting print detail. The resulting print operates as a ‘ghost’ of the original circus poster, foregrounding trace, erosion, and temporal decline rather than representational fidelity. Photograph and print documentation by the author.

were not paintings but urban palimpsests, revealing the life of the city through its discarded messages. The torn edges and layered surfaces made visible the mechanisms of publicity, decay, and renewal—themes that resonate deeply with the Medrano poster recovered decades later.

In contrast, Jovan Andric, the original designer of the Medrano poster, operates in the digital realm, crafting images intended for mass reproduction and circulation. His posters embody the seamless surfaces of twenty-first-century communication—bright, high-resolution compositions conceived for instant visibility. Yet, once displaced from their intended purpose, these images acquire a different temporality. When Andric’s digital file was shared for this project, the poster crossed from the sphere of distribution into the sphere of transformation: it ceased to be promotional and became relational. The exchange of the .jpeg file between artist and designer thus re-enacted, in digital form, the very logic of *détournement* that animated Rotella’s practice.

Placed in dialogue, these two gestures—Rotella’s tearing and Andric’s sharing—map a trajectory from manual subtraction to digital transmission. Both involve acts of mediation: Rotella’s physical removal exposed the hidden layers beneath; Andric’s digital exchange revealed the unseen infrastructures of communication networks. The hybrid artistic process developed in this project inhabits the interval between the two, translating the historical language of *décollage* into contemporary printmaking and digital fabrication. Here, the *trace* migrates from the torn paper to the scanned matrix, from the wall to the algorithmic surface, without losing its communicative resonance.

This dialogue also extends into the ethics of image circulation. While Rotella’s appropriation of public posters occurred within the anonymity of the street, today’s digital economy is governed by authorship, copyright, and networks of consent. The permission granted by

Andric to use and reinterpret his poster transforms the act of re-creation into a collaborative exchange, suggesting a new kind of digital commons where artistic communication unfolds through reciprocity rather than rupture. The circulation of the image—from wall to archive, from designer's hard drive to artist's hand—becomes a microcosm of the global flow of cultural information in the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, this dialogue between Rotella and Andric situates the project within a continuum of practices that treat communication as a material and relational process. The *décollage* of the post-war city and the hybrid printmaking of the digital era share a common ethos: both seek to render visible the unseen structures of mediation. In bridging these temporal and technological distances, the work reaffirms that every act of making—whether tearing paper or translating pixels—constitutes an attempt to listen to what the image still has to say.

5. Reflection—Communication as Cyclical Flow

The exploration of *hybrid palimpsests* reveals mediation not as a fixed channel of transmission but as a living circuit of transformation. Each translation between material and digital form—each shift from ink to data and back—constitutes an act of communication in itself. Within this cycle, matter speaks through its resistance, its textures, and its imperfections; technology responds by reframing and amplifying those signals. The result is a continuous negotiation in which medium, process, and concept intertwine to generate meaning. The hybrid artwork becomes a site where communication materializes as rhythm rather than message.

This understanding challenges the conventional separation between content and form, image and medium. As Marshall McLuhan (1964, p. 8) famously argued, 'the medium is the message'—yet in this context, the medium is also a method of thinking, a process of making sense through touch and transformation. The analogue–digital dialogue embodied in these works foregrounds re-materialization as an iterative process, a practice of giving form to thought through cycles of inscription and erasure. Each print, scan, and cut enacts a temporal loop, echoing the logic of feedback rather than linear delivery.

The implications of this approach extend beyond studio practice. In design, curatorial, and archival contexts, such cyclical communication reframes how we understand preservation and authorship. A digital file is no longer a static record but a potential matrix for new materializations; an analogue print is not an endpoint but a node in an ongoing network of reinterpretations. Within education, this perspective invites students and researchers to consider artistic production as relational learning, where the encounter with materials and tools generates knowledge through doing (Barrett, 2010, p. 2). As Vaos and Mouriki (2016, p. 33) suggest, art education today must accommodate the fluidity and multiplicity of artistic creation, fostering environments where subjectivity and uncertainty become productive conditions for learning. Correspondingly, Mouriki and Vaos (2009, p. 214) argue that artistic expression can function as both a reflective and transformative process, enabling learners to perceive art not merely as representation but as a form of thought. Within this pedagogical framework, the hybrid palimpsest reinforces the notion of learning as an expressive and interpretive act—one that emerges through active engagement with material and technological processes. The hybrid palimpsest thus becomes a pedagogical metaphor for the entanglement of physical and virtual modes of thinking.

In a broader sense, these reflections point to the cultural politics of materiality in the digital age. As images and artefacts migrate across platforms and temporalities, their communicative power lies in their capacity to survive translation—to persist, adapt, and transform without losing their embodied memory. The practice developed here demonstrates how the reactivation of a single image—the Medrano poster—can expose the cyclical dynamics of

communication that shape contemporary life: from the circulation of media to the renewal of social rituals of visibility and gathering.

Ultimately, the *hybrid palimpsest* offers a way to think about exchange as reciprocity rather than transmission, process rather than product. Its cyclical logic resists closure, insisting that every imprint, digital or analogue, is provisional—open to being remade, reinterpreted, and re-communicated. In this sense, the work gestures toward an expanded understanding of artistic communication: one that is material, performative, and endlessly in motion.

6. Conclusion

In reflecting on this practice, what emerges most clearly is that communication in art is not defined by mastery of a medium but by the encounter between materials, processes, and time. The hybrid palimpsest stands as both a method and a metaphor for this encounter: it gathers traces across methodologies and technologies, not to fuse them into perfection but to let their frictions and correspondences speak. In an age saturated with tools and techniques, the challenge for the artist is no longer to demonstrate virtuosity but to sustain the dialogue between analogue and digital, touch and code, permanence and flux.

This dialogue is where meaning resides. The analogue plate, the laser-cut fragment, and the digital file are not separate entities but successive states within a living process of transformation. Each carries an imprint of the other—the pressure of ink mirrored by the resolution of a scan, the vibration of the hand echoed by the pulse of the laser. These crossings remind us that artistic practice is a form of *thinking-through-making*, a communicative act in which matter and idea evolve together. As Bolter and Grusin (1999, p. 55) observed, every medium ‘remediates’ another, absorbing its gestures and reconfiguring its possibilities. In this sense, the hybrid palimpsest embodies remediation not as replacement but as continuity: a choreography of media in perpetual translation.

From the perspective of *media archaeology*, this continuity can be understood as a layering of temporalities. As Jussi Parikka (2012, p. 15) notes, media are ‘sediments of cultural time’, each carrying the memory of previous technologies. The printmaking plate, the digital interface, and the urban wall all store traces of human gesture. They are archives of movement and communication. To work within this layered field is to participate in the archaeology of the present—to listen to the voices of materials, old and new, as they converse across history (Mattern, 2017, p. 12).

What this project ultimately proposes is a shift of attention: from the finished object to the process of inscription, from the image to the act of tracing. The Medrano poster, in its physical endurance and digital rebirth, exemplifies how images communicate through survival, not stability. Each re-materialization, whether through ink, light, or data, renews the image’s ability to connect across contexts. Communication, then, is not about delivering a message but about maintaining a conversation—between mediums, between times, between makers.

The hybrid palimpsest, as both concept and practice, affirms that in the twenty-first century, artistic communication thrives in intersections: between analogue and digital, memory and projection, preservation and change. It calls for an understanding of art as an ecology of traces—an evolving system where the act of making remains the most profound form of dialogue.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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