

## **Dieter Deventer Time's Traces**

In the antiquity and the middle ages, writing media such as papyrus and parchment were expensive and rare, and consequently they were used multiple times by overwriting the old text. To aid this process, the previous script was scraped away or removed using agents such as citric acid. These are the palimpsests that have yielded such rich results to modern researchers, since they have been able to transport several texts through the ages on a single sheet. Fluorescent photography can be used to make these hidden texts at least partially legible. Canvases and other image carriers were also considered precious raw materials and were either reused after removing the previous painting, or simply painted over.

Many of the objects that Dieter Deventer has found and photographed have been through something similar.

The arrangements shown here may be man-made: Intentional or not, creative, destructive, or simply the product of chance: Weathering, corrosion & other processes of disintegration. And yet for the scale that ranges from creation to decay—how is its hierarchy determined? Looking at the Deventer's idiosyncratic and apparently random motifs, perception is turned on its head: Decay becomes creation, disintegration becomes beauty and aesthetic allure. Time brings disparate sources together which, in the instant of depiction, generate a homogenous effect.

The effects of time on superimposed layers can be reversed by corrosion & other chemical or physical processes if, for instance, they suddenly break through the bottom of a poster. The layers blend together, the relationship between forefront and background is thrown into disarray. We experience a reversal of the arrow of time.

If we assume that disintegration, erosion, decay, corrosion or entropy go hand in hand with discomfort, revulsion and the perception of disorder, this work provokes a singular rearrangement of terms.

It is thought that in the formation of optical impressions, only 20% of the information comes from the retina; the remainder of the resulting optical sensory impression is the product of experiences stored in the brain. Accordingly, vision is primarily a cerebral activity with friendly help from the retina. It is therefore logical that something perceived to be beautiful correlates with a preexisting pattern and fits neatly into our own perceptual order. In other words, the brain's existing visual patterns somehow relate to the chance products of disorder as portrayed by Deventer. Perhaps decay has an ordering effect in that it evens out time and reduces its transit to a level that is present and perceptible. The isolated representation of corroding surfaces displaces possible associations and makes abstract perception possible. Thus, if a rusting container were to be seen in a pastoral setting, we would rightly interpret it to be an indictment, an obstruction to aestheticized perception. If we were continually trying to perceive the world in its totality, our actions would probably be quite restricted. Our ability to suppress information, i.e. the faculty of abstraction, is what gives us our perceptual lifeline, our dialectical multiplicity of perception.

What we perceive to be degeneration and destruction is, for robust and unassuming life forms like bacteria and mosses, a new opportunity to feed and multiply. Our destruction gives birth to new and complex systems; some alive, others not.

The manufacture of an object is, *prima facie*, an act of creation, the creation of order, and yet it necessarily also implies destruction and decay. If, for instance, you were to sum up all of the costs involved in building a ship, including not only the direct manufacturing costs, but also the ecological devastation, the sum would likely be astronomical. The same applies to operating the ship and its eventual scrapping, as evinced by the "iron-eating" shipbreakers of Chittagong. Anthropological production of inanimate objects or living creatures both consumes and destroys. The momentary state of any product or multiple superimposed products and their portrayal is a micromoment in an endless chain of histories and aftermaths.

When people design or manufacture things, we are dealing with a very complex procedure. Whether an object is finished, perfect or completed is only a matter of appearances. All material, living or not, is undergoing a process that, one way or another, ends in destruction and disorder. As soon as Rembrandt had written his *fecit*, the imaginary restorationists, who would become manifest over the course of time, entered into the picture. Art is not eternal. Modern artists have even made conscious use of perishable materials, considering degeneration to be a conceptual component of their artwork. Collectors and museums, who are focused on "eternity," naturally see things differently, resulting in a conflict of objectives that is being played out at the expense of the restorationists.

Regardless of this, not even image data can be maintained forever; it is well known that even modern storage media have expiration dates. Every image, every representation, every centimeter of celluloid, every recording, every data carrier at the very moment of creation begins its journey toward ultimate destruction. Living or inanimate objects on their paths of transformation are depicted at some time or other: Mummified and fixed. The paths taken by objects and their depictions toward gradual dissolution ultimately diverge, yet for an instant they are similar to the point of interchangeability.

In Deventer's photographs, we see an intermediate realm in which time stands still. The presentation of these motifs takes the objects to a level where they can be observed; a level which develops the singular aesthetics of decay and its various stages. The isolated close-up view allows for abstraction out of time both before and after the current observation. We find order in disorder.

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