

**RIGGI, Giovanni**  
***Analysis of a degradation***  
***[Analyse d'une dégradation]***  
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**ANALYSIS OF A DEGRADATION**

The gigantic process of self-advancement begun over the course of centuries by Homo Primigenious, carried on by Erectus, passed on to Sapiens and then to Technologius is oddly related to the support (**Translator's note:** It would appear that the "support" referred to is that which is written on.) of signing and marking, a support which has become steadily more delicate and fragile as the tale to be told became more complex and confused. Right from its birth, the history of support has enabled the adventures, the arms and the armours of men to be transmitted to posterity in a manner which increased their strength and their technology, moving towards a millenary future in different shapes and forms that varied from rough stone to the soft, shining, supple paper on which we are busy writing these reflections.

Thus as a first analysis the study of the "support for signing" is the mirror of civilisation and its expansion in the knowledge of the people; it also suggests today's sudden explosion of the need for communication and - with other reasons - accounts for the outset of a natural decline in quality which has become obvious very recently and has received attentive and alarmed study over the last few years. In line with the succession of outstanding historical events, stone, papyrus, parchment and paper have appeared in a sequence in the general historical development of a continuous and often unpredictable future. The most cruel and bloody events on our journey have often created an urgent need for written communication on the part of either victor or vanquished, whilst religion and magic, love and death, fantasy and poetry have all displaced interest from meditation and given to the constantly increasing numbers of mankind the art of narration and roused in them the pleasure/right/duty of expressing in graffiti: and signs-primitive or highly developed - the most important facts and disturbing feelings of their lives.

Entreaties, ignoble and unworthy political troubles, and wars, wars, above all wars more than any other event have encouraged the discoveries and technologies needed to dominate neighbours and adversaries, whereas culture, science and peace have contributed to the refinement of the finished product, which itself when all is said and done is aimed at the domination and submission of friends and allies. This type of technological process has been

studied historically in all domains of science, and is also common in the case of paper, which today dominates world affairs and often upsets us by its forced intrusion into our intimate and private surroundings. The explosion of the mass media and the bureaucracy, particularly at our latitudes, has educated increasingly more vast strata of population, whilst favouring literacy, and curiosity about it in people at a lower stage of technical development. Today more than ever we read and write.

The need to know, as quickly as possible and by the best means possible, is perhaps the outstanding heritage of the last century: This has left resourceless many people and many governments whose entire budgets have been absorbed - to a proportional amount - according to their possession or non-possession of cellulose or the exhaustive direction of their communications network, an irreplaceable element for man's information and confrontation with the cultural level of modern nations. However, with the continued repetition of situations, and an increased consumption does not mean only a reduction in the unit price, but also a decrease in the quality of finished or standard products. A frenzy for knowledge will not mean only an increase in one's cultural patrimony, but also a sudden replacement of things hardly used - and at the logical end of the process - we must conclude that at a higher rate of consumption means a lower quality, and a lower quality is the index of highly perishable goods. Thus the reduction in unit price, consumption linked to an increasing demand, the need for literacy, the speed and rapid decay of information, the increase in demand for a quality product, are the immediate and obvious causes of the degradation of the printing paper over these last years.

There are also anarchic technologies, certain types of secretly blameworthy productions unimpeachable from the aesthetic point of view but having undeclared defects, under trademarks - often of multinationals - which have for years increased our lack of control and our absence of knowledge of the degradation taking place within the realm of paper: and still air and water, heaven and earth, people and things are covered and filled with toxic residues, powders and liquids with unknown secondary effects, and poisonous fumes from other urgent technologies, and all these have done the job with almost universal agreement but on the sly and so no-one has got to know.

In spite of all we have just said, we still have precious incunabula, Egyptian papyri and engraved tablets which could with simple precautions be a patrimony for us all and will be the same for posterity, but at the same time we have modern texts which are very numerous, polyhedral, polychromatic, polyglot, polytechnic, polydisciplinary which have become our patrimony and ours alone, and not the heritage of our descendants more or less removed in time. The process of degradation recently revealed by laboratory studies on cellulose up to science-fiction limits have shown how much better ancient pulps last than the modern ones, and show us what route we should follow from now on.

Multitudes of people are now coming to grips with the delicate art of writing, but if they wish to leave the large or small harvest of their maturity to succeeding ages, they will have to learn not to give in to the blandishments of reduced prices or miracle technologies and they more than anyone must denounce to the whole world the formulas for the global degradation which is killing us a little more every day.

**Translator's note:** This reads to me like a remarkably incompetent translation from an Italian original: in parts it is almost impossible to sort out what he is about. But it probably doesn't

matter as he has obviously not got any particular point to make, except that cheap paper and pollution are not good things.

**END**