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Conservation Treatment:

A Risk Factor

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Is the conservator
a —best kept—
secret agent of deterioration?

Can we be more honest about risk?

"truth is that which makes a people certain, clear, and strong."

Martin Heidegger

Wall Paintings: irreversible treatment processes

CLEANING *selective* removal of material

UNCOVERING *selective* removal of material

AQUEOUS TREATMENTS, e.g. poulticing

FIXING

CONSOLIDATION

GROUTING

DETACHMENT

10 Agents of Deterioration (Negative Risk)

1. Physical Forces
2. Thieves and Vandals
3. Fire
4. Water
5. Pests
6. Pollutants
7. Light, Ultraviolet and Infrared
8. Incorrect Temperature
9. Incorrect Relative Humidity
10. Dissociation

Stefan Michalski 1987: 1994
Robert Waller 1994

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Preventive approach

"first, do no harm"

[Primum non nocere]

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Where is conservation treatment in all of this?

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Preventive conservation

Where is conservation treatment in all of this?

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Two roles for conservators:

Preventive conservation

Remedial conservation

“Deterioration” Agents

…five stages:

1 avoid sources of the agent

2 detect the agent

3 block the agent

4 respond to the agent

Preventive

5 recover from the agent

Remedial

Michalski 1990:589

Agent 11: the potential for gain and or loss

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Detecting the 11th Agent

CLEANING

UNCOVERING

AQUEOUS TREATMENTS

FIXING

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Deterioration Agents Role of conservator and treatment

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Conservator =

An agent who *tries* to do good!

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Treatment = Risk

= Opportunity

NECESSARY RISK in **treatment processes**

Dualism:

Negative **Risk**

Positive **Risk**

two *necessary* aspects of the treatment process

Two *necessary* aspects of the treatment process

Negative

For example: Irreversible information loss or treatment failure

Positive

For example: added value(s) like new or enhanced information (understanding), function, stabilisation

Value Shaping Agents

1. Physical Forces
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3. Fire
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10. Dissociation
11. Conservation

The agents are interrelated : complex interaction!

Role of conservator and treatment *4 Aristotelian Causes*

1. material change (addition, subtraction, alteration)

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… a work of art has something to say and seeks to share its truth in dialogue

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Feller 1994: “LIFETIMES” of objects and added materials

what should be the limit of acceptable lifetime and acceptable decline in properties for conservation-quality materials to be used in long-term contact with artifacts? **The subject remains to be addressed.**

Feller 1994:11 *Accelerated aging : photochemical and thermal aspects*

Class	Classification	Intended useful lifetime	Approximate equivalent standard of photochemical stability
T	Materials in temporary contact	Less than 6 months?	–
C	Unstable or fugitive	Less than 20 years	BS1006 class 3 or less
B	Intermediate	(20–100 years)	(3 to 6)
A	Excellent	(A2?) greater than 100 years	Greater than BS1006
		(A1?) greater than 500 years	?

Table 1.1. Standards of Intended Use and Photochemical Stability for Materials in Conservation (Feller 1975).

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Treatments

Royal Gallery, Palace of Westminster, England

WATERGLASS WALL PAINTINGS: = *Inorganic Binder (Potassium Silicate)*

1861-65 (Painted)

1874	*subtractive*	Dirt removal	[Cleaning mechanical
1875	*additive*		Washing with water]
1878			
1888			
1894			
1897	*subtractive*	Dirt removal	[Cleaning mechanical & aqueous]
	additive	Wax & Varnish?	[Consolidants = organics]
1938	*subtractive*	Dirt removal	[Cleaning mechanical & aqueous]
	additive	Wax	[Consolidant = organic]
1963	*subtractive*	Wax removal	[Cleaning solvent-based]

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„Cleaning“ with light – experimentation with colour temperature (The Royal Gallery, Palace of Westminster)

„The meetingof Wellington and Blucher after the Battle of Waterloo“ - Beleuchtungsreihe bei wechselnden Lichtfarben

2700 Kelvin | 3500 Kelvin | 4000 Kelvin | 5000 Kelvin | 6500 Kelvin

„The Death of Nelson“ - Beleuchtungsreihe bei wechselnden Lichtfarben

2700 Kelvin | 3500 Kelvin | 4000 Kelvin | 5000 Kelvin | 6500 Kelvin

LIGHT PROJECTION

Royal Gallery, Palace of Westminster, England

„Cleaning“ with light – experimentation with colour temperature

Detail:
Ambient lighting in the Royal Gallery

Detail:
Lighting at 6800 Kelvin

Needed:

1. Change thinking away from isolated Deterioration Agents to interrelated Value-Shaping Agents

2. Explicit acknowledgement of risks posed by treatments and integration of dual roles (preventive – remedial) within risk management

3. Consider risk ratings for generic treatments (risk benefit)

4. More evidence–based research into treatment outcomes

5. New and better scientific/humanistic tools to help our decision-making

6. Recognition of creativity in conservation = decision making

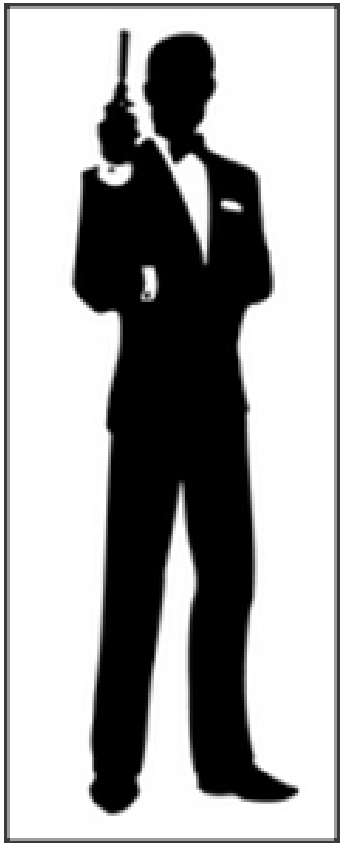
Getting closer to the truth: conservator = value-shaper

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"

– that is all Ye know on earth,

and all ye need to know.

John Keats (1819), Ode on a Grecian Urn



Value-shaper

The most thought-provoking thing
in our thought-provoking time
is that we are still not thinking.

Martin Heidegger

Was heisst Denken? (1951–1952)
Das Bedenklichste in unserer bedenklichen Zeit ist, dass wir noch nicht denken.