GEISSLER & SANN – Knowledge Comes with Death's Release 1 July – 2 September 2017

In Beate Geissler's and Oliver Sann's work, poetry emerges from a speculative landscape of cracked computer screens. Typically, we associate cracks with junk. But the broken screens by Geissler and Sann might in fact raise many more issues than the computers did when they were "alive". Cracks can be a deep-rooted source of information and inspiration if one knows how to read them.

Cracks are worrisome. Consider a house that shows the damage of time or structural weakness through the intermediation of cracks. Cracks have their own logic. They appear in response to mechanical conflicts, providing resolution by relaxing tensions. They follow the shortest path possible, the path that demands the bare minimum of energy. This can generate beautiful patterns, like that of the hexagon lattices that typically appear in dry mud or on bee hives.

When mechanical stress is highly directional, cracks form more or less straight lines. Materials can also influence the way cracks form. This is especially so if a material is anisotropic, that is if its structure is much stronger in one direction than the other. Cracks respond to the particular structural and material histories of a given object. Here, one may view Geissler's and Sann's cracked screens as reflections of past histories, from the construction of the screens to the images they transmitted and the noises they made.

There is an inherent beauty in cracks because they genuinely express a form of fragility. Cracks can be warnings, but they can also be the guiding lines for growth: In the early 20th century, Sir Thomas D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson argues in his influential book «On Growth and Form» (1917) that all living things are built to resist mechanical stress. In fact, current research in cell biology, from neuron trajectories to tissue invagination in developing embryos, seem to confirm Thompson's claim.

Ultimately, cracks are the markers of our own weaknesses. But as these lessons from physics and biology show, we can learn a lot from our fragility and discover the beauty of imperfection that resides in the frail balance between tension and resistance. Such beauty is echoed by the Japanese art of Kintsugi, wherein the history of a broken object is not hidden but instead revealed and transcended by deliberately visible golden joints. In their work, Beate Geissler and Olivier Sann invent their own Kintsugi. They build on their own history of computer screens in stock exchange offices, and harness the many implications of these machines. In certain ways, they give back an organic nature to these technologically advanced products, identifying a form of life in the ashes of a tormented and largely disconnected industry.

Olivier Hamant, 2017

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