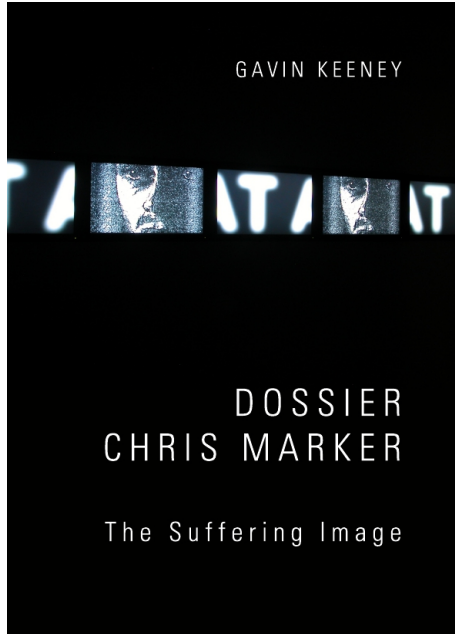


AGENCE 'X'

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Gavin Keeney, *Dossier Chris Marker: The Suffering Image* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) – Cloth (with dust cover), 268 pages – ISBN (10): 1-4438-4182-X – ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4182-5

Dossier Chris Marker is a study of a late-modern chiasmus, impersonal-personal agency, as it comes to expression in the works of French artist and filmmaker Chris Marker as the dynamic interplay of political and subjective agency. As chiasmus, the complementary halves of this often-apocalyptic *dynamis* (a semi-catastrophic, temporal or historical force-field) also – arguably – secretly agree to meet, *through the work of art*, in the futural. Consistent with the classical figure of *concordia discors*, these irreducible warring aspects of life experience are, in fact, resolved in an atemporal and ahistorical moment that inhabits the work of art from its inception. This redemptive aspect in art is also the ultimate gesture of the artwork as “mask” or “screen” for forces that reside beyond the frame of the image or work, as its proverbial Other, or *within* the frame, as other to that Other. A topological “knot,” or ontological “problem,” it is this very conflict that animates all of Marker’s extensive works – filmic and otherwise.

In the case of Chris Marker, this age-old or immemorial “thing-in-itself” (the artwork *as* image of world-chiasmus) finds its foremost or penultimate formation in his very-still photography – the singular images that are also the building blocks for his renowned ciné-essays. Not without irony, this same austere, reductive force of the still image (as proscription) also inhabits the more complex, synthetic works (or montages) that he has formulated and presented “dramatically,” here and there, through the often-sketchy apparatuses of his new-media experiments, as of the late 1980s. Ultimately, this world-image as chiasmus was always present within his earliest literary projects, from the 1940s forward – most especially in books and essays, *with* or *without* actual images.

Marker’s “return” to photography (to exhibiting still photography in galleries), in the late 2000s, is in many ways a return to the singular object of the artist’s desire; the image in/for itself, while that image – endlessly troubled or interrogated for decades – continues to speak “in tongues” anyway, often against, or oblivious to, the voice of the author/artist/narrator.

Despite the complications of the so-called post-modern condition (its nihilist-relativist bias), and its similar, mostly circular, concerns with the image and/or media, Marker’s work is *not* post-modern. In fact, when tested against immemorial cultural epiphenomena, that work withstands all attempts at categorization and/or art-historical analysis proper. It remains unassimilable to the post-modern cause ... What emerges, upon closer examination, and through rigorous re-contextualization, is the prescient force of Marker’s works toward that futural state buried in art that is also “theological,” versus atheological, and heedlessly anterior to cultural politics per se. Combined with the modernist and classical impulse toward the utopian, this work nonetheless stands astride the two currents that comprise the chiasmus of conceptual thought itself – world and not-world. As such, Marker is – after all – a High Romantic Christian Marxist. The “Christic” aspect is rightly well-hidden, but emerges when the eschatological versus historical center of his work is exposed (the existential-metaphysical fuse), and when his early years are examined in light of his latter and/or *final* years. Marker’s apocalypse is writ large in the diverse works that *cross* decades, and it is a redemptive, world-shattering formation of art *as pleroma*.

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