AGENCE ‘X’

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PRÉCIS

Knowledge, Spirit, Law: Book I, Radical Scholarship, published in modified open-access form by Punctum Books, Brooklyn, New York, in association with the Center for Transformative Media, Parsons/The New School, New York, New York, launches a three-volume “anthology” series that will survey forms of contemporary scholarship and issues related to Intellectual Property Rights in the age of Cognitive Capital. The primary focus of the critical project is the Moral Rights of Authors, foremost as scholarship and artistic production confronts the post-digital age, and as quantitative and pseudo-scientific operations overtake both conventional and avant-garde forms of humanistic research.

The six essays contained within Book One function as a preliminary summary for an extended “phenomenology of scholarship” based in creative and hybrid forms of publication, presentation, and dissemination, plus the editioning of works of scholarship as forms of art, and works of art as forms of scholarship. Begun in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in August 2014, the book concludes with an up-to-date summary (“Publishing Advisory”) for meeting, exceeding, and subverting the standards of present-day scholarship in the Arts and Humanities. The philosophical and pragmatic project privileges a “down-market” strategy for scholarship (albeit, toward moving “upstream”) – in part by renouncing digital rights (formulated in “Franciscan” mode as “the right to have no digital rights”).

Cover image – James Joyce Café, Trieste, Italy, 2014

FROM THE PREFACE

Knowledge, Spirit, Law – as project – is a summary and analysis of current and past textual and visual practices and their relationship to parallel arts and discourses where greater risks may be taken, inclusive of categorically “useless” high-discursive disciplines such as theology and philosophy, plus consideration of methodologies and venues for the dissemination of works critical of, or at odds with, both the neo-avantgarde culture industry (Benjamin H.D. Buchloh’s term, updating Theodor W. Adorno) and intellectual orthodoxy in neo-liberal humanistic studies.

The eleven combined essays of Book I, Radical Scholarship (2015) and Book II, The Anti-capitalist Sublime (2016) will cover topics and circle themes related to the problems and crises specific to neo-liberal academia and the
multiple arts, while proposing creative paths around various obstructions. The obstructions include: metrics-obsessed academia; circular and incestuous peer review; digitalization of research as stalking horse for text- and data-mining; and violation by global corporate fiat of Intellectual Property Rights, inclusive of the moral rights of authors and artists. Book III, The Moral Rights of Authors (2017) will revisit the Early Modern origins for Intellectual Property through an examination of the Venetian Renaissance and the polymathic or confraternal communities active at the time when the printed book forever altered practices associated with cultural production proper.

The overarching theme of the book series is the necessity for the re-universalization of knowledge, arguably underway regardless of the dramatic increase in pseudo-empirical studies in present-day academia and still-born aesthetic frisson in the visual arts, plus the penchant for so-called Digital Humanities in concert with aspects of Cognitive Capitalism, foremost Big Data (Mass Digitalization).

The overall project is to be perpetually curated or anthologized via new forms of networking, dissemination, and revision. Intended to be developed in three consecutive volumes, as above, the textual version of the project will serve as a moving and/or shifting critique of new forms of expression in humanistic studies. As anthology, it will be released in variable forms and revised incessantly to keep pace with the hoped-for revolution in thought always already just over the horizon (that is, a revolution systemically deferred by Capital).

BOOK ONE – TABLE OF CONTENTS / SUMMARIES

PREFACE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES ON THE EDITION

INTRODUCTION

Radical Scholarship – A summary of the operative precepts of Knowledge, Spirit, Law and justification for its strident and, at times, judgmental forms of inquiry into present-day humanistic studies. An explication of the latent hybrid formulations of the overall study, given the time frame of the study and its attempt to secure for the future anomalous means of new high scholarship – i.e., scholarship as work of art, and art work as form of scholarship. Establishes the minimal resources or justification for situating a return to pre-modern forms of exegesis in combination or tension with modern, post-modern, and so-called contemporary forms. This justification for occasional relapses to pre-modern forms of thought includes the perennial appearance and disappearance of Gnosticism, as applied to the arts and critical studies, plus a preliminary discussion of pre-conscious states that inform speculative practice.

ESSAYS

1/ Re-universalizing Knowledge – Forms of scholarship, historical and contemporary, that address the necessity of the speculative and non-utilitarian spirit of the Humanities. The primary address for the issues of representation and critique in scholarship, while nominally discursive, betrays nonetheless traces of unresolved or metaphysical “aesthetic” concerns that may be considered the irreducible problem of Modernity proper. A discussion of the discord present in contemporary artistic and scholarly disciplines and the post-modern deferral or abolition of the paradigmic in favor of the syntagmatic. While the speculative turn within Western, post-modern discursive systems underwent a shift with the so-called theological turn of the late twentieth century, the subsequent post-critical turn of the early twenty-first century has placed in question any and all forms of knowledge that cannot be relativized, foremost those that have hidden or repressed mystical content.

2/ Estranged Dawns – A meta-critique of the operative principles in present-day cultural studies assembled under the rubric Visual Culture and an examination of the antidote/antithesis; that is to say, invisible verbal cultures. Considers landscape as it comes to reside in music and the visual arts as middle ground for the meeting of two worlds and the “intercalary marks” given to the same. The spurious claim of an incipient illiteracy as justification for visual culture produces, ineluctably, the justification for the justification – a circularity that is fully consistent with globalizing tendencies within mediatic cultural production as commercium. A consideration of what constitutes revolutions of Spirit (versus materialist-historical revolutions) via present-day intimations of an estranged, post-capitalist dawn.
3/ The Film-essay – An evaluation of arguments for/against cinema and its truth-telling apparatuses (for example, the visual image plus its relation to narrativity), with special attention paid to the conflicting positions assumed by figures such as Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, Tacita Dean et al. in relation to this complex. An evocation of themes present in cultural criticism yet eclipsed by the rationalist and neo-positivist bias of the same, inclusive of a brief detour into justifications for ambient music as an instantiation of sublimity. A discussion of Godard’s *Film Socialisme and Histoire(s) du cinéma* apropos of the cyclical redemption of cinema and the intellectual resources utilized toward the film-essay, plus a “return” to Chris Marker via his late comments on the impending death of cinema, c.2000.

4/ Film Mysticism and “The Haunted Wood” – A brief discussion of Chris Marker’s role as a type of “medium” for the more radical premises of cinema and his evocation of pre-conscious and mnemonic aspects of nemeses in *Level Five* (1996), plus aspects of “Zapping Zone” (1990), that suggest he transferred many of his concerns for cinema to multimedia installations, which then permitted the exaggeration of effects via New Media of mesmeric elements native to photography and cinema as forms of speculative discourse.

5/ Circular Discourses – A “commentary” on the production of intentional and unintentional commentaries in contemporary and modern historiography and the circularity of the same as means for avoiding closure and/or the role of the same in the production of renascent ideology and hegemony. The return of the commentary, in turn, produces the possibility of a new scholasticism, one of several classic venues through which to undermine normative discursive conventions. The possibility of new hybrid forms of conducting research via epistolary and post-rational composition, plus the privileging of the tautological as end to dialectics. A brief description of controversies surrounding Jonathan Israel’s recent trilogy on the Enlightenment, as indicative of recurring arguments in the Humanities as to unitary versus disparate historical phenomenon, and an examination of the rhetorical and ahistorical flourishes associated with the radical Zapatista movement in Mexico, via pronouncements by Subcomandante Marcos that signal a literary and imaginative versus strictly political praxis at the heart of the insurgency.

6/ Verb Tenses and Time-senses – An evocation of the time-less aspects (immemorial or universal antecedents/precepts) of scholarship and artistic production through a consideration of explicit and implicit verb tenses present or applied retrospectively to works through critical analysis. A type of grammatological undertaking, criticism in the modality of tenses suggests that atemporality is the secret reserve for high-artistic and high-scholastic works, an embodied presentiment that flies in the face of historical studies per se. This presentiment also surfaces in the multiple arts in the mysteries of inspired intersubjective states per Emmanuel Levinas, but also vis-à-vis the “old ways” present in all mnemonic arts (literary and otherwise). A statement of principles regarding the moral and ethical aspects of humanistic studies that function beyond authorized venues and against creeping determinist strictures (for example, political ideology and state religion) and guarded disciplines (for example, closed intellectual and artistic networks).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Agence ‘X’ Publishing Advisory
Appendix B: Perpetual Petition for the Right of the Author to Have No Digital Rights
Appendix C: Symptom “A”: The End

REFERENCES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gavin Keeney is an editor, writer, and critic. His most recent books include: *Dossier Chris Marker: The Suffering Image* (2012); and *Not-I/Thou: The Other Subject of Art and Architecture* (2014). He has taught, lectured, and served as visiting critic in architecture schools in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Australia, and is the Creative Director of Agence ‘X’, an artists’, architects’, and authors’ re-representation bureau founded in New York, New York, in October 2007. Recent research via PhD studies in Architecture (thesis conducted “sur travaux” in Australia and Europe) concerned theories of visual and subjective agency in Art and Architecture. The PhD was fully funded by an Australian Government International Postgraduate Research Scholarship. More recently he has lectured on academic intellectual property rights and publication strategies at the University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia, under the auspices of the US Department of State’s Fulbright Specialist Program, in association with the Faculty of Architecture and Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and with support from the Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory, Ljubljana.

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