



Per Se • Work in Progress

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In defending themselves against the ever-more aggressive encroachments of utilitarian, market-oriented, skills-based demands for cost-effective education and research, the humanities often fall back upon a claim for the intrinsic worth of some scholarly pursuits: forms of academic inquiry that are per se valuable and need no justification beyond themselves. The close reading of a poem, the detailed annotation of an ancient manuscript, the philosophical parsing of a concept, are said to be valuable per se, in and for themselves.

Such argument for such intrinsic value may resemble those of the ecologist who defends an area of 'old growth forest', perhaps even a single tree, of the urban heritage expert who speaks out for the preservation of a listed building, or of the curator lovingly caring for a single rare artefact. But none of these comparisons really has any weight against the imperious demands of the monetarized return-on-investment model of knowledge because effectively they both

operate with the same logic: that of the isolated, reified commodity, cut loose of its history of production and its environment of use-value. Intrinsic value is the value of capitalist mobility and exchangeability. Per se is a moneyed myth. In positing the quality of 'in itself', or of intrinsic 'value', we in fact invest in matter or the object under consideration qualities beyond itself. The thing-in-itself is given a quiddity that it doesn't necessarily possess, but we believe it does or should or might possess. Per se is a ruse, as it value adds, a capitalist ploy.

This investment in fact betrays the truth behind the façade of per se: the only real value is extrinsic. Real value, use-value within a fabric of practices and polyvalences, comes from the manner in which everything is related to something else, is networked with its environment, indeed, 'in itself' already constitutes a myriad of complex networks.

If the ubiquitous logic of per se seeks to turn everything into an isolated object of avarice, this book responds by parsing per se into its already multiple elements. Per se, it transpires, is always already a community, a bundle of relations, a matrix—a place with its own geography and well-trod pathways. Responding to the reification of the world, this work in progress explores the ramifications of place and its peopling as an antidote for our grim times of geocide.

