



Showing Off!: A Philosophy of Image

Jorella Andrews

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Drawing on art, media, and phenomenological sources, *Showing Off!: A Philosophy of Image* challenges much recent thought by proposing a fundamentally positive relationship between visibility and the ethical. In philosophy, cultural studies and art, relationships between visibility and the ethical are usually theorized in negative terms, according to the dyadic logics of seeing on the one hand, and being seen, on the other. Here, agency and power are assumed to operate either on the side of those who see, or on the side of those who control the means by which people and things enter into visibility. To be seen, by contrast - when it occurs outside of those parameters of control- is to be at a disadvantage; hence, for instance, contemporary theorist Peggy Phelan's rejection of the idea, central to activist practices of the 1970's and 80's, that projects of political emancipation must be intertwined with, and are dependent on, processes of 'making oneself visible'. Acknowledgment of the vulnerability of visibility also underlies the realities of life lived within increasingly pervasive systems of imposed and self-imposed surveillance, and apparently confident public performances of visual self display.

Showing Off!: A Philosophy of Image is written against the backdrop of these phenomena, positions and concerns, but asks what happens to our debates about visibility when a third term, that of 'self-showing', is brought into play. Indeed, it proposes a fundamentally positive relationship between visibility and the ethical, one primarily rooted not in acts of open and non-oppressive seeing or spectating, as might be expected, but rather in our capacity to inhabit both the risks and the possibilities of our own visible being. In other words, this book maintains that the proper site of generosity and agency within any visual encounter is located not on the side of sight, but on that of self-showing - or showing off!

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