



Ethics of Visuality, The: Levinas and the Contemporary Gaze (International Library of Contemporary Philosophy)

Hagi Kenaan

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Our world is saturated with images. Images multiply around us, having reached the status of essentially reproducible commodities. Overwhelmed by this proliferation of visual stimuli, our gaze becomes increasingly bored and distracted. Do we ever really read and engage with images? Can they ever provide the sense of meaningfulness we crave?

French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas confronted and subverted these questions. A superficial reading of his works might indicate an ambivalence if not an out-and-out hostility towards the world of images; he objected to the medium's finite, flat character and, more precisely, to its incapacity to convey meaning at all. Yet an enigmatic statement: "Ethics are optics" recurred throughout his work. Hagi Kenaan takes this mysterious idea as the starting point for a strikingly original philosophical argument on the place of visuality in Levinas's ethics. The Ethics of Visuality looks at the key concepts of Levinas's work and articulates his vision of 'Otherness' together with the visual tropes of the Human Face as symbolic of alterity and transcendence.

Where other critical approaches have largely undermined Levinas's ambivalence towards the visual, The Ethics of Visuality uncovers the relevance of Levinas's bias against the visual, and makes place for a philosophy of the importance of the human face to ethical living the contemporary world.

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