



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

Hagi Kenaan

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Our world is saturated with images. 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 a wholesale critique of the visual, whose mode of signification remains, for him, objectified, finite and flat. Yet an enigmatic statement – 'Ethics is an 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' ethics. *The Ethics of Visuality* analyses Levinas' philosophy of the human face in order to show how his vision of 'Otherness'(alterity and transcendence) can open up for us a new and surprising kind of optics that is so needed for an ethical living in the contemporary world.

Where other critical approaches have largely undermined Levinas' ambivalence towards the visual, *The Ethics of Visuality* uncovers the relevance of Levinas' bias against the visual to developing a radical philosophy/theory of visual meaning in which the aesthetic is always already intertwined with the ethical.

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