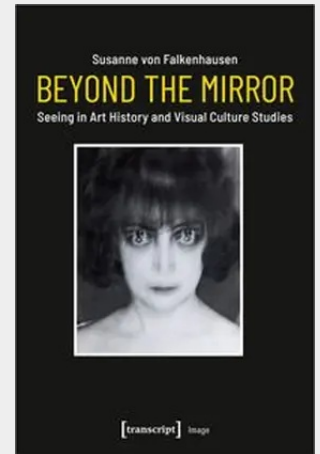


Beyond the Mirror

Seeing in Art History and Visual Culture Studies

Since the late 1980s visibility has become a currency of social recognition, and a political issue. It also brought forth a new discipline, visual culture studies, and a hotly contested debate unfolded between art history and visual culture studies over the interpretation of visual culture, whose impact can still be felt today. In this first comparative study Susanne von Falkenhausen reveals the concepts of seeing as scholarly act that underwrite these competing approaches to visibility and society, along with the agendas of identity politics that motivate them. In close readings of key texts spanning from the early 20th century to the present the author crosses expertly between American, German, and British versions of art history, cultural studies, aesthetics, and film studies.

1. Why did You choose this topic? Teaching art history since the 1990s I aimed for a dialogue with the new (in-)discipline visual culture studies in order to find answers to questions of identity politics, and to integrate them into the methodologies of my discipline. I found that visibility as a key resource in identity politics poses more problems than answers and decided to look deeper into the basic operation of these two disciplines that have the visual as their field of study: seeing as a scholarly act of interpretation. 2. What new perspectives does your book offer? My comparative focus on seeing as the basic act of scholarly practice in art history and visual culture studies is new, but also the results of my close readings of canonical texts: the differences between the two disciplines in seeing their objects of investigation, my critique of narcissistic ways of seeing the ›Other‹, and the question of an ethics of seeing coming to terms with problems of identification and objectivity. All of them are linked with the agenda of identity politics. 3. What makes your topic relevant for current research debates? Identity politics have reached a new degree of radicalization, sometimes with disturbing results like the demand for censorship, the prevalence of moral demands over dialogue, or even violence. Research in the visual field is deeply related to this agenda. This relationship must be laid open and discussed. My book is aimed at surpassing disciplinary border patrols and contributing to a debate about the relation between disciplinary approaches and political agendas. 4. Choose one person you would like to discuss your book with! Donna Haraway. 5. Your book summary in one sentence: How do art historians and visual culture scholars see their objects of study, and how does this relate to the political agenda of identity politics?



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