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by Show-n-tell

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*Reviewed by Andrea Dahlberg*

andrea.dahlberg@bakernet.com

"Show-n-tell" is the pseudonym used by an artist based in Boston when she participated in an online adult video community. Her involvement came about by accident when she purchased software and a camera to communicate with a friend abroad. But soon the friend was forgotten and Show-n-tell was using the internet in ways she had not foreseen. Show-n-tell documented her online adventures, and in this book she traces her increasing fascination with and engagement in a community she encountered by chance. In many respects the themes of her work are familiar to us through the work of well-established artists such as Lynne Hershman. Through the distancing medium of the internet Show-n-tell encounters new sexual worlds and individuals she would be unlikely to meet in her ordinary life as a married Turkish American artist and teacher. The new technology draws her into unforeseen encounters. She begins to construct new identities, and she comes to understand herself differently. Although many of the ideas raised by this work are familiar - the construction of identity through technology, the role of the internet and its visual culture in shaping sexual desire, voyeurism, defining and re-defining moral problems created by a new technology which can so powerfully transcend traditional parameters of time and space - this work is an engaging, honest and human study of one person's evolving encounter with all these issues.

Show-n-tell uses screen shots taken in chat rooms, sometime enlarging them so much that they no longer convey specific people or objects. These pixellated images disguise individual identities but also suggest that the themes about sexuality and identity are larger and more universal than just the particular individuals in a chat room at one time. She also reproduces short dialogues and excerpts from her own diary of her experience. Some of the most interesting aspects of the work are those which describe what is unique to the internet - the way a body can be visually segmented by a webcam and the resulting collage reframed as an imaginary whole by viewers, how a webcam is experienced as a pair of eyes and the keyboard a voice, the way the computer itself is eroticised, how online identities differ from other identities a person has and how this mediated form of interaction effects a person's face to face relationships.

This book will be relevant to anyone interested in gender, sexuality and especially the construction of gender and identities through internet technology. But it stands as an art work in its own right. "Show-n-tell" is actually a metaphor for this form of artistic practice.