



# Showing Off: The Geltung Hypothesis

*Philip L. Wagner*

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Hardly a place exists on earth that has not been shaped in some way by human beings. Every day we modify and even sweep away natural landscapes as we build places to live and work. But *why* we react and interact as social beings intent on exercising ecological dominance poses an endlessly compelling puzzle for everyone from novelists to geographers.

In *Showing Off*, distinguished geographer Philip L. Wagner offers a persuasive hypothesis. Drawing on a lifetime of inquiry, travel, and teaching, he asserts that the strive for Geltung—personal standing, recognition, acceptance, esteem, and influence—shapes all of our interactions and defines the unique social character of human beings.

Wagner applies the Geltung hypothesis to a wide range of human activities from falling in love and spreading gossip to buying goods and making war. His examples demonstrate how communication and display—"showing off"—impel geographic change, as they reveal how and why people with the most Geltung tend to occupy the most desirable places.

This broad vision draws insights from many fields. A major contribution to cultural geography, the book also sheds new light on individual psychology and psychopathology and suggests new themes for cognitive science and even philosophy. Sure to stir lively debate in many circles, it will be provocative reading for everyone fascinated by the continuum between people and places.

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