

UNITED WISDOM

Being visible without an obligation to be liked

The Person and the Inner World

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

I-18-N02 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Being visible without an obligation to be liked

Epigraph

> *“experiments of living”*

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter III, p.105 of digital edition Gutenberg34901. A brief fragment about varied ways of living, not a promise that every experiment will succeed.

What this article is about

At a small library event, Pavel shows his photographs for the first time. Some people come close, some walk past, and one visitor asks at length about a picture of a staircase. Someone else finds the photographs too gloomy. Pavel came to share his work, but already catches himself wanting to explain immediately to everyone why it deserves attention. It is as though appearing before people requires an obligation to leave everyone with a good impression.

Visibility makes us available to other people's perception. That perception does not become a result we can control. We can choose the work, words, clothes, place and degree of openness; we cannot obtain everyone's prior agreement with what they will see. This article considers the difference between participation, responsibility for our actions and the requirement to be liked.

We will not treat indifference to others' opinions as a sign of maturity. Feedback may be needed, and an unpleasant assessment may be accurate in a particular respect. The question is different: what are you prepared to present, whose response actually concerns this undertaking, and which response need not become permission to continue? The scenes are hypothetical; practical questions are editorial suggestions and do not describe a tested therapy.

I. Visibility has an object and limits

At the library event, what is visible is not the whole of Pavel, but particular work in a particular form. Visitors see twelve photographs, short captions and someone willing to answer questions. They do not know the entire history of his relationship with the city, the circumstances of taking the pictures or his other activities. This is the encounter's limited scope, rather than a deficiency. If everyone must understand his entire personality correctly, even a small showing becomes an impossible assignment. An available action needs to retain an available object.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Pavel can decide beforehand what he is exhibiting. Perhaps he is interested in empty places between evening encounters: staircases, stops and closed doors. That subject lets him select pictures and captions. It does not oblige him to tell the audience which feelings accompanied every day of photography. If a personal story helps explain one image and he wants to share it, it can enter the conversation. But attention to a picture does not automatically entitle a viewer to a detailed explanation of the photographer's private life.

Visibility can have different scopes. Reading one text to friends, proposing a work idea, choosing bright clothes for a celebration and publishing a large project are different actions. They open different parts of experience to different people. Between complete silence and complete publicity, many intermediate forms exist. You can choose one without promising further expansion. A small appearance is not a contract for permanent availability, regular disclosure or an obligation to explain every subsequent absence.

A limit can concern time too. Pavel is willing to discuss photographs this evening and return to ordinary work tomorrow. He need not immediately turn the attention into a channel, a programme of meetings or a new profession. If he wishes to continue, that will be a separate decision. Such a limit preserves the accuracy of the initial act: today he is showing pictures. Visitors' interest should not quietly become an obligation to build his entire life around what happened to become noticeable to others this particular evening.

Before assessing the impression, it helps to establish your object: what am I showing, to whom, in which form and up to what limit? This question does not remove nervousness. It gives it a scale. You can be anxious about twelve photographs without turning the exhibition into an examination of your right to have your own view. If one visitor becomes interested in a staircase, that is already a specific encounter with a specific work. It need not testify to universal recognition to matter to both participants.

II. An unfamiliar choice need not first gain a majority

At the next meeting, Pavel is advised to add more familiar city views: those photographs are easier to understand and sell. The proposal may be useful if his current task really is selling to a particular audience. But it does not become the only possible basis for selecting work. What will help sales and what do I want to show are different questions. Both are legitimate; each needs its own answer. The arrival of a commercial criterion does not cancel the exhibition's original subject.

In Chapter III of *On Liberty*, Mill defends diversity in individual ways of living, qualifying it by the limit of harm to others. This is a historical normative argument, not modern audience research. It promises neither approval, success nor psychological invulnerability. His reasoning lets us ask about difference without requiring a prior majority of supporters.

In our scene, this does not mean that Pavel must remain unintelligible. He can rewrite a caption, change the order or remove a weak image. These actions refine the showing. They do not necessarily turn it into an attempt to earn viewers' permission for the choice of subject itself. If the author retains an interest in empty places, he can seek a more accurate form for that interest. Not every suggestion about a familiar subject answers the question of how to express an unfamiliar subject already chosen.

Sometimes a majority is simply irrelevant to the appropriate scale. A text for a small professional group may not interest relatives. Music for a particular listener need not appeal to everyone in a group chat. This proves neither the author's superiority nor everyone else's ignorance. An encounter has an addressee. When that addressee is chosen honestly, limited interest does not automatically look like failure. It is more useful to ask whether contact occurred with those for whom the proposal was made and how clear its conditions were.

However, unfamiliarity does not by itself make a work good. You can depart from a common pattern and still make an error, create an awkward form or fail to fulfil a promise. The right to choose therefore does not cancel examination of the result. Pavel can keep his subject and acknowledge that the exhibition's lighting prevents people from seeing it. He need not abandon difference altogether. He can separate the subject from the quality of its presentation and correct what actually concerns the undertaking.

III. Being liked and fulfilling a promise are different results

If Pavel announced an evening of photography discussion, visitors can expect the pictures to be available, the starting time known and the conversation related to the announced subject. These are specific promises. If he arrives late, has not prepared the display and demands admiration instead of answering, criticism concerns his actions. Here the right not to be liked offers no escape from responsibility. Personal taste does not release him from the conditions of an encounter to which others were invited and for which they set aside time.

But promising to show work is not promising to evoke a particular feeling. One viewer may see calm in an empty staircase, another boredom, and a third an unpleasant memory. If the image is presented honestly, these differences do not necessarily mean that someone is mistaken. An impression arises in a viewer with their own history and interest. An author can listen, clarify the intention and dispute an interpretation. Yet an identical impression in everyone cannot be placed on a list of promises they can actually fulfil in advance.

This distinction matters outside art too. Someone proposing a work project answers for calculations, deadlines and clarity of argument. They cannot promise colleagues that the new idea will immediately appeal. A guest choosing an unusual outfit considers the agreed format of the event. They need not ensure identical taste in everyone present. The object of

responsibility changes between situations, but it can be named. A negative reaction can then be examined for content, rather than becoming one verdict on the person's entire appearance.

It helps to ask: what exactly did I promise, what did I actually do, and what did I want in response? Disappointment sometimes concerns an unspoken expectation. Pavel hoped a close friend would appreciate the series first, but the friend helped with organisation all evening and never found time to look. That can be unpleasant. However, no promise of immediate attention existed until it was discussed. Noticing the distinction lets the author ask for separate conversation time instead of accusing someone of breaching an agreement that did not exist.

Conversely, not every expectation should become the expecting person's mistake. If the organiser promised to introduce the author but forgot, that is actual non-performance. If a friend agreed to provide feedback and disappeared without an answer, the arrangement needs clarification. The distinction serves both sides. It avoids demanding an impossible impression while preserving entirely possible responsibility for words, deadlines, actions and participation. Being visible without an obligation to be liked means remaining available for this specific conversation.

IV. Another's assessment needs translating into your question

After the evening, Pavel receives three messages. The first calls the photographs boring. The second requests more explanation of the last image. The third advises using another camera for the whole series. If each message is treated as an instruction for immediate correction, the work will change direction with every new viewer. If all are rejected as someone else's opinion, a useful question may be lost. Between these extreme actions lies the possibility of clarifying which part of the work is actually at issue.

Boring describes an impression but does not yet explain its cause. An author can ask what failed to hold attention if they want to continue the conversation. A viewer can decline to develop their assessment in detail. A missing explanation does not make the impression a lie; it merely limits its usefulness for the next revision. Pavel can accept that the encounter with the pictures did not occur for one particular person, without using a single word to judge the whole series or his right to practise photography.

The request for explanation has a clearer object. Perhaps the caption really assumes knowledge of the location that the visitor lacks. Changing it may then help reveal what the author intended to show. The camera suggestion needs another clarification: which task is the present image failing to accomplish? If the speaker simply prefers another kind of equipment, that is no obligatory basis for a purchase. If they identify a visible technical defect, the remark

can be checked. The same confident tone does not give different suggestions equal justification.

An author can choose which feedback they request now. Perhaps they need responses about the sequence of images, rather than an assessment of their future career. They can say so before the showing. Such a question makes conversation easier, although it does not compel viewers to restrict themselves to it. A remark about something else can be recorded separately and revisited later. Not every substantive thought must immediately change the current task. A project too has a stage at which certain questions matter more than others.

Translating an assessment into your question does not mean claiming the final word on its fairness. A remark sometimes reveals a problem the author did not want to examine. Sometimes it concerns an affected person whose consent is actually required. The convenience of the original intention is then an insufficient answer. Specificity helps here too: what was done, who was affected, and which boundary was crossed? This conversation differs from a general demand to become more agreeable, and lets an action be corrected without rewriting an entire personality to suit someone else.

V. Attention must not become an obligation to disclose

A visitor asks Pavel why the photographs contain no people. He talks about evening routes and the space between encounters. She then suggests that the author is lonely and asks about relationships. This change of subject can happen without malicious intent. But a viewer's curiosity does not make a personal answer compulsory. The author can return to the work or say that he does not want to discuss this part of his life. A boundary does not first require persuading the visitor that her question is wrong.

Someone can connect their work with a personal story and later change their degree of openness. Today they share one fact and tomorrow keep another private. That is not necessarily inconsistency or dishonesty. Partial disclosure does not grant access to an entire later biography. If an author previously described an experience, the listener has no right to demand updates, confirmations and additional details. Every new part of experience can be discussed on its own terms, especially where it concerns people not taking part in the public conversation.

The same boundary exists in an ordinary group. Bright clothes do not promise a conversation about the body. A new job does not oblige someone to explain their income immediately. Attending an event does not make a person available for photography in every context. Specific rules may depend on the place and agreed conditions, but surrounding interest does not itself replace agreement. Being visible in one form and private in another are compatible positions. They do not require completely disappearing from shared life.

Sometimes wanting to be liked leads to extra disclosure. Someone tells more than intended to relieve tension, satisfy curiosity or sustain a conversation. Afterwards they may discover that they wanted attention to the work but supplied a story they were not ready to discuss. This experience calls for no general self-condemnation. It is more useful to identify a boundary for next time and what can now be clarified: this fact is not intended for further retelling, and this subject is closed.

A direct statement of a boundary does not guarantee observance. But it makes your position clearer. If the other person keeps demanding details, there is a reason to change the format or end the conversation. The decision concerns a particular interaction, rather than a need to avoid all attention. Pavel can stay beside the photographs and continue discussing light, place and sequence. Protecting the private does not oblige him to abandon the public subject for which he came to this evening.

VI. Indifference is also a possible response

The hardest result can be not criticism but the absence of a noticeable reaction. Several acquaintances look at the pictures and resume their conversation. Pavel does not know what they saw. A ready explanation can easily enter this gap: nobody appreciated them, nobody needs the work, appearing was a mistake. Yet the absence of a message contains less information. Someone may have been tired, distracted, short of words, uninterested or unconvinced that they needed to report an impression. Uncertainty remains uncertainty until clarified.

If an answer is actually needed, you can request one from a particular person. Not from everyone at once or through a demand to assess your personality, but about a specific question: is the sequence clear, where did captions help, and which picture invited a closer look? The other person can agree, decline or suggest another time. This request creates a new arrangement. It differs from expecting the audience to identify your need for confirmation and supply it without a separate discussion of their participation.

Some works address a small circle and meet few responses. This may require a changed showing method, a more precise addressee or further work. It does not automatically establish the author's worth. Conversely, a large response does not cancel a work's weaknesses. Reaction and quality relate to a particular task, but are not interchangeable concepts. If the aim was to introduce neighbours to the series, it helps to check whether that introduction occurred. If the aim was sales, different information about the result is needed.

You can be upset by indifference while understanding all these distinctions. Clarity does not have to produce a good mood immediately. You can finish the evening, talk to someone close or postpone a decision about further showing. This does not devalue participation. Sometimes

it is enough to acknowledge: I wanted more attention, did not receive it, and do not yet know what to do. Such a sentence turns disappointment into neither proof of worthlessness nor an accusation that all viewers were unfair.

There is also a wish not to enlarge the audience. Pavel can decide that conversation with three interested people is enough. This is a legitimate scale if it corresponds to his current purpose and agreements. A small circle need not be portrayed as secret superiority over the masses; a large one need not be a compulsory stage of adulthood. The question remains specific: what participation matters to this work now, and which efforts is the author willing to make for it? Not every visibility requires continuous growth.

VII. The right not to be liked does not include disrupting others

Imagine another scene: someone plays their music very loudly in a shared room and answers a complaint by saying they need not appeal to everyone. But the complaint concerns the conditions of shared space rather than musical taste. People cannot continue their conversation or work. Invoking independence moves the question to a convenient area without answering it. You can keep your musical preference and lower the volume. Removing a disturbance is not renouncing your taste or your internal right to it.

Visibility may involve a resource participants share: meeting time, space, attention or equipment access. We therefore need to distinguish presenting our work from appropriating the entire venue. If everyone was promised ten minutes, wanting to show more does not diminish the other contributions. If a room is shared, an unusual form must consider its conditions. An agreement does not disappear because an author feels a strong connection to their proposal. Other participants too have an object they wish to preserve.

In conversation, you can clarify what has actually been breached. Wanting everyone to dress identically and requiring a clear passage are different demands. A request to use a microphone so the contribution can be heard differs from advice to become more agreeable. Both may sound in the same displeased tone. It helps to separate their content before agreeing or disputing. Otherwise someone else's taste may be accepted as a compulsory rule, or a necessary condition for joint action rejected as an attempt to prohibit all difference.

If a boundary is unclear, it can be discussed beforehand. Pavel checks where to place the photographs, whether lighting can be changed, who is responsible for keeping the work safe and how long the discussion will take. This organisational part is no less real than the intention. It lets the proposal exist beside the library's other activities. Agreed conditions promise no pleasant impression, but provide a more intelligible space for an encounter. The author answers for their agreements, and the institution for its actually stated conditions.

Sometimes an environment demands conformity that the author is unwilling to accept. Another format, another venue or declining participation may then be possible. Not every disagreement is resolved by the right phrase or persistence. Yet refusal does not necessarily mean that the work is unworthy of being shown anywhere. It may concern the incompatibility between this place's conditions and the current intention. Clarifying the scale preserves further choice without promising that every project will necessarily find a convenient audience or available venue.

VIII. You can prepare a form without rehearsing approval

Before the showing, Pavel checks captions, tries image arrangements and asks a friend to walk through the exhibition. This prepares an available form and may make the evening clearer. A different process begins when the author mentally rehearses every visitor and tries to remove beforehand anything someone might dislike. The work then acquires an endless list of addressees with incompatible tastes. Preparation cannot finish, because one more reaction can always be imagined that the present form does not prevent.

It helps to give preparation's end observable conditions. Pictures selected, captions readable, time announced, main arrangements confirmed. This proves no perfection. It is a sufficiently specific reason to proceed to showing. If a remaining question actually changes the form, it can be resolved. If only the possibility of displeasing an unknown person remains, additional editing may not supply the desired guarantee. Appearing before people still preserves uncertainty that cannot be completely included in the author's preliminary checks.

Support too can be requested specifically. A friend might help with the first question or give a reminder about finishing time. Their task is not to admire every photograph and stop all criticism. This support leaves both participants independent. The friend can assist organisation and have their own taste. Pavel can accept help without demanding a uniform impression. If he also needs emotional support afterwards, it is better to agree that separately than quietly add it to a technical request.

Sometimes someone chooses a smaller form as sufficient for a first appearance. A few photographs at one meeting instead of a large exhibition; one prepared question instead of a lengthy speech; one text instead of a permanent public diary. That choice is not necessarily avoidance or a lack of ambition. It may fit the time, resources and current subject. A small form has its own requirements for quality and participation. It need not be devalued simply because a larger option exists that the person currently does not seek.

After preparing, you can leave some matters undecided. Pavel does not know whether the series will continue or whether he will want another showing. Tonight requires no answer. If asked, he can say that he has not decided. This is no deficiency in the programme. Present

visibility need not contain a completed biographical strategy. It is enough to present what is actually prepared and avoid promising what does not yet exist. This clarity makes participation more available to the author and those who came to see the work.

IX. What follows need not obey the evening's impression

After the showing, Pavel packs up. He is glad about one conversation, upset by one remark and tired of attention. All three reactions can coexist. There is no need to choose an overall assessment immediately to explain the whole subsequent path. Sometimes separate facts are worth recording: which questions repeated, what was difficult to see, and who requested more. Facts are not yet a decision, but supply material for one. The first aftertaste need not alone govern the project's future.

You can separately name what you want to keep and what you are willing to change. Pavel retains his interest in empty city places, changes two captions and decides to take no commercial commissions for now. These decisions concern different questions. One need not automatically determine the others. If visitors liked the series, that does not oblige endless repetition. If they disliked it, that does not prohibit continuing to explore the subject. Reaction enters consideration without acquiring the exclusive right to choose the author's next action for them.

At the same time, what follows may require a conversation about actual consequences. If an image reveals someone or somewhere whose conditions were breached, the question cannot be closed by referring to negative taste. If the author promised to hand work over to the organiser, handover or clarification is needed. A specific obligation outlasts the evening's pleasure or disappointment. Separating assessment and responsibility helps finish more clearly: what must be done for others, and what concerns your own future work and can remain open?

Visibility without an obligation to be liked does not require becoming cold towards people. You can want a kind reception, enjoy interest, be saddened by rejection and still keep the choice of your action. This position removes no difficulty. It merely avoids adding an impossible contract for universally good impressions. Pavel showed twelve photographs; people encountered them differently. What faces him now is no trial of his right to see the city in his own way, but several specific questions about work, encounter and further participation.

What this means in practice

Take one approaching appearance: sharing work, a meeting, a showing, a proposal or choosing clothes. Name its object, addressee and boundary. What exactly will become available to others? What are you prepared to explain, and what should remain private? If there is a shared arrangement, check its conditions separately from hoping for a pleasant impression. Identify a few feasible actions for which you are actually willing to answer.

Then define a feedback question. It may concern clarity, sequence, convenience of form or a specific error. Everything need not be covered at once. If help is needed, request particular participation and agree it with the person. Afterwards keep facts, remarks and your own impression as different kinds of information. Brief indifference or enthusiastic approval need not contain a ready decision about continuing the project.

A practical result may be a clearer object of showing, a corrected caption, a stated boundary or a decision to choose another venue. Nervousness need not disappear. Wanting to continue does not require universal approval; wanting to stop means earlier success need not oblige you to retain the earlier format. The possibility of visibility includes the right to choose your participation and readiness to answer for its specific conditions.

Key quotation

> *“the despotism of custom”*

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter III, p.132. A short fragment. Historical criticism of uniformity does not provide a contemporary description of all societies or cancel responsibility towards others.

Connections between traditions

Reference	Subject	Point of comparison	Limit
Mill, Chapter III	Individual diversity	Difference and public approval	Historical normative argument
UW editorial frame	Presenting one's work	Impression and obligation	Hypothetical contemporary scenes

The comparison does not make an artistic showing evidence for a philosophical theory. Mill's nearby historical generalisations about peoples are not transferred as present facts; universal agreement among cultures is not asserted.

Sources

John Stuart Mill. *On Liberty*, Chapter III, “Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being”, selected paragraphs on pp.103–106,126–134. Gutenberg34901 text, catalogue. Selected passages surrounding the quotations and argument, the title and catalogue information were actually read; not the entire chapter or book. Digital basis: Walter Scott Publishing Co., introduction by W.L.Courtney; the physical edition year was not established from the title. The editorial introduction is not attributed to Mill. Public domain in the United States; other jurisdictions were not checked. This is a primary philosophical text, not research on the practice's effectiveness.

Tags

visibility, approval, participation, individuality, independence, boundaries, responsibility, impression, assessment, feedback, publicity, personal space, showing, photography, creativity, audience, taste, difference, agreement, promise, indifference, criticism, preparation, form, Mill, liberty, philosophy, everyday life, United Wisdom, right to choose

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a coauthor of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.