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MWP 2016/09
Max Weber Programme

The Anatomy of Transparency: The Concept and its
Multifarious Implications

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ISSN 1830-7728

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Printed in Italy
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
www.eui.eu
cadmus.eui.eu

Abstract

There appears to be an uninterrupted rise in the quest for transparency in global governance. Its desirability relies on the promise of making power visible and as such, controllable. However, this 'rise and rise of transparency' has occurred thus far without sufficient conceptual analysis or critique. The metaphorical authority of transparency seems to be self-justificatory. In this Working Paper, this point of departure is questioned. This is done by analyzing the partly contradictory connotations of transparency and their social implications. It is argued a) that transparency derives its metaphorical authority from our rudimentary sensory experiences of being able to see; the scope of this vision can be, however, manipulated in many ways; b) transparency's negative connotations are undertheorized when referring to social and societal life; at the heart of positively perceived transparency there is performativity structured by theater imagery; c) negatively connoting transparency is associated with the failure of successful self-representation; depending on the context, this may cause strategic failure and/or shame and embarrassment. The analysis presented in this Working Paper is designed to be the start for a more comprehensive account for transparency as a socio-legal ideal.

Keywords

Transparency, global governance, conceptual analysis, conceptual metaphor theory, performativity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank several people for their helpful comments on the paper and inspiring discussions on the topic. In particular I am grateful to Or Bassok, Richard Bellamy, Nehal Bhuta, Maria Adele Carrai, Deirdre Curtin, Florian Hertel, Susanna Lindroos-Hovinheimo, Panu Minkkinen, Olli Mäenpää, Zoran Oklopcic, Dennis Patterson, Bilyana Petkova, Yaniv Roznai and Péter Szigeti. I also owe thanks to all the members of the Thematic Research Group on Governance, Constitutionalism and Democracy (sub-group 1), in which I presented an earlier version of this paper in December 2015.

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Max Weber Fellow, 2015-2016

“But how could abstractions be made visible?” *

Introduction: Why Transparency, Why Now?

Transparency has become the New Norm.¹ A state should be transparent, institutions should be transparent, the market should be transparent, processes should be transparent, reasoning should be transparent, even the whole of society should be transparent.² The importance of transparency seems to be growing uninterrupted.³ It has become a buzzword, which transcends its old institutional habitat of a state. It may even be becoming a global norm.⁴ For instance, Mark Fenster locates transparency “among the pantheon of great policy virtues”.⁵ Christopher Hood, for one, mentions “the rise and rise of transparency”⁶, and Anne Peters “the transparency turn.”⁷ Christensen and Cornelissen state that “[transparency] has become a taken-for-granted ideal and explanation of how society and its organizations must function.”⁸ By allegedly enabling access to information and exposing the way in which power is exercised, it is celebrated as one of the cornerstones of liberal democratic government.⁹

Even beyond the context of governance transparency talk is ubiquitous. Its demands seem to be constantly conquering new realms.¹⁰ It is hardly an overstatement to argue that we live in the era of transparency. Conversely, ‘the lack of transparency’ instantly sounds ominous and to be condemned in contemporary language. Transparency has gained an almost mythical status in current society.¹¹

* Martin Jay (Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought. Univ. California Press, 1994, p. 95)

¹ This is indeed *expressis verbis* the case, for instance, in the IMF. See Ida Koivisto: The IMF and the Transparency Turn. Minnesota Journal of International Law, forthcoming 2016.

² Critically Byung-Chul Han: The Transparency Society. Translated by Erik Butler. Stanford University Press 2015; Gianni Vattimo: The Transparent Society. Polity Press 1992.

³ Mikkel Flyverbom (Sunlight in Cyberspace? On Transparency as a Form of Ordering. European Journal of Social Theory 2015, Vol. 18(2), p. 168–184, p. 179) mentions ‘transparency evangelism’.

⁴ Anne Peters: Towards Transparency as a Global Norm. In Anne Peters & Andrea Bianchi (eds): Transparency in International Law. Cambridge 2013, p. 534–607.

⁵ Mark Fenster: The Opacity of Transparency. Iowa Law Review 91, 2006, p. 885–949, 888.

⁶ Christopher Hood: Beyond Exchanging First Principles. Some Closing Comments. In Christopher Hood and David Heald (eds): Transparency – Key to Better Governance? Oxford University Press 2006, p. 211–225.

⁷ Peters 2013, p. 534. Peters borrows the term from Aarti Gupta (Aarti Gupta: Transparency under Scrutiny: Information Disclosure in Global Environmental Governance. Global Environmental Politics 8, 2008, p. 1–7, 6).

⁸ Lars Thøger Christensen & Joep Cornelissen: Organizational Transparency as Myth and Metaphor. European Journal of Social Theory 2015, Vol. 18(2), p. 132–149, 133.

⁹ Critical analysis of that promise in the EU, see Deirdre Curtin & Albert Meijer: Does Transparency Strengthen Legitimacy? Information Polity 11, 2006, p. 109–122.

¹⁰ Andrea Bianchi: On Power and Illusion: The Concept of Transparency in International Law. In Andrea Bianchi & Anne Peters (eds): Transparency in International Law. Cambridge 2013, p. 1–20, p. 1: “[Transparency] is recommended by psychologists to recover trust after infidelity; and it is increasingly imposed on banks and financial institutions. Non-transparent financial transactions, no matter how insignificant, by spouses may lead to a central banker’s resignation. Medical practice leans dangerously towards unconditional forms of transparency: you may be unceremoniously told that you are going to die just for the sake of transparency (particularly vis-à-vis the physician’s professional insurance!). Worldwide campaigns have been led in the name of transparency by not-so-transparent organizations, as was the case of WikiLeaks, against the abuse of power by States. Transparent portable phones present one of the most pressing research challenges for electronic gadget designers.”

¹¹ Christensen & Cornelissen 2015, p. 132–149.

Although some critical voices are emerging,¹² the background assumption of this paper is that thus far, ‘the transparency turn’ has happened without sufficient conceptual analysis or critique. What are we calling for when we call for transparency? The metaphorical authority of transparency is largely taken as self-evident. At the same time, it is an ambiguous concept, which lacks a consensual definition. The underlying policy question is, thus, the soundness of the modern justificatory principles of global governance.

According to the Oxford dictionary, transparency is “The quality or condition of being transparent; perviousness to light; diaphaneity, pellucidity”; and “That which is transparent; a transparent object or medium.” Thus, it is a ‘quality or condition’ or an object, ‘*that which* is transparent’. It allows us to see through it; it creates visibility when invisibility or opacity is also possible. It presupposes a subject who is watching something that is located on the other side of a transparent object – like looking through a window. Hence, in the form of transparency, visibility is established regardless of a tangible object between the beholder and the target.

Based on the metaphorical analogy of this physical feature, transparency has come to denote a modern, surprisingly complex and expanding socio-legal ideal. It is important to notice that as an ideal, transparency becomes a normative concept. It includes a covert ‘pro-attitude’ towards it, even if this is not translated into norms and rules.¹³ This is to say we need to discuss the premises of the assumptions such as ‘transparency is good’ or ‘transparency creates legitimacy’.

At the same time, however, transparency is also used as a descriptive concept, equally metaphorically. In that case, its meaning is complex, as I will demonstrate. Apart from its multiple meanings in different specialist languages, in our quotidian language, transparency has a surprisingly sophisticated negative connotation which often remains overlooked. By that I mean the use of the term transparency in the meaning of *undesired or unauthorized exposure*.

Transparency dwells in our language in more ways than one. Unlike other similar concepts alluding to accessibility to knowledge (publicity, access to information, openness etc.), transparency has peculiar psychological and social ramifications. In my view, the multiplicity of connotations of transparency stem from its quasi-symbolic nature; it promises visibility and at the same time it escapes a gaze itself. Transparency is, or at least seems to be, a pure medium, an instrument, a messenger. This leads to indifference regarding the message delivered; sometimes transparency is considered good, sometimes bad, and sometimes, perhaps, neutral.

If we take the multiplicity of connotations seriously, what, then, is the specific role and distinct value of transparency itself? Rarely, is any abstract object actually, physically transparent. When it is taken as a metaphor, it loses its innocence as a mere physical phenomenon. In most cases, transparency becomes a construct. However, the meaning of actual visibility also lingers; the constructive function does not fully occupy its meaning and functionality. Paradoxically, transparency is a fully visual and fully verbal phenomenon.

In this text, I approach the concept of transparency as an embodiment of certain theoretical tensions, which spring from its multilayered semantics: how its literal meaning becomes metaphorically authoritative and, furthermore, socio-legally normative. I argue that this gradual transformation does not happen without problems. Instead, it raises an array of questions. How does transparency utilize different realms of meaning, textual and visual, symbolic and iconic, revelatory and constructive? What are their interconnections and implications? What is the role and level of normativity; what should be transparent and how? My ambition here is first to purport the existence of the theoretical tensions and then to analyze their quality.

¹² As a token of this, for example, recent special issues on transparency have been published in *European Journal of Social Theory* 2015, Vol. 18(2) and *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 2014, Vol. 14(1).

¹³ Normative or “thick” concepts are concepts that contain descriptive power, but also a pro-attitude towards them. For instance, calling someone brave implies that being brave is desirable. Thus, they provide reasons for action. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (2. Rev. Ed., Oxford University Press, current online version 2014), “A normative epistemology determines how you ought to conduct your cognitive life; a descriptive one only describes how people in fact do so. However, the distinction is not clear-cut in practice: according to the principle of charity the only way of interpreting what people do in fact think, is by assuming that by and large they think what they ought to think. The philosophy of social sciences is fraught with problems of distinguishing between fact and value.”

Transparency Between the Visual and the Verbal: Hypotheses and Approach

The point of departure of this paper is that transparency as a concept needs to be taken seriously. That is to say, I oppose the view which is exemplified in this quote from David Heald: “Transparency as physical construction carries symbolic power quite apart from its metaphorical use in discourse about the ways in which government, business and public affairs should be conducted.”¹⁴ The quote clearly distinguishes transparency’s symbolic power from its metaphorical use.

I, on the contrary, question this separation and argue that transparency’s symbolic power – based on its characteristics as a physical phenomenon – and its metaphorical use are deeply intertwined. Thus, I do not subscribe to this ‘quite apart’. Potentially, besides symbolic power, we should also talk about iconic or mimetic power, the power of transparency to portray, imitate or to ‘capture’ the reality of governance and beyond. In order to demonstrate these arguments, transparency ought to be analyzed as part of our everyday language, and we should look at which of transparency’s connotations travel into the vocabulary of political and legal thought.

As I will demonstrate, as a positively connoting metaphor, transparency refers to allowed or created visibility. Therefore, in many contexts, transparency operates in the same or similar way as visual culture. To some extent, theorizing on images and their nonverbal contentions on the structure and nature of reality can be helpful. Here, the idea of visual communication unites. However, transparency is only partly, although importantly, comparable with theories of image. Transparency embodies a peculiar rationality, which is best described indirectly; it is not visibility itself, it enables visibility, it is not a photograph, it is the optimal lighting for a photograph, it is not a film, it is the screen, it is not the play, it is the stage, it is not the content, it is the platform, it is a signifier whose signified varies.

We easily take images as icons, mimicry of reality, whereas words are a system of conventional signs, symbols.¹⁵ This semiotic categorization seems to be unconscious. We attribute disparate propositional merits to words and pictures regarding the depiction of reality. However, the visual field filters into the realm of the verbal or the iconic into the symbolic. The verbal and the visual are overlapping and intertwined phenomena. We need our vision to read, for example, to see a text, which is a verbal composition of ideas. Also texts are constructs; they, too, are mediated substitutes of reality.

As the visual does not equate to images as conscious representations, neither does the textual equate to the verbal. Also the written word may be subject to both belief and suspicion, and indeed, it is. That said, however, words as such, written or spoken, seem to be perceptually less deceitful than images. A word’s mimetic power is always more indirect than that of an image.¹⁶ When we talk or write with words that allude to eyesight, the verbal and the visual intersect. That said, the connection is not limited to constructive nature; there also exists a uniting cognitive component.

It is important to notice that despite our reliance on the visual, it is not innocent: our sensory capacities are limited and the scope of visibility easily manipulated. The mimicry of reality involves necessarily a conscious agent; pictures or other visual presentations do not emerge *ex nihilo*. An image

¹⁴ David Heald: The Varieties of Transparency. In Christopher Hood & David Heald (eds): Transparency – Key to Better Governance? Oxford University Press 2006, p. 25–43, 25.

¹⁵ This vocabulary of semiotics is based on Charles Peirce’s well-known categorization of different signs. He divides signs into indexes, which refer indirectly, using a sensory cue, to its object (ie. smoke is an index of fire), icons, which resemble its object (ie. a portrait of a person) and symbols, conventional signs (ie. words). See Charles Peirce: Collected Writings (8 Vols. 1931–58). Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss & Arthur W Burks (eds). Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA. Albert Atkin: Peirce’s Theory of Signs. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2010. (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/>)

¹⁶ See Walter Benjamin: On the Mimetic Faculty. In Walter Benjamin: Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Schocken Books, New York 1986, p. 333–336, 336: “In this way, language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity: a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic.”

is a construct which does not equate to the visual as a category.¹⁷ Indeed, as Jean Baudrillard contends, pictures are a substitute of the real through signs.¹⁸ We recognize the unreliability of this substitution intuitively. Bruno Latour refers to the dual attitudes towards images with the term *iconoclasm*: it stands for the recurrent oscillation between belief and suspicion on the representation of an image, or, the crisis of representation. We can never be completely sure about the level of human manipulation in visual representation.¹⁹ Naïve realism and postmodern skepticism form an ongoing dynamic.

As mentioned, *prima facie* transparency appears to be an avenue to reality, a mere facilitator, and at the same time nothing in itself.²⁰ When transparency is taken as an ideal, it leads to the curious idolatry of (seeming) nothingness. This, however, may be an illusion, beautifully voiced by Claire Birchall:

[t]ransparency – – is an invisible discourse because its mediation is obscured by its status as a cultural signifier of neutrality. It is seen as not having a particular quality in and of itself but as, rather, merely the invisible medium through which content is brought to our attention, into the visible realm.²¹

Media are not objective or harmless: showing alters the image or even the nature of the object shown. When we see with the aid of a tool, the tool becomes a part what we see. Thus, the experience of mediated seeing is an experience of how it is to operate that particular tool.²² So, is the medium, as Marshall McLuhan famously argues, ultimately the message?²³ If we take that idea seriously, and approach transparency as a medium that is, it either is the message itself, entirely or partially, becomes

¹⁷ Richard K. Sherwin: *Visualizing Law in the Age of the Digital Baroque: Arabesques and Entanglements*. Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2012, p. 40: “That is how naïve realism works. It insists that it is enough to understand (or think we understand) what we see on the screen. No reflection is required when common sense tells us that the visual truth of the matter is self-evident. But the meaning of an image always goes beyond what it depicts. Visual truth, like visibility itself, is a construct.” J. Teurlings & M. Stauff: Introduction: The Transparency Issue. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 2014, Vol. 14(1), p. 3–10, p. 6.

¹⁸ Daniela Carpi: *Crime Evidence: ‘Simulacres et Simulations’, Photography as Forensic Evidence*. In Leif Dahlberg, Klaus Stierstorfer & Daniela Carpi (eds.): *Visualizing Law and Authority. Essays on Legal Aesthetics*. Walter de Gruyter, München, 2012, p. 253–365, 254. Jean Baudrillard: *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

¹⁹ Bruno Latour: *What is Iconoclasm?* In Bruno Latour & Peter Weibel (eds): *Iconoclasm. Beyond Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*. MIT Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 13–38. Further elaborated by Sherwin 2012, p. 36.

²⁰ Claire Birchall: Introduction to ‘Secrecy and Transparency’ *The Politics of Opacity and Openness, Theory, Culture & Society* 2011 (SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore), Vol. 28(7- 8), p. 8: “But why the rush to acquire [transparency]? After all, it’s not a thing in itself. In a sense, it’s nothing at all, merely the absence of concealment.” Han 2015, p. 40: “Neither truth nor symbolic appearance are see-through. Only emptiness is entirely transparent.”

²¹ Claire Birchall: *Radical Transparency?* *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 2014, Vol. 14(1)2014, p.77–88, 81–82.

²² Sherwin 2012, p. 84.

²³ Marshall McLuhan: *Understanding Media. Extensions of a Man*. MIT Press 1964, p. 7–21, p. 7: “The instance of electric light may prove illuminating in this connection. The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or a name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the “content” of a medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as a written word is a content of print, and print is a content of a telegraph. If it is asked, “What is the content of speech?” It is necessary to say, “It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal.” Even though McLuhan’s medium conception is, according to some critics, too over-inclusive and reductionist, in the context of this study, it helps to address an important question: what is the message of transparency as a medium apart from the content it may deliver? Critically Jean Baudrillard (*Simulation and Simulacra* 1994, p. 33): “The medium itself is no longer identifiable as such, and the confusion of the medium and the message (McLuhan) is the first great formula of this new era. There is no longer a medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffused, and diffracted in the real, and one can no longer even say that the medium is altered by it.”

a part of the thing it shows; or at least, it changes its object.²⁴ Possibly, we could refer to this field of inquiry as distinguishing different *scopic regimes*, as different optical arrangements that allow us to have an apt attitude and expectation towards the object seen.²⁵

It seems that transparency as a governance ideal is an icono-agnostic or icono-ambivalent phenomenon. What I mean by that follows. On the one hand, transparency is ideologically iconoclastic: by allegedly stripping governance from secrecy, appearances and concealment, it promises to allow governance itself to emerge in its pure essence before the eyes of the viewer. In that sense, it is suspicious towards mediation. Following that reasoning, the transcendence of governance, if you will, would take care of its own representation so long as the impediments blocking its visibility were removed.

On the other hand, I argue, transparency is also iconophilic and necessarily so. It needs to rely on illustrations, images, statistics, performances, and reports etc. – conscious, constructed appearances. Ultimately, it needs to rely on people and their mimetic abilities. Different constructs are the forms of governance to present itself; it has no way of evident transcendent appearing. To quote Gary Watt:

The image of a thing is usually contrasted with the thing itself; the image of a thing is said to be reflective, representative, reproductive or mimetic of the thing rather than identical to it. And yet the image of a thing can sometimes be the most reliable knowledge we have of the thing. Sometimes we lack the capacity to see the thing itself, because the thing itself is too abstract or too profound or too remote. In such cases we might have to settle for a flame-cast shadow on the wall of the cave or an image reflected in a mirror in the dark.²⁶

Thus, in order to appear, governance inevitably needs mediation, and this mediation takes the form of constructs.²⁷ A conscious image is a mediator of something that cannot be otherwise accessed. However, it is not clear whether all of the constructs are meant for the eyes of the public; some of them are deliberately concealed or censored, some are esoteric, understandable only by a select few. Thus, transparency can also be seen as a more substantial feature of the image itself. Philosopher Byung-Chul Han's stance is radically critical. He argues that

Images are transparent, when – freed from all dramaturgy, choreography, and scenography, from any hermeneutic depth, and indeed any meaning at all – they become pornographic. Pornography is unmediated contact between the image and the eye.²⁸

²⁴ Mark Fenster (Transparency in Search of a Theory. *European Journal of Social Theory* 2015, Vol. 18(2), p. 150–167, 150) approaches transparency as communication. As such, it is essentially mediated, and “excessively simplified and thus is blind to the complexities of the contemporary state, government information, and the public.”

²⁵ The term is coined by French film theorist Christian Metz in his book *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1982, 1st published in 1975, translated by Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster & Alfred Guzzetti) to distinguish the cinema from the theatre (p. 61): “what defines the specifically cinematic scopic regime is not so much the distance kept ... as the absence of the object seen”. Understood more metaphorically, see for example, Mark Reinhardt: *Vision's Unseen: On Sovereignty, Race, and the Optical Unconscious*, 8:4 *Theory & Event*, 2015.

²⁶ Gary Watt: *Law Suits: Clothing as the Image of Law*. In Leif Dahlberg, Klaus Stierstorfer & Daniela Carpi (eds.): *Visualizing Law and Authority. Essays on Legal Aesthetics*. Walter de Gruyter, München, 2012, p. 23–50, 23.

²⁷ Carpi's analysis of the meaning of pictures is similar (2012 p. 254): “Pictures are a “mise en scène” of communication: instead of producing meaning they fade away in the very act of producing reality. Images, while pretending to portray the real and fix reality, in generating models of a real, as Baudrillard would say, end up effacing reality itself: “it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them.” However, not all images mimic reality in a concrete sense, they may illustrate abstractions instead. These can be called ‘aniconic images’. As Sherwin (2012, p. 16) describes, “Aniconic images may present themselves as visual, but they actually point toward the unseen. The authority of an aniconic image derives from an invisible source.” I also consider necessary performativity a version or an interpretation of iconophilia – an image (of governance) may be interpreted as a frozen image, a still picture, if you will, of a performance.

²⁸ Han 2015, p. 1–2.

This text aims to question the current orthodoxy of transparency according to which transparency is a common solution to many problems of governance. It does so by stating that transparency as an ideal is inherently flawed. For that purpose, the hypotheses are: a) that transparency derives its metaphorical authority from our rudimentary sensory experiences of being able to see; the scope of this vision can be, however, manipulated in many ways; b) transparency's negative connotations are undertheorized when referring to social and societal life; at the heart of positive transparency there is performativity structured by theater imagery; c) negatively connoting transparency is associated with the failure of successful self-representation; depending on the context, this may cause strategic failure and/or shame and embarrassment.

In addition, I will argue that transparency cannot succeed in living up to its promise of immediate visibility, and even if it did, the interpretation of this image would be dispersed. If we push that idea even further, we can argue the following. The transparency we want is, and cannot but be, mediated. It takes the forms of a performance and a construct. If we want it to be otherwise, something 'natural', we want something which does not exist. Instead, we may encounter something which Baudrillard has famously called hyperreality, a 'reality' in which facts and fiction, reality and its simulation are seamlessly interwoven, making it impossible to distinguish one from the other.²⁹ Noticing this requires giving up on the fallacious fantasies of accessing to reality through transparency. These fantasies may be further underpinned by political ideology, which is why transparency makes and is able to make such frequent appearances in current normative governance discourses, such as the global administrative law.³⁰ In those, transparency is lifted on a pedestal, beyond the scope of critique.

In order to test the hypotheses – to the extent that talking about 'testing hypotheses' is apt in legal scholarship – a multidisciplinary approach is required. As Sherwin argues, "When law marries visual culture their joint offspring requires new academic partners, including media and cultural studies, art history, cognitive psychology, psychoanalysis, and neuroscience."³¹ In a similar way, my approach is manifold. In order to make the individual parts of the overall argument credible, purely legal or doctrinal methodology is inappropriate.

Therefore, I am adopting various, partly overlapping approaches: conceptual analysis and conceptual metaphor theory, (legal and political) philosophy, even some of the concepts and approaches of semiotics, (social) psychology and narratology. The mentioned approaches are discussed and applied in the relevant subsections. Some might call this choice intellectual eclecticism. As this statement may be fair, eclecticism does not equate to contingency; all of the applied approaches are chosen to illuminate some particular, thus far unnoticed or under-theorized aspect of a particular instance of transparency.

For better or for worse, the very questions of truth, reality, illusion and knowledge and their social implications form the undertow of the research. When we approach the visual concept of transparency as a construction, a narrative or a performance, as I am going to argue, apart from epistemological matters, ethical and aesthetical questions also follow.

Thus, the question about transparency is also a question about ethical or political phenomenology. This labeling makes the representation created with transparency techniques subject to multiple considerations.³² In a way, transparency conflates all three of Kant's critiques: the critique of pure reason, the critique of practical reason and the critique of judgement. The adequacy and loyalty of representation of the reality becomes the key question of transparency. It extends from aesthetics (the beauty or skillfulness of representation; the mimetic power or accuracy) to ethics (the motives,

²⁹ Baudrillard defines (1994, p. 1) hyper reality as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality."

³⁰ B. Kingsbury, N. Krisch & R. B. Stewart: *The Emergence of Global Administrative Law*. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 68:15, 2005, p. 15–61.

³¹ Sherwin 2012 p. 3.

³² Compare with Flyverbom 2015, p. 180: "[t]ransparency is best understood as a matter of translating, establishing associations and managing visibilities in ways that contribute to the ordering of specific organizational efforts and regulatory concerns."

aims and loyalty of representation), to epistemology (the comprehension and interpretation of the represented reality, ‘the thing for us’), and finally and dauntingly, ontology (‘the thing in itself’).³³

These thorny questions about metaphors – into which I delve shortly – ‘truth’ and its interpreter are well portrayed in this quote from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson:

Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness. These endeavors of the imagination are not devoid of rationality; since they use metaphor, they employ an imaginative rationality – Truth is relative to understanding, which means that there are no absolute objective truths about the world. This does not mean that there are no truths; it means that truth is relative to our conceptual system [way of talking], which is grounded in, and constantly tested by, our experiences and those of other members of our culture in our daily interactions with other people and with our physical and cultural environments.³⁴

Moreover, the metaphoric nature of our conception of truth extends also to scholarship as a practice in general and to the topic of this study specifically. Moshe Halbertal argues that

Our ontology and epistemology is, so to speak, in a grip of the “depth metaphor.” We distinguish between the apparent and the real, the internal and the merely external. Our epistemology is grounded in such a picture. We “discover” or “uncover” the “underlying” assumption, the “depth of the matter” and so on.³⁵

As scholars, we want to reveal, enlighten and emancipate, to excavate the truth which is hiding underneath a deceitfully neat surface of appearance. Ontologically and epistemologically, this presupposes a vertical understanding of truth. Moreover, it covertly privileges the non-apparent essence of things over their manifestations in the apparent. This assumption that ‘the truth is down there’³⁶ is in tension with the perspectivist idea of ‘truth is in the eye of the beholder’, or, at least that it crucially depends on the chosen perspective.³⁷ As a rule, we intuitively seem to subscribe to both ideas – vertical and horizontal multitude of truths and potentially also some principle of ranking them – perhaps in the very way that Lakoff and Johnson contend. In any case, it seems that metaphors and what is true to us are closely connected. Here, this idea is essential both methodologically and hypothetically (as a candidate for a research result).³⁸

³³ See also Sherwin 2012, p. 18.

³⁴ George Lakoff & Mark Johnson: *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press 2003, p. 193.

³⁵ Moshe Halbertal: *Concealment and Revelation. Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA 2007, p. 155.

³⁶ This approach is both epitomized and complicated by Michel Foucault in his archeological and genealogical projects. As Gordon (Neve Gordon: *On Visibility and Power: An Arendtian Corrective of Foucault*, *Human Studies* 25, 2002, p. 125–145) notes, “according to Foucault discursive practices do not conceal a hidden reality; they are neither a facade for immoral practices nor do they produce false interests. Foucault’s genealogical method, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow point out, suggests that the “very project of finding a deep meaning underlying appearances may itself be an illusion, to the extent that it thinks it is capturing what is really going on” (Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow: *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Second Edition with an Afterword by and an Interview with Michel Foucault. University of Chicago Press, 1983 p. 181).”

³⁷ Perspectivism is famously attributed to the philosophical writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Slavoj Žižek (*The Plague of Fantasies*, Verso Books, New York 1997, p. 97–104), for one, approaches the necessary perspectivist appearance of reality with the term of *ideological anamorphosis*.

³⁸ Christensen & Cornelissen 2015, p. 134: “Reality, according to modern thought, is usually out of sight, concealed, so to speak, ‘behind’ the scene. Through the use of reason and rationality, the promise of modern thought is to move the spectator behind the ‘curtain’, to uncover the truth behind its fancy façades and seductive appearances and eventually emancipate the individual from the superstitions and repressions of authoritative regimes (Nisbet, 1966). Hegel’s distinction between *Schein* and *Wesen* – a distinction reproduced in the works of Marx – represents the modern ideal of revealing and exposing the truth concealed by the glittering images of the world. Likewise, Weber’s description of modern society as a ‘disenchanted’ (inspired by Schiller’s notion of the ‘de-divinization’ of the world) described

The text is organized as follows. First, I approach transparency from the viewpoint of conceptual metaphor theory. That means finding out the possible cognitive preconditions according to which the metaphor makes sense and can be used to make abstract phenomena both understandable and legitimate. Second, I approach transparency's connotations in everyday language and their concomitant implications: what is the meaning of performative self and controlled disclosure? Third, I deepen the analysis of the theater imagery underpinning the ideas of performativity and veiled reality. Fourth, I discuss the corollaries of unintentional transparency: avoiding shame and protecting strategy. Finally, I present some concluding remarks.

To Understand is to See: Transparency Metaphor's Cognitive Core

We often demand more transparency and blame the lack of it without pondering the implications of this concept or its potential ramifications. How and why does it make sense to us beyond its literal meaning? Why does it evoke informational, social or even moral associations? Why particularly this "visual semantics"?³⁹ To dissect transparency as an ideal or a goal, first we need to tackle its power to illustrate the relevant facets of human activity, in other words, its mimetic power. We need to excavate the basic assumptions of transparency as a metaphor or a metaphorical concept.

The physical feature of seeing through allows the metaphorical or analogical use of the concept. The desirability of this feature, however, is not self-explanatory. It is not clear why we wish to see through, regardless, what there is to see. What kind of cognitive mechanism does it presuppose? Is it the nature of things or a social construction? Crucially, as Teurlings and Stauff note, "[t]he meaning of the word transparency oscillates between something that is and something that needs to be created."⁴⁰ What is the dynamic of this oscillation? In order to dissect the meaning and functional mechanism of transparency as a metaphor, some basic ideas of conceptual or cognitive metaphor theory are helpful.

The point of departure in the conceptual metaphor theory is the following question: how do metaphors shape our thinking and language? Lakoff's and Johnson's influential book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980, 2003) concentrates on addressing and proving this idea: "Do we systematically use inference patterns from one conceptual domain to reason about another conception domain?" In brief, the authors' answer is yes. According to them, our thinking largely utilizes analogy, reasoning based on similarity.

Thus, the main argument of the theory is that metaphors are not merely a matter of figurative speech as they are traditionally understood.⁴¹ Instead, they are seen to be relating to cognitive functions. As Lakoff and Johnson argue, "Since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us."⁴² Striking as it is, according to the theory, metaphors and our conception of reality are profoundly intertwined.

That is to say, our very thinking is partly structured in metaphoric form. According to the theory, certain conceptual metaphors govern basic abstract ideas. It is important to notice that what makes them 'conceptual' or 'cognitive' is their pre-linguistic nature. That means they are types of deep-structures of different metaphors, which do not necessarily feature as such in quotidian language.

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modernity as a secularized society in which scientific knowledge is valued higher than faith and where processes of 'rationalization' replace ancient beliefs with naturalist scientific explanations. Modernity, thus, represents the goal of absolute (self-)transparency – a goal reflected in positive science and notions of open and unrestricted information (see e.g. Vattimo, 1992)."

³⁹ Jan Teurlings & Markus Stauff: Introduction: The Transparency Issue. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 2014, Vol. 14(1), p. 6.

⁴⁰ Teurlings & Stauff: 2014, p. 3–10.

⁴¹ On metaphors in philosophy, see for instance Marga Reimer & Elisabeth Camp: Metaphor. In Ernest Lepore & Barry C. Smith: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, p. 845–863, p. 845–846: Metaphor is a trope or figure of speech, where a 'figure of speech' is a non-literal use of language. What distinguishes metaphor from the other tropes such as irony, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole and meiosis? According to a standard definition, "a figure of speech in which one thing is represented (or spoken of) as something else."

⁴² Lakoff & Johnson 2003 p. 146.

Instead, they structure speech by making linguistic metaphors comprehensible. A structured concept is restructured by another.

In order to couple two different ideas metaphorically, there needs to be a so-called source domain and a target domain of meaning. Source domain stands for the more concrete phenomenon whereas the target phenomenon for the more abstract one. Subsequently, some features of the source domain are analogously attributed to the target domain. That is reflected in the choice of words and the certain rationalities they embody, like LOVE IS A JOURNEY, TIME IS MONEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR, THE MIND IS A MACHINE. In these examples, ‘journey’, ‘money’, ‘war’ and ‘machine’ form the source domains and ‘love’, ‘time’, ‘argument’ and ‘the mind’ the target domains. Many abstractions are so overarching and multifaceted that one conceptual metaphor is not capable of capturing all of their aspects. In these cases, many conceptual metaphors are needed to illustrate them. However, they do not form a coherent taxonomy. Some conceptual metaphors may suggest conflicting ontologies even when pointing to the same abstraction (such as IDEAS ARE PEOPLE, IDEAS ARE FOOD).⁴³

Discerning abstract concepts happens through different techniques of analogous reasoning called ‘mapping’, and using ‘images schemes’ and ‘experimental gestalts’.⁴⁴ They function as methods of juxtaposing different spheres of meaning. In addition, these mappings are further reflected in our language and action. Moreover, according to Lakoff and Johnson, those metaphorical mappings are not purely contingent or arbitrary in nature. Instead, they are based on our bodily experiences of the world: “experiences in which the two conceptual domains are correlated and consequently establish mappings from one domain another.”⁴⁵ That gives a metaphor a trait of universalism, even though it is debatable to what extent conceptual metaphors are language-specific.⁴⁶ In addition, a danger of essentialism may emerge; it is hard to verify whether every human being really shares the same cognitive structures and concomitant cognitive metaphors, regardless of their cultural background, level of education and intellectual capacities.

The entire theory in all its sophistication cannot be discussed here. However, at this point, we know enough to approach transparency from its point of view. The question is: can we detect a conceptual metaphor which would make ‘transparency’ an apt linguistic metaphor? In other words, which particular conceptual metaphor, if any, allows transparency to appeal to us?

Importantly, ‘seeing’ transcends its literal meaning. It also has wider cognitive implications. Following Lakoff and Johnson, transparency is probably based on the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING.⁴⁷ At a linguistic level, it appears in sentences such as ‘I *see* what you mean’; ‘let me *point out* something to you’.⁴⁸ When a gaze, even metaphorically, can reach its target uninhibitedly, presumably, understanding follows. Hence, as an ideal type, transparency allows

⁴³ Conceptual metaphors are categorized into different groups according to their structural characteristics, such as ontological (e.g. ideas are entities and words are containers), orientational (e.g. more is up, good is up etc.) and structural metaphors (e.g. time is money, saving time).

⁴⁴ According to Mark Turner (*Literary Mind*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1996, p. 15–17), not only concepts or metaphors but also so-called small spatial stories, kind of skeletal schemata, which make larger narratives understandable, have their basis in our cognitive system. They are semantically very rudimentary, such as ‘catch a ball’, ‘throw a rock’, ‘sit in a chair’, ‘pet a dog’, ‘take a drink from a glass of water’. Much of our thinking consists of projecting these schemes on different situations (parapoligal projection; image schemas).

⁴⁵ Lakoff & Johnson 2003, p. 246–247.

⁴⁶ Lakoff & Johnson 2003, p. 247: It seems there are both universal metaphors and those subject to cultural variation. In addition (p. 145), “Much of cultural change arises from the introduction of new metaphorical concepts and loss of old ones. For example, the Westernization of cultures throughout the world is partly a matter of introducing the TIME IS MONEY metaphor into those cultures.”

⁴⁷ This can be put into the category of structural (activity) metaphors. Cornelissen and Christensen (2015, p. 33) share the view of the foundational metaphor of transparency to be ‘understanding is seeing’, or, as they put it ‘seeing is knowing’.

⁴⁸ Lakoff & Johnson (2003, p. 104) also use transparency as an example of a linguistic metaphor based on the cognitive metaphor of UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING: “That is a remarkably transparent argument.” Or: “Your argument has no content at all — I can see right through it.”

us to see and subsequently, to understand. I argue that this is the basic cognitive underpinning of transparency as a linguistic metaphor.

However, it is important to notice that although metaphoric structures make abstractions more discernible, they are inevitably simplifications. Love is not a journey, but a complex compound of emotions, thoughts, desires, and social norms and expectations. Neither do we always understand when we see: even if I can see the sun in the sky I do not ‘understand’ it.⁴⁹ Indeed, the whole notion of understanding is loaded with philosophical questions. The implicit ‘like’ needs to be postulated: love is (like) a journey, time is (like) money. In that sense, a conceptual metaphor is a condensed simile.⁵⁰

So, do we really understand when we see and does transparency leave us with a clear view? What are the limits of the metaphor? It is probably not fair to blame the metaphor for not capturing the entire abstraction. Instead, it is important to bear in mind that metaphors’ capacity to illustrate a particular abstraction is partial. Correspondingly, also transparency’s illustrative power is limited.

Andrea Bianchi enumerates a list of puzzling questions, which the ‘window metaphor’ fails to address. The whole array is worth quoting here:

Do I have a clear view if I look through a clean window? What if my view is blurred? Is what I see reality or just a mental representation of what I expect to see? Does it make a difference whether the window is open or closed? Is transparency equivalent to nothingness? What if the outside is dark or if the sun is shining? Would what I see then not be different? To what extent could different types of window glass alter my perception of what I see? Is standing behind a perfectly transparent window equivalent to standing outside? Is what I see dependent also on the position in which I am behind the window? By moving a few inches either side or my turning my eyes up pf down, left or right, what I see can be remarkably different.⁵¹

It is easy to see (sic!) how fragile and imperfect the transparency metaphor actually is. It provokes a number of questions and leaves them unanswered. At the same time, however, it has proven useful, maybe partly because of this very simplistic nature. It is important to notice that the choice of the name of the ideal ‘transparency’ is not haphazard but based on a cognitive analogy. Subsequently, its promise of letting us see and understand is seductive. Nonetheless, transparency neither addresses the beholder's capacity to interpret what she sees nor the target’s capacity to manipulate its representation. In that sense, transparency is neutral and passive.

However, the passivity of transparency is not self-evident even at the level of language. Apart from the (seemingly) passive window metaphor, in some contexts it is replaced with or accompanied by a ‘flashlight metaphor’. According to it, transparency, by directing the beam towards certain areas, illuminates them while leaving others in darkness.⁵² Thus, instead of passively enabling visibility in the sense of removing obstacles blocking visibility, it would actively create visible objects by illuminating them. Subsequently, to depict this phenomenon, light-related slogans follow. Famously,

⁴⁹ Christina Garsten, & Monica Lindh de Montoya: In retrospect. *The Play of Shadows*. In Christina Garsten, & Monica Lindh de Montoya (eds) *Transparency in a New Global Order: Unveiling Organizational Visions*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2008, p. 283–286. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (*Transparent Fictions; or, the Conspiracies of a Liberal Imagination: An Afterword*. In Harry G. West & Todd Sanders (eds): *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*. Duke University Press 2003, p. 287–299, 288) state: “The more literally we believe in the axiom “to see is to know” the more haunted we are by what hovers beyond the edges of the visible.” See also Žižek 1997, p. 131.

⁵⁰ This idea – metaphors being ‘compressed’ or ‘abbreviated’ similes – was apparently already presented by Aristotle; see Reimer & Camp 2006, p. 851. However, as Reimer & Camp notice (2006, p. 857), the idea of a metaphor as a condensed simile might also be suitable of so-called non-cognitivist theories of metaphor. In them, metaphors are not considered to include any specific cognitive element. Instead, they emphasize the effectiveness of the metaphor, its ability to deliver a message.

⁵¹ Bianchi 2013, p. 9.

⁵² Teurlings & Stauff 2014 p. 6: “Each tool that renders one thing visible also contributes to the invisibilization of something else, either by systematically (and necessarily) leaving certain matters out or just by distracting the attention from other facts and interrelations.”

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said that “sunlight is the best disinfectant”⁵³ and the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, “lights on, rats out.”⁵⁴

Unlike the window metaphor, the flashlight metaphor accentuates the intentionality and performativity of transparency.⁵⁵ In it, someone in charge of directing the beam needs to be presumed. Nonetheless, both of the metaphors, the window and the flashlight, can be purported to be based on the conceptual metaphor of ‘understanding is seeing’. The distinctive parameter is based on the activity of the created visibility. Importantly, flashlight – even when being an apt metaphor for illustrating artificially created visibility – does not feature in legal and policy discourse like transparency, which, on the basis of natural language, is more closely connected to the window metaphor.

Instead, the flashlight metaphor could be discerned as an analytic tool for enriching the portrait of transparency as an abstraction. Moreover, I am arguing that regardless of the choice of the metaphor – the window metaphor or the flashlight metaphor – performativity remains as the basic structure of transparency as a socio-legal ideal.

The important question is whether or not the cognitive core of transparency is prone to ideological, political or otherwise teleological purposes, which in the worst case may be totalized. It seems that even the mythical understanding of transparency is possible.⁵⁶ Christensen and Cornelissen argue that the idea of a myth and its implications affects our understanding of transparency as a quest of conflicting potential. The crux or the contention is that whenever myth is at play, concepts and ideas transform from representations, their indirect meanings, into their instant appearance.⁵⁷

In transparency myth, access to information is not seen as a token of transparency, but instead, as transparency itself; or, ‘as if’ turns into ‘as’.⁵⁸ Even though myth is metaphorical in nature, it creates a tension towards its representative character. It denies its nature as presenting a part of the whole but a totality itself. In this way, a myth is similar to dogma, which can be seen as a set of beliefs which go together as a totality and posits itself beyond doubt. An ideal can be recognized as such, but a myth is blind to itself.⁵⁹

Transparency referring to Social Life: the Meaning of Performativity

Building on the logic of ‘understanding is seeing’ and concomitant metaphors and metaphorical myths, transparency enjoys broad acceptance. However, things become complicated, when it refers to social and potentially also societal life. In the following, I discuss the meaning of transparency as a part of social interaction and its different connotations. What is the meaning of intentionality or performativity? I argue that in social life transparency has many layers, which have different operational logics.

⁵³ Luis Brandeis: *Other Peoples’ Money*. 1913/ Available at: www.law.louisville.edu/library/collections/brandeis/node/196. Critically A. Etzioni: *Is Transparency the Best Disinfectant?* *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 18:4, 2010, p. 389–404.

⁵⁴ Alex Gibney’s documentary film “We Steal Secrets: the Story of WikiLeaks”, 2013.

⁵⁵ O. A. Albu & M. Flyverbom: *Categories and Dimensions of Organizational Transparency*. Paper prepared for the 3rd Global Conference on Transparency Research, October 24th – 26th, 2013, HEC PARIS, p. 5 (available at <http://research.cbs.dk/en/publications/uuid%2817e63524-04d5-4561-980f-2da7b7955380%29.html>). Albu and Flyverbom conduct a meta-research on the many meanings and approached to the concept of transparency in social sciences and humanities. Crucial distinctive water shed is that of *performativity*. The authors (p. 15) couple the idea of performativity with John L. Austin’s speech act theory.

⁵⁶ Christensen & Cornelissen 2015, p. 133: “We argue that the transparency myth provides a deep-seated substratum for a range of metaphors, which provide naturalized ways of talking and thinking about organizations. The myth directly fuels contemporary ways of talking and thinking about organizational transparency, yet ironically is itself sheltered from critique and remains intact.” See also p. 33. Curtin & Meijer 2006, p. 120–121.

⁵⁷ Christensen & Cornelissen 2015, p. 136.

⁵⁸ Christensen & Cornelissen 2015, p. 138, also Han 2015, p. viii: “Transparency is an ideology. Like all ideologies, it has a positive core that has been mystified and made absolute. The danger of transparency lies in such totalization. If totalized, it yields terror.”

⁵⁹ Christensen & Cornelissen 2015, p. 136.

Seeing – or more importantly – understanding (or knowing) in the form of transparency is not always deemed positive. Instead, transparency also has negative, even pejorative connotations, which are systematically unnoticed or overlooked in current transparency debates. In my view, they are of crucial importance in understanding how transparency works. The negative connotations become evident when we say that someone’s speeches or actions are transparent or that we can see through them. In these cases, transparency is considered bad.⁶⁰ That is because it signifies the inability to conceal true motives behind a certain action. In that particular way, it is a failure of instrumental reason; the chosen strategy is deflated by the act of being exposed.

Perhaps surprisingly, we resent this revelation. We prefer hidden motives to remain hidden. If someone is involuntarily transparent, we do not appreciate it; in those cases transparency means failure and weakness instead of virtuous demeanor. Indeed, unintended transparency is probably one of our worst nightmares: the dream of being naked in the school yard is a universal one. How much more horrible it would be if someone could read our thoughts.⁶¹

Unintentional transparency can be highly problematic in social interaction. Namely, the disclosure of our possible primitive or socially unacceptable temptations and desires would undermine the credibility of our conscious good intentions. This is also recognized by Sigmund Freud in his classic work on *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), in which he contends that our culture, which is supposed to make us happy, is at the same time causing anxiety by defining the ways in which we can pursue happiness. Importantly, our animal instincts need to be suppressed.⁶²

In order that civilized social harmony prevails, much must be left unsaid and also, unnoticed. One could even argue that the whole process of socialization is underpinned by this regulative ideal. A general revelation of all of our temptations and urges would, under the imaginary condition of total transparency, make saving face – our prestige or dignity in social situations⁶³ – impossible, ultimately, because there would be no face to be saved.⁶⁴ I will come back to this point later in the text.

⁶⁰ Compare with Teurlings & Stauff 2014, p. 4: “The value of transparency is paradoxical: There are some cases in which transparency is very clearly defined as a danger – most people want to keep their private data private. In many more cases, however, the positive value of transparency is simply assumed – transparency even becomes an imperative. It looks as if, depending on different kinds of entities and issues, transparency has to either be complete or completely rejected. There seems to be no in-between.”

⁶¹ It seems that our fear of being transparent is actually often unwarranted. Thomas Gilovich, Victoria Husted Medvec and Kenneth Stavisky demonstrate in their study (The Illusion of Transparency: Biased Assessments of Others’ Ability to Read One’s Emotional States, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1998, vol. 75, no 2, p. 332–346) that people often overestimate the extent in which their internal states ‘leak out’ to others. One conclusion is, thus, that we are better liars than we think (p. 345). However, along with refining technology, such as brain imaging, the question of mental privacy has emerged. For example, see Amihud Gilead: Can Brain Imaging Breach Our Mental Privacy? *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, June 2015, Volume 6, Issue 2, p. 275–291; and Sarah D. Richmond, Geraint Rees & Sarah J. L. Edwards (eds): *I Know What You’re Thinking: Brain Imaging and Mental Privacy*. Oxford University Press 2012.

⁶² Sigmund Freud: *Civilization and its Discontents*. W.W. Norton & Company Inc., New York 1966. Also Thomas Nagel (Concealment and Exposure and Other Essays, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 4) argues that concealment is necessary to our very civilization: “Concealment includes not only secrecy and deception but also reticence and non-acknowledgment. There is much more going on inside us all the time than we are willing to express, and civilization would be impossible if we could all read each other’s minds.” For instance, Žižek has questioned the basic idea of Freud’s book; since Freud, the rules governing acceptable behavior have become more liberal in western societies. However, the goal of happiness has sustained. In addition, what is considered normal is understandable only within that culture. See Slavoj Žižek: *Nature and its Discontents*, *SubStance*, Issue 117, Volume 37, Number 3, 2008, p. 37–72.

⁶³ Erving Goffman: *Interaction Ritual – Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1967/1982; chapter ‘On Face-work’, p. 5–45, p. 5): “The term ‘face’ may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line of others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image others may share as when a person makes a good showing of his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself.”

⁶⁴ This presupposes a split subject, who may have conflicting desires and aspirations. That, of course, goes back to a psychoanalytical interpretation of the human character.

However, voluntary or intentional transparency, also conceptualized as honesty, candor, openness, sincerity etc. is not subject to this contempt. On the contrary, it is celebrated as honorable, although it may entail healthy suspicions of the need for that kind of labelling. Still, it can never be complete. Total transparency, even intentional, would mean social suicide. As mentioned, social life requires restraining impulses. Therefore, positively connoting transparency calls for certain kind of performativity. That is to say, it requires conscious exposure and awareness of the potential social consequences of that exposure.

Erving Goffman discusses indirectly these issues in his seminal work of social psychology, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959; 1990). Goffman's point of departure is precisely that of a performative self. His theory is built around a dramaturgical metaphor of a theater. In it, he approaches the social self as a performance, as a show addressed to a particular audience.⁶⁵ That is to say, every person is an actor of sorts, trying to control the appearance, demeanor and impression she gives to others and, at the same time, read the current situation to readjust the performance to its requirements. The goal is to induce, consciously or unconsciously, a desired reaction in the audience, to gain the audience's approval, affection or to otherwise govern their perception.⁶⁶

As the performance happens metaphorically on the 'stage' of a theater, the backstage is not meant for the eyes of the audience.⁶⁷ Social self as a performance presupposes a time and place for acting as well as not acting. Throughout the book, Goffman emphasizes the importance of an agreed definition upon the situation.⁶⁸ On the one hand, the audience is needed to validate the performance: "[w]hen an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them".⁶⁹ Goffman calls this impression management.⁷⁰

On the other hand, the performance is also deeply personal. We have an emotional attachment to our performance; we need to have belief in it in order to be 'sincere'; otherwise we may be called cynical.⁷¹ Correspondingly, when we blame someone for 'putting on an act' or being pretentious, and in that sense being pejoratively transparent, we actually make an aesthetic judgment on bad acting or failed impression management.⁷² So the question is not about whether or not someone is acting, but

⁶⁵ Goffman's (1990, p. 26) definition of performance is as follows: "[a]ll the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants."

⁶⁶ Goffman 1990, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Goffman (1990, p 231) argues, that "we often find a division into back region, where a performance of a routine is prepared, and front region, where the performance is presented. Access to these regions is controlled in order to prevent the audience from seeing backstage and to prevent outsiders from coming into a performance that is not addressed to them."

⁶⁸ Goffman 1990, p. 15: "Let us now turn from the others to the point of view of the individual who presents himself before them. He may wish them to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how in fact he feels towards them, or to obtain no clear-cut impression; he may wish to ensure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them. Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind, and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan."

⁶⁹ Goffman 1990, p. 28.

⁷⁰ Goffman 1990, p. 203–230.

⁷¹ Goffman 1990, p. 28–29, see also p. 210.

⁷² Interestingly, theater language in general tends to be pejorative. See Jonas Barish: *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1981), who analyzes the negative attitudes which theater is historically subject to in Western thought. As he asks on the very cover of the book, "Why has theater aroused such passionate antipathy over the centuries? Why has it been attacked not only by straight-laced moralists but by major philosophers – Plato, Saint Augustine, Rousseau, Nietzsche? Does their hostility toward the theater point to a fundamental human failing?" This antipathy is clearly visible in language. Unlike adjectives alluding to other art forms, epithets, terms and expressions borrowed from the world of theater seem to be almost systematically belittling: theatrical, melodramatic, stagey, make a

how appropriately, easily and plausibly that is done.⁷³ Following Goffman's reasoning it could be argued that everybody acts, but not equally skillfully.

In the following, I deepen the analysis of the meaning of theater imagery relevant to the idea of the performative self. I argue that it structures the different connotations of transparency in social life.

Performativity, Transparency and the Implications of Theater Imagery

As described, the idea of performativity of self is based on and inspired by an image of a theater. The implications of this metaphoric conceptualization are worth a closer look, including beyond its immediate social psychological application. A theater is a powerful imagery, which entails an entire vocabulary with concomitant functions: there is a stage, a backstage, a curtain, performance, audience and the credibility, impressiveness or authenticity of performance. This imagery matters in regard to theorizing transparency in at least three, intertwined senses.

First, it seems that the successfulness of our social life depends on our capacity to create and uphold an appropriate persona. Even though 'persona' is not a part of Goffman's vocabulary in a strict sense, the performative self, according to my understanding, means roughly the same thing. According to the Oxford dictionary, persona means "1. The aspect of someone's character that is presented to or perceived by others: her public persona; 1.1. A role or character adopted by an author or an actor."⁷⁴ This duality of meaning is hardly coincidental but analogous.

Etymologically, 'persona' comes from Latin. It signifies a theatrical mask, a cover, a costume. As such, it creates a showable face in rather concrete terms and is thus compatible with the theater imagery.⁷⁵ This idea is also negatively portrayed in the metaphor of 'losing face'. Furthermore, the very term 'person' is part of the same etymological root as persona, which makes visible the quintessential importance of the social self. According to one explanation, "'person' may be related to the Latin *personare* 'to sound through' (i.e. the mask as something spoken through and perhaps amplifying the voice)",⁷⁶ which would make an interesting sensory counterpart for transparency as 'seeing through'.

Even if wearing a mask or displaying a persona may sound dishonest, it is crucial so as to appear and function as a coherent agent in the social world. Moreover, people may have different

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scene, putting on an act, putting on a performance, making a spectacle of oneself etc. None of them evokes positive associations. This effect is not restricted to English. (p. 1).

⁷³ In assessing the performance, there is also an interesting aspect of entitlement. Goffman 1990, p. 66: "Sometimes when we ask whether a fostered impression is true or false we really mean to ask whether or not the performer is authorized to give the performance in question, and are not primarily concerned with the actual performance itself."

⁷⁴ http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/persona. In psychology, it originates from Jungian thought and may be contrasted to 'anima'. Carl Gustav Jung: *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (Second Edition, Routledge, London 1953/1966/1990, p. 192): persona is "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual." He further associates persona with his idea of a collective psyche.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, on the cover of the book 'Transparency in International Law' is a picture of a decorative mask. See Ulrich Peruß: *Andrea Bianchi & Anne Peters: Transparency in International Law*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xx + 620. £90. ISBN: 9781107021389, I•CON 12, 2014, p. 820.

⁷⁶ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=person>. Online Etymology Dictionary. See also Han 2015, p. 35. This may hold also institutionally. Watt (2012, p. 38) argues: "[The] mask is the epitome of legal covering. The hand is a powerful medium of social communication but to read a face is to read a mind as directly, probably more directly as a book that the same mind might write. The interposing of an artificial mask between the face the reader, the viewer is therefore an imperious attempt to control the means of communication. It will hardly surprise us then, to discover that our public face, our social personhood and legal personality is a construct conceived in terms of a mask. *Persona* is the Latin word for the type of mask that was used in classical drama going back to the theatre of the Ancient Greeks. The law struggles to hear and to see the nuances of our inner being and so prefers to deal with the abstract superficiality of a legal personality. Even corporations have a legal personality and it is only with reluctance that the courts will occasionally lift the so-called "corporate veil" to reveal the deeper reality of the thing. The mask of legal personality requires the social performance on the law's terms."

personas, different masks for different situations, enabling flexibly performative identity.⁷⁷ In fact, it is necessary. However, the choice and changing of the mask depends on the non-performing or private aspect of the self, whether this is conscious or not.⁷⁸ Goffman argues that the self on the metaphorical backstage is the part of a person that is not performative. On the backstage, "the suppressed facts make an appearance."⁷⁹ Conversely, when the person goes social, she puts a mask on and becomes conscious of the particular audience and its laws; she is exposed to gaze.⁸⁰

Second, the idea of public and private spheres is an essential part of the theater imaginary. This goes both for a persona as a showable face but also for theater as a space for the performance to take place, including also the audience and the potential other stage personnel. Namely, a constitutive part of a theater, the curtain, clearly makes the distinction between the public or the performative and the private or the hidden operations of the play. Its function is thus to govern visibilities and enable coherent performance and to govern the reactions of the audience. The non-public-eye-durable operations remain concealed – without transparency.

This is, indeed, where transparency as an idea becomes relevant. If the curtain was transparent, its very function would be undercut. As it hardly ever is transparent, here, transparency may become a synonym of exposure. Accordingly, transparency might be seen as an opened curtain, opened either intentionally by the actors or other personnel, exposing the backstage in a controlled manner, or unintentionally, by someone else in an unauthorized way. However, it is important to notice that every spectator in a theater is aware of the existence of the backstage and the necessary preparatory operations which happen there. It is fair to argue that nobody is under the belief that the performance is all there is to it. Instead, it is commonly understood that a successful performance is underpinned by cautious preparation which is not intended to be seen. This does not cause objection; it is accepted as a structural feature of theater as an art form.

Third, the opened curtain or a lifted veil entails questions of truth and reality. The concealing function of a curtain, a mask or a veil may cause suspicions of the 'reality' of the performance and whether there is 'truer truth' behind the created opacity. Is exposed reality less relevant or less true than concealed reality, especially when we know that operations behind the curtain exist and matter? As this is a spontaneously natural way of thinking, the idea of 'truth', about a person or object of other kind, residing on the other side of the curtain, may be too simplistic.

Jean Starobinski summarizes well the counterargument for the truth-as-a-lifted-veil conception:

The metaphor of the lifted veil is the figurative counterpart of a realist theory of knowledge. It is an image employed in a naïvely optimistic manner, which pretends to see the true visage behind the mask, to grasp the "thing in itself": to touch the reality behind the appearance, the substance beyond the accident.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Goffman (1990, p. 57) calls this 'audience segregation'. If audience segregation fails, it entails impression management problems (p. 139).

⁷⁸ Goffman 1990, p. 63–64:

⁷⁹ Goffman 1990, p. 114.

⁸⁰ Goffman 1990, p. 114–140.

⁸¹ Jean Starobinski: Jean Jacques Rousseau. *Transparency and Obstruction*. Transl. by Arthur Goldhammer. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1988, p. 74. The link between theater-like performativity and transparency was interestingly recognized – and resented – by Rousseau, who dreamed of total transparency. According to Starobinski (1988, p. 95) Rousseau called for the metaphor of a festival instead of that of a theater. In the latter, dispersed actor-spectator constellations would prevail and both of the positions would be shared by all: "The theater is to the festival as opacity is to transparency". More generally on the antipathy towards theater, see Barish 1981. Jay 1994, p. 92–93: "Unlike the theater with its division between spectators and actors, the festival was a model of total participation. Whereas the theater trafficked in illusion and pandered to the senses, the festival provided a healthy moral experience in the open air. Rather than a mere representation – Rousseau was Platonic in his hostility to aesthetic as well as political representation – the festival was pure presence, an end in itself, a communion of souls without anything to mediate between them. Thus the festival, most strikingly presented in the wine harvest in *La nouvelle Heloise*, had its counterpart in the patriotic community expressing the General Will developed in the *Social Contract*."

Also Teurlings and Stauff argue that transparency is not an act of showing or distributing a picture of a certain object. According to them, reality, “as any more than banal notion of ideology concedes”, cannot be exposed by lifting a veil. Namely, the ‘reality itself’ is intricate and consists also of hidden areas and invisibility. Hence, any kind of mediating entity only adds to the impossibility of full transparency.⁸²

Strikingly, it seems that normative transparency and its metaphorical promise is based exactly on this kind of realist theory of knowledge, yet with the inclusion of its above described icono-ambivalent logic. If we do not subscribe to this understanding, the truth revealing function of transparency will be questioned. Therefore, the allure of the idea of a lifted veil or an opened curtain as a method of accessing truth needs to be considered critically. Namely, taken too optimistically, it may lead to something that I would call naïve iconoclasm. According to it, facades would somehow always be fake or less real than the veiled reality. The social self or the conscious performance need not be any less truthful than the operations ‘behind the scenes’; a mask, a veil or a curtain do not only obstruct or cover but create an alternative appearance. Importantly, they include more agency. As Walter Benjamin states, truth is not a matter of exposure of the secret, but a revelation that does justice to it.⁸³

To the extent we can juxtapose the curtain, mask or a veil with an image; we go back to the idea of iconoclasm, the oscillation of iconoclasm and iconophily, or the oscillation between belief and suspicion towards an image. As argued, all of the three implications of the theater metaphor are entangled; they are all united by the same idea of truth, whether is it ‘natural’ or constructed, designed to be seen or not. How we perceive what we see and how we are supposed to perceive. In the following, I deepen the analysis of the motives of concealment in social life.

Some Functions of Concealment: Protecting Strategy, Avoiding Shame

Protecting Strategy

To derive a general rule or, more modestly, a working hypothesis from the idea and importance of the performative self, it is fair to suggest that we seem to despise the failure to portray ourselves in a controlled and deliberate way in social interaction. To some extent, we respect conscious revelation but not being revealed by someone else.

As presented, the literal meaning of transparency suggests that it allows access to unmediated, or at least undistorted, reality. As I have argued that this idea is problematic for several reasons, more follows. It is not easy to detect that we do not want everything to be transparent. Correspondingly, when transparency functions as a metaphor for positive social interaction, mediation and performativity of the (alleged) truth becomes furtively *sine qua non*. Transparency as such may be instrumental, but its appreciation varies as a function of control. Seen like that, (self-)control, an ability to deliver a credible performance, or, successful impression management, becomes a higher-rank value than gaining extensive knowledge about the particular social context. This is also portrayed in our intrinsic aversion towards ‘too much information’, which stems from our tacit recognition of the particular boundaries of appropriate revelation.

The necessary performativity of the self could be dismissed as a feature of social life which would not be applicable to transparency as an institutional ideal. However, I, on the contrary, argue

⁸² Teurlings and Stauff 2015, p. 5.

⁸³ Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne. Verso Books, New York, London, 1998, p. 31. Also Michel Taussig: *Defacement. Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. Stanford University Press 1999, p. 8. Interestingly, Walter Benjamin (Marcus Bullock & Michael W. Jennings (eds): *Goethe’s Elective Affinities. Selected Writings 1913–1926. Vol 1*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 351, quoted in Han 2015, p. 21) also conflates the object being veiled with its beauty: “The beautiful is neither the veil nor the veiled object but rather the object in its veil. Unveiled, however, it would prove to be infinitely inconspicuous [*unscheinbar*].... For that object, to which in the last instance the veil is essential, is not to be characterized otherwise. Since only the beautiful and outside is nothing – veiling or being veiled – can be essential, the divine ground of the being of beauty lies in the secret.”

that the pejorative meaning provides us with a valuable perspective into the functioning mechanism of transparency also beyond that. As argued above, ‘transparency’ as a metaphoric concept is not based on homonymy but analogy. This is why it is worthwhile to delve into some psycho-social and even philosophical aspects of transparency. They make transparency’s intrinsic social sanctions visible, which may also account for its effect as the mentioned ‘disinfectant.’ The analogy of (social-)psychology may have explanatory power also in institutional contexts.

The ability to conceal one’s certain, strategic, motives is especially essential in zero-sum-game situations, in which the agents – whether individuals or institutions – compete instead of cooperate with each other. Using the theater imagery, the situation could be described in a following way: there are two or more stages and two or more audiences; both (or all) are acting simultaneously in both roles. The meaning of interactivity accentuates. Here, the failure to conceal strategy epitomizes: one’s gain is the other’s loss. By being (involuntarily) transparent to the competitor the agent spoils or at least severely jeopardizes his or her chance of winning. Gamblers use the term ‘tell’ to refer to the risk of revealing their cards through subtle facial expressions or body movements. In this situation, the failure equates the concrete loss of the game and subsequently, also money.

Generalizing that rationality, game theory departs from the idea of asymmetric distribution of information and its effects on strategic behavior.⁸⁴ It is based on the calculations of the other agents’ potential moves and their effect on the selection of the best possible strategy. In the context of international relations, states may be considered players of a game. They want to know each other’s cards in order to gain international leverage. The desire to know the other players’ intentions is where intelligence and espionage come into the picture. Secrecy is both their reason and operational principle.⁸⁵ What is publicly known already implies what is not known, an agenda implies a non-agenda, maybe even a hidden agenda. Indeed, this resembles a large-scale card game: every player knows that the others have cards, whose content she is not aware of. In a way, that makes the whole game worth playing, and indeed, a game to begin with.

The asymmetry of knowledge constitutes an apparatus of mutual cynicism. The agents, in this context, want to conceal their own and know the other’s strategy, at best so that the other is not conscious of the happened revelation. This problematique was well dramatized in the film ‘The Imitation Game’ (2014). It told the story of British mathematician Alan Turing and his team of cryptographers during World War II. Their task was to crack Germany’s encrypted communication system Enigma. In the film, a crucial dramatic tension was built around an ethical conundrum: how should the team act after having cracked the code? The team decided to keep the success of their task concealed. This caused some collateral damage, for instance, the death of one team member’s brother. However, revealing the de-coding would have been even more detrimental: it would have probably caused Germany to change its encryption technique, prolonged the war and cost more lives. In this context, the adoption of utilitarian ethics becomes particularly tempting.

At this point, it would be easy to draw the following conclusion: transparency is good when agents are acting *with* and bad when they are acting *against* each other. However, that would be a dangerous simplification. Namely, transparency, so as to be kept in high regard, needs to be controlled also beyond clearly strategic situations, even in the context of cooperation or neutral social interaction. In the following, I deepen the analysis of the motives of self-regulation and transparency.

Avoiding Shame

I argue that unintentional transparency as signifying lack of control is avoided, because, in addition to losing a game, as described, it is closely bound to shame and embarrassment. Shame is a social feeling which undermines the worth and honor of a person in the eyes of community, stripping her from

⁸⁴ Much economic modelling is based on the idea. Subsequently, ‘transparency’ belongs also to the vocabulary of economics, for instance in the forms of ‘market transparency’ or ‘price transparency’. See for example, Robert Bloomfield and Maureen O’Hara: Market Transparency: Who Wins and Who Loses? The Review of Financial Studies vol. 2, n. 1, 1999, p. 5–35.

⁸⁵ As Ulrich Preuß states in his book review (2014, p. 820): “Note that a state’s spying on another country is not a wrongful act under international law; it is supposed to be an indispensable instrument of protecting state security.”

gained social status. It can be a highly painful experience to an individual and it is often described, as noted, by using the metaphor of losing face.⁸⁶ Shame makes a person want to hide away from the judging or derisive gazes, or gazes in general, to disappear. It could also be approached as an injury of the persona.

The capability of upholding a persona is, as discussed, of crucial importance. As Thomas Nagel argues,

So conventions of reticence and privacy serve a valuable function in keeping us out of each other's faces. But they also serve to give each of us some control over the face we present to the world. We don't want to expose ourselves completely to strangers even if we don't fear their disapproval, hostility, or disgust. Naked exposure itself, whether or not it arouses disapproval, is disqualifying. The boundary between what we reveal and what we do not, and some control over that boundary, is among the most important attributes of our humanity.⁸⁷

The archetypal allegory of the emergence of shame is portrayed by revealed nakedness.⁸⁸ This is mythically recognized.⁸⁹ For instance, this is interestingly addressed in Hans Christian Andersen's famous story of the Emperor's new clothes. In it, a child is in a decisive position. She shouts that the Emperor is not wearing any clothes whatsoever, thus breaking the implicit collective agreement of pretending otherwise. The Emperor, in order to save his face, continues as if nothing had happened and as if he was not naked. He acts as if he still had control over his self-presentation. What is more, in the story, the shame is triggered specifically by the external eye and its internalization. Something in the concomitant context transforms the innocent, (fallaciously) chosen nakedness into shameful. I contend that it is coupled with *the loss of control*.

In the following, I will apply mainly Moshe Halbertal's theorizing on the covert marriage of transparency and shame: how do these phenomena relate to each other?⁹⁰ Halbertal's book 'Concealment and Revelation. Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications' (2007) concentrates mainly, as the title says, on the history of esotericism in Jewish thought. However, the last chapter of the book (Chapter 17: 'Taxonomy and Paradoxes of Esotericism: Conceptual Conclusion') discusses the philosophical underpinnings of concealment and revelation, and can, also according to the author, be read separately. This is how the book is used here.

In order to describe the drama of shame, Halbertal refers to Sartre's example. In it, someone peeks at a naked person through a keyhole, transgressing the limits of privacy. When this is happening, another person passes by and witnesses the other person committing the deed.⁹¹ According to Halbertal, shame can be approached as a two-order phenomenon. To prove that, he expands Sartre's narrative: What if we would assume that the person in the room opens the door and catches the voyeur watching. This revelation, or, transparency, if you will, creates two different positions of shame. The person who is naked feels embarrassed as well as the person who was caught watching. However, the shame constituting element differs regarding the two.

First, the person who was observed watching internalizes the observer's point of view. According to Halbertal, in that case, the outside eye does not actually constitute the shame. Instead, it triggers a change in self-perception. That is to say, the one who was watching through the keyhole has been made to perceive himself watching. Thus, one has to confront the deed via someone else's

⁸⁶ Goffman 1982, p. 5–45.

⁸⁷ Nagel 2002, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Nagel 2002, p. 16: "[h]umans clothe themselves, in one way or another, [h] even if it is only with paint, offering a self-presentation rather than their nakedness to the public gaze."

⁸⁹ Also revealed nakedness – in the sense of suddenly understanding its inappropriateness and inherent shamefulness – was a central consequence of the fall of the man in the Bible. Before that nudity was natural. See Watt 2012, p. 25, Han 2015, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Halbertal 2007

⁹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre: *Being and Nothingness. A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated Hazel E. Barnes. Philosophical Library, New York 1956, p. 261–262, Halbertal 2007, p. 143–144.

perception, which induces shame. In this case, the role of the external eye is important but not decisive: the change of perception might happen also without a catalyzing witness. That would, nevertheless, require sufficient self-reflexivity, an ability to watch oneself as though from outside.⁹² Here, shame is enmeshed with guilt, caused by failure in meeting one's own ethical standards.

Second, the more rudimentary form of shame – the shame of the person who was watched being naked – has a different mechanism of emergence. This is what Halbertal calls primary shame, a situation in which the shame inflicting effect of a gaze is more purely constitutive than in the case of secondary shame. Namely, it makes the nudity shameful by exposing it against or notwithstanding of the person's will. The constitutive element is stronger,

[s]ince he causes a transformation in the description of the thing exposed, which is not the case in secondary shame. Nudity becomes a concern when it is improperly observed; it is the contact with the eye that makes it shameful.⁹³

So, in the first case shame is secondary, because it is the shame of inducing shame in another person or shame of wanting to penetrate wrongfully into the other person's sphere of privacy. In the latter case, it is primary: the eye caused a transformation of a natural, private state of things into a shameful disclosure beyond an individual's control. In the first case the eye is revelatory whereas in the second it is transformational. As Halbertal argues, "In that respect, because of the constitutive role of the observer, shame and guilt are clearly distinguishable in cases of primary shame but not in secondary shame."⁹⁴

Transparency-induced shame, thus, may create a hierarchy of positions, causing disparate constellations of emotions. Even though transparency may be contrasted both to strategy and to privacy, it seems that the violation of either does lead, at the end of the day, to shame. In revealed strategy it is tinted by exposed weakness and guilt whereas in violated privacy more purely of losing face. Still, transparency, in both cases, results in degradation in the eyes of the immediate community, or at least, of one person. Following Halbertal's categorization, it could be argued that the loss of strategy triggers a second order shame whereas loss of privacy the primary one. That would mean that in the case of loss of strategy, shame and guilt would be intertwined whereas in the case of the loss of privacy, that would not be the case.

Moreover, as Halbertal notes, the genuine opposite of shame is not shamelessness but intimacy. It could also be called confidentiality. In an intimate situation, it is possible to reveal more of oneself than otherwise; the fear of humiliation is shut down.⁹⁵ As Nagel defines it, "Intimacy in its various forms is a partial lifting of the usual veil of reticence."⁹⁶ However, even in this case, I argue, call for control remains as the deep-structure of positively connoting transparency. Also, for that reason, intimacy cannot be forced.⁹⁷ Intimacy requires trust, which presumes at least an implicit agreement of further non-disclosure. Thus, the danger of unintentional transparency is minimized; revelation is based on the calculated risk of trusting. Through this mechanism, intimacy constitutes a

⁹² Halbertal 2007, p. 143–144.

⁹³ Halbertal 2007, p. 144.

⁹⁴ Halbertal 2007, p. 144, p. 145. He further argues that secondary shame leads to the loss of self-esteem whereas in the primary shame, in the form of forced nakedness, there is no self-esteem to be lost. That is because the subject is deprived of the ability to control when and how to appear to the public eye.

⁹⁵ Halbertal 2007, p. 146.

⁹⁶ Nagel 2002, p. 18.

⁹⁷ Halbertal 2007, p. 146. Compare with Han (2015, p. 34-35) who detects an ideological shift which he particularly associated with the rise of transparency and normative intimacy: He argues that modern society has stepped out from the idea of theatricality as a metaphor of social life with its public-private distinction and entered into that of normative intimacy to the extent that the "tyranny of intimacy psychologizes and personalizes everything". According to him, "we have entered into the ideology of intimacy in which relations prove more real, genuine, credible, and authentic the more closely they approach the inner psychic needs of individuals. One believes that one attains transparency of the soul by revealing intimate feelings and emotions, by laying the soul bare."

local enlargement of the sphere of the controlled self. In other words, intimacy does not jeopardize one's ability have a persona.⁹⁸

An example of this kind of situation could be confidential discussions between friends or spouses or a therapist and a patient. Private and institutional confidential discussions are, however, only partly comparable. Especially in institutional confidential discussions, the possibility of shame prevails. This may become visible in avoiding straight eye-contact. As Halbertal notes, this in mind, there are institutional arrangements which make a straight eye-contact impossible when utterly personal, possibly shame inducing matters are revealed (a therapist's coach, a priest's confessional). In addition, this makes the inability to control ones representation a historical phenomenon: the shame may be caused by past deeds even though the actual revelation would be intentional.⁹⁹

In the institutional confidential discussions or non-verbal revelations (e.g. nakedness before a medical doctor), however, shameless revelation becomes possible without mutual intimacy, because the genuine subjectivity of the object of the gaze is bracketed by a particular setup. The person is approached in a certain role, as a patient, for example.¹⁰⁰ The placement into this role keeps the persona otherwise protected from shame. However, again we observe a structural difference between first and second order shame: confidential discussions between an attorney and a client would not be subject to avoiding eye-contact. This is probably because these discussions relate more to the choice of the optimal strategy than intimate revelations about privacy.

As discussed above, involuntary, off-performance transparency can be detrimental to the persona, successful impression management and the upholding of a positive self-image. At worst, losing face would mean the very defilement of the persona. According to Halbertal, total transparency would even signify the disappearance of the borderline between the self and the surroundings; transparency is not a border-friendly category. Shame, caused by involuntary transparency, is a profound violation of one's consciousness of boundedness; the self cannot be transparent because individuation requires a certain amount of concealment. Moreover, enabled by this concealment, the self operates on the scale of closeness and distance. This happens by revealing different levels of itself as a function of trust, "through the privileged position he has to his interiority".¹⁰¹

Yet, the question of the transparency of the self *itself* remains. The performativity can be seen through, but can the self?¹⁰² It seems that the self can never be fully transparent even to itself, as psychoanalysis has shown. As Halbertal argues,

The problem of transparency extends beyond the political structure and institutions to the self. It might be argued that not only social order and institutions will collapse under complete conditions of transparency, but the self will be undermined if it becomes completely transparent to itself. After all, repression and its relative self-deception are necessary forms of self-maintenance.¹⁰³

That is to say, total transparency would be detrimental in non-obvious ways. In the condition of total transparency, the individuality of people and, debatably, even institutions would vanish.

However, much of the persona consists of our conscious construction, of the narrative of ourselves: who we are and how we became to be who we are.¹⁰⁴ Possibly, this narrative structure

⁹⁸ Halbertal 2007, p. 146.

⁹⁹ Halbertal 2007, p. 148.

¹⁰⁰ Halbertal 2007, p. 148. Shifts in the established roles may cause the shame to return. Halbertal mentions the example of meeting one's therapist at a dinner table.

¹⁰¹ Halbertal 2007, p. 142–143. Also Han 2015, p. 3: "Total illumination [of a human soul] would scorch it and cause a particular kind of spiritual burnout."

¹⁰² Goffman 1990, p. 28: "[n]o one is in quite as good an observational position to see through the act as the person who puts it on."

¹⁰³ Halbertal 2007, p. 3-4.

¹⁰⁴ See A. P. Kerby: *Narrative and the Self*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis 1991, p. 4: "On a narrative account, the self is to be construed not as a prelinguistic given that merely employs language, much as we might employ a tool, but rather as a product of language – that might be called the implied subject of self-referring utterances."

further underpins the performative persona we choose to display in the constant condition of social plays. Maybe it could be seen as a screenplay of the performances. From a realist or cynical point of view, this means also the crucial self-maintenance mechanism of self-deception as mentioned. Indeed, the idea of a narrated self and its plausibility is problematic as a complete account of the self. Narrative form is partial at best and is typically based on simplistic attributions of causality. Especially when it comes to other people, we perceive things which do not fit with the narrated persona. Interestingly, although we cannot falsify other people's autobiographies we tend to be somewhat suspicious towards them. At the same time, we firmly believe our own.¹⁰⁵

Hence, we can never be totally transparent to ourselves, nor to others.¹⁰⁶ These two spheres of opacity (opacity to ourselves, opacity to others) need not, and cannot, be identical: some aspects of us maybe clear, non-performatively transparent, to others but not to ourselves, and, of course, vice versa. In order to be positive, transparency would need to be intentional. As stated, unintentional transparency, for one, would not be valued or pursued; at best, it would cause a neutral reaction. This leads to a curious paradox: *so as to be appreciated, the visual needs to become performative, which conceptually, is only one subcategory of the visual*. It presupposes a conscious agent which either illuminates or constructs the desired view. Thus, when referring to a value in social life, the meaning of transparency is subtracted from its connotative multitude and reduced to the performative.

Concluding Remarks: Six Paradoxes of Transparency

This paper has discussed some of the theoretical preconditions which make the normative ideal of transparency understandable. It has also broken down its general metaphorical functionality. The emphasis has been on arguing how transparency entails many unnoticed or undertheorized characteristics which make it more controversial an ideal in social life and in institutional contexts than has been acknowledged so far. The main findings can be summarized in six inherent paradoxes peculiar to transparency.¹⁰⁷ In the following, I shall discuss each of these complexities one by one, although they are partly overlapping and a matter of perspective.

Transparency metaphor oscillates between 'window' and 'flashlight interpretations'. I argued that transparency as a linguistic metaphor is based on the cognitive metaphor of 'understanding is seeing'. Furthermore, transparency has two metaphoric interpretations: those of the window metaphor and the flashlight metaphor. Window alludes to allowing transparency to happen naturally whereas flashlight alludes to a conscious agent who directs the beam and thus illuminates the object. However, even the window metaphor needs to be constructed; also it cannot reveal everything abstractly relevant.

Transparency oscillates between visual and verbal representation. The physical element of transparency has lent its rationality to the symbolic function. Although transparency may mean symbolic transparency, referring to making documents public, or giving reasons for a decision, or communicating effectively, this does not exhaust its meaning. At the same time, the direct see-ability is still working as a form of transparency, as a direct access to meeting the glass walls of governance buildings and live streaming, for instance. The symbolic use has not fully occupied the more direct visual rationality of transparency. These two forms of transparency involve different amounts and forms of mediation. Transparency functions both *as* transparency and *as if* transparency.

(Contd.) _____

The self, or subject, then becomes a result of discursive praxis rather than either a substantial entity having ontological priority over praxis or a self with epistemological priority, an originator of meaning."

¹⁰⁵ Timothy D. Wilson: *Strangers to Ourselves*. Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA & London 2002.

¹⁰⁶ Han 2015, p. 3: "According to Freud, the ego denies precisely what the unconscious affirms and desires without reserve. Therefore, a rift runs through the human psyche and prevents the ego from agreeing even with itself. This fundamental rift renders self-transparency impossible. A rift also gapes between people. For this reason, interpersonal transparency proves impossible to achieve. It is also not worth trying to do so. The other's very lack of transparency is what keeps the relationship alive." Also J. Butler: *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Fordham University Press 2005.

¹⁰⁷ I thank Or Bassok for inspiring this classification.

Transparency as a tool is not neutral. As stated, transparency seems to function without an agenda. It appears a mere facilitator of visibility, enabled by being, in Birchall's words, "the cultural signifier of neutrality". However, it is never completely neutral, as any media. As I have argued, following MacLuhan and Baudrillard and some others, media do not only expose but also create part of the object seen. We do not only see things made visible by transparency but we see the created transparency itself in the form of the practices labelled as 'transparency'. Especially when it comes to transparency, certain scopic regimes come into play.

Transparency oscillates between constructive and revelatory functions. One problem of transparency is that one can never be quite sure of the level of mediation, the 'hand at work'. As argued, transparency is at the same time something that naturally is and something that has been consciously created. A paradox of iconoclasm exists at the heart of transparency; transparency both relies on mediation and is suspicious towards it. That makes it hard to assess, to what extent we can trust the scenery we are offered.

Transparency is not always desirable. The proliferating normative transparency talk suggests that the more transparency there is the better. This, however, is an illusion. I have argued that our social life is necessarily based on restricting our urges to reveal and to see things. Indeed, when we blame someone for being transparent we blame them for being strategically clumsy by unwillingly disclosing a hidden agenda. Transparency – or openness, honesty, or candor – needs to be framed as such in order to be esteemed. This is also visible in institutional contexts, which can be exemplified by information leaks; transparency acquired by them does not create legitimacy. Only the constructive element is capable of creating legitimacy.

Transparency is never full. Even when transparency is celebrated as a leading principle of governance, it is automatically acknowledged that not all is ever fully transparent. Even if transparency were to be considered generally and widely desirable and even feasible, there are powerful counterarguments for limiting its scope from the viewpoint of its provider or alternatively, of the public. In addition to 'natural' opacity, transparency practices are crucially a way of controlling the release of information and the scope of the visible.

Identifying these six paradoxes of transparency is only the beginning of a more comprehensive account of transparency. Thus, this paper is only a start. So far, I have concentrated on arguing the implications of the negative connotation of transparency; how it is necessary to understand the negative side of it in order to account for how the positive side can be possible both semantically and normatively. The next step will be to concentrate on the positive connotation, transparency as a more institutionalized democratic value, in an established setting whereby one-sided, vertical power is being exercised. When this mechanism is sufficiently analyzed, its appearance in legal and political language can be classified. To that end, in particular the meaning of the private/public distinction needs to be properly addressed.

