

A History of Ideological Transparency

Transparency has been used as a metaphor for direct social perception since antiquity. I study variations in such transparency rhetoric as ideological elements of broader social changes. In the 18th century, an individualist form of transparency language emerges with the spread of commodity production. In the mid-20th century, bureaucratization associates "transparency" with planned individualization that works to mask, legitimize, and facilitate undemocratic bureaucratic control. I argue that Marxists should learn to recognize and avoid such misleading connotations and outline their own theory of transparency.

Keywords

Projekt Ideologietheorie, individualism, commodity production, ngram, bureaucratization

Introduction

The term, "transparency," is now everywhere, from QR-coded sushi rolls (McEachran 2013) to livestock welfare (European Commission 2012, 7) and trade treaty negotiations (European Commission 2014a, 2014b). "Revolutionary" (Sourcemap 2014) new internet services like Sourcemap, Goodguide, and KnowTheChain ostensibly render the supply chains of commodities "transparent" to consumers. Three books called "The Transparent Society" have been published since the 1990s (Vattimo 1992; Brin 1998; Han 2012), not to mention the innumerable differently named ones.

The above examples showcase *ideological transparency*, in which professional ideologists use "transparency" to suggest direct social perception. The purpose of this article is to understand why "transparency" is used in this way and to show how such rhetoric has changed with social developments. Through critique, the article also takes the first steps towards a Marxist theory of transparency.

In the first part of the article, I discuss current scholarly understandings of social transparency and present my own premises. Like other transparency rhetoric, academic works understand social transparency to mean that people can see through to the reality of something. I argue that this basic frame is misleading with respect to both physical and social transparency. Furthermore, I show that social transparency language and associated practices are better studied as elements of *ideological socialization*, or making society from above (Rehmann 2013, 248–50).

In the second part of the article, I outline a conceptual history of transparency. I use corpus data to show that social transparency language, i.e. transparency rhetoric that concerns people's relations rather than physical optics, has long implied direct perception and fitting one's social role. Two shifts have occurred, however, in the recent history of social "transparency." Beginning in the 18th century, "transparency" became associated with individual self-direction. This early individualism has been complemented by bureaucratic overtones since the 1930s. I interpret the changes as ideological elements of commodity production and bureaucratization.

Today, transparency rhetoric is an element of planned individualization that works to mask, legitimize, and facilitate undemocratic bureaucratic control. By promising direct perception, transparency misleadingly suggests that individuals freely and knowingly choose their own destiny, although they are really being socialized from above by professional ideologists.

I conclude by considering how transparency might be integrated into Marx's conception of appearance. I argue that if social transparency were properly conceived, it might prove useful for theorizing how different social formations retain imprints of objects, or "traces",

across space and time. This, in turn, raises the question of what role the collective planning of transparency would play in a communist society.

Social and Physical Transparency

Two recent review articles condense what social scientists now understand by transparency. On the one hand, top-ranking business organization journal articles define transparency as “the perceived quality of intentionally shared information from a sender” (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson 2014, 5).¹ On the other hand, the literature on government or public sector transparency conceives transparency as “the extent external actors are afforded access to information about the way public organizations operate” (Cucciniello, Porumbescu, and Grimmelikhuijsen 2017, 36). In both cases, greater social transparency means that someone provides someone else with more and/or better “information” about something. When transparency increases, in other words, the recipient of the information supposedly becomes able to “see through” social relations or observe objects in a more accurate manner.

This metaphorical, ideal-typical way of conceptualizing social transparency depends on a misunderstanding of the physical phenomenon. Physical transparency does not really imply that anyone perceives anything, let alone well. Molten glass, for instance, is largely transparent to visible light (Beder, Bass, and Shackelford 1971). The glass emits, however, visible blackbody radiation that human eyes cannot distinguish from the light that shines through the glass, making the glass seem opaque. Transparency may also be misleading,

¹ “Perceived quality” here means that the recipient *in fact receives*, i.e. “perceives”, the high-quality information in question. In Schnackenberg and Tomlinson’s view, in other words, good information that exists hidden in a desk drawer is not transparency. Their expression “perceived quality” is thus misleading, since they are not interested in whether the subject thinks the information provided to them is of high-quality.

such as when prisms invert images. Physical transparency does not guarantee, in other words, that given faculties of perception can interpret an object out of the radiation that passes through a transparent medium.

Metaphors are never perfect analogies. It is, however, noteworthy that social transparency rhetoric suspends its correspondence with physical transparency precisely when physical transparency problematizes the direct link between subject and object. Physical transparency teems with tricks: it can refract, invert, and so on, yet remain fully "transparent." Why should the social variety be more innocent? What if some variants of social transparency *prevent* or *limit* perception?

As I show later, social connotations of "transparency" are being cited with growing frequency. This means that social transparency is useful to some in the current situation. The word would not be endlessly repeated if no one felt the need for it. The interesting questions are *who* feels such a need, *why* they feel it, whether we *really* "see" everything we are promised, and what *else* we might "see" in the absence of this "transparency" – in short, *how the rhetorical and other practices surrounding social transparency function in society*. An ideology-theoretical reading of social transparency is needed.

Transparency and Ideology Theory

[Mr. Goff, a high-ranking judge,] is naturally transparent and open. He is exceptionally averse to stealthy, skulking, clandestine or evasive methods, although he is able to practice a non-committal policy when in a good cause.

Edgar C. Beall, M.D., analyzing judge Goff's skull (1895)

“Ideology” is among the more polysemous words used within the social sciences and humanities. One prominent textbook mentions ten different scholarly connotations that range from “a political belief system” to “the ideas of the ruling class” (Heywood 2012, 5). The *Projekt Ideologitheorie* approach that I espouse here is not commonly listed in textbooks. If it were, however, its bullet point paraphrase might be *socialization from above* (cf. Haug 1993, 17, 50). This conception is based on a careful reconstruction and development of Marx’s and Engels’ treatment of the subject. It is, however, somewhat at odds with several forms of Marxist ideology theory (e.g., McCarney 1980; Rehmann and Metscher 2012). I outline below the relationship between transparency and the *Projekt’s* conception of the ideological.

The *Projekt* argues that social clefts, e.g., gender and class antagonism, are only possible given that something cultivates cohesion across them (Haug 1993, 81). One form of such cultivation is a layer of specialist instances, or “ideological powers” (Haug 1993, 57, 100), such as states, priesthoods, academies, and judiciaries. These powers rise “above” the antagonistic relations that they regulate (Haug 1993, 85) by adopting postures of representation, divinity, objectivity, neutrality, and so on. However, the powers usually maintain the antagonisms that they build on rather than abolishing them. The powers are reliant on the antagonisms, and those who benefit from the clefts disproportionately influence those ideological powers (Haug 1993, 49).

From their elevated vantage points, ideological powers organize people’s in/competences into complementary relations of labor, exploitation, domination, and subordination (Haug 1993, 130), such as with gender-specific roles, morals, or taste that consolidate the subordination of women to men. The powers also allow individuals to actively socialize

themselves by adopting ideological aspects into their self-understandings and daily life (Haug 1993, 83). To achieve such reception, ideologists operating within ideological powers must take into account and reorganize their audiences' everyday preconceptions and practices (Haug 1993, 53). This means that ideological powers are not monolithic. The powers are influenced by their audiences and often split by internal struggles (Haug 1993, 100–106).

In the phrenograph I quoted above, for example, Doctor Beall analyzes Judge Goff's skull to prove his natural transparency. An ideology-theoretical interpretation of this event would note that justice tends to present itself as impartial and without secret bias (cf. Hart 2012, 159–62). Beall's transparency rhetoric uses the popular-pseudoscientific appeal of phrenology in attempting to lift the judge above the social contradictions that he regulates.

Comparable transparency talk now surrounds all ideological powers. Academic "transparency" implies reproducibility (Nature Geoscience 2014); ecclesiastical "transparency" ensures the holiness of saints (O'Connell 2016); and so on. I later give many examples of how transparency constitutes or challenges the "above-ness" of ideological socialization.

In emphasizing socialization from above, I de-emphasize issues that often feature prominently in both Marxist and non-Marxist discussions on ideology. Most importantly, I do not group people based on what they think (Freeden 2003, 39), and my main focus is not on revealing falsities (Sayer 1979, 8). The ideological process certainly does produce falsities and groupthink, and transparency is assuredly shot through with both. My main interest lies, however, in why ideologists deploy transparency and how this connects with and transforms the daily experience of their audiences. What changed in people's lives in the

20th century, for example, such that judges now trumpet their transparent procedures rather than their transparent honesty?

Concretely, I give theoretical interpretations of changes in transparency language and the practices associated with it. The underlying assumption here is that language is social-historical (Lecercle 2006, 152–74) in the sense that the situations and forms of life that gave rise to language remain inscribed in it. I interpret transparency language to understand how it operates within societal developments. In particular, I link forms of transparency language to Marxist analyses of the spread of commodity production and bureaucratization. These are, of course, not the only factors affecting transparency language, but I argue that their influence is particularly strong.

My approach to transparency does not imply perception. Instead, it suggests that transparency is often misleading, especially insofar as it operates as an element of ideological socialization. This way of conceptualizing transparency runs directly counter to the way in which both Marx and Marxists use the word. They do not discuss transparency in any systematic theoretical register, and only use the word colloquially to imply that people see well (e.g., Adorno 1970–1986, vol. 8, p. 467; Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 35, p. 90).

Arguably, however, my interpretation is compatible with Marx's general outlook, which rarely accepts everyday intuitions uncritically. As Marx puts it in the third volume of *Capital*, "all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 37, p. 804). I likewise seek the essence of social transparency beyond its outward promises of unimpeded perception in how the term is actually used in particular contexts.

Corpora and "Transparency"

I made the findings in this article using etymological dictionaries and three corpora: the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, the Brepols Latin and Oriental Cross Database Search Tool, and Google Ngram. Thesaurus and Brepols enable searches of old literature in Greek and Latin, whereas Google's vast database of digitized texts reports how often a given strings of words occurred in a given year. Google also compares this with all similar-length strings published in a given year over the past half-millennium. Most of Google's data concerns the last three hundred years. "Transparencies" occur in a few dozen texts during the 17th century, for example, whereas the 21st yields thousands of hits. I made the searches reported here using either standard Google Ngram dataset version 2 or Mark Davies' expanded interface (Davies 2011).

I used the corpora in two distinct ways. For Brepols and Graecae, I simply searched for transparency and combed through the results by hand for social connotations. Google's less manageable size forced me to produce lists of the most common words to neighbor "transparent" and "transparency." I then combed through context to verify mainly social-metaphoric connotations and analyzed them further.

Table 1 shows, for example, that "simplicity" is the socially-connoted word that most frequently follows or precedes "transparent" and "transparency" in the 19th century. Mutual information (MI) is a measure of the degree to which words are associated (Davies n.d.). The low mutual information score of "simplicity" means, in other words, that it also often occurs with other words. "Openness", by contrast, has a high mutual information score, which indicates a more exclusive association with "transparent".

In interpreting the results, it is important to note that the above corpora do not encompass everyday language, nor are they necessarily representative of the written. Only a fraction of all ancient texts survive, for instance, and those that do have been produced by ideologists. Likewise, Pechenick et al. reveal that the proportion of scientific and scholarly texts in Google's corpus increases explosively during the 20th century (2015, 2–3). I thus cannot assume any direct relationship between my findings and the entirety of colloquial or literary language. Google's automatic dating of texts is also rather unreliable, its account of pre-19th century texts is lacking, it overstates texts that have been published in multiple editions, and its method of detecting neighboring words disregards punctuation. Because of this, I verify date and context by hand when I cite texts or make claims about first appearances. I only report the most robust quantitative trends in the data, and lay the bulk of my argument on a qualitative theoretical interpretation of example fragments.

In brief, my searches suggest that ideologists use "transparency" to support claims of *direct perception* and *fitting one's social role* throughout the data. During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, new *individualist* connotations gain sway. These are in turn overtaken by *bureaucratic-individualist* associations in the mid-20th. In the following section, I give a bird's eye view of this history of transparency language.

A Broad View of "Transparency"

I call transparent (*diaphanes*) that which, although it is visible, is not simply speaking visible in virtue of itself but rather because of the color of something else. Such is air and water and a great number of solid bodies —.

Aristotle, *De Anima* (2010, 61; II.7, 418b1-10)

Perhaps the most influential discussion of transparency in European history is by Aristotle, who defines the transparent (*diaphanes*: *dia* "through" and *phaino* "show") in terms of see-through physical materials. He commonly uses a separate word (*sapheneia*) for social contexts such as communication and knowledge (Leshner 2010). Other Greeks do, however, use transparency as a metaphor for social and mental visibility. The historian Thucydides, for example, claims that because Pericles was "for bribes manifestly (*diaphanes*) the most incorrupt, he freely controlled [sic] the multitude; and was not so much led by them as he led them" (1843, 220).

The stem "transparent-" emerges in Medieval Latin. The first occurrence that I am aware of is Burgundio of Pisa's 12th century translation of *On Generation and Corruption* by Aristotle (1986, Bekker 324b). From Medieval Latin, the form spreads to other languages. I focus mainly on English social transparency. Its trends arguably have the broadest purchase due to the status of English as the current imperial language of global capitalism. The Google Ngram data for English are also of higher quality than those for other languages.

The most common English words to occur with "transparent" between the years 1500 and 2008 suggest a physical connotation, e.g. "transparent glass". Social connotations prior to the 20th century are often related to personality traits, such as "transparent sincerity", which appears in the 18th century. Institutional connotations, such as "transparent procedures", appear in the 1960s.

Two major themes recur throughout the history of "transparency". First, it has long been used to support claims of *direct perception*. Philosopher Thomas Hobbes contends, for

instance, that the sovereign should use transparent words so that public officials “see” his intent clearly. According to Hobbes, sovereignty cannot be transferred to administrators “without express and perspicuous [from *perspicuus*: per “through”, specio “observe”] words to that purpose. And this kind of public ministers resembleth the nerves, and tendons that move the several limbs of a body natural” (1998, 160). The probable reason for the stability of this direct-perception aspect of the metaphor is that optical transparency indeed often seems like direct perception to humans, who cannot see the propagation of light. We thus heuristically tend to equate optical transparency with accurate perception, although in reality transparency can be misleading. Ideologists have latched onto this heuristic throughout history to use people’s pre-existing physical intuitions in service of ideological social goals.

Second, *fitting one’s social role seamlessly* is a major theme of “transparency”. Transparency makes Pericles a natural leader and Goff a natural judge, i.e. perfectly fitting for their social positions. Transparency turns Hobbes’ administrators into appendices of the sovereign. From today’s perspective, these transparencies seem highly *non-individualist* in emphasizing people’s organic interconnection over their fundamental individuality.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, a new *individualist* form of ideological transparency rhetoric emerges. This kind of transparency does not weld individuals and society into a whole, but rather mediates between them. In the section that follows, I develop a theoretical interpretation of individualist transparency. I argue that the change occurs because commodity production, i.e. production for sale, becomes the central means by which society remakes itself.

The Commodity and Individualist Transparency

[T]o what has the competitive system in trade and commerce brought us? Is transparent sincerity the common quality of mercantile transactions? Is it not comparatively rare, and by its rarity honourable; and by its merited honour a merited condemnation of the prevailing system and spirit, showing that there is something wrong, and which should be amended?

William John Fox, Editor of the *Monthly Repository* (1832, 703)

Capitalist society has tended towards seeming individual freedom and equality in its civil-societal sphere. As Marx notes, the individual now "seems to be rid of the natural, etc., ties which in earlier historical epochs made him an appurtenance [accessory] of a particular, limited aggregation of human beings" (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 28, p. 17).

According to Marx, the main reason for this newfound self-determination lies in the expansion of commodity production. Acts of exchange necessarily establish a degree of freedom and equality among buyers and sellers, which is why experiences of self-directing individuality spread together with commodity-centric relations of production (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 28, pp. 100-101). People start living their social lives "fetishistically" through things, as Marx puts it (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 35, p. 85), which misleadingly makes them seem independent from each other.

Alongside freedom, however, capitalist commodity production also gives rise to extensive top-down control such as labor discipline (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 35, p. 337) and legal regulation (Pashukanis 2002, 109–33), as well as horizontal coercion such as competition (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 35, p. 276). Such forms of "determinateness" appear "as an objective limitation of the individual by relationships which are independent of him and self-sufficient" (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 28, pp. 100–101). This

contradiction between freedom and external regulation is a fertile ground for transparency ideologists, who begin to insert direct perception into the gap between free individuals and society (e.g., Rauh et al. 1851, 5).

An illuminating example of individualist transparency ideology can be found in early 18th century "instructive applications" of Aesop's Fables by Samuel Croxall, a prominent Whig and the Archdeacon of Hereford. In his interpretation of the fable of the beautiful brother and foul sister, the Archdeacon encourages the ugly person to cultivate "beauties of good temper", because this will lead others to "value him, like an oriental jewel, not by a glittering outside, which is common to baser stones, but by his intrinsic worth, his bright imagination, his clear reason, and the transparent sincerity of his honest heart" (1792, 132–33).

Croxall's "transparency" no longer promises to append individuals seamlessly into their given social categories. Rather, it is a way for the ugly sister to determine herself from within by letting an inner truth shine through. The commodity metaphor is right on the surface of the text: the individual assures her demand on the marriage market, and the resultant degrees of freedom, by cultivating an inner self as valuable as a jewel.

The Archdeacon's narrative presupposes an audience with experience of the relative freedom of exchange. The sister is not instructed to obey her superior but to lure mates with her qualities. The text's ideological socializing dimension is evident, however, in the insistence on outside valuation. Individuals supposedly direct themselves from within, but ideologists tell them which gender performances are in market demand. Croxall's modernized Aesop proved a smash hit, and numerous editions have been published every century since (worldcat.org 2015), indicating a lasting demand for Croxall's rhetoric.

Beyond standing as metaphors of individual freedom, commodities also engender asocial behavior that can ostensibly be alleviated via transparency. For instance, the mid-19th century Reverend George Washington Burnap preaches the corrupting influence of commerce. He warns the Mercantile Library Association of Baltimore that “[i]t is certainly one of the easiest things in the world to commend a thing we wish to sell beyond the bounds of strict truth” (1841, 422–23). He claims to show, however, that “[t]here is but one road to permanent happiness and prosperity, and that is the path of unspotted integrity, of high-souled honor, of the most transparent honesty” (1841, 424).

For Reverend Burnap, it is no longer God’s sovereign whip that cleanses the temple of traders. Rather, transparent honesty is *beneficial to the exchanging individuals themselves*. If they wish to partake in permanent happiness and prosperity, the merchants in Burnap’s audience should choose to garner the trust of their equals through transparent honesty.

I interpret the emergence of individualist transparency, graphed in Figure 1, as an ideological element of a paradox of commodity production. Exchange makes individuals seem and feel like their own ultimate ground and vindication, yet commodity production requires and enforces strict social coordination. In the cultural history of capitalism, this paradox appears as endless pontification on (the lack of) individual authenticity, genteel self-control, sincerity, honesty, and autonomy in the face of external social pressure, oppression, and alienation (Berman 1971, xiv–xvii; Halttunen 1986, 93, 121). The experience of sociality as an external constraint to the “inner self” is prime material for transparency ideologists (e.g., Hanna 1852, 291), since direct perception intuitively bridges this characteristically modern (Constant 1988, 308–10) gap between society and the free self.

Historian Reinhart Koselleck famously called the years roughly between 1750 and 1850 a "saddle period" (Koselleck 1967, 82) during which many modern concepts emerged within, as Marxists would say, the consolidating capitalist mode of production. In my interpretation, the emergence of individualist ideological transparency is an element of the selfsame saddle. It is an ideological adjustment to the reality of commodity production. This "transparency" shares the old connotation of direct perception, but modifies it according to changes in the composition of society.

The above account of individualist transparency challenges Hood's (2006, secs. 2–3) interpretation, which traces transparency to four main roots: the open covenants doctrine of international diplomacy; the decline of absolutism; corporate disclosure as required by creditors and owners; and the development of modern social science. Although these factors can be read as elements of the consolidation of capitalist commodity production, they do not contrariwise explain why individualist transparency also simultaneously appears in many other contexts.

I have now laid out my interpretation of the early forms of individualist social transparency. I have not yet explained, however, why new bureaucratic ones develop in the 20th century, or how these new transparencies function. Notions such as "transparent honesty" are recognizable today, but they feel embarrassingly antiquated and clichéd compared to the buoyant dynamism of "corporate transparency". In the section that follows, I outline this mid-20th century turn towards "transparencies" that are *simultaneously both individualist and bureaucratic*.

Bureaucratic Transparency

[T]he progress students are making needs to be as accessible to them as it is to teachers or policymakers. Such transparency can empower students to take greater control of their own destinies. It is, after all, ultimately the student who must own her or his understanding and progress. Systems of assessment that are opaque, secretive, and slow-responding cripple students' sense of responsibility.

Educational psychologist Lee Shulman (2007, 25), commenting on a 2006 report of a U.S. federal commission for education reform

The illustrious Pericles was "transparent" in ancient Greece. Judge Goff was "transparent" in late 19th-century New York. Starting in the mid-20th century, however, "transparency" has become the purview of rather more intangible entities: markets are transparent, Nestlé is transparent, and the European Commission is transparent. Even the Pope no longer trusts God's inscrutable will and holy purity alone to justify his actions, and bends the knee to auditors for "absolute transparency" instead (Service 2015). Why is "transparency" adopting such connotations?

I explain this transition as an ideological element of the bureaucratization of capitalist society. The current forms of transparency rhetoric and practices are an effect of the expansion of bureaucratic control. The transition has two aspects. On the one hand, "transparency" becomes bureaucratic jargon for attempts at socializing modern self-directing individuals from above, such as with "governance" and "predictability" (see Table 2). On the other hand, transparency is deployed as a seeming bulwark against bureaucratic centralism. In this latter function, direct perception rhetoric conveys the misleading impression of decentralization and democracy, legitimizing hierarchy and protecting

bureaucracies against charges of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. This connotation is dominant in associations such as "accountability" and "disclosure".

I begin by outlining bureaucratic transparency's prehistory. After this, I focus on its relationship to bureaucratization, or the proportional increase of *administration by hierarchically accountable functionaries* (Chattopadhyay 1993, 40). Note that Chattopadhyay's definition, although strongly inspired by Marx, includes private bureaucracies (see also Anderson 2017). Marx, by contrast, associates the word "bureaucracy" with the state but recognizes the organizational similarities between state and corporate hierarchies (cf. Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 3, p. 45). Chattopadhyay's definition is more appropriate here, since I argue that the tension between freedom and hierarchical organization causes the need for transparency.

The prehistory of bureaucratic transparency lies in *publicity* and the paradigmatic Enlightenment demand that governments should be accountable to the individuals who form the public sphere and deliberate on the course of policy (Habermas 1991, 68–71). The drafters of the world's first freedom of information legislation from 1766, for example, proclaim that bureaucratic conduct should be "revealed to the public through the press" because this is conducive to "promoting obedience to the laws" (Mustonen 2006, 8). It is no longer enough that the sovereign's words are perspicuous to their subordinate administrators, as with Hobbes. In a society based on commodity production, the bureaucracy must seem see-through to all self-directing individuals, however misleading such a semblance may be.

Interestingly, I can find only one pre-20th century example of the word "transparency" referring to individualization as bureaucratic procedure. This is the work of 18th- and 19th-

century social reformer Jeremy Bentham, who argues that a "transparency of management" (1791, 40) can be achieved by hiring contractors to administer prisons. Bentham reasons that because contractors are self-interested "children of Mammon" (1791, 40) rather than respectable salaried civil servants, the public is incentivized to closely scrutinize them. To facilitate such scrutiny, Bentham would have the contractors work in facilities that are accessible, literally transparent, and monitored on performance metrics (1830, 352). Bentham's "transparency" thus individualizes prison bureaucrats in an attempt to efficiently plan their autonomous behavior.

The Benthamian understanding of "transparency" was marginal for over a century. Its ascent only began in the first half of the 20th century with the bureaucratization of capitalist society. The fact of this bureaucratization has been documented fairly well. Bendix, for example, studies the industrial branches of five capitalist countries during the early 20th century. He finds that the ratio of administrative to production personnel roughly tripled in less than 50 years, ending up at 1:4 (1956, 214). Meyer et al. and Torstendahl show equally rapid relative growth in both state and private bureaucracy in the United States and Northwestern Europe up to the 1970s (1985, 34–37; 1991, 192). Although the antagonistic relationship between bureaucracy and freedom had long before troubled bourgeois ideologists (Krätke 1995, 407), the pace of bureaucratization in the early 20th-century rendered the need for a solution unprecedentedly acute (e.g., Weber 1994, 67–69).

The first post-Benthamite form of bureaucratic transparency is the *Markttransparenz* of German economic thought (Cajvaneanu 2011, 123–24). Consider the example of economic statistician Horst Wagenführ's 1930 article *Marktbeobachtung*, or "Market study".

Wagenführ notes that researchers and regulators do not utilize the market information that

private bureaucracies had recently started collecting for commercial reasons. These data should be aggregated, he argues, to facilitate the equalization of supply and demand through state-imposed *Markttransparenz* (1930, 68–71).

Wagenführ's logic is characteristic of an influential branch of German ideology now known as ordoliberalism. Early ordoliberals interpreted capitalism as a contingent arrangement that was threatened by bureaucratic centralism (Röpke 1969, 25–44). Paradoxically, however, their preferred response was to *bureaucratically foster individuals* by, for example, guaranteeing competition through state intervention (Streit and Wohlgemuth 2000, 230–33). Ordoliberal ideological "transparency" was a code word for the bounds that hierarchical superiors set to individual self-coordination by, for instance, regulating available information. Importantly, however, transparency was both an *element* of and a critical *reaction* to bureaucratization, since it was imposed by bureaucracies for the (ostensible) prevention of bureaucratic centralism.

For several decades, the new liberal ideology for engineering free individuals had limited global influence. It only gained broader policy traction in the 1960s, and became omnipresent during the 1980s (Denord 2009). Its most important milestone was the European integration process, which German economics greatly influenced (Cajvaneanu 2011, 155). The results are evident in proclamations such as this one by the European Coal and Steel Community from 1962:

In the ECSC firms are normally free to determine their own prices. The main task of the ECSC is therefore to create and supervise a "transparent" market – a market which observes the Community principles of price publicity and non-discrimination. To achieve this, the ECSC

requires all firms to publish or deposit their price lists at the High Authority and to adhere to them strictly. (European Communities Information Service 1962, 14)

“Transparency” now marks the compatibility of bureaucratic regulation and the freedom of commodity exchange. The transparent hand of High Authority reaches out from the state, using data gathered by private bureaucracies, and firmly shakes the invisible hand of the market. The explicit purpose of this move is to constitute the free but adherent individuality of the firm. Accordingly, the self-directing individual associated with “transparency” need no longer be a person, as before, but may also be another bureaucracy. “Transparency” becomes an *element of individualist bureaucratic planning*.

Today, “transparency” has expanded from German economics to all parts of the world, in fields ranging from game theory to education, and from association with “markets” to all “procedures” (see Figure 2). In all these forms, expansive bureaucratic control meets the sense of self-direction that commodities engender and the corresponding forms of liberal ideology. Free individuals now seem to hold ideologists in transparent bureaucracies accountable by voting, purchasing, and so on. Ideologist bureaucrats, meanwhile, design transparent mazes for their subordinates and subjects to freely run through. Hierarchical inferiors may even demand such transparency themselves, since it caters to their experience of independence. The cloak of bureaucratic transparency hides the top-down character of ideological socialization, making it seem compatible with the fetishistic experiences of autonomy that spread with commodities.

When citizens protest against the TTIP free trade negotiations between the EU and the US, for instance, the “listening Commission” first clears the streets of Brussels with water cannons and arrests (Bermingham 2014), then begins yet another “Transparency Initiative”

(European Commission 2014c), and finally the Commission crafts a delicate system of non-disclosure that protects the treaty process from intervention (Corporate Europe Observatory 2015). Despite this, the President of the European Commission claims that citizens and bureaucrats "change and renew Europe together" (European Commission 2014c), since the now-transparent negotiations are a legitimate expression of the self-determination of EU citizens.

Although bureaucratic transparency is a close relative of publicity, it is not always public. Psychologist Shulman, quoted above, does not propose that the US federal government should publish students' progress for all to see. Students should *themselves* see it (together with their supervisors, of course) in order to "take greater control of their own destinies". There is no necessary implication of public deliberation or input, either. Corporate PR departments, for example, proudly emanate empowering transparency, but they never suggest that the public should participate in corporate decision-making.

Bureaucratic transparency also differs from simple surveillance. It not only molds conduct through scrutiny and threat of punishment, but also carefully incentivizes certain degrees of freedom over others through responsibility, aesthetics, competition, and metrics of progress (cf. Deleuze 1992). Consider, for example, Engineers Hopf and Müller's outline for an "energy transparency" system for factories, which encourages the "machine operator" to "turn off the machine during idle times to reduce the energy consumption" by simply making energy consumption visible (2013, 1667, 1670).

Finally, bureaucratic transparency must be distinguished from bureaucratic centralism, where propaganda emanates from the highest echelons. Bureaucratic transparency is a nested system of phenomenal environs that are created by hierarchical superiors at all

levels. Individuals then self-coordinate in such imposed environs. Contrary to what bourgeois critics like Weber have long feared (1978, 1401–3), bureaucracy does not erase individual freedom. Bourgeois bureaucracy promotes bounded freedom. It is a tool of the ruling capitalist class, but it hides this by promising unhindered perception and self-directing choice. None of this resembles a "network", however, as one fashionable form of ideology would have it (Ferguson 2014), since socialization from above remains dominant.

Conclusions

Throughout the material reviewed here, ideologists use "transparency" to suggest direct social perception and to equate persons with their social roles. It is only during the 18th century, however, that individualist transparency language begins to treat people like free-floating agents amidst an external social. During the 20th century, bureaucratic transparency starts creating self-directing individuals. The function of the bureaucratic transparency metaphor in this process is to justify control by implying that the audiences of transparency have perfect information and thus choose freely.

Previous analyses have tended to define social transparency as direct perception. Really-existing social transparency, however, disables and manipulates perception according to the needs of ideologists and their audiences. I analyzed this process in terms of socialization from above. I teased out commodity production and bureaucratization as explanations of modern varieties of ideological transparency. I showed how the widespread and deep effects of these developments on people's lives correspond with shifts in the connotations of "transparency". Transparency language develops together with production and social coordination.

No rigorous, non-ideological theory of transparency exists. Because of this, practice defaults to the ideological direct perception definition of transparency. Recent demands for EU “transparency” by the DiEM25 movement are a case in point: The “electronic publication of all TTIP negotiating documents” (DiEM25 n.d.) would not address the underlying conflicts that encourage the concealment of free trade negotiations in the first place. The negotiating bureaucracies would thus still have many reasons to produce misleading transparencies. Anthony Gardner, finance capitalist and former TTIP negotiator, has in fact advised future negotiators to “embrace transparency” to avoid public opposition (Gardner 2017). As long as the capitalist class has disproportionate influence on transparency ideologists, any new transparencies will tend to resemble the old.

Even if we assume classless organization of production, however, social transparency cannot stand in for universal visibility. Transparency must be conceived as active, partial, non-neutral, and in organic relation to the rest of society. Classless, anti-ideological economic planning, for example, may be transparent at best in the sense that it is collectively produced.

A full-fledged Marxist theory of social transparency would not conceive transparency as an ideal, but as a production process. This would require much elaboration and concretization that is out of place in this ideology-theoretical article. To end on an affirmative note, however, I will briefly show that the first outlines of a theory of transparency are already implicit in Marx’s conception of appearance, or *Erscheinung* (see Haug 1997).

I interpret Marx as arguing that something *appears* when it *seems like something to something² else* (e.g., Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 35, p. 84, 1975–2005, vol. 29, p. 389). Appearance is thus an emergent property of a relation among subject, object, and their situation. Importantly, however, Marx’s appearances are often limited and misleading. Appearances are chronic *problems* rather than their ideal *solutions*, *contra* most transparency rhetoric.

I find evidence of a nascent theory of transparency in Marx’s references to “traces” (*Spur*), which occur quite frequently in his discussions of appearance (e.g., Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 28, p. 173, 1975–2005, vol. 35, p. 179). He argues, for instance, that “the wage form thus extinguishes every trace of the division of the working day into necessary labour and surplus labour, into paid and unpaid labour. All labour appears as paid labour” (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 35, p. 539). The wage is like an opaque film that is itself readily visible but blocks traces of exploitation. This distribution of opacity (between observer and exploitation) and transparency (between observer and wage) gives rise to the misleading appearance of equal exchange between capitalists and laborers.

Marx’s conception of trace suggests an analogue with physical transparency: When light passes through physically transparent material, the light’s composition *retains traces of things on the other side*. This is because the light does not get absorbed, scattered, or otherwise randomized (Keating 2001, 13–22; Nair et al. 2008). This quality is necessary for things to “appear” in Marx’s sense at all: All labor could not appear as paid, for instance, if

² In his 1844 Economic Manuscripts, Marx even discusses the Sun as the object [*Gegenstand*] of sensuous things like plants (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, vol. 3, pp. 336–337), suggesting that at least at that time he did not limit all aspects of the appearance question to humans or society.

traces of wages were distinguished alongside traces of exploitation. Radiation that is blocked or randomized cannot give rise to even misleading appearances, such as inverted images. This does not say anything, however, about how anyone senses or interprets the traces that transparency lets through.

I propose a Marxist conception of transparency as *moments in human relations that retain traces across space and time*. I thus discard the implication of adequate observation or perception. Instead, transparency is a necessary but insufficient condition of appearance, including misleading, inverted appearances. Transparency ideologists, for instance, often purposefully labor to retain misleading traces of objects for socialization purposes, such as when product certificates like “organic” correlate with production conditions that differ from what consumers expect (Allen and Kovach 2000, 224).

Trace retention is probably unavoidable in any developed society. This is because social coordination requires the purposeful or unconscious retention of traces of, for instance, quantities and qualities of work. Transparency is, however, chronically problematic. It is controversial which traces should be retained, and everyone obviously cannot always interpret all traces adequately in all possible senses. This means that transparency as such does not possess any independent, non-relational causal directionality or moral virtue. Struggles over transparency would probably not cease under communism, as Richard Wolff’s non-perfectionist understanding of communism (2007, 332) implies. Even without ideologists, the planning of appearance production would likely contain a contentious moment of transparency planning, i.e. the planning of trace retention.

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1970–19861975–2005

Word	Frequency	Mutual information

simplicity	409	5.73
honesty	189	5.62
sincerity	167	5.01
fallacy	78	4.12
disguise	66	4.12
pretext	57	3.27
openness	36	8.97
candor	30	5.99
frankness	24	5.20
truthfulness	28	4.76
allegory	19	3.80
integrity	4	4.37

Table 1. Years 1800 to 1899, twelve most frequent mainly social neighbors of "transparent" and "transparency" within two words and with MI > 3, Google's corpus of American English.

Word	Frequency	Mutual information
accountability (accountable)	5356 (882)	9.94 (6.21)
openness	1491	8.36

honesty	1365	5.92
simplicity	1038	5.12
improve	882	4.81
ensure	816	5.30
disclosure	798	6.37
enhance	583	5.83
illusion	522	5.94
promote	512	4.63
governance	358	6.10
predictability	291	8.35

Table 2. Years 1900 to 2008, twelve most frequent mainly social neighbors of "transparent" and "transparency" with MI > 4 and within two words, Google's corpus of American English.

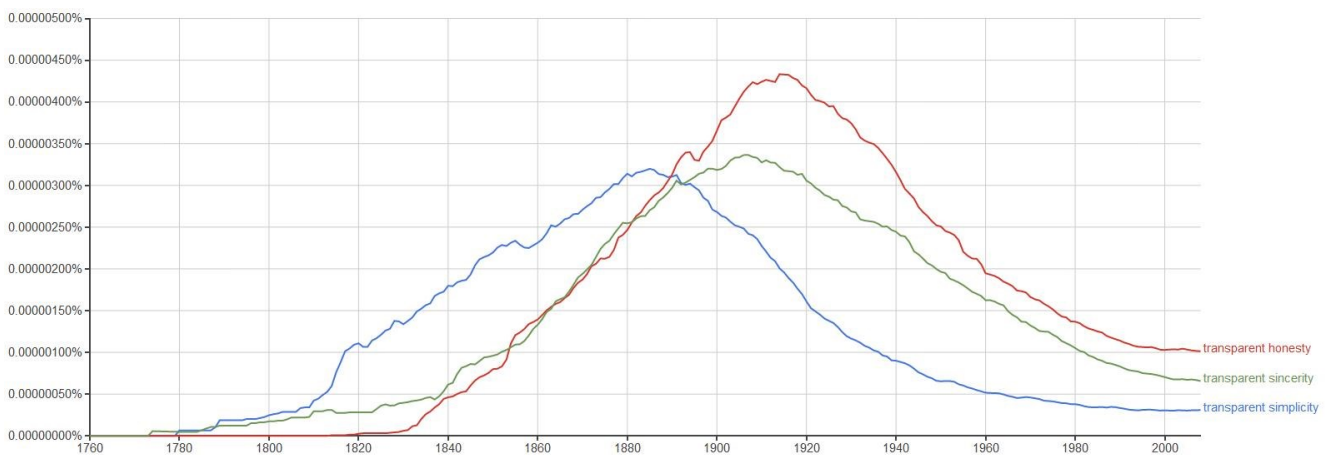


Figure 1. The percentage of "transparent simplicity", "honesty", and "sincerity" of all two-word combinations, 1760–2008, with a smoothing value of 20, Google's combined English corpus.

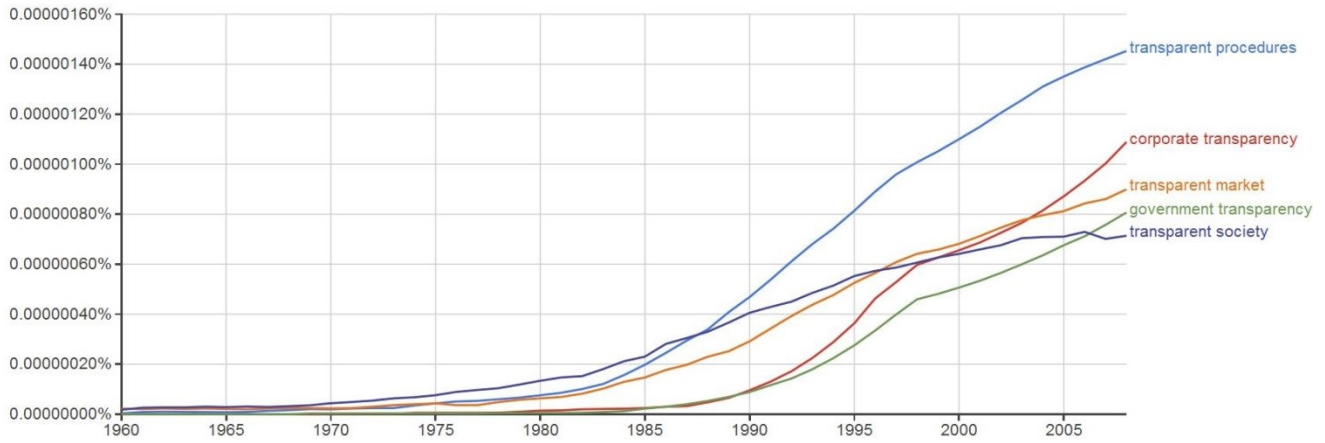


Figure 2. "Transparent procedures", "market", and "society"; "corporate" and "government transparency" relative to all two-word combinations, 1960–2008, with a smoothing value of 10, Google's combined English corpus.