

The Digital Prism

Many people are concerned about the unchecked powers of tech giants and the hidden operations of big data and algorithms. Yet we do not have the vocabularies to properly articulate how these digital transformations shape our lives. This book shows how the management of our digital footprints, visibilities and attention is a central force in the digital transformation of societies and politics. Seen through the prism of digital technologies and data, the lives of people and workings of organizations take new shapes in our understanding. Making sense of these requires that we push beyond common ways of thinking about transparency and surveillance, and look at how managing visibilities is a central but overlooked phenomenon that influences how people live, how organizations work and how societies and politics operate.

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The Digital Prism

Transparency and Managed Visibilities in a Datafied World

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Acknowledgments

Books, like many other rewarding parts of life, are demanding, time consuming and sometimes painful. As much as I've enjoyed writing this book, it has also surprised me how difficult it is to carve out time and space for this kind of work. Often, more urgent issues would require my attention, and the pressure to focus on other kinds of publications seems to be mounting, at least in some circles. Still, I've been thrilled about the project, and I believe that books allow us to put together our thoughts and ideas in more elaborate and exploratory ways. They allow for ventures that journal articles do not permit. This book is one such venture, and a bit on roller skates, bringing together big discussions about digital transformations, transparency and visibilities, and travelling across levels of analysis such as the individual, the organizational and the societal. My hope is that these reflections will resonate with those of others – in academia, policy-making and the broader public – who are concerned with the intersection of technology and data and social life, particularly when it comes to what we come to see, know and act on when much of what we do happens in digital spaces. These are massive topics and will require much more work, and I'm thoroughly thrilled to see so much research and public discussion of technology issues. Finally, it seems that we are ready to explore the interface of technology and society. So much work has focused on technology itself – the next big thing that will change everything – and overlooked the human, organizational and societal forces that make some technological possibilities useless or even harmful. I'm happy that we see more nuanced and balanced approaches to these issues, because they will help us make wiser choices about technological and human developments, and I feel fortunate to have engaged with some of the people at the forefront of setting more reflective and critical agendas for our engagement with

digital transformations. Writing this book would not have been possible without the many people, the many ideas and the many places that helped it come into being.

This book is the culmination of a long-standing interest in transparency as a recipe for organizational and social change. Luckily, many others are interested in questions about the effects of sharing information and opening up, and I want to thank some of them. At Copenhagen Business School, I am fortunate to be surrounded by smart and supportive colleagues, such as Dan Kärreman, Hans Krause Hansen, Lars Thøger Christensen, Julie Uldam, Dennis Schoeneborn, Christina Garsten and many others who have helped me develop and articulate these ideas about transparency and visibilities. In particular, my collaborations with Hans Krause Hansen, Lars Thøger Christensen and Oana Brindusa Albu on the topic of transparency paved the way for this book.

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Books are also made in places and my favorite writing spot turned out to be the New York Public Library, where this book seemed more willing to be written than anywhere else, and where I had some of my happiest moments working on it. In Copenhagen, another beautiful library known as the Black Diamond provided a similar refuge when other tasks, meetings and deadlines threatened the viability of this book.

Some of the points in this book have appeared in other form in articles in the *International Journal of Communication, Business & Society*, the *European Journal of Social Theory* and *International Political Sociology*, and in book chapters.