

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.

MIKKEL FLYVERBOM is Professor of Communication and Digital Transformations and Academic Director of the research platform Digital Transformations at Copenhagen Business School. He is also Research Fellow at the Center for Information Technology and Society at University of California, Santa Barbara, a columnist for the Danish newspaper Politiken and widely used expert on tech issues. He is the author of *The Power of Networks: Organizing the Global Politics of the Internet* (2011).

The Digital Prism

Transparency and Managed Visibilities in a Datafied World

MIKKEL FLYVERBOM
Copenhagen Business School



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Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-57696-4 — The Digital Prism
Mikkel Flyverbom
Frontmatter
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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107576964

DOI: 10.1017/9781316442692

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First published 2019

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Names: Flyverbom, Mikkel, author.

Title: The digital prism : transparency and visibility in the age of total information / Mikkel Flyverbom.

Description: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019008717 | ISBN 9781107130814 (hardback) | ISBN 9781107576964 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Information society – Social aspects. | Information technology – Management. | Electronic surveillance. | BISAC: BUSINESS & ECONOMICS / Organizational Behavior.

Classification: LCC HM851 .F593 2019 | DDC 303.48/33–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019008717>

ISBN 978-1-107-13081-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-57696-4 Paperback

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Contents

Acknowledgments	<i>page</i> vi
Introduction: The Transparency Formula	1
1 Digital and Datafied Spaces	25
2 Transparency and Managed Visibilities	39
3 People under Scrutiny	59
4 Organizations Gone Transparent	85
5 Seeing the World	121
Conclusion: Life in the Digital Prism	145
Bibliography	155
Index	170

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.

This book also benefitted from a Google Research Award that both allowed me to spend a semester at Stanford University and gave me very useful contacts inside Google and other tech companies in Silicon Valley in the early phases of the project. I am particularly grateful for the support from Vinton Cerf, one of the fathers of the internet and “Chief Internet Evangelist” and Vice-President at Google. My ideas and insights about the workings of transparency in and around tech companies have been shaped by valuable conversations with policy directors, policy managers and higher-level staff at Google in Mountain View, CA; at Facebook in Palo Alto and its new headquarters in Menlo Park, CA; and with Facebook and Google employees located in Europe. Also, I have used material from these tech companies’ blogs and other public sources, and followed their participation in public meetings, hearings, news stories and events.

In later phases of writing, a Fulbright grant and a position as research fellow at Rutgers University with colleagues Craig Scott, Jack Bratich, Mark Akhus and others gave me both useful insights and the time to focus. Similarly, I have benefitted from valuable discussions with people at Microsoft Research, such as Tarleton

viii ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gillespie, Nancy Baym, Sarah T. Hamid and Kate Crawford, and members of the KIN Center for Digital Innovation in Amsterdam, including Marleen Huysmann, Natalja Laurey, Amanda Porter and others.

While writing this book, I have also been excited to be part of a growing community of scholars asking difficult questions about transparency, secrecy, surveillance, spectacles and other visibility practices. My collaborations with wonderful, bright people such as Clare Birchall, Cynthia Stohl, Michael Stohl, Paul Leonardi, Juliane Reinecke, Jeffrey Treem, Tim Kuhn, Leopold Ringel, Mark Fenster, Shiv Ganesh and Andrea Mubi Brighenti made this book possible. Also, I'm thankful for the solid research assistance I got from Kalina Staikova and Jacob Ørmen, both of whom are becoming accomplished academics, and for the support of my two editors at Cambridge University Press, Paula Parish and Valerie Appleby. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to Ursula Plesner, whose clear thinking and solid loving shaped this book and continues to shape my life in the best possible ways.

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.