

Jens Ivo Engels / Frédéric Monier (eds.)

History of Transparency in Politics and Society





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Contents

Jens Ivo Engels / Frédéric Monier	
Researching the History of Transparency: Introduction	7
Olivier Meuwly	
Between Anarchism and Liberalism. The first Debates on the Idea of a Transparent Society	21
Silvia Marton	
“Transparency” and “corruption” in Romanian electoral politics (1866–1914)	35
Alexandra Alina Iancu	
Transparency as amplifier of democratic dysfunctions. Party finance and party quasi-constitutionalisation in interwar Romania	53
Sandra Zimmermann	
Between “clarity” and “darkness”. The Role of Public Disclosure in the Barmat-Parliamentary-Committees (1925)	71
Florian Altenhöner	
Selective Transparency. Non-state intelligence services in Germany, 1918/ 1933	89
Harm Kaal	
Transparency in postwar Dutch political culture, 1945–1980s	105
Vojin Saša Vukadinović	
“Let me make one thing perfectly clear”. Richard Nixon and the language of transparency	121

Ronald Kroeze / Sjoerd Keulen	
“More exciting than Watergate, more real than Dynasty”. Transparency’s rise: the Dutch RSV-inquiry in the context of the 1980s	137
Martin Mainka	
Mass Media as Transparency Actors. The Debate on Disclosure Practices of <i>Der Spiegel</i> during the Flick-affair (1980s)	155
Eric Dehay / Nathalie Lévy	
A short history of transparency and central banks in the academic literature	173
Authors and editors	185

Researching the History of Transparency: Introduction

In public debates, there are consensual concerns, such as peace and welfare. Transparency is among these seemingly unambiguous principles. In many respects, transparency has become synonymous with the common good. Many actors and organizations claim to act transparently, including private companies, public administrations, universities and so on.

On the one hand, this can be easily explained. Transparency corresponds to the image we have of ourselves: We conceive us as responsible citizens and independent consumers. We make autonomous and rational decisions. Seemingly, we only lack occasional information to make the right political or economic choices. If people are correctly informed, wisdom will rule the world. Of course, this self-representation is problematic, but it goes along with the ideal of “empowerment” and self-conscious individualism which have been developed since the 1960s in Western societies.

In fact, there are three important factors that explain the triumph of transparency during the last decades. The first is a concept of democracy according to which citizens decide individually and on the basis of accurate information how they will vote. The second is the result of trust in the forces of the market economy, which only works if the economic facts are known, in other words, if they are transparent. And finally, digitization and the Internet have their share in the hope of transparency. The availability of data and information in the digital age provides a basis for the utopia of a transparent society.¹

But it is precisely this, data transparency in the digital age, that points to the ambivalence of transparency. Today it has become clear: it is not so much Google that makes the world transparent to its users, but rather its users become transparent in the databases of the internet company with all their intimate characteristics. Trust in the rationality of unleashed markets has also been

1 Bessone, Magali: Culte de l'internet et transparence: L'héritage de la philosophie américaine, in: *Esprit* 7 (2011), pp. 145–159; Flyverbom, Mikkel: *The Digital Prism: Transparency and managed visibilities in a datafied world*, Cambridge 2019.

shaken, at the latest since the financial crisis of 2008/10. Finally, we have realized by now that even unbridled disclosure in the political field has its limits. As the Donald Trump impeachment shows: knowing the facts does not necessarily alter political convictions – not the least because there might be no consensus of what is a “fact”. So the desire for transparency may result in opacity.

These few words may be enough to demonstrate the importance and ambivalence of the concept of transparency for current public debates. Since the 1990s, social sciences have taken up the problem of transparency. After a period of affirmative research, critical accounts have dominated for the last decade or so.

Historiography, so far, has proven more or less untouched by the topic. With this book we try to change this to a certain extent. This book does not come along with a developed concept for the historical exploration of transparency. Rather, first spotlights are thrown on the subject and different approaches to the history of transparency are proposed.

The contributions to this volume are the written versions of some of the papers presented at the conference “History of Transparency in Politics and Society”, which took place in Darmstadt on 18 and 19 June 2019. The conference has been organized by the Franco-German research group HISTRANS, which the authors of this text lead together with other colleagues.

In this text we will first introduce transparency as a metaphorical term. Subsequently we will expand on the three main ambivalences of the transparency concept, before outlining some trends in past transparency research. At the end of this text we consider how historical transparency research can be conducted.

Very short introduction to the history of the term transparency

Transparency has a positive connotation for various reasons. The persuasive power of the notion of transparency is to a large extent the result of its metaphorical nature. Public debates are very much influenced by this. In the legislation of recent decades, transparency is associated with light and with freedom. The German “*Informationsfreiheitsgesetz*” of 2006, like the US “Freedom of Information Act” of 1967, is based on the principle that government action should be transparent and comprehensible to citizens. The metaphorical message is twofold: access to information is free, but also: access to information creates freedom.

Titles of other laws are even more flowery, for example when they remind us of beautiful summer days. As early as 1976, the US Congress passed the “Government in Sunshine Act”, ruling that Federal Bodies’ meetings had to be held open for the public. Thirty years later the “Physician Payments Sunshine Act” of 2010, being a part of Obama Care medical insurance legislation, ruled that doctors’

bills had to be transparent if paid by health insurances. Alluding to sunshine, light, and translucency, transparency is connected to strong symbols in Western culture since a very long time. As an example we refer to the self-representation of the Sun King Louis XIV, who of course had no aspiration to transparent government in the modern sense, but who identified himself with the light of Apollo and the sun in order to demonstrate his glory and life-giving forces to the benefit of his realm and his subjects.

Transparency is visibility. The notion itself appeared in French in the 17th century in the natural sciences (especially in optics), but also in the field of theatre and women's fashion, with a meaning similar to the Greek διαφανής (diaphanés = translucent). The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 2nd ed. of 1718 gives the example: "la transparence de l'eau, du verre". Similar descriptions are given in the more recent editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (for ex. edition 8 of 1932–1935). The same applies to the *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle* by Larousse: "un corps est transparent quand les rayons de lumière passent librement à travers sa masse".

Similar definitions can be found in Germany, but obviously less frequently used compared to France. The *Brockhaus Conversations-Lexicon* of 1847 includes the adjective "transparent" and alludes to translucent colours. The edition of 1895 shows the same entry. Against that, *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon* of 1899 does not contain any entry, even not the adjective, just like the *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* of 1928.

In contrast to the German and French cases, the development in England was different and the political use of transparency started much earlier. The British reformer and philosopher Jeremy Bentham first used the term transparency in a political context at the beginning of the 19th century, as "transparent management or publicity". He combined it with the demand to disclose the earnings of office holders, quite close to the actual use of the word. Bentham believed that good management in public office could not be achieved by appealing to the honesty of the incumbent alone, but only through public knowledge and control.²

However, according to the present state of research, this had no equivalent in either German or French use of language, where the physical terminology remained dominant. What is associated with political transparency today was largely part of the meaning of "public" in France towards the end of the 19th century. Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle* reads "qui appartient à l'universalité des citoyens, qui concerne tout le peuple" or "le gouvernement général du pays". However, the situation changed from 1950 onwards:

2 Hood, Christopher: Transparency in Historical Perspective, in: Hood, Christopher/ Heald, David (eds.): Transparency. The key to better governance? Oxford 2006, pp. 3–23, p. 9.

the term now found its way into French business management and tax law (law of 15.03.1963 on “*Transparence fiscale*” for real estate companies).³

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the concept of transparency attained a similar usage even later, from the 1970s onwards. First, it was connected to demands for transparency in science, in planning or in jurisdiction.⁴ An early example of a genuinely political use is the 1971 issue of the journal *Kritik* entitled “*Parlamentarismus ohne Transparenz*” (“Parliamentarism without transparency”). However, transparency has only been included in the actual political discourse since the 1980s. It became a central concept during the Flick-affair, especially as a demand for more transparency in party financing.⁵

Around the same time, the “New Social Movements” in most Western democracies fought for more political participation. The environmental and peace movements were particularly successful in West Germany. Accusations were often made that the State was hiding knowledge concerning environmental risks. The strategy of the environmental movement included obtaining information about possible environmental damage so that it could then use expert knowledge to take action against projects such as the expansion of nuclear power plants.⁶ Reclaiming access to government information about environmental problems such as nuclear technology or the pollution of rivers was part of many of these campaigns. Slowly the idea of access to information dropped into the political discourse, without being called, for the time being, transparency.⁷

The three aporias of transparency

Despite its current public significance and political relevance, transparency is not an easy concept for research. In our view, there are mainly three issues that need to be considered and reflected upon when researching transparency. One of them is the observation that transparency usually appears as a promise and hope, but

3 Belorgey, G.: *Le gouvernement et l'administration de la France*, Paris 1967, p. 144.

4 Cremer-Renz, Christa: *Transparenz wissenschaftlicher Prozesse durch Aktionsforschung* Dortmund 1975; Schneider, Enno: *Transparenz von Planungsprozessen: Analyse von Elementen der Planung unter methodologischen Aspekten*, Stuttgart 1977; Scherer, Joachim: *Gerichtsöffentlichkeit als Medienöffentlichkeit. Zur Transparenz der Entscheidungsfindung im straf- und verwaltungsgerichtlichen Verfahren*, Königstein 1979.

5 *Der Spiegel*: “Wenn der Schatzmeister kommt”, (46) 12.11.1984; Engels, Jens Ivo: *Alles nur gekauft? Korruption in der Bundesrepublik seit 1949*, Darmstadt 2019; cf. the contribution of Martin Mainka to this volume.

6 Cf. Engels, Jens Ivo: *Politische Korruption in der Moderne. Debatten und Praktiken in Großbritannien und Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 282 (2006), pp. 313–350.

7 Engels, Jens Ivo: *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik. Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung 1950–1980*, Paderborn 2006.

hardly as an attainable state. The second is the aforementioned ambiguity of transparency as a normative political demand and at the same time as an analytical category in social and historical research. The third ambivalence is related to question of power and agency: Transparency may benefit ordinary citizens, but also the authorities and the elites.

Transparency is a demand or promise, but not a state of stability that could ever be achieved.⁸ Rather, transparency results in movement. Successes in transparency always seem deficient or imperfect. There is much evidence to suggest that demands for transparency can never be fully met and that the willingness to be transparent can never be entirely satisfactory. Let us take the political sphere as an example. Often, the effort to achieve transparency leads to growing mistrust despite and precisely because of increasing knowledge about politics and the state. This may be due to the fact that the flood of information is constantly growing and nobody is able to process them all. The abundance of information then leads to frustration and to the suspicion that the really explosive things are hidden in this mass of information. Thus, the act of information generates the suspicion of disinformation.⁹

The hope for total transparency must always be disappointed anyway, because there is no possibility to make public every step in a decision-making process. Since this is not possible for sheer technical reasons, and every observer knows this, the suspicion arises that the information published is not the decisive one. For this reason, no political decision-making process is conceivable in which opacity is not created alongside transparency.¹⁰

Even the assumption that transparency is a means of enlightening is questioned with good reason: Matthew Fluck has recently highlighted the similarities between conspiracy theories and transparency demands in the current political debate.¹¹ In the sociology of organization, too, it is argued that transparency erodes trust within an organization, which is quite the opposite of common assumptions about the effect of transparency.¹²

8 Schneider, Manfred: *Transparenztraum. Literatur, Politik, Medien und das Unmögliche*, Berlin 2013.

9 Hansen, Hans Krause/ Christensen, Lars Thøger/ Flyverbom, Mikkel: Introduction. Logics of transparency in late modernity. Paradoxes, mediation and governance, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 18 (2015), pp. 117–131, p. 120.

10 Cavaillé, Jean-Pierre: *La face cachée de l'injonction de transparence*. 2014, available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/dossiersgrihl/6212> [last access 02.04.2020]; Fenster, Mark: The Opacity of Transparency, in: *Iowa Law Review* 91 (2006), pp. 885–949.

11 Fluck, Matthew: Theory, “truthers”, and transparency: Reflecting on knowledge in the twenty-first century, in: *Review of International Studies* 42 (2016), pp. 48–73.

12 Osrecki, Fran: Fighting Corruption with Transparent Organizations. Anti-Corruption and Functional Deviance in Organizational Behavior, in: *ephemera* 15 (2015), pp. 337–364.

Transparency research is confronted with a similar problem as corruption research. In both areas we are dealing with a highly normative concept, which is clearly positive (transparency) or negative (corruption).¹³ On the one hand, this makes the object of research attractive and relevant. On the other hand, researchers have to deal with the fact that the term is “transporting” moral and political “prejudices” of our present.

The positive attributes associated with transparency have already been mentioned above. Historically, it can be said that the concept of transparency or related ideas such as access to information and “readability” of society or organizations have been widely disseminated as positive expectations for the future since the Enlightenment. Manfred Schneider calls this phenomenon, which can be found in European societies since the 18th century, *Transparenztraum* (“dream of transparency”).¹⁴ Today, transparency is virtually seen as a condition of existence for active citizens and responsible consumers.

These perspectives give rise to the desire to investigate the foundations of such a development. This brings us closer to a more analytical understanding of the term. Indeed some studies have used transparency as an analytical term, particularly to describe the access to or provision of information in different historical contexts.¹⁵

The British administrative scientist Christopher Hood identifies three historical traditions of the idea of transparency, namely procedural fidelity, open communication and the effort to make society “knowable”. Procedural fidelity refers to the rule of law and legislation, which has been part of political thought since ancient Greece. Open communication would be the historical core of what is today understood as freedom of information. The origin of this freedom is identified by Hood in enlightened theory of state, such as Immanuel Kant’s *Zum ewigen Frieden* including condemnation of secret treaties and Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Contrat social* which demands the publicity of statecraft. According to Hood, the concept of a knowable society also goes back to the efforts of 18th

13 On corruption history and normativity cf. Engels, Jens Ivo/ Monier, Frédéric: Pour une histoire comparée des faveurs et de la corruption: France et Allemagne (XIXe–XXe siècles), in: Engels, Jens Ivo/ Monier, Frédéric/ Petiteau, Natalie (eds.): La politique vue d’en bas. Pratiques privées et débats publics 19e–20e siècles, Paris 2011, pp. 127–148; Engels, Jens Ivo: Die Geschichte der Korruption. Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis ins 20. Jahrhundert, Frankfurt a. M. 2014.

14 Schneider: *Transparenztraum*.

15 Ciccolella, Daniela: False transparency: disclosing financial data between Enlightenment and absolutism (Naples, 1780’s), in: *Histoire & Mesure* 30 (2015), pp. 215–256; Cicchini, Marco: A new ‘inquisition’? Police reform, urban transparency and house numbering in eighteenth-century Geneva, in: *Urban History* 39 (2012), pp. 614–623; Jaensch, Dean: Democratic Representation: Then, Now, and in the Future, in: *Flinders Journal of History & Politics* 27 (2011), pp. 26–34.

century state authorities to describe the population statistically and to collect information in order to improve ruling. As Hood explains, the installation of surveillance cameras in public spaces is one result of this tradition.¹⁶

Carolyn Ball makes another statement. She identifies three key elements of transparency: transparency as a tool for implementing good governance, transparency as a synonym for reliable government decision-making and finally as a counter concept to political corruption.¹⁷ In fact, transparency is often seen in the context of accountability, i.e. the responsibility and liability of public officials or other authorities.¹⁸ Transparency in this context means the accessibility of information so that political decision-making processes become visible, comprehensible and monitorable or criticisable. David Heald refers to the possibility of mutual observation in society.¹⁹

At this point the third ambivalence of transparency becomes apparent. For nothing would be more naive than to believe that transparency leads unilaterally to the population controlling the mighty. On the contrary, the opposite case is possible, indeed historically at least as common as the first one. This is shown, for example, by the work of James Scott, who in his influential study *Seeing like a State* showed how the modern state tried in different ways to make the population “readable”. This readability was aimed at changing society by social engineering in the sense of an authoritative ideal. Frequently social engineering was accompanied by coercion and violence not the least against minorities – culminating in the dictatorships of the 20th century.²⁰

Today, the best known example of a similar method is the use of information technology including face recognition and a system of social scoring in China. The automated recording of “socially harmful” and “socially useful” behaviour of Chinese citizens on the internet and in public places creates complete transparency and provides the authorities with extensive educational and disciplinary opportunities.

Based on similar observations, David Heald has developed a concept for different effects of transparency. This concept considers transparency as an observation category between different groups or persons. Heald illustrates how transparency can allocate power depending on how it operates. In essence, he is

16 Hood: Transparency in Historical Perspective, pp. 5–8.

17 Ball, Carolyn: What is Transparency? in: Public Integrity 11 (2009), pp. 293–308.

18 Osrecki: Fighting corruption; Flinders, Matthew: Devolution, delegation and the Westminster Model: a comparative analysis of developments within the UK, 1998–2009, in: Commonwealth & Comparative Politics 49 (2011), pp. 1–28.

19 Heald, David: Varieties of transparency, in: Hood, Christopher/ Heald, David (eds.): Transparency. The key to better governance? Oxford 2006, pp. 25–45.

20 Scott, James: *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven/ London 1998.

concerned with determining the direction of transparency, i.e. the question of what is visible to whom. Heald distinguishes between two versions of so-called “vertical” transparency, which directly addresses the exercise and control of power. He calls it “transparency upwards” when authorities are able to observe the population, and “transparency downwards” when subordinates are capable of observing the authorities. According to Heald, “symmetrical” transparency prevails if both directions coexist.²¹

In addition, Heald describes forms of non-hierarchical or “horizontal” transparency: these include “transparency outwards”, when members of an organization can observe their surroundings, and “transparency inwards”, when outside persons observe the processes inside an organization. Heald also distinguishes between “process transparency”, i.e. the observability of a decision-making process, and “event transparency”, where inputs and outputs of decision-making processes can be observed.

Literature overview

Similar to “sustainability”, “transparency” is a term that is used both in the political debate and in many different scientific disciplines. The state of research is therefore quite confusing.

In France, research has been conducted since the 1980s in the human and social sciences and in law. In the first phase, between 1981 and 2001, transparency was seen above all as a social requirement, as a new standard for the relationship between the administration and the citizens, particularly with regard to access to information.²² Transparency here is seen as the opposite of “secrecy”, especially with regard to jurisdiction.²³ Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, historians, political scientists and philosophers have been studying the emergence of the modern *raison d'état* since the early modern era.²⁴ In this context, transparency appears as a synonym for political morality and, in the public debate of the 1980s and 1990s, specifically as a means of combating political corruption. A whole series of reforms in the area of party financing in France (as in Germany) reveals the prevailing idea that “transparency” as a regulatory goal is a necessary and at

21 Heald: *Varieties of transparency*, p. 27f.

22 Rangeon, François (ed.): *Information et transparence administratives*, actes du colloque d'Amiens, Amiens 1988.

23 Ministère de la Justice, service de coordination de la recherche: *La justice et les fonctions sociales du secret, rapport général et conclusions*, Paris 1981.

24 Lazzeri, Christian (ed.): *Le pouvoir de la raison d'État*, Paris 1992; Zarka, Yves-Charles (ed.): *Raison et déraison d'État: Théoriciens et théories de la raison d'État aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, Paris 1994.

the same time efficient means of fighting corruption. Given the importance of this collective idea, research since the turn of the millennium has taken a new direction, in the sense of a critique of the imprecise concept. This applies in particular to political science.²⁵

In recent years, several academic disciplines have critically explored transparency. Even in the field of anti-corruption, there have been complaints that transparency has only a “mediocre” effect.²⁶ Thus, the effects of specialized actors such as the non-governmental organization *Transparency International* are increasingly criticized.²⁷ The first doctoral theses on this topic, which were submitted in France, argue accordingly with great caution, for example on the transparency policy of the Council of Europe.²⁸

Criticism has also reached the field of economics, putting forward warnings of the dangers of an “ideology of transparency” in public finance, as well as negative consequences of a commitment by all economic actors to total financial transparency.²⁹ Economists fear that transparency requirements are increasingly turning out to be regulatory measures that inhibit entrepreneurship.³⁰ At least, this is the result of a research project funded by the *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* from 2007 to 2010.³¹

Despite these studies, there has not yet been extensive historical reflection on the genesis of the concept of transparency. As mentioned above, individual publications have linked transparency to the Enlightenment of the 18th century and to the demands of the French Revolution. In this perspective, transparency is

25 Transparence et secret (Special issue) *Pouvoirs*, no. 97, avril 2001.

26 Alt, Éric: Les lois sur la transparence et la fraude: une réponse médiocre à la corruption de la République, in: Bonfils, Philippe/ Mucchielli, Laurent/ Roux, Adrien (eds.): *Comprendre et lutter contre la corruption*, Aix-en-Provence 2015, pp. 117–122.

27 Guillaume, Louis: De l’opacité à la transparence: les limites de l’indice de perception de la corruption de Transparency international, in: *Déviance et Société* 31 (2007), pp. 41–64; Andersson, Staffan/ Heywood, Paul M.: The Politics of Perception: Use and Abuse of Transparency International’s Approach to Measuring Corruption, in: *Political Studies* 57 (2009), pp. 746–767.

28 Karimov, Inam: Le rôle de la transparence dans la lutte contre la corruption à travers l’expérience du Conseil de l’Europe, unpublished PhD Thesis, Université Paris-I 2013.

29 Charron, Jacques-Olivier: L’idéologie de la transparence dans l’audit: une approche de sa dimension médiatique, in: *Comptabilité, contrôle, audit* 10/3 (2004), p. 105.

30 Duhamel, Jean-Christophe/ Fasterling, Björn/ Refait-Alexandre, Catherine: La transparence – outil de conciliation de la finance et du management, in: *Revue française de gestion* 198/199 (2009), pp. 59–75.

31 Farvaque, Étienne/ Gainet, Céline/ Refait-Alexandre, Catherine/ Shaïdane, Dafer: “Is corporate finance necessarily desirable?”, Hal-SHS programme ANR 2007: Transparency and information disclosure in corporate finance.

a “foundation of modern democracy”.³² Nevertheless, this affirmative judgement has become problematic since the turn of the millennium. For many works in political science, law or philosophy that deal with the current demand for transparency stress the ambivalence of the concept. For some, transparency even stands in contrast to the classical conception of the public sphere,³³ for others it resembles denunciation, and yet others observe a deepening break between the principle of the public sphere and the “requirement of transparency” in today’s representative democracies.³⁴ The relationship between transparency and participation also remains far from clear.³⁵ In 2017, a monograph was published on the intellectual history of transparency in France during the four decades following the end of the Second World War. This study highlights the scepticism of mid-century intellectuals towards the idea of transparency.³⁶

All in all, research in recent years has developed in different directions. This has led to a certain fragmentation. Many studies refer exclusively to very concrete, narrowly defined fields, such as administration in new public management, the Internet economy,³⁷ international relations,³⁸ philosophy³⁹ or open access policy.⁴⁰ The phenomenon of data leaks and the new role of whistleblowers have also led to academic debate.⁴¹ It is precisely in these works that historical perspectives and the attempt to incorporate the findings of related disciplines are missing.

In German historiography, too, there are still hardly any works on the history of transparency. An exception to the rule is Manfred Schneider’s *Transparenztraum* of 2013, a pioneering study but not written by a genuine historian. Schneider combines intellectual, art and political history since the Enlightenment. His two most important insights have been discussed in detail above:

32 Münch, Philippe: Révolution française, opinion publique et transparence: les fondements de la démocratie moderne, in: *Appareil* 7 (2011), available at: <https://doi.org/10.4000/appareil.1220> [02.04.2020].

33 Pitseys, John: Publicité et transparence, in: *Revue française de science politique* 66 (2016), pp. 117–135.

34 Cavaillé: *La face cachée*.

35 Guglielmi, Gilles/ Zoller, Elisabeth (eds.): *Transparence, démocratie et gouvernance citoyenne*, Paris 2014.

36 Geroulanos, Stefanos: *Transparency in Postwar France. A Critical History of the Present*, Redwood City 2017.

37 Flyverbom, Mikkel: Sunlight in cyberspace? On transparency as a form of ordering, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 18 (2015), pp. 168–184.

38 Larkin, Sean P.: The Age of Transparency, in: *Foreign Affairs* 95 (2016), pp. 136–146.

39 Vattimo, Gianni: *La società trasparente*, Milano 1989.

40 Mancosu, Giorgio: *La transparence publique à l’ère de l’Open data. Étude comparée France-Italie*, unpublished PhD thesis, Université Paris 2/Università di Cagliari 2016.

41 Fenster, Mark: The Transparency Fix: Advocating Legal Rights and Their Alternatives in the Pursuit of a Visible State, in: *University of Pittsburgh Law Review* 73 (2012), pp. 443–503.

firstly, transparency is a demand and promise that can never be fulfilled, often it is utopian in nature. And secondly: transparency is ambivalent, it can check power, but it can also cement dominance. The great advantage of this book is that it uses many examples from both German and French history.⁴²

The history of freedom of information is often equated with the history of transparency. In the USA, the beginnings go back to the 1930s. Under the motto of “right to know”, the media and civil rights movements in particular have been pressing for laws that have increasingly expanded the accessibility of government documents since the 1950s.⁴³ Other authors, similar to Schneider, state that important thinkers such as the British economist Richard Whately have developed thinking in terms of transparency categories.⁴⁴

In parallel, there are some studies on the metaphors of transparency, mostly with a cultural history approach. Usually, the Enlightenment is again regarded as decisive here. In such studies, transparency metaphors, for example from science, are examined as to their political relevance.⁴⁵ Different studies highlight Enlightenment’s promise of human agency to change the world and to detect the truth instead of myths, beliefs or superstitions. In this view, transparency promises on the one hand to recognize the world, on the other to change it.⁴⁶ In addition, analogies between (transparent) architecture and social concepts have attracted attention.⁴⁷

Historical transparency research: Approaches, results and perspectives

What is the specific approach of historiography in transparency research? First of all, this includes a clear distinction between transparency being a political or social demand in a given historical setting on the one hand and the use of the concept of transparency for an analysis of historical societies on the other. Both variants of historical transparency research are possible, whereby the second variant poses very great challenges. For if historical societies are to be analyzed in

42 Schneider: Transparenztraum.

43 Fenster: The Transparency fix, pp. 451–466.

44 Levy, David/ Peart, Sandra J.: Richard Whately and the Gospel of Transparency, in: *American Journal of Economics & Sociology* 69 (2010), pp. 166–187.

45 Levitt, Theresa: *The shadow of enlightenment. Optical and political transparency in France, 1789–1848*, Oxford 2009.

46 Christensen, Lars Thøger/ Cornelissen, Joep: Organizational transparency as myth and metaphor, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 18 (2015), pp. 132–149.

47 Jarosinski, Eric: Architectural symbolism and the rhetoric of transparency, in: *Journal of Urban History* 29 (2002), pp. 62–77; Barnstone, Deborah A.: *The Transparent State. Architecture and Politics in Postwar Germany*, London 2005.