

This is a repository copy of *The dialogic performativity of secrecy and transparency*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/193438/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Fan, Ziyun orcid.org/0000-0003-1480-8361 and Christensen, Lars Thøger (2024) The dialogic performativity of secrecy and transparency. Human Relations. ISSN: 0018-7267

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221139457>

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

human relations

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Journal:	<i>Human Relations</i>
Manuscript ID	HR-2021-0610.R3
Manuscript Type:	Standard Manuscript
Keywords:	Secrecy, Transparency, Secrecy-transparency dynamics, Dialogics, Performativity

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Ziyun Fan¹

University of York, UK

Lars Thøger Christensen

Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

The dialogic principle allows us to maintain duality at the heart of unity. It associates two terms that are at the same time complementary and antagonistic (Morin, 2008, p.49).

Knowing and not knowing, transparency and the lack of it are not rigid and mutually incompatible opposites. Rather they appear as “symbiotic” moments that depend on each other and complement one another. Transparency and secrecy can have similar and even the same functions and consequences, and they can overlap and merge with one another (Owetschkin & Berger, 2019, p.6).

Abstract

How does the pursuit of transparency and insight have a tendency to produce secrecy? And vice versa? In popular and political discourse, secrecy and transparency are usually depicted as mutually exclusive practices. At the same time, we know from extant research that the two are closely related, that they each have performative effects, and tend to encroach on each other. The inseparability and performative dynamics between the two, however, remains to be unfolded. This critical essay revisits the secrecy-transparency relationship through the lens of Edgar Morin’s dialogical principle. From this perspective, we argue that secrecy-transparency dialogics perform as a complex whole, involving both complementary and

¹ Corresponding author:

Ziyun Fan, School for Business and Society, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5ZF, UK.
Email: Ziyun.fan@york.ac.uk

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

antagonistic forces. As an illustration of dialogic performativity, we draw on the phenomenon and practice of ‘open meetings’ in public sector organizations. Specifically, we argue that the ambiguous fascination with knowing and not knowing create conditions for simulated insight and self-imposed conformity in ways that recalibrate the relationship between transparency and secrecy. On this background, we call for renewed critical and reflexive engagement with the transparency ideal and its presumed antipode, secrecy.

Keywords: Secrecy, Transparency, Secrecy-transparency dynamics, Dialogics, Performativity

Introduction

Although the academic literature has recognized that transparency goes hand in hand with secrecy (e.g., Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Birchall, 2021; Cronin, 2020; Fenster, 2017; Owetschkin & Berger, 2019; Ringel, 2019; see also Simmel, 1906/1950), popular and political rhetoric continues to depict the two as opposing and antagonistic forces (Lord, 2006; Oliver, 2004; Rawlins, 2009; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016; Tapscott & Ticoll, 2003). Fuelled by still more frequent disclosures of corporate and political misconduct, the notion that secrecy and transparency are mutually exclusive is gaining further ground. Critical attention attracted by secrecy has been intensified in contemporary society directing, for example, the focus of inquisitive journalists and NGOs towards the hidden and invisible, sharpening the anti-secrecy rhetoric of politicians, and engaging regulators in setting and managing new standards for openness and accountability. The assumption seems to be, as Ringel (2019, p.707) critically observes, that “[t]he more thorough disclosure practices are implemented, the less secrecy prevails” (see also Fan & Liu, 2022).

Yet, while such efforts may be driven by genuine intentions to increase public insight, they often fail to recognize how secrecy is embedded in all transparency efforts and vice versa. When, for example, meetings in public sector organizations are *public by decree* and – in the

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

name of transparency – recorded or otherwise documented for public consumption, new secrecy practices tend to emerge (Ringel, 2019; see also Piotrowski & Borry, 2010). In order to, for example, discuss confidential or person-sensitive material that cannot be aired in conventional meetings, decision makers in public organizations may convene informally outside workplace premises or under the banners of “non-meetings”. Such secrecy practices, engendered by the transparency rule itself, can only work organizationally if it is itself transparent to (at least some) organizational members. At the same time, the potential for such practices to become known to outsiders can result in both intensified transparency demands and new circles of secrecy practices. The phenomenon of open meetings in public sector organizations, where transparency is officially mandated and celebrated but nonetheless intimately related to secrecy, will be used to illustrate our points throughout the paper.

That said, such secrecy-transparency relationship is not necessarily confined to public sector organizations, although it is likely to attain a specific intensity in that particular context. Transparency and secrecy are related in all types of organizations not only because full transparency can be counterproductive and prevent important information from being aired or considered (e.g., Bok, 1982) or because organizations necessarily have something to hide (cf. Eisenberg, 1982), but also because transparency is inherently selective, illuminating certain practices while leaving others in the dark (Christensen & Cheney, 2015). Increasing transparency may not simply decrease secrecy or the other way around. Rather, as we shall argue, they depend on each other to achieve their respective goals. Understanding such interdependency is critical in today’s world where the increased social premium on transparency continuously reshapes and redefines what are considered illegitimate forms of secrecy and, accordingly, determines what is relevant or necessary to know.

Attempts to understand the complexities of the secrecy-transparency relationship ought to consider both its epistemological and social dimensions – epistemological, because

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

the searchlight of transparency endeavors inevitably is limited; and social, because any ambition to expose simultaneously stimulates a desire to pretend, pose, and idealize. Because of these tendencies, many transparency practices produce secrecy in new shapes (Baudrillard 1988). In this paper, we draw on the phenomenon of open meetings to argue that secrecy and transparency are performative practices that not simply oppose each other, but also – and simultaneously – produce their presumed antipodes. By *performativity* we refer to the view that organizational and social realities are continuously enacted and constituted through discourse, rituals, and other social practices. Describing such practices as performative, in other words, means to acknowledge that they are *doing* and accomplishing something with potential consequences for social life (Butler, 1997, 1999; Gond et al., 2016; Taylor & van Every, 2000).

The performativity of secrecy and transparency has been noted in previous works, describing how transparency measures and rituals produce new types of opacity (Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Christensen & Cornelissen, 2015; Fenster, 2006; Ringel, 2019), how secrecy involves revelation (Fan & Grey, 2021; Fan & Liu, 2022) and keeps reappearing in new guises (Owetschkin & Berger, 2019), and how both secrecy and transparency are needed to compensate for each other's deficiencies (Bok, 1982). Yet, the performative dynamics of the secrecy-transparency relationship remains unspecified. In this paper, we set out to expand on the observation that secrecy and transparency not simply impinge on each other but perform with and through each other in several different ways.

To this purpose, we draw on Morin's (1992) discussion of *dialogic* and his observation that complex systems are constituted by an interplay between logics that are at once antagonistic and complementary. By bringing attention to such dynamics, our contribution to the existing literature is twofold. First, we extend existing understandings of the secrecy-transparency relationship by discussing and illustrating how secrecy and transparency perform with and through each other. 'Secrecy-transparency performativity', we argue, is a system that

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

performs as a complex whole, rather than through its constitutive parts. Second, by investigating the secrecy-transparency relationship through the lens of dialogic, the paper draws attention to Morin’s insightful work that, while powerfully explaining how contradictions contribute to systemic dynamism (see also Morin, 1984), remains to be explored in organization studies.

By engaging with the dialogic performativity of secrecy and transparency and developing the paper in an essay style, we hope to inspire renewed critical engagement among politicians, regulators, journalists, and public audiences with the revered ideal of transparency and its presumed antipode, secrecy. In doing so, our focus is not organizations deliberately designed to operate in the dark (see Scott, 2013). Rather, given the growing social and political significance of the topic, we find it important to focus on organizations and social actors that come across in everyday life as being most open and candid about their practices. Such focus is particularly pertinent when we recognize that transparency practices inevitably cultivate opacity (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2015; Fenster, 2006; Ringel, 2019) and tend to offer more power to social actors who are able to operate opaquely within current transparency regimes (e.g., Birchall, 2021; Cronin, 2020).

Secrecy, Transparency, and the Nexus Between Them

Secrecy: A process of informational and social (re)organization

The growing, yet limited, scholarship on secrecy has differentiated secrecy from ‘secrets’, defining the latter as information that is unknown to others. As there are things secret that are not deliberately concealed (Derrida & Ferraris, 2011), what is unknown is not necessarily equivalent to what is *kept* secret. Secrecy usually refers to processes of *intentionally* blocking information about something from reaching particular parties (Bok, 1982; Simmel, 1906/1950). Secrecy, thus, might be considered “a method for handling concealed information” (Bellman,

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

1981, p.8) that sets apart keepers of particular knowledge from those who are excluded from it (Simmel, 1906/1950). When something is intentionally kept secret, it becomes clear that there is more to it than its informational content.

Through the structuring of concealment, secrecy infuses and shapes informational and social interactions. As a case in point, Gusterson's (1998) ethnographic study of the Lawrence Livermore nuclear weapons laboratory shows how such structuring is employed strategically in intelligence and military policies. Specifically, Gusterson illustrates how secrecy was organized on a 'need to know' basis that categorized individuals at work: "without a green badge, a scientist is not a full adult member of the laboratory...Scientists without green badges cannot visit their green-badged colleagues in their offices, unless chaperoned" (1998, p.71). Being certified as 'needing to know' involves access to otherwise concealed knowledge. This example, which equally applies to participants in unofficial meetings or "non-meetings" mentioned previously, illustrates an inherent paradox at the core of secrecy: while insiders might be told that the secret is not to be revealed and are trusted to keep the secret, they are themselves being told the hidden information (Bellman, 1981; Fan, Costas & Grey, 2017; Fan & Dawson, 2022). Such a double frame is embedded in the practices of secrecy as it is communicatively organized and yet protected from communication. What makes secrecy vulnerable or 'impure' (Birchall, 2021; Fan & Liu, 2022) is therefore secrecy itself.

Consequently, serving as a boundary-drawing mechanism for secrecy, the organizing character of the 'need to know' basis indicates a profound ambivalence of the boundary itself: how do we know if we need to know something? And, if we do not know what we need to know, how do we get to know it; yet, once we know something that we do not need to know, we cannot 'unknow' it (Costas & Grey, 2016, p.81). Secrecy organizes relational and possibly ambiguous maps, only known to insiders, that constitute "pathways through which information is exchanged and interaction occur every day" (Courpasson & Younes, 2018, p.284; see also

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Liu & Fan, 2022). The organization of secrecy, in other words, marks an affirmational identity and membership that essentially involves insight for members. As such, secrecy in this way is inherently performative (Herzfeld, 2009), even though the transparency it produces is only for the few.

The idea and promise of transparency

In contemporary society, transparency is presented as a necessary antidote to illegitimate forms of secrecy (Henriques, 2007; Lord, 2006; Oliver, 2004; Rawlins, 2009; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Associated with practices such as information accessibility, labeling, auditing, and open meetings (Fung, et al., 2007; Garsten & de Montoya, 2008; Heald, 2006a; Power, 1997), transparency has become one of the most powerful and seductive concepts in contemporary public discourse (Owetschkin & Berger, 2019). In the context of organization, transparency is celebrated for its ability to facilitate knowledge sharing, accountability, and due diligence. As such, it is expected to lead to better and more acceptable organizational practices (Strathern, 2000; see also Tapscott & Ticoll, 2003).

Transparency’s modernist promise is to illuminate and reveal what used to be hidden. As such, it is regarded as an indispensable source of insight, knowledge, and eventually, emancipation (Vattimo, 1992). While this promise has ancient roots (Hood, 2006), modernity explicitly celebrates transparency as a critical dimension of reason, rationality, and good governance, especially in public organizations (e.g., Florini, 2007; Garsten & de Montoya, 2008; Piotrowski, 2010). The ideal of modern thought is to enhance the capacity to understand what goes on behind the façade in order to liberate the individual from the superstitions and repressions of authoritative regimes. Weber’s (1968) idealized description of modern society as ‘disenchanted’, for example, depicted a secularized society in which insight, achieved via rational practices and scientific principles, replaces faith and superstition (Nisbet, 1966).

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

While transparency has become an undisputed value in and of itself, a value that is “more often preached than practiced, more often invoked than defined” (Hood, 2006, p.1; see also Tsoukas, 1997), recurrent critique of transparency has revealed it as an equivocal and perhaps even misguided ideal (e.g., Birchall, 2021; Han, 2012; Lessig, 2009). Still, the confidence in transparency as a mechanism for insight and knowledge continues to be on the rise (Owetschkin & Berger, 2019). The same discrepancy is at play in the context of organization. Critical organization scholars, thus, have problematized the organizational transparency pursuit, pointing out its questionable ontological and epistemological assumptions, its tensions with other organizational practices, and its inadvertent consequences for organizations and the larger society (e.g., Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Albu & Ringel, 2018; Christensen & Cheney, 2015; Fenster, 2006; Garsten & Montoya, 2008). Nonetheless, transparency is continually employed as an ethical practice and path necessary to cure the mistrust faced by many contemporary organizations. As we shall argue below, this elevated status of transparency is performative in several different ways that link its pursuit to secrecy. While secrecy and transparency seem to point in opposite directions – one unethical, the other ethical – they are mutually constituted and more closely related than generally considered. It is, in other words, theoretically and practically meaningless to address one without considering the other.

The nexus between secrecy and transparency

More than a century ago, Simmel (1906/1950) outlined the social significance of secrecy and its potential relationship to publicity, which was the term he used for transparency. Arguing that secrecy is a “universal sociological form” (p.463) that channels and facilitates human interaction, Simmel (1906) pointed out that knowing inevitably involves a mixture of insight and ignorance, revelation and concealment. Human associations, he emphasized, “require a

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

definite ratio of secrecy which merely changes its objects” (1906, p.467). Thus, while increased transparency may reduce certain types of concealment, secrecy is likely to reappear elsewhere or in a different shape such that the space between the two is constantly “recalibrated”, as Owetschkin and Berger (2019, p.6) put it. Secrecy, in other words, cannot be eliminated by increasing transparency as the borders between the two are constantly shifting. Simmel not only depicted secrecy as inevitable, but also considered it indispensable in enriching our social reality, arguing that it “produces an immense enlargement of life: numerous content of life cannot even emerge in the presence of full publicity” (Simmel, 1906/1950, p.330). Several recent writings have applied this understanding of secrecy to organizational life.

In her book *Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation*, Bok (1982) explains how secrecy and transparency are necessary to counterbalance each other in democratic societies. Although each can be harmful in their side effects, they are both likely to be more manipulative without some influence from the other. Thus, while secrecy without transparency allows those in power to uphold unfair practices and limit popular participation, transparency without some secrecy tends to reduce the quality of policy-making in administrative practices (see also Dufresne & Offstein, 2008; Eisenberg, 1984). If, for example, public policymakers, advisors, and contributors are required to do everything in the open, they might display more established and less controversial views aligned with dominant political and public rhetoric (see also Heald, 2006b). This, Bok argues, could result in the premature closure of creative but tentative ideas, and thereby reduce the potential for learning and innovation.

- While Bok’s (1982) discussion focuses on administrative and governmental secrecy, Costas and Grey (2014; 2016) argue more generally that complex organizational structures as well as new forms of organizing might promote secrecy to the same extent as they promote knowledge sharing. Specifically, they emphasize the political and social nature of information (Costas & Grey,

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

2014) that makes the relationship between transparency and secrecy “more intricate than commonly assumed” (Costas & Grey, 2016, p.54). They, however, do not address further what such intricate relationships might be. Along the same lines, Fan and Liu (2022) draw on archival stories to discuss how information concealment as the site and process that sustains secrecy can simultaneously become the site where secrecy is *revealed*. While they emphasize that concealment and revelation are mutually constitutive through their ongoing oppositions, they draw no explicit link to the issue of transparency.

A number of writings have explicitly addressed the mutual constitution of secrecy and transparency. Albu and Flyverbom (2019), for example, argue that transparency measures and practices are simultaneously practices of opacity because they affect what can be seen and known (see also Christensen & Cornelissen, 2015; Fenster, 2006). While they mention that secrecy and transparency can co-exist and have paradoxical relations (2019, p.279), the intricacies of that particular relationship are left unspecified. Ringel (2019) provides a more specific analysis of the transparency-secrecy relationship with his study of the German Pirate Party, a political party that celebrated and practiced open meetings in the early phases of its election. Specifically, Ringel discusses the transparency-secrecy interplay as a frontstage-backstage dynamic. This vocabulary, borrowed from Goffman (1959), suggests that social actors engage in impression management when operating frontstage, that is, whenever they are exposed to the gaze of others. Backstage, by contrast, is where they can relax and drop their fronts. This implies, as Goffman (1959) pointed out, that backstage is an arena where the frontstage performance is “knowingly contradicted” (p.114). Ringel (2019) uses this insight to discuss the performative nature of secrecy and transparency and to suggest that new forms of secrecy emerge in reaction to transparency measures.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Cronin (2020) approaches the relationship between secrecy and transparency in the domain of public relations. Describing secrecy and transparency as a “composite entity” (p.226) or as “conjoined twins” (p.230), Cronin (2020) centrally argues that the shifting dynamics between the two are not merely situated in *existing* social relations, but actively contribute to their constitution. Suggesting that public relations play an active role in mediating the secrecy-transparency dynamics and that this role may protect the rules of the capitalist game, she emphasizes that neither secrecy nor transparency should be presumed as positive or negative in their social and political impact. While acknowledging that the mutual constitution between secrecy and transparency is significant and under-investigated, Cronin’s specific focus on the public relations domain reveals only a singular dimension of the complexity.

Elaborating on the image of secrecy and transparency as “conjoined twins” (p.3), Birchall (2021) describes each of them as “singular and unique, but essentially connected, sharing vital functions, and only severable by extreme measures and at some considerable risk” (p.4). Both “fail to stay pure”, as Birchall (2021, p.9) puts it, and might even encroach on each other in ways that confuse the observer to think that one is the other. Acknowledging in line with Simmel’s work that secrecy is unavoidable, Birchall is critical especially of transparency practices that promote types of knowledge creation useful to the preservation of the status quo. A radical approach, she argues, involves questioning whether “the opposition between secrecy and transparency is sustainable” (2021, p.54; see also Birchall, 2011a, 2011b).

These insights are all highly significant as they disrupt the one-dimensional thinking that dominates public and political discourse on secrecy and transparency. Acknowledging the mutual impingement and constitution of secrecy and transparency, however, is only a first important step toward a reconceptualization of these significant dimensions of social life. The next step is to elaborate on the performative dynamics involved when secrecy and transparency not only co-exist and encroach on each other but perform with and through each other.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Dialogic Performativity

Claiming that the secrecy-transparency relationship is performative means to adopt a “non-representational view of discourse”, that is, to acknowledge that the use of these terms and their interconnections not simply describe, but accomplish or constitute social reality (Gond et al., 2016, p.441; see also Ashcraft, et al., 2009; Taylor & van Every, 2000). As Gond et al. (2016) point out, understandings of performativity in the context of organization and management theory often take their point of departure in Austin’s (1962) Speech Act Theory and its notion of doing things with words. As Austin and later Searle (1969) made clear, utterances have potential to accomplish things, provided the circumstances or ‘felicity conditions’ such as procedures, participants, and intentions are right. In contemporary society where transparency is considered a necessary antidote to illegitimate forms of secrecy, the call for transparency is a significant speech act that is very difficult to ignore or resist (Vogelmann, 2019).

To fully capture its organizational and social dynamics, however, this view on performativity needs to be expanded. With its primary focus on speech acts in conventional settings where felicity conditions are clear-cut and participants have fairly well-defined roles (e.g., McKinlay, 2011), Austin’s version tends to neglect performativity’s temporal, social, and systemic complexities (e.g., Christensen, Morsing & Thyssen, 2021). Moreover, it reduces performativity to explicit and singular speech acts realized by speaking subjects. Yet, the productive force (or “social magic”) of performativity, as Butler (1999, p.124) formulates it, is “extra-linguistic”. Performativity, Butler argues, must be rethought as ambiguous social rituals that are repeatedly re-enacted: “There need be no subject who initiates or enunciates the performative process, only a reiteration of a set of social relations within which theory emerges with limited performative agency” (Butler, 2010, p.152). Specifically, she draws on Derrida to suggest that communicative constitution (of gender) is unstable and takes place only gradually

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

through numerous reiterations. Emphasizing the provisional nature of performativity, the significance of Butler’s insights extends beyond gender studies to social dynamics more broadly. Although communication often “misfires” (Austin, 1979, p.238), that is, fail to perform as intended, the repeated iteration of particular values or ideals has “socially binding consequences” (Butler, 2011, p.147). While such consequences may involve reinforcing existing practices and understandings, others become ‘counterperformatives’ (MacKenzie, 2004) that contradict or undermine the presumed intentions of the performative.

In this critical essay, we build upon this notion of performativity as a ritualized, yet ambiguously re-enacted, practice with potential to add unexpected dynamics to social systems. Such understanding allows us to unpack the inherent ambiguity of the secrecy-transparency relationship and challenge the one-dimensional juxtaposition of secrecy and transparency as antagonistic forces. To extend this view, we draw on the French sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin’s writings on dialogics to analyze how secrecy and transparency simultaneously constitute, challenge, and contradict each other as a form of ‘dialogic performativity’.

The Dialogic Principle

Morin (1992) uses his notion of *dialogic* to describe the nature of complex systems, including societies and organizations. Such systems, Morin argues, are characterized by multiple logics that are at once complementary and antagonistic with respect to one another. The terms ‘dialogic’ or ‘dialogism’ are often associated with the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and his description of the dynamic, interactive, and essentially polyphonic relationship between authors, characters, and texts. Problematizing understandings of language use as unified (‘monoglotic’), Bakhtin emphasized the open-ended and diverse (‘heteroglot’) nature of utterances and their meaning (see also Holquist, 2002). While Morin’s notion of dialogic holds

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

the potential to encompass such characteristics of language use, he developed his particular understanding of dialogic without focusing specifically on linguistics (Kofman, 1996).

What Morin seeks to understand is how two or more logics that seem to rule out each other can contribute to systemic unity without losing their distinct qualities. His complexity theory characterizes dialogic as “the complete (complementary/concurrent/antagonistic) association of logics which are collectively needed for the existence, functioning, and development of an organized phenomenon” (Morin, 1986, p.98; translated in Kofman, 1996, p.60). His examples of dialogics in living systems include unity/diversity, wisdom/madness, openness/closure, order/disorder, chance/necessity, and individuality/collectivity (Morin, 2008). While these logics seemingly contradict and preclude each other, they serve the system as a whole (Morin, 1986). In his book *Penser l'Europe*, Morin explains how the European culture is influenced and shaped by complementary and antagonistic dynamics derived from its Jewish, Christian, Greek, Roman (etc.) elements, each of which operates according to its own logic (Morin, 1987). Organizations too are shaped by multiple, coexisting logics that are at once antagonistic and complementary to organizational functioning. Examples of such dialogics are integration/differentiation (e.g., Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), control/flexibility (e.g., Achrol, 1991), and centralization/decentralization (e.g., Weick, 1987). Importantly, such dialogics cannot be eliminated by imposing control and order.

Morin's point of departure and primary reference is the Hegelian and Marxian notion of dialectics, which he finds too deterministic and rationalistic and therefore unable to account for the performative complementarities of seemingly antagonistic logics (Kofman, 1996). Whereas dialectics implies that opposing forces are dissolved (at least temporarily) in synthesis, Morin's notion of dialogics suggests that different and opposing logics *continue* to co-exist as they neither alternate, replace, or annul each other (Morin, 2008), and that such co-existence in turn serves and sustains the system as a whole (Morin, 1992). The unity of complex

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

phenomena, in other words, does not require an amalgamation of its constitutive elements and their particular logics. The mutual interdependence of such involved logics, shaped by complementary and opposing forces, ritualizes their persistence over time and gradually (re)defines the system. Even though conflicting logics subject a system to multiple tensions, crises, and sometimes, setbacks, they simultaneously serve the performativity of the system by allowing it to stay vibrant and adaptive to different situations.

Specifically, Morin argues that systemic dynamism is generated by organizational recursion. Recursion or recursivity, he points out, “is a process where the products and the effects are at the same time causes and producers of what produces them” (Morin, 2008, p. 49). Morin illustrates such effects with the image of a whirlpool in which opposite forces meet and generate a self-organizing entity. We briefly illustrated such recursivity up front when talking about how open meetings tend to create new secrecies that produce new transparency initiatives, new secrecy efforts and so forth. In the remainder of the paper, we unfold this point further by adopting Morin’s dialogical perspective.

The Performativity of Secrecy-Transparency Dialogics: The Case of Open Meetings

If secrecy and transparency are inseparable and mutually constituted, as extant research has pointed out, how can we further characterize their antagonistic complementarity? While the dialogic performativity between secrecy and transparency is carefully manufactured and exploited in some cases, in others it emerges unwittingly behind the backs of social actors in their efforts to reveal or conceal. In the following, we use the example of open meetings to discuss and illustrate how the secrecy-transparency dialogic performs in organizational practice.

Knowing and not knowing in open meetings

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Open meetings were initiated as part of the transparency ambition of democratic societies and became a legal practice in the United States under the label of ‘sunshine laws’ (Crowder, 2006; Piotrowski, 2010). As a mechanism for ‘transparency inwards’ (Heald, 2006a) that allows the general public to look inside from the outside, the notion of open meetings has become a widespread ethical principle for public organizations in democratic societies and, as such, a proxy for general participation in the decision-making of public organizations. Emphasizing that ‘we’ open up because ‘we’ have nothing to hide from ‘you’ reinforces the anti-secrecy mindset. At the same time, however, the ethical and even legal obligations of open meetings cultivate different formats of secrecy acts, such as ‘non-meetings’, as ‘legitimate reasons’ for certain not-to-disclose agendas, until the next revelation of a public organization scandal.

To understand how transparency and secrecy practices perform through each other in the context of open meetings, it is important first to acknowledge that demands for (more) transparency depend on secrecy, or at least on the supposition that some sort of illegitimate secrecy is at play. Such suspicion may be enough to justify new transparency initiatives and measures. Legitimizing the meaning and practices of transparency, secrecy may therefore be considered transparency’s “condition of possibility” (Birchall, 2011b, p.143; Phillips, 2011, p.160). At the same time, the type of transparency made possible by open meetings as well as the growing calls for information accessibility may themselves cultivate suspicions that something problematic remains to be unearthed (e.g., Christensen & Cheney, 2015). The assumed antagonism between secrecy and transparency, thus, defines and reinforces their complementarity. What stimulates such complementarity is a seductive, yet ambiguous, fascination with knowing and not knowing (see Baudrillard, 1990; Brown, 2001; Han, 2015; Schmitt, 1996). Such fascination is recursively performative, especially in the context of open meetings where knowing and not knowing continuously produce and justify each other.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Another ambiguous aspect of such fascination concerns the value and importance ascribed to, respectively, concealed and revealed information. Intentionally concealed information has a particular social status as it is perceived as more valuable and more true than other types of information: If the concealed information were not particularly interesting or attractive, then why would it be intentionally hidden? Having exclusive access to such information can increase one’s status and power and strengthen one’s belongingness to a social group, thereby contributing to a grammar of ‘us’. As Simmel (1906/1950, p.332) pointed out, “For many individuals, property does not fully gain its significance with mere ownership, but only with the consciousness that others must do without it”. Possession, in other words, provides a sense of privilege and status upheld by the recognition that one has access to a hidden realm that others do not. As such, it can generate an aristocratic sensation that one is more relevant and important to a social network than the ‘knowing less’ others (e.g., Courpasson & Younes, 2018; Fan & Grey, 2021).

When such information becomes generally accessible – for example, through open meetings – it may lose its particular allure. Openness without an air of secrecy is likely to produce indifference and apathy (Baudrillard, 1990; Han, 2015). The aristocratic sensation of ownership, however, can be (re)established if the topics addressed in open meetings are highly complex and difficult to fathom for laypersons (Henriques, 2007; see also Fung et al., 2007). Being in the know in such contexts can generate in-groups and associated feelings of superiority. The antagonistic complementarity of the secrecy-transparency dialogic, thus, performs and stimulates processes of social and informational differentiation.

Strategic information use in open meetings

The increased social premium on transparency force decision makers, especially in public organizations, to produce and display convincing signs of insight. Open meetings may serve

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

such purpose. Yet, the ambiguous fascination with secrecy and transparency and their intricate relationship can be exploited by organizations, politicians, and other actors to merely create an *impression* of insight. Such practices may include, for example, careful selection and scheduling of released information, as well as strategic uses of informational comparisons, ambiguity, and complexity.

It has been demonstrated that organizations selectively disclose or leak information through ‘competitive signalling’ (e.g., Heil & Robertsen, 1991) and shrewdly manage the timing of such disclosures, sometimes with the intention of deflecting critique or handling potential issues (see also O’Neill, 2006). In addition, many organizations deliberately use ambiguity to simultaneously reveal *and* conceal (Eisenberg, 1984; see also Etzioni, 2010). In the context of open meetings, public officials often make long, time-wasting speeches with jargons and self-evident statistics for the purpose of ‘saying and revealing’, instead of facilitating sensemaking (e.g., Piotrowski & Borry, 2010). Such practices employed to simulate transparency without providing real insight are sometimes called “pseudo transparency” (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2016, p.122), “zombie transparency” (Birchall, 2021, p.2), or “false clarity” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1987/2002, p.xvii), as their promise to offer insight “fails to deliver anything more than ready-made enlightenment” (Jarosinski, 2009, p.160).

Even when complexity and ambiguity are avoided, the *volume* of information flow can itself be a source of secrecy. While information access and availability are often considered proxies for transparency, information overload – sometimes described as “data bombing” or “snowing” (Cronin, 2020, p.223) – may hide the object of inquiry in plain sight (Stohl, et al., 2016). As Lacan argued in his seminar on Poe’s ‘Purloined Letter’, “the best way to hide something was to display it ostentatiously” (Phillips, 2011, p.161). As an extreme case of publishing documents of open meetings such as minutes, comments, and records, the US Security and Exchange Commission’s publicly documented database lists 200 gigabytes of

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

filings each year between 1996 and 2005 – amounting to roughly 15 million pages of text – a number that went up from 35 gigabytes a decade earlier (Roth, 2009, cited in Birchall, 2011b, p.145). Even with a generally accessible language, it is not likely for the public to digest such an amount of information. In such cases, transparency measures can be regarded as strategies for opacity through which secrecy reemerges in new shapes.

This observation is radicalized in the writings of Baudrillard (1988; 1990). With his notion of communication ecstasy, he depicts a society in which the availability of information is ‘obscene’, because it illuminates objects in ways that resemble close-up photos in pornography. As he explains, “It is no longer the obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the obscure, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more visible-than-visible; it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in information and communication” (1988, p.22). The obscenity of information availability, Baudrillard argues, does not mean that secrecy is disappearing. What disappears are the objects we seek to understand. By illuminating them through rituals of transparency they “plunge back into the secret” (1988, p.35). This observation, which we shall further unfold below, illustrates the antagonistic complementarity between secrecy and transparency as a complex and recursive rhythm of emergence and disappearance.

Self-imposed conformity in open meetings

Meetings may be regarded as transparent as long as important discussions and decisions are made accessible to outside publics. In principle, this can be done retrospectively, that is, after the event. Yet, the notion of open meetings suggests that meetings are accessible in *real time*, for example through the use of videotaping or other types of recordings (cf. Heald, 2006a). The attraction of open meetings may, in fact, lie exactly in the possibility of observing processes of

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

deliberations and decision makings in the very moments they unfold. From a transparency perspective, however, this possibility is simultaneously the Achilles heel of open meetings.

When decision makers know that everything they say and do – including not only their accounts of prior decisions and their lines of argumentation but also their bodily gestures and their facial expressions – is observable to the public, they may be inclined to put on a show or “massage the truth”, as O’Neill (2002) puts it (cited in Heald, 2006b, p. 62). Such propensity is likely to be pronounced especially in open meetings involving “preliminary” discussions where meeting participants may be unwilling to share too much information about their preferences. Since open meetings, like other types of real time transparency, cannot be edited before they are publicized, they tend to encourage conformity to norms and expectations (Christensen & Cheney, 2015). Increasing transparency in such settings, for example by installing more cameras and microphones and otherwise increasing the technical quality of recordings, is likely to formalize meetings and normalize behaviors in ways that recreate secrecy in new shapes. Drawing on Foucault (1977) who explained how the condition of being closely watched instills self-discipline among those observed, Butler (2005) points out that official performances hide more than they reveal. Specifically, she argues that individuals when officially called upon to account for their choices and behaviors tend to submit to a narrative modus that can be recognized and accepted by others. Because such modus is not of the person’s own making, but a reflection of prevailing norms, it will tend to obscure the very subject that provides the account. Even with the best intentions to be open and honest, participants in open meetings are social actors to the extent of generating layers of secrecy that overshadow the initial transparency pursuit (see also Baudrillard, 1983).

Open meetings, then, shift the emphasis from information provision to social performance and reproduction. As a specific type of synopticon (Mathiesen, 1997) – a notion describing ‘the many watching the few’ as opposed to Bentham’s panopticon where the few

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

are watching the many – open meetings create a system of self-control cloaked as audience control. One result may be, as Piotrowski and Borry (2010) argue, that agendas discussed in open meetings tend to remain more or less the same. Consequently, and more problematically, the public who is granted access to the meetings will have to figure out themselves what is going on under the veil of openness. As Birchall (2021) points out, any forms of open access transfers the responsibility to make sense of and use the revealed information to the now involved citizens. Citizens who gain access, she points out, are expected to be auditors, analysts, and translators without having any real power and real insight.

There are several reasons why transparency practices such as open meetings are upheld despite their limitations. Firstly, openness signals that power is being transferred from the inside to the outside and that the boundary between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ is being rearranged. This allows the public to perceive itself as part of the ‘in-group’ for knowledge possession, even if such perception is mistaken. Secondly, acts of revelation – sometimes used strategically by politicians and other public figures to admit missteps and personal shortcomings – can generate a sense of authenticity necessary to generate trust in cases where real insight is difficult to achieve (Power, 1997). In between the giving away and the giving off, the antagonistic complementarity of secrecy and transparency suggests that the more open and candid one seems to be, the more murkiness might be embedded within. The secrecy dimensions of transparency practices, however, may be difficult to detect in practice. Transparency measures have become ‘performative statements’ (Cabantous, et al., 2016; Cabantous & Gond, 2011) of insight that not only constitute social reality, but rationalize themselves as reality *per se*. Such rationalization in turn becomes an isomorphic normative logic that institutionalizes specific transparency practices across organizational settings, as exemplified by the use of open meetings and open reporting systems (e.g., Flyverbom, et al., 2015).

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Concluding Discussion

Secrecy and transparency are usually presented as antipodes, that is, as forces and practices that counteract and abolish each other. Even though several studies have noted that the relations between the two are more intricate than commonly assumed, the presumption that secrecy and transparency are mutually exclusive continues to dominate public and political discourse. This paper is derived from the concern about such one-dimensional understanding of the transparency-secrecy nexus and its associated practices.

The predominance of such one-dimensional understanding is harmful to many societal processes, including the functioning of democracy, participation, and education, because it ignores how secrecy and transparency are enveloped within and produced through each other. While a growing number of academic writings are recognizing this, pointing out that secrecy and transparency are performative forces that encroach on each other, the intricacies of *how* they do so have been left unspecified. In this paper, we expand existing research of the secrecy-transparency relationship by discussing and illustrating how secrecy and transparency operate with and through each other. To that purpose, we draw on Morin's dialogic principle that describes how complex systems are constituted and shaped by logics that are simultaneously complementary and antagonistic to each other. This perspective makes it possible to center stage and theorize the performative interactions between tendencies that are usually regarded as incompatible (Morin, 1984). By discussing the performativity of the secrecy-transparency dialogic, we foreground questions of what secrecy reveals and transparency conceals.

With this paper, we hope to contribute to an integrated view on the secrecy-transparency nexus that acknowledges its multidimensional performativity. This, we believe, is a meaningful engagement with the concept and practical impact of 'performativity', as it does not simply ask what transparency and secrecy expose or hide, but what their intricate

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

1 dialogics ‘do’ together in terms of organizing and knowing. Only through an integrated view
2
3 that acknowledges how one can be produced through the other, can we understand their
4
5 complex and conflicting outcomes. With this perspective, we suggest moving beyond Ringel’s
6
7 (2019) otherwise interesting discussion of how the German Pirate Party came to reorganize its
8
9 open meetings as a balance between frontstage and backstage practices. Associating
10
11 transparency with frontstage and secrecy with backstage tends to reproduce the common-sense
12
13 distinction between the two and overlook their intricate and performative complementarity (cf.
14
15 Meyrowitz, 1985). Organizations may, for example, deliberately reveal certain dimensions of
16
17 otherwise backstage behavior, thereby giving off the impression that nothing is hidden. Since
18
19 norms for “proper” frontstage behavior (including disclosures and other transparency measures)
20
21 are open-ended and sometimes ambiguous, they can be co-created by social actors (e.g.,
22
23 organizations) engaging in selective frontstaging (cf. Oliver, 1992). This possibility is in line
24
25 with Simmel’s observation that secrecy, if reduced in some areas, tends to reappear elsewhere.
26
27 Frontstage behavior, in other words, is not only managed and performed as Goffman suggested,
28
29 but may eventually define or constitute the situation and the performer.
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37

38 Practically speaking, where do we go from here? Bok’s (1982) solution to the
39
40 inevitable tension between secrecy and transparency is to ensure openness about the moral
41
42 choices that lead to secrecy. While some level of secrecy is inevitable in deliberative processes
43
44 and may be necessary to protect individuals against centralized powers and intrusive media
45
46 (see also Birchall, 2021; Heald, 2006), Bok argues that principles for secrecy, at least in public
47
48 administration, need to be subject to open debate and critique. This, of course, presupposes a
49
50 high level of public (self)-reflection as to how secrecy and transparency are produced and
51
52 performed through each other. Specifically, it requires an ability to make the unwitting
53
54 production of secrets that inevitably accompanies transparency efforts apparent to all relevant
55
56 parties. The same is true when it comes to the moral choices that lead to transparency. In both
57
58
59
60

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

public and private sectors, transparency measures include questions about what transparency rules should be followed, how to follow such rules, what specific activities should be considered, and what controls are needed to exercise those activities within the set rules. The question of *how* transparency is incorporated into regulatory regimes, for example, involves pressing issues of its own accountability (Power, 1997). As Lodge (2004, p.125) puts it, the dimensions *within* transparency implementations “differ greatly in terms of who holds whom accountable for what type of activities and type of consequences”. Any ambiguity about transparency rules enables an unwitting concealment within its implementation.

For further research, we suggest looking beyond open meetings in public sector organizations. The boundary conditions under which transparency practices produce secrecy and vice versa are not limited to this particular phenomenon but are likely to be similar in all cases where strict transparency practices or standards are mandated. One such example is the dialogic performativity of transparency requirements for publicly traded companies that publish financial and, increasingly so, ESG reports. A relevant question here might be how the detailed criteria or metrics for reporting on environmental, social, and governance topics tend to hide specific organizational practices and how the new/renewed secrecies emerged recursively shape what is being published and disclosed.

Moreover, the dialogic performativity discussed in this paper is not confined to cases where transparency is legally or regulatorily mandated. Secrecy may arise out of transparency efforts also in situations where the transparency ideal is zealously pursued without proper attention to its limitations. Morin’s complexity theory expounds how *a dogmatic engagement with any ideal or a principle* tends to produce its assumed antipode. He describes, for example, how a rigid pursuit of rationality – a pursuit that remains ignorant and impervious to its own limitations – tends to produce blind knowledge. Such knowledge, he argues, is akin to the mythical thinking that rationality claims to eradicate (Morin, 1986). This insight is relevant

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

also to our specific purpose. Thus, while secrecy and transparency, as we have seen, are essentially and inevitably co-dependent as “conjoined twins” (Birchall, 2021; Cronin, 2020), their tendency to overpower the other is likely to be pronounced especially in contexts where each is pursued single-mindedly and credulously, assuming that the other will disappear or be significantly reduced.

Such contexts are multiple these days where transparency is celebrated as a panacea to many evils of contemporary society without openly considering its limitations and unintended consequences (Owetschkin & Berger, 2019). While public sector organizations – facing many different stakeholder demands – are especially prone to be confronted with such naïve transparency ideal, private organizations and NGOs may equally find it difficult to fully recognize and admit how their own transparency ideals and endeavors may themselves be sources of secrecy. Thus, in our efforts to depict the antagonistic complementarity of the secrecy/transparency dialogic we should be sensitive especially to contexts where either are pursued most ardently.

Recognizing the antagonistic complementarity of secrecy and transparency, thus, does not imply that the whole idea of transparency is itself a failure and should be scratched out. Even though many transparency practices, as we have argued, are problematic and seem to counteract the ideal, the foundational promise of modernity to move behind the ‘curtain’ by raising awareness and deepening insight is still highly relevant today. Because of its democratic significance, we ought to sharpen our awareness of transparency to critically see through and beyond its current practices and manifestations. Following Christensen and Cheney’s (2015) call to apply transparency to itself, we therefore suggest updating the transparency ideal by intensifying it through reflexive measures. While remaining ultrasensitive to the social, political, and epistemological limitations and absurdities associated with transparency practices (e.g., Baudrillard, 1988; Han, 2015; Wilensky, 2015), such intensification implies a

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

growing awareness of what we know and, especially, *how* we know it (Morin, 1986). As Morin has pointed out on multiple occasions (e.g., Palais des beaux-arts de Bruxelles, 2020), such awareness needs to be developed in research, education, journalism, and public debate. In the classroom, for instance, it is possible to raise a dialogic awareness of secrecy and transparency by having students – at any academic level – identify and discuss examples recognized as good transparency practices, focusing firstly on the insights that such practices provide and facilitate and then, secondly, on what is hidden as a consequence of the practices. A similar technique could be used – in fact, *ought* to be used – in journalism and political and public debates whenever new transparency measures and metrics are being considered.

The goal in each case is not to undermine the foundational ideal of insight, but to foster a sharpened understanding of the antagonistic complementarity between secrecy and transparency and see any knowledge pursuit as a source of both “clarity *and* opacity, light *and* darkness” (Christensen & Cheney, 2015, p.76). Such reinvesting in the transparency ideal has implications also for NGOs and social critics explicitly devoted to the fight for more transparency in social and organizational life. The noblest effort of such groups and critics, we believe, is to show in each case how secrecy might creep in as transparency is increased. Rather than regarding such efforts as threatening to the overall transparency pursuit, the notion and practice of *applying transparency to itself* should be seen as transparency’s *sine qua non*, necessary to revive our democratic obligation and endeavour.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our anonymous reviewers and our acting editor Jean-Pascal Gond for their continually constructive and supportive comments in developing this paper.

Funding

There are no funders to report for this submission

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

References

Achrol, R. S. (1991). Evolution of the marketing organization: New forms for turbulent environments. *Journal of Marketing*, 55(4), 77-93.

Albu, O. B. & Flyverbom, M. (2019). Organizational transparency: Conceptualizations, conditions, and consequences. *Business & Society*, 58(2), 268-297.

Albu, O. B. & Ringel, L. (2018). The perils of organizational transparency: Consistency, surveillance, and authority negotiations. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 57, 227-256.

Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R., & Cooren, F. (2009). Constitutional amendments: “Materializing” organizational communication. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 3(1), 1-64.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Austin, J. L. (1979). *Philosophical papers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1983). *In the shadow of the silent majorities*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Baudrillard, J. (1988). *The ecstasy of communication*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Baudrillard, J. (1990). *Seduction*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

Bellman, B. L. (1981). The paradox of secrecy. *Human Studies*, 4(1), 1-24.

Birchall, C. (2011a). Introduction to ‘secrecy and transparency’: The politics of opacity and openness. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(7-8), 7-25.

Birchall, C. (2011b). “There's been too much secrecy in this city”: The False Choice between Secrecy and Transparency in US Politics. *Cultural Politics*, 7(1), 133-156.

Birchall, C. (2021). *Radical secrecy: The ends of transparency in datafield America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

- Bok, S. (1982). *Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Brown, S. (2001). Torment your customers (they'll love it). *Harvard Business Review*, 79(9), 82-88.
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of performativity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999). Performativity's social magic. In R. Shusterman (Ed.), *Bourdieu: A critical reader* (pp. 113-128). Blackwell.
- Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Butler, J. (2010). Performative agency. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3(2), 147-161.
- Cabantous, L., & Gond, J. P. (2011). Rational decision making as performative praxis: Explaining rationality's Éternel Retour. *Organization science*, 22(3), 573-586.
- Cabantous, L., Gond, J. P., Harding, N., & Learmonth, M. (2016). Critical essay: Reconsidering critical performativity. *Human Relations*, 69(2), 197-213.
- Christensen, L. T. & Cornelissen, J. P. (2015). Organizational transparency as myth and metaphor. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 18(2), 132-149.
- Christensen, L. T., Morsing, M., & Thyssen, O. (2021). Talk-action dynamics: Modalities of aspirational talk. *Organization Studies*, 42(3), 407-427.
- Christensen, L.T. & G. Cheney (2015). Peering into transparency: Challenging ideals, proxies and organizational practices. *Communication Theory*, 25(1), 70-90.
- Costas, J. & Grey, C. (2014). Bringing secrecy into the open: Towards a theorization of the social processes of organizational secrecy. *Organization Studies*, 35, 1423-1447.
- Costas, J. & Grey, C. (2016). *Secrecy at work: The hidden architecture of organizational life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Courpasson, D., & Younes, D. (2018). Double or quits: Understanding the links between secrecy and creativity in a project development process. *Organization Studies*, 39(2-3), 271-295.

Cronin, A. M. (2020). The secrecy–transparency dynamic: A sociological reframing of secrecy and transparency for public relations research. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 9(3), 219-236.

Crowder, P. A. (2006). Ain't no sunshine: Examining informality and state open meetings acts as the anti-public norm in inner-city redevelopment deal making. *Tenn. L. Rev.*, 74, 623-640.

Derrida, J. & Ferraris, M. (2001). *A taste for the secret*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Dufresne, R. L. & Offstein, E. H. (2008). On the virtues of secrecy in organizations. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(2), 102-106.

Eisenberg, E. M. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs*, 51(3), 227-242.

Etzioni, A. (2010). Is transparency the best disinfectant? *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 18(4), 389–404.

Fan, Z., & Dawson, P. (2022). Gossip as evaluative sensemaking and the concealment of confidential gossip in the everyday life of organizations. *Management Learning*, 53(2), 146-166.

Fan, Z., & Grey, C. (2021). Everyday secrecy: Boundaries of confidential gossip. *Culture and Organization*, 27(3), 209-225.

Fan, Z., & Liu, Y. (2022). Decoding secrecy as multiple temporal processes: Co-constitution of concealment and revelation in archival stories. *Human Relations*, 75(6), 1028-1052.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Fan, Z., Costas, J., & Grey, C. (2017). Secrecy and communication: towards a research agenda.

Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 22(4), 562-566.

Fenster, M. (2006). The opacity of transparency. *Iowa Law Review*, 91, 885-949.

Fenster, M. (2017). *The transparency fix: Secrets, leaks and uncontrollable information*.

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Florini, A. (2007) (Ed.). *The right to know: Transparency for an open world*. New

York: Columbia University Press.

Fung, A., Graham, M., & Weil, D. (2007). *Full disclosure: The perils and promise of trans-*

parency. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Garsten, C., & de Montoya, M.L. (2008). Introduction: examining the politics of transparency.

In C. Garsten & M.L. de Montoya (Eds.), *Transparency in a new global order* (pp. 1-21). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Gond, J-P., Cabantous, L., Harding, N., & Learmonth, M. (2016). What do we mean by

performativity in organizational and management theory? The uses and abuses of performativity. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 18(4), 440-463.

Gusterson, H. (1998). *Nuclear rites: A weapons laboratory at the end of the Cold War*.

Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Han, B-C. (2015). *The transparency society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Heald, D. (2006a). Varieties of transparency. In Hood, C., & Heald, D., (Eds.), *Transparency*.

The key to better governance? (pp. 25-43). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heald, D. (2006b). Transparency as an instrumental value. In C. Hood & D. Heald (Eds.),

Transparency. The key to better governance? (pp. 59-73). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

- 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7
 - 8
 - 9
 - 10
 - 11
 - 12
 - 13
 - 14
 - 15
 - 16
 - 17
 - 18
 - 19
 - 20
 - 21
 - 22
 - 23
 - 24
 - 25
 - 26
 - 27
 - 28
 - 29
 - 30
 - 31
 - 32
 - 33
 - 34
 - 35
 - 36
 - 37
 - 38
 - 39
 - 40
 - 41
 - 42
 - 43
 - 44
 - 45
 - 46
 - 47
 - 48
 - 49
 - 50
 - 51
 - 52
 - 53
 - 54
 - 55
 - 56
 - 57
 - 58
 - 59
 - 60
- Heil, O., & Robertson, T.S. (1991). Toward a theory of competitive marketing signaling: A research agenda. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(6), 403-418.
- Henriques, A. (2007). *Corporate truth. The limits to transparency*. London: Earthscan.
- Herzfeld, M. (2009). The performance of secrecy: Domesticity and privacy in public spaces. *Semiotica*, 175(1/4), 135-162.
- Holquist, M. (2002). *Dialogism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Hood, C. (2006). Transparency in historical perspective. In Hood, C., & Heald, D. (Eds.), *Transparency: The key to better governance?* (pp. 3-23). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1987/2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment*. Edited by Noerr, G. S, translated by Jephcott, E. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Jarosinski, E. (2009). Of stones and glass houses: Minima Moralia as critique of transparency. In Richter G. (Ed.), *Language without soil: Adorno and Late Philosophical Modernity* (pp.157–71). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Kofman, M. (1996). *Edgar Morin. From Big Brother to fraternity*. London: Pluto Press.
- Lawrence, P. R. & Lorsch, J. W. (1967), Differentiation and integration in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 12(1), 1-47.
- Lessig, L. (2009). Against transparency. The perils of openness in government. *The New Republic*, 9. Available at: <https://newrepublic.com/article/70097/against-transparency> [Date accessed: 8 October 2021].
- Liu, Y., & Fan, Z. (2022). Spatializing gossip as chaotic and multiple liminal space. *Human Relations*, Epub ahead of print, DOI: 00187267221112230.
- Lodge, M. (2004). Accountability and transparency in regulation: Critiques, doctrines and instruments. In: Jordana, J. & Levi-Faur, D. (Eds), *The politics of regulation:*

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

- Institutions and regulatory reforms for the age of governance* (pp.124-144).
Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Lord, K. M. (2006). *The perils and promise of global transparency*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- MacKenzie, D. (2004). The big, bad wolf and the rational market: Portfolio insurance, the 1987 crash and the performativity of economics. *Economy and Society*, 33(3), 303-334.
- Mathiesen, T. (1997). The viewer society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' revisited. *Theoretical Criminology*, 1(2), 215-234.
- McKinlay, A. (2011). Performativity: From J. L. Austin to Judith Butler. In: Armstrong, P, & Lightfoot, G. (Eds.), *'The leading journal in the field': Destabilizing authority in the social sciences of management* (pp. 119-142). London: Mayfly.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place. The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morin, E. (1984). *Sociologie*. Paris: Fayard.
- Morin, E. (1986). *La Méthode 3. La connaissance de la connaissance. Livre premier: Anthropologie de la connaissance*. Paris: Seuil.
- Morin, E. (1987). *Penser l'Europe*. Paris : Gallimard.
- Morin, E. (1992), *Method: Towards a study of humankind: The nature of nature, vol. 1*, New York: Peter Lang.
- Morin, E. (2008). *On complexity*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Nisbet, R. A. (1966). *The sociological tradition*. London: Heinemann.
- O'Neill, O. (2006). Transparency and the ethics of communication. In Hood, C., & Heald, D., (Eds.), *Transparency. The key to better governance?* (pp. 75-90). Oxford: Oxford University Press

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Oliver, C. (1992). Strategic responses to institutional processes. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(1), 145-179.

Oliver, R. W. (2004). *What is transparency?* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Owetschkin, D. & Berger, S. (2019). Contested transparencies: An introduction. In Berger, S. & Owetschkin, D. (Eds.), *Contested transparencies, social movements and the public sphere: Multi-disciplinary perspectives* (p.1-32). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Palais des beaux-arts de Bruxelles. (2020, September 2). Repairing the future with Edgar Morin. Interview BOZAR at home, available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3iw4NwdIa4>

Phillips, J. W. (2011). Secrecy and transparency: An interview with Samuel Weber. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(7-8), 158-172.

Piotrowski, S. J. (2010). (Ed.) *Transparency and secrecy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Piotrowski, S. J., & Borry, E. (2010). An analytic framework for open meetings and transparency. *Public Administration and Management*, 15(1), 138-176.

Power, M. (1997). *The audit society: Rituals of verification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rawlins, B. (2009). Give the emperor a mirror: Toward developing a stakeholder measurement of organizational transparency. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(1), 71-99.

Ringel, L. (2019). Unpacking the transparency-secrecy nexus: Frontstage and backstage behaviour in a political party. *Organization Studies*, 40, 705-723.

Roth, D. (2009). Road Map for Financial Recovery: Radical Transparency Now!. *Wired Magazine* 17, February 23.

Schmitt, C. (1996). *Roman Catholicism and political form*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

- Schnackenberg, A. K., & Tomlinson, E. C. (2016). Organizational transparency: A new perspective on managing trust in organization-stakeholder relationships. *Journal of Management*, 42(7), 1784-1810.
- Scott, C. R. (2013). *Anonymous agencies, backstreet businesses, and covert collectives: Rethinking organizations in the 21st century*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Simmel, G. (1906). The sociology of secrecy and of secret societies. *American Journal of Sociology*, 11(4), 441-498.
- Simmel, G. (1906/1950). *The sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by Wolff, K. H. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Stohl, C., Stohl, M., & Leonardi, P. M. (2016). Managing opacity: Information visibility and the paradox of transparency in the digital age. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 123-137.
- Strathern, M. (2000). The tyranny of transparency. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26(3), 309-321.
- Tapscott, D., & Ticoll, D. (2003). *The naked corporation: How the age of transparency will revolutionize business*. New York: The Free Press.
- Taylor, J. R., & van Every, E. J. (2000). *The emergent organization. Communication as its site and surface*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Tsoukas, H. (1997). The tyranny of light: The temptations and the paradoxes of the information society. *Futures*, 29(9), 827-843.
- Vattimo, G. (1992). *The transparent society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Vogelmann, F. (2019). Transparency's trap: Problems of an unquestioned norm. In Berger, S. & Owetschkin, D. (Eds.), *Contested transparencies, social movements and the public*

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

sphere. *Multi-disciplinary perspectives* (pp. 35-54). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Vujnovic, M., & Kruckeberg, D. (2016). Pitfalls and promises of transparency in the digital age. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(2), 121-143

Weber, M. (1968). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.

Weick, K.E. (1987). Organizational culture as a source of high reliability. *California Management Review*, 29(2), 112-127.

Wilensky, H. L. (2015). *Organizational intelligence: Knowledge and policy in government and industry*. Quid Pro Books.

Biographies

Ziyun Fan is Associate Professor in Organization Studies at the School for Business and Society, University of York, UK. She is fascinated by the ‘irregularities’ and ‘peculiarities’ in our everyday organizational life and has explored topics such as organizational secrecy, organizational communication, (confidential) gossip, silence, temporality, and space. She has published in *Human Relations*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Management Learning*, *Organization Studies*, and elsewhere. [Email: ziyun.fan@york.ac.uk]

Lars Thøger Christensen (Ph.D.) is Professor of Communication and Organization at the Copenhagen Business School (Denmark). His research interests include issues of identity, autocommunication, CSR, ventriloquism, transparency, hypocrisy, talk-action dynamics, and voicing. He approaches these issues through a communication lens focused on how organizations talk themselves into new realities. In addition to six books and contributions to several edited volumes, his research appears in *Organization*

The Dialogic Performativity of Secrecy and Transparency

Studies, Human Relations, Journal of Business Research, Organization Theory, Organization, Communication Theory, Management Communication Quarterly, and elsewhere. [Email: lrc.msc@cbs.dk]

Peer Review Version