Book Reviews

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Michael Karlsson

Transparency and Journalism: A Critical Appraisal of a Disruptive Norm

Routledge, 2021, 128 pp.

At first glance, it seems apparent that journalists should strive for transparency in their work. Journalists are truth tellers. Thus, one would assume they have nothing to hide. Journalistic transparency – “being open about how news is made” (including the disclosure of sources, data, possible biases, corrections, etc.) and “inviting citizens to monitor and be a part of that process” (p. 1) – is also a promising norm. In theory, the more open journalists are, the more credible and trustworthy they are deemed to be. In turn, this should strengthen both their legitimacy and the legitimacy of their news organisations. At a time when journalism’s authority has been challenged worldwide, trust has become increasingly sought-after. Transparency is now here to deliver just that. As such, transparency appears to be a disruptive force in journalism: It has the potential to turn the values and practices of journalism on its head. Thus,

Transparency and Journalism: A Critical Appraisal of a Disruptive Norm is a perfect fit for the Routledge series Disruptions: Studies in Digital Journalism.

Michael Karlsson is one of the preeminent scholars on transparency in journalism. The Karlstad University (Sweden) professor has examined journalistic transparency for more than a decade. His book (the first to focus exclusively on transparency in journalism) provides a comprehensive overview about transparency in journalism and also challenges widely held assumptions. It aims to reconceptualise transparency as a form of strategically managed visibility. Karlsson’s book, written in a refreshing, self-reflective tone, offers vital insights for both researchers and journalism practitioners, given that he pushes the field to question journalistic transparency’s effectiveness and to explore more audience- or user-centred forms of information disclo-

sure, such as targeted transparency. Karlsson not only critically examines the current strands of transparency research but also provides new theoretical perspectives and a unique framework (see performative transparency model) through which the vital elements that constitute transparency can be identified, understood, and researched.

Karlsson first situates the promise, function, expectations, and philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of transparency within journalism as an institution. He is quick to point out that the theorisation of transparency in journalism has been limited, as it is often based on the linear notion that greater institutional openness will directly result in greater credibility and trust in journalism within democratic societies. Karlsson describes this idea as the implicit theory of transparency. The problem with this implicit theory, he argues, is that research has thus far not found much evidence that transparency is indeed as powerful in creating credibility and trust among the audience. This, of course, has not stopped news organisations around the world from adopting transparency as a new institutional value and practice. Karlsson draws on new institutional theory (see Chapter 5) to explain how institutional dynamics such as isomorphism and institutional myth (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) have fuelled the implementation of the transparency norm within the news industry as a way to garner and increase professional legitimacy.

Karlsson further investigates the philosophical roots of transparency in liberal democratic theory in Chapter 2. He shows that transparency serves to reduce information asymmetry between governments and the public, as well as between institutions and their stakeholders, which in turn is supposed to increase confidence and trust in institutional decision-makers. But Karlsson

points out that this approach is limited at best, and naïve at worst, as it overlooks the reality that institutions use transparency strategically (see Chapter 5). In order to more systematically research and understand transparency in journalism, Karlsson proposes the performative transparency model (PTM). PTM is based on Erving Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* – specifically, the concepts of frontstage and backstage, which have frequently served as the theoretical concept to describe the workings of transparency, that is, how backstage information is being made public on the frontstage. Previous research, as Karlsson points out, typically approaches transparency from a variety of perspectives, frequently without considering an overarching framework of how transparency is enacted or performed. Building on Goffman's elements of performance, Karlsson isolates five components: stage, actors (journalists and the public), script, aesthetic and delivery, and effects of transparency. These components specify the who, how, where, and what of journalistic transparency and serve as a roadmap for future research on journalistic transparency. Most importantly, PTM invites journalism practitioners to think differently about transparency, that is, not just about what is made transparent, but how to package and deliver information in a way that audiences will recognise as a news organisation's effort to be open and transparent.

Karlsson also examines current and future trends of journalistic innovation. In Chapter 4, he makes the case for algorithmic transparency, although he describes it as nearly impossible to achieve. This discussion expands on the few existing research studies on algorithmic transparency by detailing that the complexity and sophistication of algorithmic and automated systems actually need other computerised

systems to disentangle this algorithmic complexity in order to make algorithmic decisions and processes transparent to the public. This apparent dilemma of technological sophistication is just one of the several limitations of transparency that Karlsson examines in the book.

In Chapter 5, Karlsson stresses the organisational costs of adopting and practicing transparency. He points out that the scarcity of journalistic resources could cause news organisations additional problems, especially if a reshuffling of resources leads to an increase in mistakes, about which one would later need to be transparent. Besides such organisational challenges in the transparency implementation process, Karlsson suggests that transparency could curtail professional discretion and freedom. Again, drawing on Goffman's theoretical concept of frontstage and backstage, Karlsson shows the inevitability of a limited professional transparency, because such transparency is often curated. Journalists and news organisations control transparency information and may only disclose information they deem acceptable.

Karlsson argues that transparency can be understood as the opposite of trust because the need for transparency occurs whenever there is no trust within a society. Foucault (1995) had also suggested that a society which relies on the regime of transparency – or to use other terms, total visibility and surveillance – doesn't need trust, but relies on control. Given these theoretical underpinnings and limitations, plus the notion that dispensing transparency always requires some control over information (making it similar to the idea of secrecy), Karlsson proceeds to argue that transparency in journalism cannot be equated with openness. Instead, transparency may be better understood as a form of strategically managed visibility. Ultimately, the disclosure or

making visible of information is strategic in so far as it is done with the expectation of achieving various goals, namely credibility, trust, and legitimacy. Strategically managed transparency, Karlsson suggests, also undermines the philosophical foundation of transparency where openness is expected: an expectation that is based on trust. With this lack of trust to begin with, "one could reasonably question why a sceptic's trust would change and why they would willingly take a leap of faith just because an institution they mistrust releases more information" (p. 87). This may indeed be the crux of the limitations of transparency in journalism. How can journalistic transparency elicit trust in people who, from the start, don't trust the news media or a news organisation?

Despite his pessimistic assessment of what transparency in journalism can practically or even theoretically do, Karlsson proposes several ways that transparency can be important in journalism. Karlsson argues that transparency needs to be more audience-centred and targeted toward the needs of news consumers. He suggests that demand-driven – that is, user-requested information, rather than the more common proactive disclosure of information by news organisations – may be more effective in building trust and legitimacy. Moreover, Karlsson posits that a user-centred approach would enable the evaluation and measurement of the various transparency efforts, allowing news organisations and researchers to gauge their effectiveness to engage and possibly to elicit trust.

Karlsson ends by mapping out various avenues for future research based on his proposed performative transparency model. He suggests that the majority of empirical and theoretical work concerning transparency in journalism still lies ahead, which makes this book of particular interest to

scholars, researchers, and graduate students. Thinking about transparency needs to change, he argues, away from assumptions about direct effects and toward more indirect and long-term effects of transparency on credibility, trust, and legitimacy in journalism. Karlsson helps to reconceptualise and reimagine transparency in journalism in order to better understand its short- and long-term function and effectiveness. After all, the idea of transparency won't disappear any time soon from the field of journalism or society at large.

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Henrik Bødker & Hanna E. Morris (Eds.)
Climate Change and Journalism: Negotiating Rifts of Time
 Routledge, 2022, 234 pp.

This edited collection, *Climate Change and Journalism: Negotiating Rifts of Time*, explores how journalism's temporalities interact with the temporal complexities of climate change in various cultures, media, and genres. In particular, the volume sheds light on how journalistic conventions and practices embedded in modernity's linear, present-oriented temporal imaginations are ill-equipped to situate climate change within broader historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts.

The volume has two expressed objectives, which are presented in the editors' introduction: 1) to critically examine existing journalistic practice through a tempo-

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ral lens and 2) to consider alternatives that promote more democratic, accountable, and equitable climate change reporting (p. 4). To these aims, the book appropriately opens with a theoretical foreword – where Barbara Adam outlines some temporal disconnects between climate change and newsworthiness – and concludes with a practice-oriented afterword, where the award-winning journalist Mark Schapiro reflects upon the multiple climate stories that are to be told across all journalism's genres.

The volume's twelve chapters mobilise several theoretical and methodological approaches to examine a varied selection of contemporary examples of media repre-

sentations of climate change. What unites the chapters is that they are all, in one way or another, concerned with temporality. Moreover, many chapters share a common interest in uncovering how certain journalistic tropes, frames, and narratives may reproduce historically dominant discourses and, thereby, fail to situate climate change within an historical context of extraction and exploitation. As such, the volume distinguishes itself from much earlier research on climate change communication, which has typically concerned itself with norms of balanced reporting, public understandings of science, and perceptions of risk. In contrast, many of this volume's chapters are concerned with whose voices and perspectives are recognised, whose are erased, and whose need to be heard.

This critical interest is eloquently justified in Chapter 2, where Candis Callison argues that mediations of climate change must better account for how social orders predicated on capitalism and colonialism have created and amplified a lack of resilience in the face of ecological change. Among other things, Callison challenges the widespread assumption that because climate change feels far away – both in terms of time and space – the communicative challenge that must be overcome is to make people perceive the situation as an acute crisis. One example that comes to mind is *The Guardian's* decision to change its style guide, replacing the term “climate change” with “climate crisis, emergency, or breakdown”, in order to make the newspaper's reporting on climate change more accountable and accurate (Carrington, 2019). However, Callison argues that crisis-talk necessarily foregrounds the “what to do”-question while downplaying questions about what and whom climate change is a crisis for – and what and who caused the crisis (p. 11). Thereby, a crisis epistemology prevents journalists from critically

evaluating the systems and structures that created the situation and removes Indigenous voices, practices, and ways of knowing from view.

A more accountable approach to climate change is what Callison terms “systems journalism” (see also Callison & Young, 2020), which demands critical self-investigation into how journalistic practice interacts and intersects with broader power structures and social orders. Callison exemplifies this approach by turning to Indigenous journalism, demonstrating how giving visibility to Indigenous expertise and frameworks for understanding human-nonhuman relationships gives agency to historically marginalised bodies and promotes types of knowledge that are decisive for succeeding in adapting to climate-changed futures.

Journalism's failure to account for historical systems of extraction and exploitation as the cause of climate change is also discussed in Chapter 5, where Hanna E. Morris provides a particularly well-argued and thought-provoking analysis of *TIME* cover stories portraying Greta Thunberg and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Morris demonstrates how climate change is depoliticised and decontextualised through the trope of generational conflict, which reduces the problem to be about the Baby Boomer generation's lifestyle. Consequently, cross-generational issues of class, race, and gender are effectively sidestepped, and solutions requiring fundamental societal transformations, rather than merely Boomers changing their habits, remain undressed.

Questions of visibility and power are also raised in Chapter 8, where Catherine J. Bruns¹ examines the international mediations of the funeral held for the Okjökull glacier in Iceland. Bruns's analysis offers novel insights into the temporal and rhetorical dimensions of “eco grief” – a cur-

rently much-debated topic among scholars in the Nordic region (see, for example, the debate pages in the Norwegian newspaper *Morgenbladet* in the period 23 July–10 September 2021). While commending the public funeral's success in giving visibility to ecological loss, Bruns also critically discusses how and why both the glacier's funeral and its journalistic mediations failed to include Indigenous people, practices, and perspectives. Essentially, she argues, this lack of representation and recognition perpetuates a colonial discourse where Indigenous frameworks relating to nature are considered inferior to the modern, Western ways of relating to the ecological world.

Ecological loss is also addressed in Chapter 9, where Matthew Tegelberg offers a critique of commercial travel journalism promoting "Last Chance Tourism" in the Canadian Arctic. Tegelberg shows how media representations of luxury Arctic cruises ignore environmental concerns and reduce local realities for the Arctic communities to exotic cultural experiences on the tourists' itinerary. As such, he argues, commercial travel journalism not only fails to address tourism's ecological footprint, but also reproduces dominant colonial discourses that erase the lives and histories of Indigenous locals. In contrast, local journalism is characterised by a systems approach to Arctic cruise tourism that, according to Tegelberg, represents more accountable reporting on tourism's impact on local communities and the environment.

The question of how journalists can better reflect the multiple stories, experiences, and material relationships of power involved in the issue of climate change is also raised in Chapter 12, where Dominic Hinde discusses how journalism may benefit from constructing "the present as an eschatology" (p. 190). According to Hinde, journalism's embeddedness in modernity's linear temporality constrains its genres and

narratives. To free itself from these constraints, Hinde suggests an eschatological gaze on the present, where time is understood not as chronological and quantitative, but as a situational moment (Kairos).

Whereas the heretofore mentioned chapters demonstrate the temporal lens's value in exposing contemporary Western journalism's inability to link climate change to broader historical, social, and economic contexts, two other noteworthy chapters – with quite different objectives – also aroused my interest. In Chapter 11, Darren Fleet provides an original take on climate change by examining how various temporalities of religious faith, on the one hand, and fossil fuels, on the other, together shape different social realities, identities, and political views on climate change in Canada. Furthermore, in Chapter 6, Duangkaew Dhiensawadjij reveals how Thai climate change journalism bypasses local struggles for adaptation and resiliency and plays into government and corporate interests by emphasising global and future aspects of climate change over local and present concerns. Considering how a commonly voiced critique of Western climate change journalism is that, by foregrounding local and immediate risks (e.g., extreme weather events), it fails to take a global and future-oriented outlook, Dhiensawadjij offers new ways of thinking about the challenges of climate change journalism in a global context.

The volume also explores negotiations between the newsroom's urgency and climate change's status as an emergency in France (Chapter 3), temporality strategies applied in Spanish-language social media news videos about climate change (Chapter 4), science's participation in the environmental conflict over the Great Barrier Reef (Chapter 7), and Brazilian newspapers' negotiations of Jair Bolsonaro's position on deforestation of the Amazon (Chapter 10).

The multiple ways in which temporality is conceptualised throughout the volume demonstrates the temporal lens's broad application. At the same time, it poses a challenge for the book's coherence. In many chapters, the temporal perspective contributes to original analysis and arguments; in other chapters, however, the emphasis on temporality appears rather forced, and I am not always convinced that it contributes productively to the analyses and discussions.

The impression that the volume is not intended to be read from cover to cover is strengthened by the lack of cross-referencing between chapters that obviously speak together. For instance, several chapters discuss Candis Callison's concept of "systems journalism" (Chapters 2, 5, 9, and 12), but none refer to each other. More problematic, however, are the chapters that speak to cross-purposes without recognising and reflecting upon this. An illustrative example is the peculiar placement of Chol Salles's examination of French media collectives' efforts to give climate change emergency status (Chapter 3), which follows directly after Callison's critique of crisis talk. Here, the editors would have done well to include a justification of why climate change may need emergency status despite the problematic aspects of a crisis epistemology addressed in the preceding chapter – either in the chapter itself or in the editors' introduction.

That said, the volume provides many valuable insights for scholars and students occupied with climate change journalism. Although none of the chapters analyse discourses from the Nordic media system, many of the discussions raised are highly relevant to a Nordic audience. Their relevance lies in the ability to elucidate some of journalism's blind spots and consider possible avenues for change. In so doing, the volume challenges our customary ways of thinking about time and journalistic conventions – both so accustomed to us that we often fail to recognise that they are not natural, but cultivated through practices and institutions deeply entangled in a modern, capitalist, and colonialist worldview.

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Note

1. The author of this review is currently co-authoring a paper with Catherine J. Bruns.

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Andriana Margareta Dancus

Exposing Vulnerability: Self-Mediation in Scandinavian Films by Women

Intellect, 2019, 184 pp.

Few of us are comfortable with the idea of dwelling in discomfort; to do so seems antithetical to the notion of positivity. Yet *Exposing Vulnerability: Self-Mediation in Scandinavian Films by Women* focuses on the production – and value – of grand cathartic emotions (both positive and negative) that emerge from films that focus on the vulnerable, and thus are inherently discomfiting. The premise that visceral reactions can have value stems from the argument that negative emotions themselves can have positive connotations and results. This argument spans *Exposing Vulnerability*'s six chapters, introduction, and conclusion to create a well-developed text that balances theory, introspection, and deep description of the analysed films.

True to the title, Dancus is comfortable discussing her own vulnerability, opening the text with an overview of periods where her research and career underwent transitions, not least in writing the book itself. She articulates a paradox: while *hygge* (a Danish and Norwegian word for a state of mood: coziness, conviviality, and contentment) is often imagined as the universal Scandinavian valuing of warmth and internal comfort, Scandinavian cinema seems to be at odds with this “comfort consumption” and international reputation. Women directors in particular seem to be willing to push against *hygge* to produce films that lack warmth, instead speaking in tones of discontent, horror, or taboo. The women's vulnerability is situated on top of their already precarious status in film. From 2011 to 2017, the Scan-

dinavian countries made excellent strides in gender parity, though they still struggle to maintain it in the film industry. For example, the female shares of key roles in all films released in Norway during this time period never goes above 35 per cent. Generally, the Scandinavian countries have film institutes that seek to implement more gender equity in film. According to Dancus's critique, gender as a prism has fallen in Scandinavian scholarship in the 2000s, with a few notable exceptions, therefore affecting her choice to centre gender in analysis.

Dancus notes that there is a kind of “consumption scepticism” that is critically lacking or unacknowledged in kinds of self-mediation other than film (such as blogs, reality television, or memoirs). Dancus asserts that the idea of staging vulnerabilities to provide a diversity of perspectives is noteworthy, as nearly all filmmakers who engage in it are women. While the content of her vulnerability-centred analysis is highly specific – seven Scandinavian films produced post-2000 – Dancus argues that they contain messages that resonate across cultural, political, national, and ethnic contexts. This could be because the way we construct meaning in our lives is a universal process, even as meanings that result from the construction may be highly context specific.

With vulnerability as a central theme of the text, Dancus clearly articulates the concept right away in the introduction. Drawing from existing literature from the twenty-first century, she frames it as a multifaceted shared condition with both positive

and negative manifestations. Vulnerability is closely intertwined with regimes of power – regimes that can operate on multiple levels – and is manifest in concrete relationships and behaviour. Vulnerability takes on additional meanings and implications when it takes place through a female body. In order to subject oneself to the camera and engage in vulnerability, women must engage in visible social taboos. Critically, this means that after the exposure, they are no longer able to fully anticipate or control people's reactions or responses.

In a sense, this book can be seen as a successor to the edited volume *The Power of Vulnerability: Mobilizing Effect in Feminist, Queer, and Anti-Racist Media Cultures* (Koi-vunen et al., 2018), a critical study where contributors use historical and contemporary examples specifically from Sweden to consider how vulnerability language has been mobilised in connection to various activism activities. *Exposing Vulnerability* expands this empirical focus to include Norway and concentrates on a particular kind of potential activism: filmmaking. It similarly focuses on documenting and understanding vulnerability by turning attention to films, creating a specific lens with which to examine vulnerabilities like mental health and illness, ethnic trauma, and migration.

The text's focus on first-person films is intentional, curating a list from over thirty qualifying first-person films down to something more manageable for a single volume. First-person film refers to Scandinavian films by, and featuring, women filmmakers, a large enough category to accommodate various degrees of self-identification.

Three central questions guide the book: How is vulnerability imagined and staged in the films? How do the staged vulnerabilities resonate across the public sphere and perform political work? How do the staged vulnerabilities operate as an ethical resource for the viewers? Each of the text's chapters delivers an independent analysis, commentary, and reflection on a different

Scandinavian first-person film in accordance with these three questions. Chapter 5 does differ by comparing two films, though investigating each film as a separate chapter. Dancus is clear that she is not just treating each film as a case study, but she is also treating each as an object that speaks back and invites viewers to think on their own.

All of the chapters in this book effectively leverage deep description and connect back to the concrete theories laid out in the introduction; however, there are two chapters that particularly stand out. The first is Chapter 1, where the author examines Norwegian director Solveig Melkeraen's *Good Girl*, which charts her experiences with severe depression and electroconvulsive therapy. The first thing that stands out about this chapter is that it shows how the shooting of the film seems to have *augmented*, rather than alleviated, the filmmaker's suffering.

The author starts the first chapter with strong, emotionally evocative language. Dancus never presents the illusion of being separate from the researched material. She introduces *Good Girl* by detailing her experience of seeing it for the first time in 2014 at the Bergen International Film Festival. She had such a strong emotional reaction and discomfort to the film that she nearly left. This event centred her on the notion of vulnerability. Despite her heightened emotions, Dancus's descriptions of the film for readers are presented factually and directly.

The first chapter sets up an important remembrance for readers through the book: Self-mediation does not necessarily lead to satisfaction, achievement of goals, or happiness. Instead, self-mediation could end up being a self-interruption, something that harms or acts as a stumbling block on the way to recovery. This presents a discomfort that readers may experience: Self-mediation can harm. For example, the filmmaker's consideration of addressing depression by "not giving a damn" in Chapter 1 is overly optimistic, not recognising the

medical reality that depression cannot be solved by “deciding to cheer up”.

Chapter 5, “Of Blood and Genes”, discusses the films *Suddenly Sami* (2000) and *My Family Portrait* (2013). Both films reached wide international audiences, and both discussed journeys back to lost identities and heritages. It is important to recognise that the idea of assuming identity is *itself* contested, with Scandinavian Sámi in particular frequently noting that there is no *one* Sámi identity. The idea of reclaiming identity interacts with either approval from, or in defiance of, the wishes of previous generations who may have tried to hide parts of their heritage because of shame.

A helpful framing that could have been brought into the chapter relates to group belongingness, and group identity as it relates to the self and the community. In North American Indigenous Studies, there are frequent conversations about what “qualifies” someone to belong to a particular tribe, or be considered Native American. Ancestry is important in many regards, for instance, in the manner that Norway allows an individual to vote in the Sámi Parliamentary elections if they have a parent or grandparent that spoke Sámi as a native language. Yet, among many North American Native groups, one cannot just *declare* to be of a particular tribe, even if there is a common ancestor. The nation itself makes a decision whether an individual is a member of the group. This conversation, the complexities it introduces, and its implications are not present in this chapter; however, an awareness of these complications could benefit readers, as it is not clear to what degree the filmmakers of Chapter 5 films engaged with Sámi communities in trying to rediscover their heritage, or whether these were highly individualistic journeys.

In the conclusion, Dancus asserts that it is not just the presentation of vulnerability that matters in films, but also the respon-

siveness of viewers. In each case study, the idyllic nature by which many members of the international community tend to view the Scandinavian countries is challenged as filmmakers shed light on the dark underside of society. These are topics that exist in all countries, though in some cases are particular challenges of homogeneous or wealthy states.

The idea of vulnerability is certainly central and important in *Exposing Vulnerability*, but readers are left with the impression that the implications of this vulnerability study may be more limited when looking at burgeoning national or Indigenous film industries, compared with the wealth of the Scandinavian countries. The book is particularly fitting for Scandinavian area studies scholars, as many Scandinavian studies programmes in North America and Europe are at least somewhat centred in literature and film analysis. While it is certainly focused on film, the different topics with which the films engage and reckon with, such as ethnicity, migration, Indigeneity, and mental health, still have important implications for scholars of the social sciences. At the same time, the book’s emphasis on film analysis does mean that it is more fitting for graduate students with introductions to the lexicon of filmography and academic scholars in the field, rather than trade audiences.

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