

Beyond transparency

Transparency often seems to signify some sort of openness. When something is transparent it is assumed to be honest because everything can be seen just as it happens. A beautiful thought; it is no wonder that transparency is seen as a thoroughly good thing.

Thus in this sense transparency is itself a revelation. But if one takes it that transparency simply reveals things to be just as they are, so the greatest transparency would be, not to have no medium between the object and the eye, but to see quite directly. But then there would no longer be any transparency.

So transparency is more complex. It requires something that is seen through, but it also requires something that is seen. In other words, transparency does not simplify things but, on the contrary, makes them more complex. In transparency we do not see directly and nor do we see one thing, but many things simultaneously.

One can see through a window. But a window does not open directly on to the world and the whole idea of a window is that there are in fact two different worlds: interior and exterior. And the window is a boundary. The demand that one should break one's boundaries is roughly as sensible as the suggestion that one should break one's windows. The existence of boundaries makes it possible to see more.

Transparency means there is something beyond. We may certainly know there is something there, but we cannot get there directly. To a degree we can see or understand that something is different, and this perhaps is what is so beguiling about transparency. Transparency is bewitching because that other side exists with such certainty. For its part that bewitchment tells us how certain, important and fundamental to us the existence of that other side is.

Transparency does not only reveal but also conceals, delimits, and presents us with a riddle. In doing so, perhaps transparency tells us something essential about how things really are.

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