How Transparency Works

Transparency has become a ubiquitous presence in seemingly every sphere of social, economic, and political life. Yet, for all the claims that transparency works, little attention has been paid to *how* it works – even when it fails to achieve its goals. Instead of assuming that transparency is itself transparent, this book questions the technological practices, material qualities, and institutional standards producing transparency in extractive, commodity trading, and agricultural sites. Furthermore, it asks: How is transparency certified and standardized? How is it regimented by "ethical" and "responsible" businesses, or valued by traders and investors, from auction rooms to sustainability reports? The contributions bring nuanced answers to these questions, approaching transparency through four key organizing concepts: disclosure, immediacy, trust, and truth. These are concepts that anchor the making of transparency across the lifespan of global commodities.

FILIPE CALVÃO is an economic and environmental anthropologist and Associate Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the Geneva Graduate Institute. His research explores the politics, ecologies, and economies of mineral extraction in postcolonial Africa. Currently, he investigates the intersection of digitalization, labor, and extractivism, with a particular focus on crypto-mining. His research has been published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *Economic Anthropology*, *Political Geography*, and *The Extractive Industries and Society*. In addition to being a trained gemmologist and diamond grader, he is the co-editor of the *Swiss Journal of Sociocultural Anthropology*. Previously, he led the SNSF project "Transparency: Qualities and Technologies of the Global Gemstone Industry," and he is now the Principal Investigator of the European Research Council's Starting Grant "Synthetic Lives: The Futures of Mining."

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 06:21:53, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605243

MATTHIEU BOLAY is a social anthropologist and an Associate Professor at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland (HES-SO). He also leads the SNSF Ambizione project "Arbitral Reasoning in the Legal Topographies of Global Extraction" at the University of Bern. His research covers issues related to migration and mobility, extractivism, labor, valuation, and expertise. He is co-editor of the *Swiss Journal of Sociocultural Anthropology*. His work has been published in the *American Ethnologist*, *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, *Critique of Anthropology*, *Resources Policy*, *Politique Africaine*, *Political Geography*, and *The Extractive Industries and Society*, among other journals.

ELIZABETH FERRY is Professor of Anthropology at Brandeis University. Her work includes *Not Ours Alone: Patrimony, Value, and Collectivity in Contemporary Mexico* (2005); *Minerals, Collecting, and Value Across the US–Mexico Border* (2013); and *La Batea* (with Stephen Ferry) (2017), which won the 2019 Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing, among other awards. She is co-editor of *Timely Assets: The Politics of Resources and Temporalities* (2010) and *The Anthropology of Precious Minerals* (2019). She is currently writing a book about gold as a physical object in finance and mining.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 06:21:53, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605243

How Transparency Works

Ethnographies of a Global Value

Edited by

FILIPE CALVÃO
Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva

MATTHIEU BOLAY
University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland

ELIZABETH FERRY
Brandeis University, Massachusetts

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 06:21:53, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605243



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009605205

DOI: 10.1017/9781009605243

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2026

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, with the exception of the Creative Commons version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

An online version of this work is published at doi.org/10.1017/9781009605243 under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given and any changes made are indicated. To view a copy of this license visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009605243

First published 2026

Cover image: "Emerald Inclusions" © Brian Brazeal 2013.

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

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Calv- Filipe editor | Boly, Professor Matthieu, editor | Ferry, Elizabeth Emma editor
Title: How transparency works : ethnographies of a global value / edited by Filipe Calv- Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Matthieu Boly, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, Elizabeth Ferry, Brandeis University, Massachusetts.
Description: New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2025. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025027060 (print) | LCCN 2025027061 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009605205 hardback | ISBN 9781009605236 paperback | ISBN 9781009605243 epub
Subjects: LCSH: Transparency
Classification: LCC HM1041 .H67 2026 (print) | LCC HM1041 (ebook)
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025027060
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025027061

ISBN 978-1-009-60520-5 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

For EU product safety concerns, contact us at Calle de José Abascal, 56, 1°, 28003 Madrid, Spain, or email eugpsr@cambridge.org

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 06:21:53, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605243