

Visible Carbon: The Social, Political, and Ethical Dimensions of Pollution Transparency

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As product and process life cycle analyses begin to reveal more detail about the pollution impacts of various goods and services, the knowledge revealed by this data carries the potential to transform social norms, institutions, and behavior. Carbon footprints, which specify how much of the ubiquitous greenhouse gas is released in a commodity's manufacture or through the use of a service, can link the decisions of persons, groups, and organizations to their contributory role in climate change, offering the basis for normative assessments (e.g. carbon neutrality, equitable emissions shares) as well as comparisons with rivals. As actors at every scale from individuals through nation-states seek to cap and monitor their carbon emissions, whether through voluntary or regulatory efforts at transition toward a low-carbon future and transformation to a sustainable society, visible carbon becomes a critical informational tool, albeit one fraught with difficulties of various kinds.

In this book-length project, I consider the social, political, and ethical dimensions of carbon transparency, through which carbon footprints can be calculated and information about the impacts upon climate of various goods and services. While the project is partly empirical, in considering evidence from case studies in carbon footprint assessment as well as in personal and institutional carbon budgeting, its primary contribution will be to the environmental humanities, especially around issues of justice as these arise in environmental governance. In this respect, my plan is for it to serve as a successor to my earlier book *Atmospheric Justice* (Oxford, 2008).