Scandals & rituals: The Politics and Poetics of Media Scandal in Contemporary Japan

Résumé :

In Japan and elsewhere, media coverage is essential to producing a scandal. Scandals fit standard news values of elite-centered bad news and sensationalism, while the scandal-hungry public appreciates conflict, drama, and deviation from social norms. The media are supposed to be socially responsible by providing accountability through investigation and exposure (cf. the watchdog model), but Japanese scandal reporting has become largely commercially driven and susceptible to political pressures. In my presentation, I look at how Japanese scandals are hardwired into the news selection process. In this context, I approach scandals as media products based on journalistic routines and rituals that justify journalistic claims to objectivity, and I observe how these rituals progress to their future state, giving shape to a full-blown scandal. I focus closely on the actors who promote and assemble scandal in Japan: media organizations, individual journalists, and insiders/whistleblowers. I highlight the production logic of Japanese scandals by offering a three-act structure, which flows from “leak processing” to “scandal proper”, and is concluded by “climax and fadeout”.

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