

現代社会におけるメディア・スキャンダル論

Media, scandals, and society: a theoretical introduction

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Introduction

Nowadays we are becoming increasingly used to the fact that certain truths related to various social phenomena in our media-saturated reality will always necessarily be more or less distorted, constructed, or fabricated. This fact is based on various ideological biases and technological determinations, combined with individual human errors. Besides, various politically motivated backstage struggles aim at the maintenance of established routines of interconnected social systems, and the elites' preservation of influence, wealth and authority. These struggles for elite identity can also result in a form of a mediated scandal. This stands less for a natural reaction to moral disturbances in society, and more for an organized effort to uphold social (sub)systems by either covering up transgressions, or by scapegoating, sanctioning, and eventually excluding an individual transgressor from his/her

professional platform.

As is widely known, the news devotes most of the media-time to various conflicts, accidents, crime – and scandals, which are just one example of such “transgressive” media content. The subjects that make scandal news – often the archetypes of a corrupt politician, deviating celebrity, and shady businessman – are similarly alarming in any culture, although the manifestation of dealing with transgressions can become a culture-specific phenomenon.

The omnipresent phenomenon of scandal is at times seen as too banal, and the mainstream audience has only a limited idea of the complex constitutive process behind the official presentation of what we understand under the somewhat misleading label of “scandal”. Media scandals demonstrate a convergence of competing interests, actions, and actors. The scandal process is in principle realized and produced

in the context of real social institutions, in order to handle certain crisis (triggered by info-leak), and in order fulfil certain ideological project (political, commercial, socially integrative, etc.). The authorship and responsibility are diluted since media scandals for the most part are texts/products of the journalistic field of struggle (Bourdieu). nonetheless, scandals are usually initiated from the outside of a media company (i.e. through a whistle-blower). These context-bound texts are co-constructed, shaped and distributed by multiple subjects with various motivations (information sources, agencies, media institutions, authors, editors, reporters, external commentators). The final product appears in a form of media scandal.

The assumed originality of this treatise shall lie on one hand in strengthening the basic theoretical understanding of scandals

A brief Outline of Scandal Studies

An increasing amount of scholarly literature on scandals (and a growing interest in academic discourse, which the British professor of government Anthony King in 1985 proposed to call *scandology*) proves that scandals do present certain qualities of constant social nature that are worth being put through a serious in-depth analysis. Researching and theorizing scandals is

without reducing them to a mere mass media phenomenon. On the other hand, it offers a (neo)functionalist, and socially-constructivist perspective on scandals as social control mechanisms, secular rituals of renewal, and “pseudo-events”. Besides, we want to indicate that contrarily to other large *media events* (Dayan and Katz 1992) scandals are less “natural” in terms of their emergence, and despite institutionalized attempts to reform and redress (i.e, setting up post-scandal committees, releasing didactic brochures), media scandals are non-transformative in terms of dealing with elite deviance in society. at any rate, scandals are “ritualistic” in their nature: they stand for a sort of secular (pseudo)ritual of affliction, while each scandal manifestation is a variation on the mythical theme of disintegration and renewal.

however not a new phenomenon. As a matter of fact, we can trace certain indirect roots of the academic curiosity about transgression/gossip/scandal in classical sociology, post-war social anthropology, and various subfields such as political sociology or media studies.¹ The theorists in question had in common the interest in everyday methods the “social creatures” use in order to make sense of the

everydayness while being made up during various social interactions. Their insights are informative especially for the segment of scandology which does not limit itself to approaching scandal only as a mass media phenomenon.

Media scandals became a social phenomenon during the 1950s when new media platforms were emerging and television had been introduced as a mass medium. By 1960s the media mass circulation increased worldwide, along with further development of investigative journalism. The first symbolic watershed came in 1972: the Watergate scandal came to serve as a framework for public discourse about scandals. It generated vast amount of original academic elaborations, and it became a point of reference for judging future political corruption.²

In the following decade Anthony King proposed to divide scandals into three thematic categories (sex – money – power) and to link issues of official misconduct with larger characteristics of political systems (King 1985). Nonetheless, despite frequent outbreaks of corruption in advanced democracies in 1980s (including Japan, where during the 1970s and 1980s corruption scandals became endemic), the events did not spark any significant academic attention. Apart from scandal anthologies and insiders'/journalists' accounts on scandals, there

existed only few scholarly analytical works that would focus on the nature of scandal including its emergence, development, and consequences (see Thompson 1997). It was the next historical milestone, set in Europe in 1989, that triggered further academic attention: the end of Cold war and the subsequent new post-communist era stimulated interest in political corruption. Since the 1990s scandals have emerged widely in West European Countries, mainly as a consequence of new capitalist rules, new markets, and the new nature of mediated political competition.³ Besides, the horizontal and vertical media integration (plus expansion of cable/satellite TV and internet since early 1990s) have dramatically changed the media environment in the West, including its impact on the logic of media scandal.

In the next decade John B. Thompson touched upon the topic of scandal while relating the phenomenon to new technologies, media visibility and modernity (Thompson 1995). Further, Thompson proceeded with his “social theory of scandal” in David Lull and Steven Hinerman’s often-quoted edited volume on scandals (Lull and Hinnerman 1997), where he showed that scandal sensitivity depends on the social-historical context and general moral and cultural climate of the time. Three years later Thompson published his comprehensive analysis of a political scandal (Thompson

2000). While drawing examples from the Anglo-American world. His main arguments are that high-profile scandals are symptomatic of a profound transformation of the relations between public and private life since the technologies of communication are further blurring the boundaries between public and private. Thompson gives significance to increased (mediated) visibility, enabled by the development of communication media and triggering off a series of events.⁴ Moreover, investigative journalism became regarded as accepted and sought-after element of journalistic activity. In early stages, scandals were indeed giving impetus for changes of broader political culture (Thomson 1997; 2000; 2011) while eventually generating challenges to the dominant culture in most stable and powerful nations (Dayan and Katz 1992; Lull and Hinerman 1997). We claim that this impetus for change is rare in today's media. On the contrary, the negative impact on the public may lie in betrayal of social trust whereby only reinforcing political cynicism.

In another seminal work on scandal, Ari Adut (2008) aimed to provide a general theory of scandal while combining phenomenological ("moral") and structural ("strategic") analyses. In a similar spirit as Thomson, Adut points out the diminishing confidence in politics and increased transparency, and shows that both the moral

and the strategic are fused in scandal. Further, according to Adut, scandals are not rituals of cohesion but "moral disturbances" that usually follow a predictable pattern. Scandals reaffirm collective values by actually "provoking" a moral position taking and dramatizing lines of difference. Adut however illustrates these "successful" provocations mainly by analyzing scandals in art that led to cultural paradigm shifts in the past.

Western scandal scholars tend to remind us that Anglo-Saxon countries are inherently inclined to libertarian philosophy where any exposure leads to a better system – political and economic – which is essentially good, although somewhat structurally perverted. As a matter of fact, European scandal scholars are much less optimistic, and more critical about the role of the media and their scandal constructs. American scholars often address political scandals as inherently connected to liberal democracies, but the effort to de-westernize scandal theory is on the rise as well, demonstrating that not all Anglo-American theories and expectations can be tied to scandal mediations in non-Western media cultures.⁵ While working towards a more universalist conception, the (neo)functionalist theoretical accounts on scandal effectively point that scandals are of use to reinforce a community's collective consciousness, including the role of public

ritual which serves to reinforce the primacy of shared norms and values (Gluckman 1963; Alexander 1988; Markovits and Silverstein 1988; Couldry 2003; Neckel 2005). Last but not least: while diverging from the initial aim

Social Collectivity

Scandals would be non-existent without the existence of an established social collectivity with its moral codes. In functionalist understanding transgressions/scandals are integral for any collectivity since a breach confirms the rule and strengthens the integration by the social group accepting it. Thus, the basic form of scandal as a conflict resolution pattern is a universal phenomenon since the fundamental tendency to hold the presence of others as one of basic necessities of mankind exists practically everywhere.⁷ Furthermore, many classical politologists (e.g. Montesquieu, Rousseau, or Hobbes) indicated that human societies at any point of time and space hardly survive unless they solve the problem of linking the individual to the broader society. Our social identity is however hardly “natural” per se because the social actors identify themselves by superimposed world views and modes of thought (Lippmann 1922; Lakoff 2009). Since morals stabilize and uphold society’s structure, our social identities shall be primarily understood as discursively

to focus primarily on sex, money and politics, other scholars keep on introducing new interdisciplinary approaches to scandal in various non-traditional contexts.⁶

constituted constructs with moral rules built in them from without.⁸

The spirit of society (or Durkheim’s *collective conscience*) with its mythologies (or *allegorical instructions*), stereotypes, frames and metaphors (Lippmann 1922; Lakoff 2009) is stored in *collective unconscious* (Jung), and is more or less effectively inculcated in each one of us. Without us clearly noticing it, these attributes are being maintained and legitimized on the level of various ideologies.⁹ To play our social role means then to have our thought (as reflected in our actions) supervised by a society’s ideological core values. These ideological values in turn inform the norms (moral, political, legal, religious) that become authentic projections of the *general will* (Rousseau 1994), and are being held by everyone as “the most real and the most important” (Toomer 1991, I).¹⁰

Nonetheless conflictual situations within the apparent *social consensus* do surface, eventually generating a public scandal. In the first place this is caused by the fact that we

live in intersections of different norms and discourses, as diffused by various institutions, so that our individual morality can grow contradictory and inconsistent.¹¹ Apart from our social roles (some owned, some resented) it is our staged *performance* that becomes one aspect of our personality, including its eventual “scandalous” failure (Goffman 1959; Hacking 2004), for which we are to bear our own responsibility (Sartre 1956; Heidegger 1962). In the second place, we must also consider the psychological side-effects of power-holding, individual psychosocial weaknesses, or, as Friedrich Nietzsche would insist, our unconscious “Dionysian” drive towards dissolution of boundaries and transgression of limits.

We preserve core societal values by behaving consistently with them, and as addition to that, our basic needs – most fundamentally personal security and individual rights – are attained through the introduction of law and order which binds social actors in social structures. Consequently, also our individual desires (including the intrinsic, unconscious desire to transgress) must be curbed to a significant degree by restrictive social forces (primarily the family, and the state). These authoritative forces only rarely react with leniency when sanctioning a potential source of anarchy, and they can generate various “disciplinary” emotions (guilt, shame, fear of

getting caught) whereby facilitating to keep our baser instincts under control. Unfortunately, we usually notice these forces only after actually going “against the stream”. Since deviance from social norm (in functionalist jargon: *malfunction*, or *misplaying* of one’s role) is usually an offence to the sentiment of the collective *we*, the disapproving reaction to scandal is in principle collective.

Here, the philosophers of human nature would contend that people are inherently aggressive/transgressive,¹² while the state, family, community (*and* the media as social institutions) present necessary civilizing forces. These forces (or Freudian *superegos*) can be objectified by anyone who issues commands – parents, teachers, laws, class prejudices, public opinions (e.g. Nietzsche 1966, 110). On the other hand, many classic anthropologists and sociologists teach us that conflict enhances a group’s “consciousness of kind” and revives its self-image (Turner) in a society that “needs” friction (Durkheim) same as law needs crime, religion needs sin-or, the public “needs” scandal-in order to work as a fully dynamic social system. In such understanding, transgressions are *functional* (and integral) for any collectivity since a breach confirms the rule and strengthens the integration by the social group accepting it.¹³

The existence of “liminal phases” of

conflict and transgression and “remedial phases” of resolution and redemption was confirmed cross-culturally (e.g. Turner 1990; Barkow 1992; Jenks 2003; Jewkes 2011). The institutional logic related to transgressions/sanctions is however until certain extent time/space-relative (i.e., what is scandalous here/today might not be scandalous there/tomorrow). Moreover, aforementioned social structures can be contradictory, with diverse and opposing actors (and far from representing communities that share values and interests).¹⁴ The same goes for scandals: many corrupted institutions and corporations are at the assumed “center of the collectivities”, where the corrupt police stands for the central symbol of society (Sherman 1978), and the media “speaks for that corrupt center” (Coudry 2003, 2).

Apart from personal security and individual rights, which we gain due to our self-subordination to collectivity, we enter social contract, which is expected to assure our social liberties (Rousseau 1994).¹⁵ The limitation of this contract lies in circumscribing our “natural liberties” while expecting us to endorse core ideological values. Consequently, we may easily become, in a non-coercive way, self-monitoring servants of ideological forces (Foucauldian “docile bodies”), not to mention that we become hardly distinguishable if adopting a kind of personality offered by mediated

sociocultural patterns. Such homogeneity facilitates to maintain discipline (*ethos*) while sacrificing the power of our inherent instincts for the sake of the “greater (social) good” (Durkheim). Besides, our “functionality” further diminishes once we become surrounded by *ornamental culture* (term by Susan Faludi) which encourages people to play almost no functional roles at the expense of only decorative, consumer roles. As yet another by-product of this homogenizing force, the “collective responsibility” is being built into what Nick Smith calls the “logical grammar of our moral categories” (Smith 2008, 178). This all is happening in a social universe where there exist no universally valid moral standards by which rightness or wrongness of moral values or belief systems could be objectively judged.

The notion of social collectivity, thus disseminated in society, maintains and reproduces social structures through institutions, organizations and discourses that frame and regulate social life (Foucault 1972; Giddens 1994; Castells 2009; Lakoff 2009). The existence of these “networks of power” is conditioned by forms of social control (any social process that induces conformity to social norms), and if we cross certain threshold, we may trigger a public scandal, which in turn activates additional control mechanisms.¹⁶ In modern media-saturated

societies, based on collective imaginations, codes of morality, law, mythology, or religion, the mass-mediated experience becomes

Mass Media

The formal power to label certain individuals (i.e. designate them as deviant, antisocial, immoral and shaming, prosecuting, and stigmatizing them) resides within the institution of state and the criminal justice. It is however not only the ideological climate which matters, but equally importantly it is the journalistic struggle within the journalistic *field* which co-constitutes the labeling process. These assumptions are instrumental in creating public consensus and shaping processes of social integration and control. The mass media however facilitate to trigger media-hypes (Vasterman 2005), moral panics and deviancy amplification (Cohen 2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009) and other ideologically/technologically determined negative media effects.¹⁷ Furthermore, the disciplinary discourses of scandal are backed by eventual use of negative sanctions, both material (incarceration, fine) and symbolic (loss of face, reputational damage). The media as *para-institutions of the state* (Castells), or *disciplinary apparatuses* (Foucault) are the main sources of these discourses. Although the media serve many ideological purposes,

central, while the media agenda aims to become “everyone’s issue”.

they at times happen to work as self-appointed arbiters of justice and guardians of the nation who are endowed with the authority to pry, publicize, and prosecute (e.g. Morikawa 1992; Uesugi 2012).

A “successful” scandal with the journalistic mission of “search for truth” at its core is today unimaginable without the mass media’s intervention. In order to effectively exercise power by impacting human minds, the power holders cannot refrain from using (multi) media networks of mass communication. The networks are the source of the construction of meaning in the public mind and therefore the fundamental networks of power-making in society (e.g. Castells 2009). Importantly for the notion of social collectivity, these mass media networks are essentially “conservative”:

- they believe that morality is obedience to authority
- they lay exclusive claims to patriotism
- they are intolerant towards anyone who transgresses their agenda
- they use archetypes of submission and group affiliation (both in popular fiction and

the news)

The role of the conservative media is to use language, ideas, images, and symbols repeatedly to activate their desired modes of thought (Lakoff 2009).

Furthermore, it is necessary for these media to encompass the (imagined) audience, and represent this whole as *moral majority*. In terms of language this is usually realized via the empathic label “we” – in order to stand for the empathic/patriotic social whole, define parameters of social control, and accumulate profit.¹⁸ Such forms of labelling are in the media realized through the process of *stereotyping* – dividing the abnormal from normal (the impure, unacceptable, chaotic them from the pure, acceptable, orderly us), by maintaining a symbolic frontier between them both while symbolically excluding the latter. This process, which deploys the *strategy of splitting* by reducing and fixing difference is important for the maintenance

Media Scandals

Since no media scandal in practice exists in its pure form, scholars usually deal with an ideal type of large-scale, high-profile/high-publicity media scandal where the majority of scandal non-participants (mostly common citizens) are alarmed by the transgression for a protracted period of time. The five

of social and symbolic order (Hall 1997, 258-9).

One of pre-emptive means of framing and regulating social life lies in managing, and appealing to *common sense*.¹⁹ This sense is establishing a form of self-regulation designed to meet the requirements of the society based on notions of what is acceptable, and it works as a sort of *mass super-ego*. It is the mainstream media that not only “manufacture the consent” (Herman and Chomsky 1988), but they also persecute and stigmatize certain social actors by publicizing their transgressions, and it is usually the intrinsically newsworthy mediation of deviance and crime which has a strong social control element. Thus, the media facilitate the process of forming our conscience and internalizing authority (rules, laws and conventions) through representing violations of these rules on a frequent basis. While a violation is being (tele)visualised, redressive mechanisms are brought into operation.

basic preconditions for a scandal movement are as follows:

1. there has to exist a collective *definition* of an act/behaviour as transgressive
2. transgression must be *revealed* and *denounced* by a person or group of persons

3. transgression must be *individualized* via at least one person (i.e. alleged culprit)
4. there has to be a *negative response* of the public, indispensable for any scandal

Based on these preconditions, we suggest a processual definition of an ideal-type media scandal:

Based on the commonsensical morality (i.e., the culture-specific definition of what is “scandalous”) a private transgression (elite deviance) is publicly disclosed (in principle via whistleblowing), individualized (via a transgressing culprit, or a scapegoat), framed by the media for a protracted period of time, and eventually publicly denounced. Apart from the strategic use of scandal (i.e. in attack-politics) the ideal moral/hegemonic aim is to re-confirm and strengthen the validity of the transgressed norm (symbolic or legal).

In this treatise we are however more interested in theoretical understanding of scandals and their function within social collectivity. On the most general level, the phenomenon of scandal can be approached as a **social fact** (Durkheim). Media scandals form a coherent system, are basically independent from expressions of individuals, and they arise from the ground where certain “movements of life”, and specific

effects of institutions intersect (under these movements we understand individualized “malfunctions” that can lead to betrayal of social trust). While adopting the theory of Robert Merton (1968) we can also state that **scandal is a latent dysfunction** (unanticipated and unintended temporary disruption of order and stability) with both the manifest function (proving that the supervisory organs of the state and the media-watchdogs are working) and the latent function (e.g. triggering scandal fatigue and political cynicism among the public).

Secondly, scandal can be approached as a **conflict**, confrontation, and symbol of certain crisis. On the one hand, scandals express opposing social claims to the validity of norms, and the instruments of power are used in order to defeat opposing forces. That is why in political discourse (and in attack-politics in particular) scandalizing is a powerful tool (and *not* a mere distraction from the real substance of political life). On the other hand, depending on their contents and environments, scandals aim to both re-establish the morale of the community, and they come to present certain form of social pressure. This pressure can also lie in some form of encouraging a spirit of “togetherness”, or it can represent some form of direct coercion. While promoting social cohesion and supporting the status quo, such coercion is then *integrative* since

big media events can evoke renewal of loyalty to the society with its legitimate authority (e.g. Dayan and Katz 1992; Couldry 2003). In such cases, a “successful” scandal can be also conceived of as a **statement** of the norm; a declaration of what is considered by the members of a society to be good and proper.

Finally, scandals can be approached as **rituals** (i.e. standardized patterns of behavior and performance that communicate messages about moral order). Frequently recurring scandals are in this perspective approached as a sort of secular rituals, cast into a pattern that is reproduced, institutionalized, maintained and understood as such. Especially the big scandals wish to generate “common concern”, and it can be argued that the scandal-mongering media parasitize on our inherent desire to community, which goes back to collectivity of pre-mass societies.²⁰

There certainly exist media events that merely present the status quo through various displays of social solidarity, but scandals highlight the same structure through “representing” deviance, its disapproval, and condemnation. The incentive for these representations (i.e. revealed transgressions) is in some cases purely

accidental, but especially in mediated politics the information leak has a deliberate character – the scandal which follows is then a socio-politically constructed representation with various conflicting actors.²¹ In other words, scandal politics becomes a weapon of choice for competition.

Similarly, the practice of *scapegoating* (designing one individual to be punished for the errors of others) did originally play certain role in constituting social order not only in Japan (the individual sacrifice for social preservation is a social function that is at the core of any society). It is however questionable how this legitimizing force is being objectified during the mass media-sponsored secular rituals of affliction and exclusion. This reinforces the norm by exposing deviance whereby generating public “atmosfear” that anyone can happen to be publicly tried for defying certain symbolic convention. At any rate, these rituals resemble a sort of *perpetuum mobile*: the ever repeating scandals can hardly be understood as an effective prevention of the return of a crisis since they are rather variations on one mythical theme – the perpetual, cyclical state of disintegration and renewal.

Scandal Transgressors

Confusion, contempt and other affective reactions to certain conflict/crisis that outrages society usually has a concrete object – someone who can be blamed *responsible*. This object of public outrage is not represented by an impersonal social system or some ideological concept, but in principle by a newsworthy individual who belongs to certain rank within the social elite. *Elite deviance* is defined as deviance engaged by the highest corporate, military, political, and cultural figures (e.g. Franzese 2009, 237), and the nearer one is to this imagined “sacred center”, the higher the probability of involvement. Since in contemporary media-saturated societies it is usually the media personalities, celebrities, political, business or religious leaders, who are in charge of representing the illusion of cohesion, they bear responsibility for their deviance if their public image suddenly finds itself in inconsistency with them.²²

Once elite deviance comes into full light, the elites become untrustworthy. This is also the case because they previously mystified their own person: they became rendered as “quasi-transcendent” persons of law equipped with public dignity (Neckel 2005). If scandal cannot be avoided, these extraordinary transgressors are reduced to the status of everyman (or sometimes even lower),

providing the media with a more or less “spectacular”, audience-attractive material. The media are likely to publicly manifest *opprobrious discourse* (Thompson 1997), generating sentiments of disgust and distrust among the public. Consequently the transgressor becomes designated as undesirable and “unfit” since he/she was found to be inconsistent with certain conventions. Nonetheless, his/her charisma can make the public pardon his/her violation, which in turn influences the way a scandal is handled.

Ordinary citizens who engage in certain transgressive conduct certainly can end up being demonized in the media – e.g. by being depicted as *folk devils* (Cohen). Nonetheless, they in principle do not become individual scandal subjects, because they:

- do not directly represent/symbolize any system of societal structure
- do not belong to any elite institution, nor do they hold public office
- are not trustees of public moral standards and conventions, and thus
- their social status does not wield a potential to violate social trust.²³

It is in principle the extraordinary, “conspicuous” elite (i.e. the visible

representatives of governmental, political, business, cultural, and other power circles) whose offences become rendered as eminently newsworthy. These elites however

Audiences and Desires

When critical social scientists observe the map of the contemporary forces of capital accumulation not only in Japan, they often notice that the consumers are led to believe their own personal empowerment, while dissatisfaction is transformed into a commodity through various forms of spectacular rebelliousness and transgression (e.g. Debord 1967; Jenks 2003; Heath and Potter 2005). As a matter of fact, the scandal industry in particular shall be scrutinized as “exploiting” some of our inherent psychosocial affects and moral sentiments. The key desire in this context is the **desire to relate**. The charismatics (primordial, religious, or secular) originates from this desire as well: the audiences can relate to their “idols” (celebrities, politicians, etc.) through the process of admiration.²⁵ Contrarily to the original nature (other-worldly, non-mediated) of charismatic authorities (e.g. those individuals who were able to perform miracles), the image of many real-world celebrities, politicians or artists is often effective only because of their charisma.²⁶ In Max Weber’s understanding,

become scandalized if, and only if the violation of moral and/or legal rules has been disclosed by the mass-media.²⁴

charisma represents specifically exceptional, extraordinary qualities that set an individual apart from ordinary people and create a basis for his/her special treatment (Weber 1968). This treatment is usually simultaneously conditioned by his/her loyalty which is expected to be demonstrated in turn. The notion of charismatic authority lies in possessing exceptional human qualities, however today it can simply be certain politicians who are able to evoke emotional response in larger populations, and other “extraordinary” cultural representatives that also often represent this quality.

Regarding the bond between a charismatic persona and others, both the star/agency or politician/party on the one side, and the fan/voter on the other enter a sort of unwritten social contract, guaranteed by what Alvin Gouldner (1960) called *norm of reciprocity*. Generally speaking this is a reciprocity of service and return service.²⁷ Therefore, if someone aspires to some form of leadership, he/she directly or indirectly provides potential supporters (voters, fans) with certain benefits (including the material/

financial ones), while in turn gaining sympathy, loyalty, and trust. Especially the material/financial transaction – itself always necessarily asymmetrical and covert – must be “blurred” since it borders with corruption and bribery. Thus, the phenomenon of structural corruption (*kōzō oshoku*) can also be understood as blurring the return of the favour in order to avoid accusation, and the ideal role of the media would then be to “sharpen” the picture of this transaction.

Apart from recognizing the charismatic authority and practicing personal devotion, the proportionality of service and return service is according to Gouldner assuring cohesion and stability of the social system. In terms of media consumption, a sort of ideal, balanced reciprocity can be understood as maintaining the producer/consumer contract, where desire is under given rules and conditions “aroused” on one side, and “played with” on the other. If social elites do not follow certain expectations (often moral in the case of celebrities, and material in the case of politicians), there occurs *reciprocity imbalance*.²⁸ Depending on the seriousness of the situation, the expression of disapproval can be apprehended by the public as injustice, exploitation, and finally as a betrayal of social trust. One then resorts to negative norms of reciprocity, provoking sentiments of retaliation (Gouldner 1960), and scandal is broken, based on dislocation of

charismatic elements (Storm and Wagner 2011).

Another key desire in our context is the **desire to know**. While utilizing Darwinian perspective in analyzing emotions in media, Schwab and Schwender (2011) assert that the goal of epistemic emotions is knowledge gain. Related to this, Joseph Campbell (2004) reminds us of the unbreakable universal desire of the human spirit to receive and convey stories of all sorts (the origin of this contemplation lies with Aristotle and his dictum that all men by nature desire to know). While being informed by these facts, the basic narratological pattern lies in initial uncertainty, advancing towards certain concluding climax. The elementary unit is thus *knowledge*. Especially the stardom is structured by this concealment-revelation discourse (e.g. de Cordova 1991), where the news media make use of our inherent desire for knowledge.

Clarissa Estes (2004, xxxix) observes that there is something in our psyche that recognizes a wrongful act and wants to tell the story of how it came about and what action ought to be undertaken to correct it. Similarly in the case of scandals a private wrongdoing is revealed, and the media present all upcoming facts to us as “things we must know” while contaminating the media audience (or the whole public in case of large-scale scandals) with the desire to

know more about transgressor.²⁹ Especially in big scandals the spectacle of mediated search for truth is throughout the whole process “impregnated” with this basic desire to receive stories with in-built secrets.

Apart from the desire to relate and to know, we register other desires that can be related to scandals (i.e. the desire for compassion, the escapist desire, desire to gossip, the quasi-sadistic desire and the

pleasure stemming from *schadenfreude*, etc.). For our purposes it will suffice here to note that not only in the case of media scandals our inherent desires, sentiments and emotions actually precede, guide, or even override moral contemplation which is associated with any media narrative.

Notes

- ¹ Max Gluckman showed early anthropological interest in scandal and gossip when researching tribal communities' involvement in gossip (Gluckman emphasized the “supportive” function of gossip as a powerful social instrument in the maintenance of social unity and informal social control). Erving Goffman, who developed among others the notion of *stigma*, offered interpersonal dramaturgical perspective in the context of our everydayness which is constituted through staged performances (the scandal performance is also characteristic of staging while convicted transgressors become stigmatized and temporarily exiled from their professional platform). Alvin Gouldner indirectly contributed to scandology by discussing *norms of reciprocity* as a point of better understanding of mutual symbolic relationship between scandalized social elites and common public sphere. The criticism of Guy Debord also enriches the scandal theory since many mediated scandal events are emblematic of a high degree of staged *spectacularity*. Victor Turner expanded Durkheim's solidarity/ritual theory in his theorizing of (originally van Gennep's) stages of ritual process, whereby inviting ritual analysis to be applied also to scandals. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann offer the viewpoint that social reality (including scandals and their mediation) is in various regards a socially constructed phenomenon. Robert Merton is instructive with his notion of deviance and manifest/latent dysfunction while Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory can be applied when approaching scandals as tools used to maintain power and social order in a non-coercive manner. Pierre Bourdieu with his interest in aims and consequences of political struggle enriches scandology with concepts such as (political) *habitus*, political delegation of power, or the journalistic *field* of struggle.
- ² As a Japanese counterpart to Watergate became known the Lockheed corruption scandal which climaxed in 1976 and involved the Japanese father of money politics, Tanaka Kakuei.
- ³ One of the epitomes of this new era in Europe, and a sort of counterpart to Ruppert Murdoch in the US, was the Italian media tycoon, politician and businessman Silvio Berlusconi. Scholars worldwide have ever since criticized Berlusconi's extensive control over media, his corruption affairs, and conflicts of interest between politics and ownership of his vast media empire.
- ⁴ For instance, after the 1998 Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, there occurred a fundamental change in media environment – namely the elimination of classical notions such as agenda setting or “gatekeeping” as originally understood by Walter Lippmann (Lippmann 1922; Williams and Delli Carpini 2004).
- ⁵ Owing to this academic segment we discover that political scandal is rather absent in Argentina (Waisbord 2004), and certain cultural significance is attributed to emotional responses to celebrity scandals in China (Jiang et al. 2011) or Japan (Prusa 2012a). Besides we find that public political scandals are virtually impossible and nonexistent in dictatorships (Neckel 2005), or that the Japanese media in general does a very poor job of illuminating many key issues including the government – and business corruption (Prusa 2012b; McNeill 2014).

- ⁶ The scope of this segment ranges from comparing scandal narratives to those of Greek tragedy (e.g. Ruigrok 2007) or conflating critical philosophical discourses when analyzing sports scandals (Storm and Wagner 2011) to analyzing scandal cases in history of art and literature (e.g. Adut 2008).
- ⁷ It is indeed the case that our humanity and sociality are intertwined, so that Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann can state that *homo sapiens* is always in the same measure *homo socius* (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 49), whose natural inclination to empathy and cooperation is literally hardwired in our brain (e.g. Lakoff 2009; Wetherell 2010). These arguments are supported by a scientific evidence that there exists an integrative tendency based on physiologically grounded psychological need for empathy and cohesion in a constitution of man, and that the social kinship of modern humans has its roots in its transition from the biological kinship of primates (e.g. Barkow, Cosmides and Tooby 1992; Lakoff 2009; Allen et al. 2011).
- ⁸ Indeed, various expressions of *collective memory* (Halbwachs) make a powerful contribution to a society's cultural, political and social identity. Nonetheless, formally speaking there is no such thing as "genuine" social identity because man will always not be anything "until later", and he will be what he makes of himself (e.g. Sartre 1956). Besides, the images of wholeness, which are holding together a group of (more or less incoherent) individuals, are usually effectively illusory. All identities (political, social and cultural) are neither fixed, nor permanent, and they shall be understood as constitutively relational *positions* (e.g. Gilbert 2008) After all, our culture-specific modes of virtue are also not really "natural" since they are undergoing various transformations before being constituted and incorporated as *collective images*. Therefore, the belief that our social identity is somehow equivalent to our very own existence is a form of self-deception.
- ⁹ By ideology we critically understand any conglomeration of ideas that allow us to form "common identity", to demarcate *us* from the *other*, or to become "docile bodies" (Foucault) who "are the rule" in society (Nietzsche).
- ¹⁰ Of course these values are not permanently "true" and fixed, and thus the struggle between/within ideologies represents open-ended conflicts. Also through some scandals the moral consensus is not reached, and such scandals can provoke discussion activate their transformative potential.
- ¹¹ Apart from the fact that we are members of many different groups at the same time (e.g. family, company, political party, seminar), each individual has also his/her own particular way of thinking about the rules of commonsensical morality. Especially the political representatives have to govern their conduct and strategies simultaneously as members of their political subfield (i.e. maintaining party loyalty and alliances), and the broader political field of citizens or non-professionals (see Thompson 1997, 47-8). Unsurprisingly, political scandals often render themselves as involving elements of hypocrisy, similarly as any political donation bears elements of bribery.
- ¹² Apart from the drive of self-preservation (Nietzsche), or the survival of the fittest (Darwin), Sigmund Freud also mentioned mankind's innate inclination to aggression and non-cooperative principles at uncivilized level, while Thomas Hobbes even built his whole political theory on our chronic anxiety and fear of violent death (due to which we desperately desire power and protection in a "wolf-like" world). Importantly for political scandals, the political institutions of the state are a sort of evil-but-necessary entities that only reflect inevitable moral imperfection of democracy in modern human societies. Since these institutions are operated by other ("wolf-like") actors just like ourselves, the struggles and conflicts will be always emerging, if only in a form of media scandal. (This fact lends itself to Jean Baudrillard's controversial claim that scandals *themselves* are not really "scandalous".)
- ¹³ In a similar functionalist vein Max Gluckman (1963) discussed the positive (integrative) role of gossiping/scandalizing within communities since the dawn of man, as standing in opposition to "negative" gossiping (transactional, egoistic). While the latter is in principle harmful, the former is claimed to underpin social solidarity.
- ¹⁴ For instance Jock Young (1971) and Gary Marx (1981) claimed that authorities themselves actually often contribute to a deviance they set out to control by generating opportunities and motives for rule breaking. Similarly, Robert Merton (1968) inquired how political machines continue to operate despite the fact that they frequently defy both the mores, and the law.
- ¹⁵ Social contract is generally understood as a socio-political tool for maintaining social cohesion in the face of the natural freedom of humanity.

- ¹⁶ Apart from private moral transgressions, scandals often reflect inner political struggles. What matters is the impact of the struggle among different political and other social elites, ranging from attack-politics to deliberate use of sensitive data during omnipresent conflicts between parties, within parties, between government and bureaucracy, government and opposition, etc.
- ¹⁷ *Moral panic* is a means of characterizing the reaction of the media, the public, and agents of social control while voicing populist sentiments. In our context it points to *inappropriate panic over public scandals* – usually the transgressions involving public criminality, homosexuality, pedophilia, drug abuse, food poisoning, etc. The mass media, who are an excellent breeding ground for moral panics, demonstrate the panic by reflecting certain concerns, but more often they directly influence public opinion (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009) and manufacture its consent (Herman and Chomsky 1988) within the established *discourse of fear* (Altheide 2002; 2003). Media hype is a media-practiced form of overstatement and exaggeration of events predominantly for the sake of novelty and newsworthiness. It can be channeled via sensational headlines, melodramatic vocabulary or deliberate heightening of certain elements in the story. As a result, large scandals under the spell of media hype become typically inflated in size, scope, seriousness, shifting our attention from certain structural problem to various “newsworthy”, sensationalist elements on the backdrop of a constructed morality tale.
- ¹⁸ For example by representing the moral majority by the empathic personal pronoun *watashitachi* or *wareware* (or by using the “nationalizing” substantives *nihonjin*, *kokumin*) the blame is absorbed and moral responsibility diffused because a political projection (“Japan”) cannot itself do anything without individuals on its behalf (Prusa 2012b).
- ¹⁹ *Common sense* is a shared ability to perceive, understand and judge things in our world, and it is constituted by basic concepts of object, person, time, and space (e.g. Pinker 2002). By “managing” common sense we refer to disseminating unquestioned truths that are in fact only culturally derived mythologies. Antonio Gramsci (1971) described these commonsensical “things we all know” as a fragmentary and incoherent reservoir of historically discontinuous and disjointed ideas that functions as the philosophy for non-philosophers. This common sense is further reinforced by *common knowledge* whose definition can be put forward as “everyone knows that everyone knows that everyone knows” (e.g. Adut 2008, 19).
- ²⁰ Like in the Greek Agora, the symbolically interrelated individuals “come together” as imagined community (the medium of television becomes “gathering place”) in order to collectively express dissatisfaction, anger, solidarity and empathy with scandalized elites.
- ²¹ By these actors we mean primary participants (information sources, agencies, media institutions, editors, reporters, external commentators, etc.), and secondary participants (police, prosecutors, lawyers, entertainment agencies, investigative commissions, nongovernmental organizations, commercial entities, etc.)
- ²² Celebrity (or a “media person”) is someone known mainly for her well-knownness, created by the media exposure, during various media *pseudo-events* (e.g. Boorstin 1992; Dayan and Katz 1992). Besides, it is generally believed that the media are our access point to society’s assumed center (Couldry 2003), so the media personae tend to impress us as somehow “special”, and are thus held as worthy of special attention and special treatment. A political persona is usually someone who deliberately utilizes certain elements of entertainment and emphasizes recognition at the expense of credence or belief. The “celebritization” of politicians is usually managed by the PR agencies, and contrary to famous persons, celebrities are “idols of consumption” with commercial market value attached to them.
- ²³ Although ordinary people in principle do not set large-scale scandals in motion, commoners do at times become “accidental celebrities” (Marshall 2010), dragged in a “psychodrama” (Lull and Hinerman 1997). In such case a private individual is suddenly caught in the glare of publicity through the overwhelming media frenzy, if he/she is somehow associated with certain “newsworthy” transgression as either offender or victim. Needless to say, having these media ritual hierarchies enacted on ordinary citizen can be a traumatic experience.
- ²⁴ In the case of large-scale, high-profile scandals the dialectical outcome can lie in character assassination of the transgressing “idol of the old”, and public veneration of a new object of trust.
- ²⁵ The charismatic seduction can be also the result of reaching beyond commonsensical limits through transgressive acts of “free will” (e.g. Dayan and Katz 1992), or through various enactments of “radical freedom” (Sartre 1956). Thus, a transgression can

also form a transgressor's public image, and can reinforce his/her positive charisma (for related analysis of social banditry see Hobsbawm 1969).

- ²⁶ The media again play a significant role in upholding the charismatic aura by altering standpoints and priming audiences' judgments (this can be based on nonverbal displays and visual portrayals of faces and bodies, or by communicating "sophisticated" emotional states). Thus, idols have their personality and their actions carefully synchronized.
- ²⁷ Or seen from the perspective of the exchange theory: A who receives from B must be indebted to B, while B feels legitimate, direct control over A. Since reciprocity is inherent in the nature of basically all social interaction, social scientists posit that man is *homo reciprocus*.
- ²⁸ For instance in the case of material expectations, the Japanese local support bases (*kōenkai*), backed by local companies and government workers vote for their politicians that are in turn expected to bring money (localized projects) to the representative's district.
- ²⁹ This desire is however always being ahead of itself: the audiences might not "naturally" desire gossip, but their inherent curiosity is "played with" in order to desire it. Since the inbuilt markers of desire are "always-already", there the audiences do not discover the topics/objects of desire, but they rather "re-cognize" them.

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Media, scandals, and society: a theoretical introduction

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Abstract

This treatise seeks to illuminate the theoretical background of a scandal mediation process in contemporary media-saturated societies. Further, it aims to strengthen the theoretical understanding of scandals without reducing them to a mere mass media phenomenon. This allows us to adopt various theoretical notions and sociological approaches as outlined throughout the text. The basic assumption is that no matter how arbitrary or fleeting scandals appear to be, after a careful observation they come to present certain qualities of constant social nature that are worth putting through an in-depth analysis while providing interesting interdisciplinary insights.

Key Words : media scandal, transgression, social theory