Digital Politics

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"Fukushima: an inquiry into the digital politics of the nuclear catastrophe"

The nuclear catastrophe of Fukushima, in March 2011, has been closely monitored by various officials (State and safety agencies, scientific institutions, mainstream newspapers) as well as non-official actors (watchdogs, whistle-blowers, environmental activists...). At the peak of the crisis, dozens of updates were published every hour from all over the world, making Fukushima one of the most carefully followed events, in real time, on a global scale. In this highly uncertain context, Internet has played a major role, with different actors involved trying to assess the contested nature and scale of the catastrophe. This talk will tackle the Internet coverage by France's main nuclear safety agency, the Agence de Sureté Nucléaire (ASN). From 2011 until today, the ASN has published regular assessments of the situation in Fukushima on its web site. Its role has been important, as France is, with the US and Japan, one of the three global players in the civil nuclear industry. A survey of the ASN’s online updates shows that the agency has provided a significantly more critical assessment of the situation than most of the other (especially Japanese) official sources. This is rather surprising, coming from an institution that has been pictured as a staunch and far from neutral proponent of nuclear energy. I will elaborate on the idea that the ASN’s position, far from being the result of an idealistic « commitment to truth », is paradoxically due to its numerous connections with the nuclear industry. The ASN’s Internet policy has therefore to be understood in a broader economic and social context, which highlights how, at a time of acute crisis, Internet became one of the tools to try to reshape former power relations.

Location University of Southern California Von Kleinsmid Center (VKC), Room 329

We are looking forward to discussing with all of you, Ann Crigler & Violaine Roussel, Workshop organizers.

How to find the VKC Building at USC: http://web-app.usc.edu/maps/

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