

# SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY AND CRITICAL THEORY

Week 5



# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is the purpose of news/journalism for you and your life?
- Should journalists be neutral, adversarial, or community advocates?
- Does the use of humor in critiquing our political/news culture help us as citizens?
- What does your citizen engagement look like?



# JURGEN HABERMAS: *THE STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE* (1962)

- **The Public Sphere** : Realm in social life for the formation of public opinion; open to all citizens; mediates between society and state
- Citizens behave as a public body in unrestricted fashion about matters of general interest towards enhancing the principle of public information in service to the greater good
- State authority is the executor of the public will
- Public opinion = tasks of criticism and control over the ruling structures of the state
  - Reasoning public is presupposed
- Public Sphere/Public Opinion/Meaning emerge from concrete historical situation
- Power: from '*representation*' of monarchy/feudal authority ("*before the people*") to state representatives ("*of and for the people*"): Public Authority
- Liberal Democracy = Private rights over public authority; newspapers = news/information → crucible of public opinion
  - Political; Commercial = Private Interests (**technologies of meaning/communication**)
- Today: Social Welfare State/Public Relations weakening operation of Public Sphere; commitment to the Public Sphere is waning under commercial pressures/forces



# JURGEN HABERMAS

- Emerged from Frankfurt School - nuance structure/agency arguments/Marxist framework
- Sought to critique the negative impact of capitalist logics on **democratic culture** = *the power of the people/reason*
  - Critical of modernization, and economic/administrative rationalization of daily life
  - Democratic public life cannot develop where matters of public importance are not discussed by citizens.
- An "ideal critical exchange of ideas in the Public Sphere = empowering against the deceptive nature of free institutions in the West
- Public sphere decayed in light of the growth of a commercial mass media; turned the critical public into a passive consumer public
- Today: Public Sphere = a site of self-interested contestation for the resources of the state rather than a space for the development of a public-minded rational consensus.
- speech situation "requires participants to have the same capacities of discourse, social equality and their words are not confused by ideology or other errors; truth is what would be agreed upon in an ideal speech situation"
- **Internet as Public Sphere? Deliberative democracy in public mechanisms**
- Criticisms: the Public Sphere model is antiquated due to the proliferation of mass-media communications: a public sphere as a place of purely rational independent debate never existed; multiple spheres and counterpublics.



# THE CULTURE OF JOURNALISM

▪ *News: a process of gathering information and making narrative reports edited by individuals in news organizations that offer selected frames of reference; with those frames, news helps the public make sense of important events, political issues, cultural trends, prominent people, and unusual happenings in everyday life*

- *Power*
- Values: objectivity vs. partisanship (credibility and sales)
- Bias & Facts
- Ethical practices (privacy)
- Expert testimony
- Role for Society: Adversarial, Advocacy, Objectivity
- Contemporary Dynamics: Infotainment, sound bites, pundits

Public Journalism: “moves from seeing people as consumers to seeing them as a public, as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems

Fake News (humor/social media) - **where is truth and does it matter?**

Journalism is central to democracy: access to information is critical to make important cultural decisions; questioning is necessary for democracy

Deliberative democracy = advocacy for enhanced public debate



# THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM IN A DEMOCRACY

- *Public Translator* (public not smart; too busy; uncaring): flow of information downward
- Public Forum for discussion/debate; engaged citizenry; flow of information upward
- Elements:
  - Truth, citizens, discipline, independence, check power, public forum, engaging/relevant
    - Professional Journalism - codes, standards
- Challenges: bias, transitioning logics (commercialism, ownership, content, (self-)censorship; access, glut of information)
- Truth?



# JOURNALISM BETWEEN DEPROFESSIONALIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION

**Convergence: production/consumption - “producer”**

**Mass/niche (social) media**

**Internet: Crisis in Journalism**

- **Access: Financial challenges vs. greater inclusivity/diversity of voices**
- **Professional Standards vs. changing modalities of information/circulation**
  - **Infotainment, lifestyle journalism, docu-fiction**
- **Commercialization vs marketplace of ideas**
- **Automation - more productivity, less constructive journalism**
  - **Deprofessionalization - market = unpaid work, flexible labor**
- **Decline in trust (changing news agendas; corrosion of public service values)**
- **Citizen Journalism - promises and perils**
  - **Journalism - elements: commitment to Truth, Accuracy, Transparency, Accountability, Impartiality**

**Do training/education/standards matter in fostering information for the public good?**

**What is the place of social media in this equation?**





# HOW AMERICA LOST ITS MIND

- Cultural Hubris, Isolation, individualism, Suspicion of mainstream ideas
- 1960s - challenging Truth/Emprical Science (pushing past the posts); Liberal Identity Politics vs. Conservative Traditions
- 1970s - conspiracy/paranoia - fueled by media (technology changes)
- 1980s - nationalism, power, postmodernism/relativism, subjectivity, selfishness
- 1990s - the society of the spectacle; collapse of dichotomies, rise of the Right
- 2000s - media fragmentation, internet, ugly underneath,
- “Realities”, transitioning media dynamics, commercialism, “beliefs”, echo chambers - self-righteousness (historical roots)
- Structures and Agencies





# AGENCY, STRUCTURE, YOU

What is at stake as you consider your “locations”:

- Your Citizenship
- Your Engagement
- Your Habits, Practices



- Mikešová, Marianna; Skopalová, Markéta; Kříž, Jan - week 6 - Foucault
- Hornová, Pavlína; Havlík, Tomáš; Skalická, Veronika - week 7 - Debord
- Yalvacli, Volkan; Forethová, Monika, Soto Castro, Yessenia Lizbeth, - week 8 - Said
- Bečáková, Klára; Filanová, Petra; Damian Marenno Prado - week 8 - Stuart Hall
- Holotíková, Tereza; Bořutová, Martina, Vaisová, Michaela - week 9 - Bourdieu
- Pichaničová, Petra; Chroustová,; Aneta; Vyklická, Jana - week 10 - Feminism
- Fiero, Alana Rose; Hambálek, Tomáš, Fabian Sosa Franquis - week 10 - Queer Theory
- Valentíková, Martina; Sittová, Barbora; Patricija, Fašalek- week 11 - Gramsci
- Ševčíková, Kateřina; Reisiglová, Michaela; Fuente Robles, Marina Inmaculada -

