Week 10

(Media &) The Public / Civil Sphere

Introduction

To look upon politics from the perspective of truth (…) means to take one's **stand outside the political realm**.

The standpoint outside the political realm – outside the community to which we belong and the company of our peers – is clearly characterized as one of the various modes of being alone. Outstanding among the existential modes of truthtelling are the solitude of the philosopher, the isolation of the scientist and the artist, the impartiality of the historian and the judge, and the independence of the fact-finder, the witness, and **the reporter**.

ARENDT, Hannah, *Between past and future. Eight exercises in political thought*, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, pp. 259-260.

Introduction

- **Question**

  - **To what extent is journalism an autonomous practice**, one capable of being conceptualized in isolation from political, economic, and other spheres of social power?

- **Answer (the dominant view in media theory)**

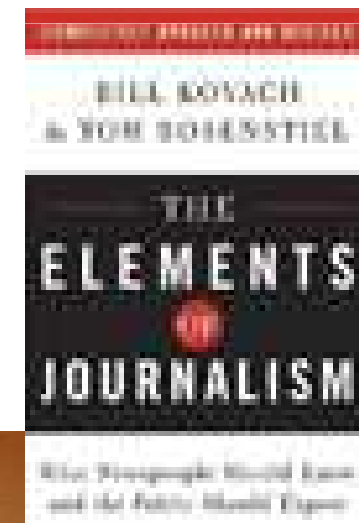 **The Political and Economic Ideology of Journalism**

Context

Public media in Europe

- PSB's consensus-age legitimating principles were aligned with particular types of views held, for example, by John Reith, the BBC's first director
  - Reith's objective was to improve society's knowledge, taste and moral awareness
  - PSB's enlightened claim to a monopoly of **reason and "quality"** implied a protection from commercial involvement and competition, and the necessity to achieve a universalised character among the population

- The abiding debate about PSB pivots on "quality" and "market pressures," echoing the Habermasian notion of the public sphere - Europe's PSB is unavoidably intent on educating, informing **rational debate.**

Independent / liberal journalism in the US

Context

- The **professionalization** / independence of journalism
    - Professional and ethical norms and values:
        - Truth
        - Justice
        - Freedom

Images courtesy of google images

Authors

✓ Different sociological approaches to the civil society and the media

- **Jürgen Habermas**
  - The media of the "Public Sphere"
    - *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989)*

- **Jeffrey C. Alexander**
  - The communicative institutions of the "Civil Sphere"
    - *The Civil Sphere (2006)*

Habermas: The Public Sphere

The Concept. By "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.[1] They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest. In a large public body, this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today, newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We speak of the political

Jeffrey C. Alexander
The communicative institutions of the "Civil Sphere"

- News stories are intrinsically related to the cultural structure of civil society

  the symbolic structure that, in Alexander's words, "build **social solidarity** and the putative obligations immanent to it, for demands about **economic equality** and **political responsibility**, for the scandals over the abuse of office power, and for repairing the rent structures of social life"

  (Alexander, 2006, p. ix).

  ✓ **Journalistic Autonomy through Civil Society**

**Jeffrey C. Alexander
The communicative institutions of the "Civil Sphere"**

- ## Key Concepts

  - The notion of a **cultural structure** to which he attributes a relative autonomy from instrumental interests

    - **Solidarity** in that power and self-interests are not the only pursuits that frame societies but also ideals of community and justice, integration, feeling for others

    - Civil society has a relevant **subjective dimension** of moral codes that are not external but immanent in society itself

Key Concepts

Civil Society I

is a rather diffuse, umbrella-like concept referring to a plethora of institutions outside the State, such as capitalist markets, voluntary religion, private and public associations, and virtually every form of cooperative social relationship that created bonds of trust.

Civil Society II

(primarily associated with Marx)

narrows and confines attention to capitalist markets and institutions.

Civil Society III

a sphere independent of the market, the State and other social spheres — such as family life or religion — which, though perhaps necessary for creating the civil sphere, are not sufficient to sustain it

Key Concepts

- **Civil society** can be conceived as an **autonomous social order**, an **universalizing community** having its own discourses, organizations and institutions — communicative (public opinion, the media) as well as regulative (law, political parties and offices) — that crystallise common ideals about civil solidarity

Arguments

- **The media** are likely to produce social solidarity
  - One of the communicative institutions of civil society, along with **public opinion**, **polls** and **associations**
  - Primarily, **cultural influence**, not power in the instrumental sense

- The news has the potential to translate the common cultural codes into specific descriptions and evaluations of events, actors, goals and situations

Case Study

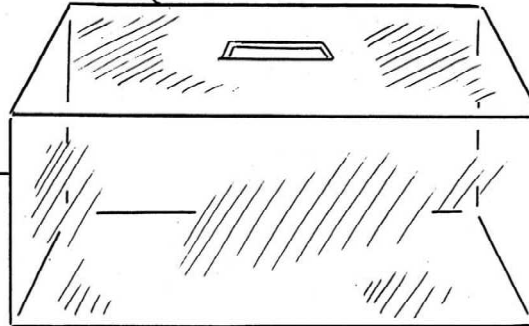# Reporting civil and anti-civil values on the March 11 terrorist attack

MÁXIMO

...ETA

...Al Qaeda

EL MUNDO

El día de la infamia

Casi 200 muertos y más de 1.400 heridos en el cuádruple atentado contra los viajeros de trenes de cercanías

EL PAIS

VIERNES 12 DE MARZO DE 2004
Año XXIX. Número 9.781   EDICIÓN MADRID

**Infierno terrorista en Madrid:
192 muertos y 1.400 heridos**

Interior investiga la pista de Al Qaeda sin descartar a ETA

The media "story" of Madrid bombing

Time	Main actions
Time	*Main actions*
Thursday	
7.37 am	The attack takes place. Terrorists leave evidence
10.30 am	Otegui says that ETA is not behind the attacks
10:50 pm	A citizen discovers a stolen van and calls to the Police
13:00 pm	Prime Minister Aznar reports that ETA was behind the attacks
13:30 pm	Interior Minister Acebes referres to Otegui's statement as "intolerable pollution"
14:30 pm	Aznar speaks about "the killer band that has caused too much pain in Spain"
15:30 pm	Police investigators analyze clues found in the van
17.30 pm	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sends a message to all embassies insisting ETA that is the culprit
20:00 pm	Aznar informs Zapatero and newspapers directors about the van. He continues to maintain the
20:20 pm	ETA hypothesis
20:30 pm	Acebes makes a public appearance to inform about the findings and the consideration of new hypothesis
21:30 pm	The King of Spain asks for unity, calmness and firmness in the struggle against terrorism without mentioning ETA
	The London newspaper *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* receives a letter in which a group linked to Al Qaeda claims the attacks

The media "story" of Madrid bombing

Friday	
5.15 am	The Police defuse a bomb collected with other personal belongings of passengers. Components of the device point to Al Qaeda hypothesis
11.30 am	Aznar does not rule out other hypotheses but maintains that the ETA hypothesis is the most logical
18:00 pm	Acebes reports the bag containing Islamic evidences, and reiterates the ETA hypothesis
18:30 pm	The terrorist group ETA denies responsability for the attacks
19:00 pm	Eleven million people demonstrate against terrorism in major Spanish cities
Saturday	
14:30 pm	Interior Minister does not rule out collaboration between groups
16:00 pm	Police arrests three Moroccans and two Indians
18:00 pm	Demonstrations in the Popular Party headquarters
19:30 pm	Someone calls Madrid regional TV reporting that there is a video tape in a bin near the M-30 Mosque
20:00 pm	Interior Minister's appearance reporting the arrests and the relation of these arrests to the mobile phone found in the backpack
20:30 pm	Leader of Popular Party's appearance
21:00 pm	Rubalcaba's (PSOE) appearance, denying PP accusations and, in turn, accusing PP of dishonesty
22:15 pm	Zaplana responds to the Socialist Party and says that the Government has been transparent
00:45 pm	Acebes's appearance: An alleged spokesman for Al Qaeda claims the attacks in a video
00:50 pm	The electoral board declares that the demonstrations outside PP headquarters are against electoral regulations
Sunday	
	77.2 percent of Spaniards go to the polls. PSOE's victory

The media "plot" of Madrid bombing

El País

El Mundo

- **Terrorist hell in Madrid**

  - Acebes suspects Al Qaeda without rejecting possible ETA involvement

- **Spaniards hit the streets**

  - People speak out against the Government, asking who was responsible for the massacre

  - Aznar and Acebes insist on ETA and the group denies it

- **All evidence points to Al Qaeda** -- Spain is voting under the cloud of the worst attack in its history

- **The day of infamy**

  - The government found a van with detonators and verses from Koram after confidently asserting ETA's responsability

- **Acebes, convinced that new evidence would prove ETA's responsability**

  - Millions of Spaniards to mobilize against terrorism

- **The first arrests link the slaughter to Islamic terrorism**

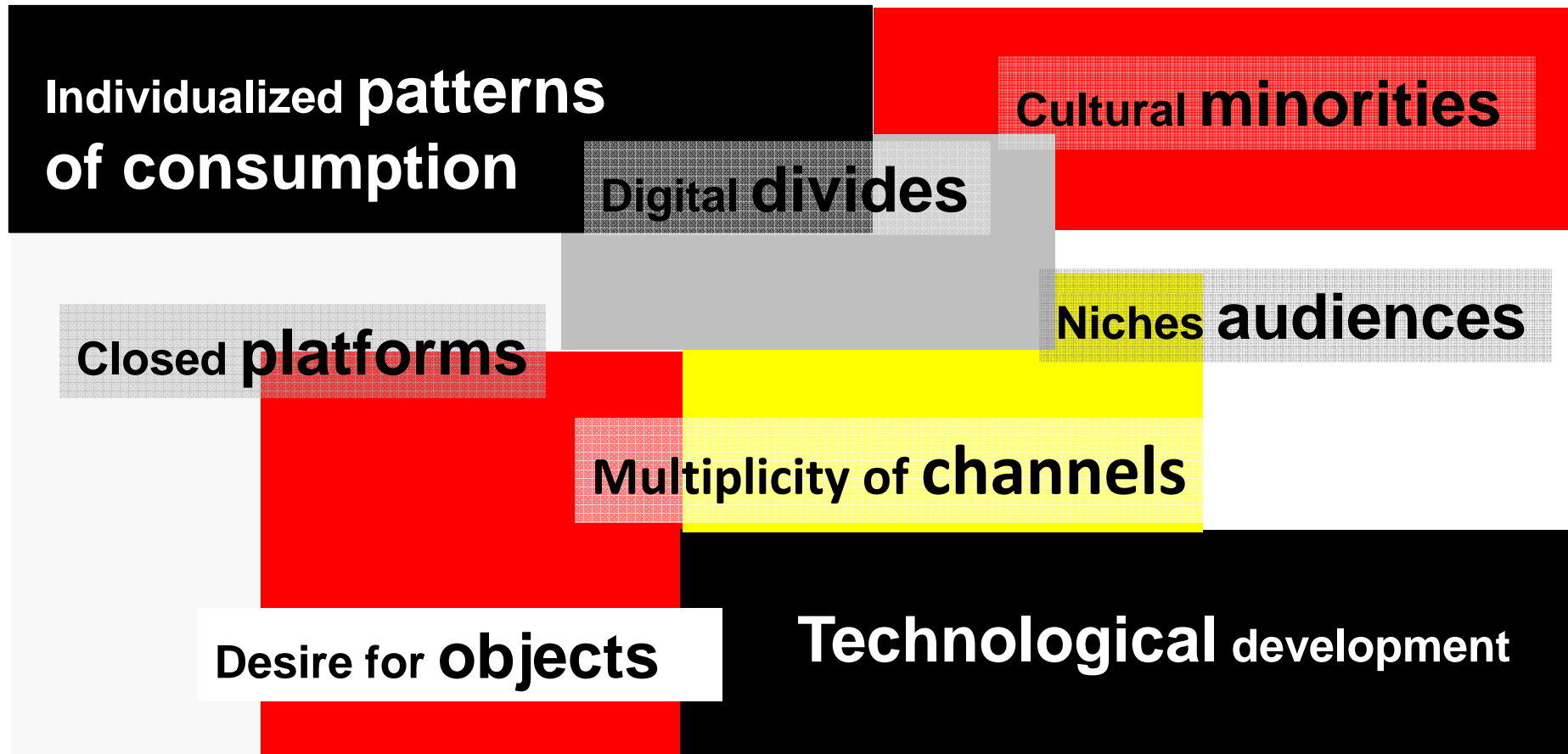 - Rajoy denounces acts of coercion against PP headquarters

Preliminary Conclusions

- The news of the Madrid bombing can be read as a narrative that reflects the binary structure of civil society

- The plot of M-11 linked the event to a narrative of evil where terrorists were placed on the profane side of civil discourse

- Aznar and Acebes were symbolically contaminated by a part of public opinion and the media that accused them of being anti-civic: deceptive, manipulative, and dishonest

  – The crucial function of **narrative time**

- Both newspapers, *El Mundo* y *El Papís*, and also both parties, the right and the left, embraced a common civil code, although they insisted, because of political interest, that the other side did not possess it

Case Study

Public and Commercial Television in Europe's Media Landscape

Audience Fragmentation: The Theory

Individualized **patterns of consumption**

Cultural **minorities**

Digital **divides**

Closed **platforms**

Niches **audiences**

Multiplicity of **channels**

Desire for **objects**

Technological development

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE
Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS)
European Commission

**Public, Commercial and Civil Television
in Europe's Media Landscape**

Narratives on Spanish Public Television in the New Media Landscape

New legitimating principles emerge from the Web:

- Far from being related to fragmentation, narratives speak of **collective expectation, community and mass-self communicated civil sphere**

#RTVE-of-everyone

Narratives on Spanish Public Television
in the New Media Landscape

"PP and PSOE agree on control of the RTVE news. There is only one possible public response: #do-not-vote-them, "#RTVE-of-everyone."

"If the directors of #RTVE-of-everyone (that we all pay) watch our TV (that we all pay), should we not make a streaming of their meetings?"