



# The Emergence of the Public

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**History of  
Information i103  
Geoff Nunberg**

**Feb. 12, 2009**



# Today's Puzzlers

1. Where and when ( $\pm 10$  years) was the first English coffeehouse established?





# Today's Puzzlers

2. What was the tree of Cracow and why was it called that?





## Today's Puzzlers

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4. What did Louis XV, Robert Hooke, and Samuel Pepys have in common?





# Today's Puzzlers

4. Who is the singer talking about and what is she saying?





## Today's Puzzlers



Mme. de Pompadour

4. Who is the singer talking about and what is she saying?

That a bastard strumpet  
Should get ahead in the court,  
That in love and in wine,  
Louis should seek some easy glory,  
Ah! there he is, ah! there he is  
He who doesn't have a care.



# Today's Itinerary

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Print in its context

The coffee-house & the 'virtuosi' – the beginnings of museums

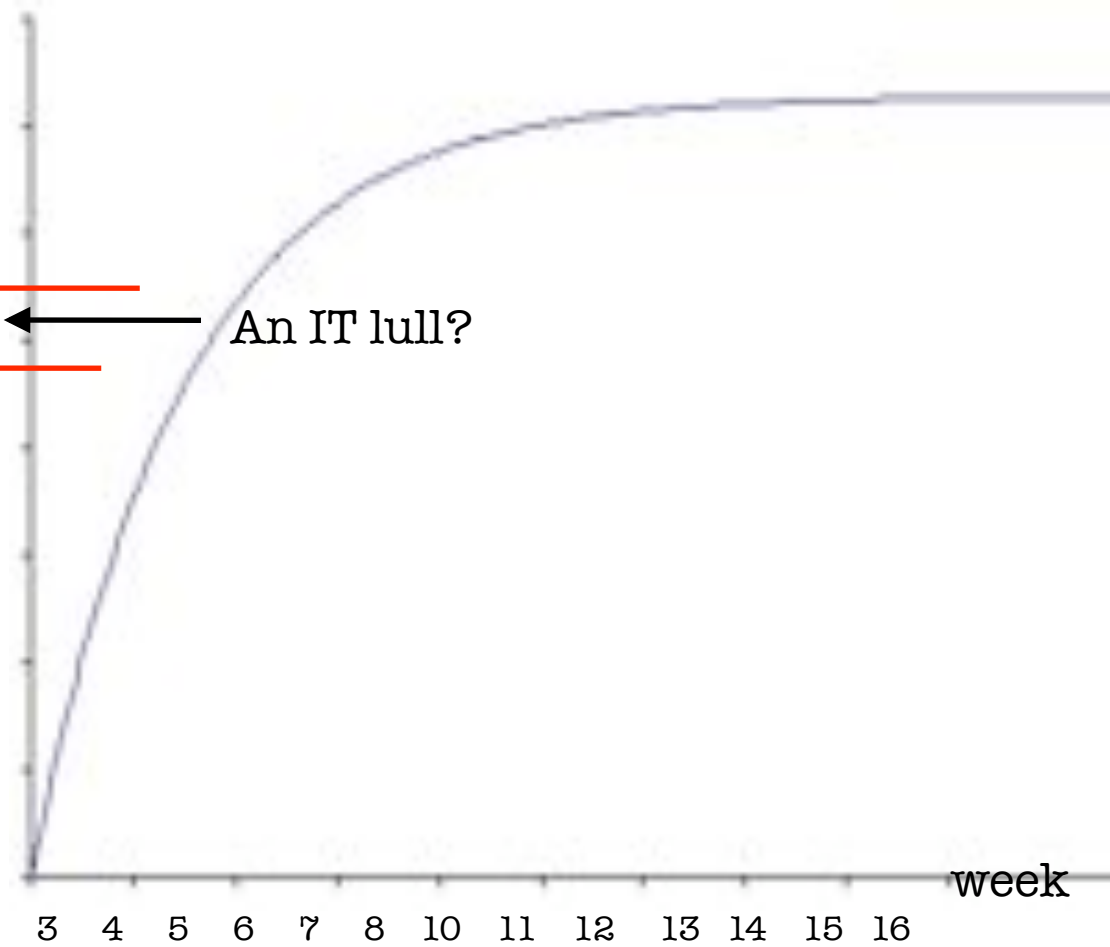
"News" and the public



# where we are



2009  
1980  
1950  
1900  
1800  
1700  
1600  
1200  
600  
400  
0  
500  
3000  
5000  
30,000  
50,000

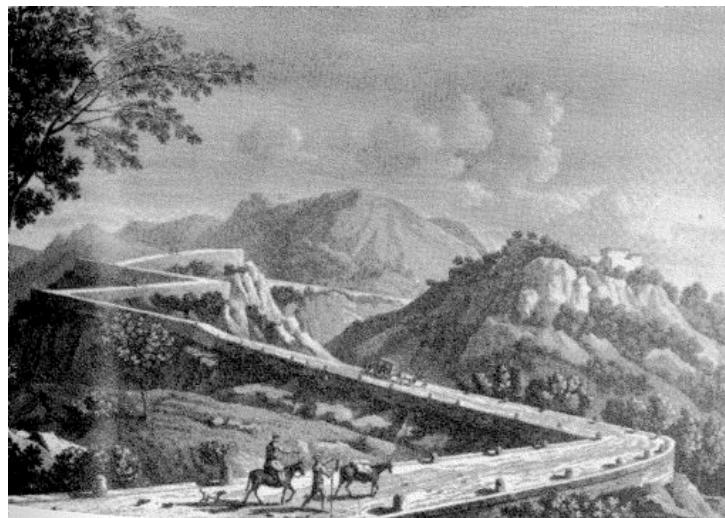
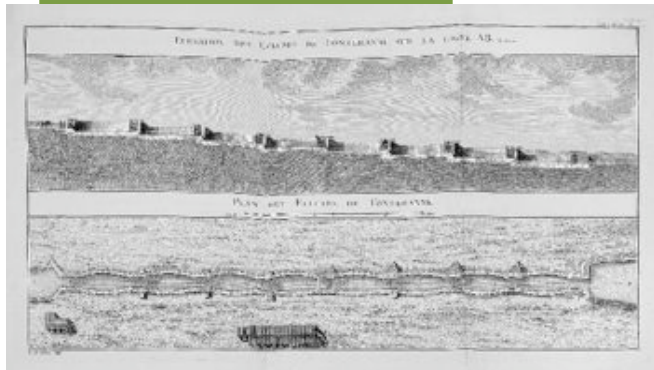






# 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c. Technology

Improved means of diffusion of information:





# The Emergence of the Modern "Informational System"

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Many, if not most, of the cultural phenomena of the modern world derive from [the 18th century] -- the periodical, the newspaper, the novel, the journalist, the critic, the public library, the concert, the public museum [*not to mention the dictionary and encyclopedia– GN*]. Perhaps most important of all, it was then that 'public opinion' came to be recognized as the ultimate arbiter in matters of taste and politics."--Tim Blanning, *The Culture of Power*



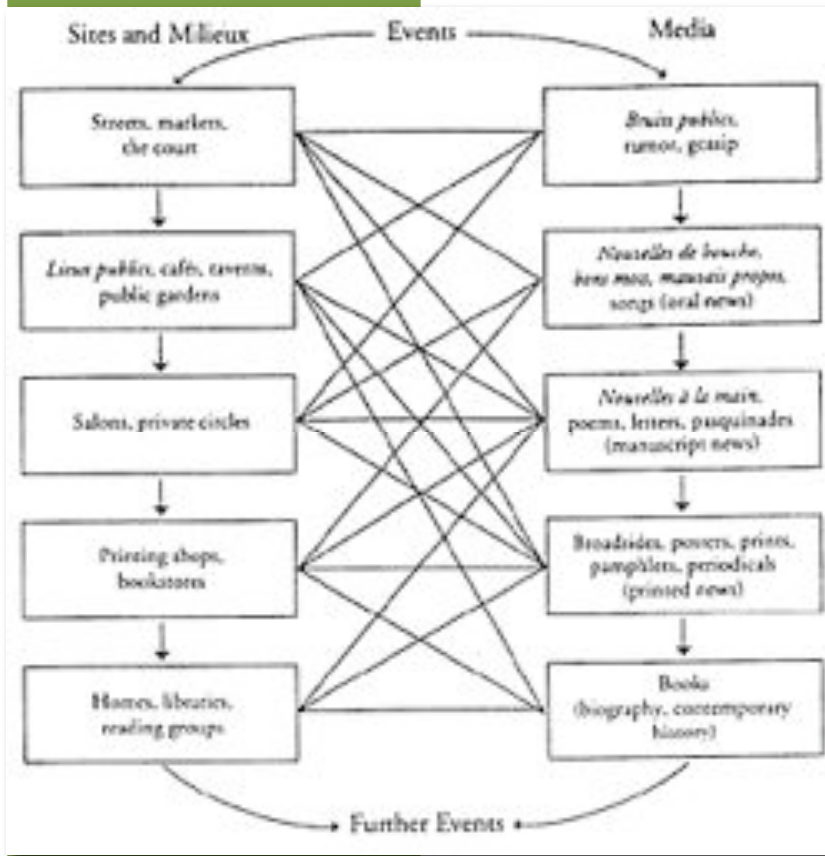
## The doctrine of supercession: "Ceci tuera cela"

The archdeacon silently considered the giant edifice, then with a sigh extended his right hand toward the book that was open on the table and his left hand toward Notre-Dame, casting a sad look from the book to the church. "Alas," he said, "This will kill that."





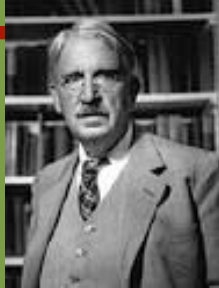
# Print, Writing, & Orality



"It makes no sense, I think, to separate printed from oral and written modes of communication, as we casually do when we speak of "print culture," because they were all bound together in a multi-media system." Robert Darnton



## All cultures are "multi-media"



Cf modern interaction of print/broadcast, intermediate oral forms...



"Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator. Publication is partial and the public which results is partially informed and formed until the meanings it purveys pass from mouth to mouth." John Dewey





# Coffeehouse Society



"The English have no settled Academies de Beaux-Esprits, as we have in Paris, but instead of such assemblies, the most ingenious persons ... meet either in places of promiscuous company, as coffee-house, or in private clubs, in taverns."--Abel Boyer, *Letters of Wit*, 1701

The coffeehouses bundled news and coffee together as a means of attracting their customers – Brian Cowan



# Coffeehouse Society

A loathsome Potion, not yet understood,  
Syrrop of soot, or Essence of Old Shoes,  
Dasht with Diurnals, and the Books of News?  
Broadside poem, 1663





## Coffeehouse Society: The "Virtuosi"

"Coffee-houses make all sorts of people sociable, the rich and the poor meet together, as also do the learned and unlearned. It improves arts, merchandize, and all other knowledge; for here an inquisitive man, that aims at good learning, may get more in an evening than he shall by books in a month... I have heard a worthy friend of mine ...who was of good learning ... say, that he did think that coffee-houses had improved useful knowledge, as much as the universities have, and spake no way of slight to them neither."-- John Houghton, *Collections*, 1701





## Knowledge and the "Virtuosi"



"[T]he reverence for antiquity, and the authority of men who have been esteemed great in philosophy ... have retarded men from advancing in science..." (Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 1620)



"He Trafficks to all places, and has his Correspondents in every part of the World; yet his Merchandizes serve not to promote our Luxury, nor encrease our Trade, and neither enrich the Nation, nor himself. A Box or two of Pebbles or Shells, and a dozen of Wasps, Spiders and Caterpillers are his Cargoe. He values a Camelion, or Salamander's Egg, above all the Sugars and Spices of the West and East-Indies... He visits Mines, Cole-pits, and Quarries frequently, but not for that sordid end that other Men usually do, viz, gain; but for the sake of the fossile Shells and Teeth that are sometimes found there." (Mary Astell, *Character of a Virtuoso*, 1696)



## Knowledge and the "Virtuosi"

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"I content myself with the speculative part of swimming; I care not for the practical. I seldom bring anything to use.... Knowledge is my ultimate end."

Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, in *The Virtuoso*, by Thomas Shadwell, 1676



# New & Expanded Print Forms

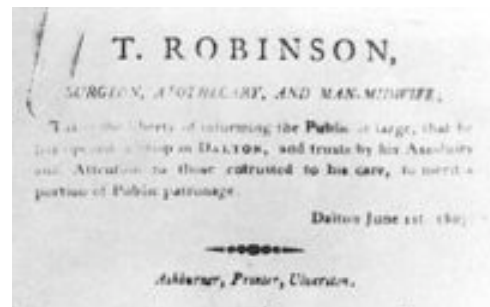
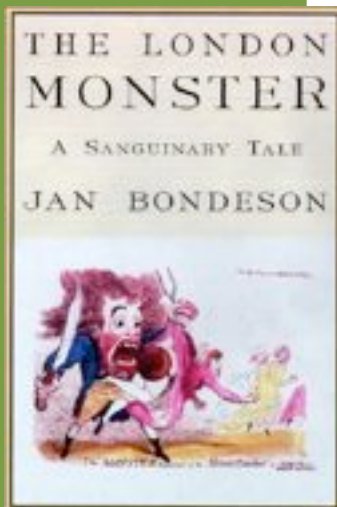
17th-18th c. see rise of chapbooks, broadsides, ballads, almanacs, pamphlets, etc.





# Expansion of Print

Also: earliest printed handbills, labels, posters, handbills, forms, indentures, receipts, tickets, etc.





# The Rise of the Periodical Press



"All Englishmen are great newsmongers. Workmen habitually begin the day by going to coffee-rooms in order to read the latest news. I have often seen shoeblacks and men of that class club together to purchase a farthing newspaper" --César de Sassure, 1726



# An Age of Growing Use of Print

## Some indicators:

### Size of personal libraries

Personal library of typical French magistrate, 15<sup>th</sup> c. 60 books

Montaigne, late 16<sup>th</sup> c. 1000 books

Montesquieu, early 18<sup>th</sup> 3000 books

### Annual sale of newspapers:

1750: 7 million

1810: 24 million

### Increase in number of printed genres

Eighteenth Century: Earliest appearance of printed posters, theater bills, newspapers, handbills, labels, tickets, marriage certificates, papers of indenture, receipts, etc.



# An Age of Growing Use of Print

Growing numbers of book titles, though not strictly linear:

Number of titles printed in England: (from Wm. St. Clair, *Reading Nation*)

1630s	600
1640s	1,600
1650s	1,200
1660s	800
1670s	1,000
1680s	1,500
1690s	1,400

1700-50	500
1750-89	600
1790-1800	800
1800-1810	800
By 1827	1,000 ("rising fast")



# The Rise of the Periodical Press



1695 -- abolition of the Licensing Act  
1702 -- appearance of the *Daily Courant*, usually considered 1st daily newspaper in England

Printed on one leaf, with blank side (like earlier news-letters) for insertion of handwritten additions.





## Growth of Printing

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Licensing Act permitted only 20 printers in England.  
By 1724, 75+ printers in London, 28 in the provinces;  
by 1785, 185 in London.



# The Rise of the Periodical Press



1709: the *Tatler* first published by Richard Steele, under the pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff

1711: Steele and Joseph Addison found the *Spectator*, with contributions from various members of the "Spectator Club."

Circulation around 3000, but Addison estimates (improbably) that each edition is read by 60,000 Londoners





## press coverage



1618-48, <i>Corantos</i> , etc	1704 <i>Review</i>
1621 <i>Butter &amp; Bourne Newsbook</i> ....	
1637 weekly public post newsletters, diurnals, etc	1709 <i>Tatler</i> 18 papers 35 per week
1665 <i>Oxford Gazette</i>	1710 <i>Examiner</i>
1695 <i>Flying Post</i>	1711 <i>Spectator</i>
1696 <i>Post-Boy, Post Man, Mercury</i>	1713 <i>Guardian</i>
1702 <i>Daily Courant</i> <i>Observator</i>	<i>Mercator</i> <i>British Merchant</i>

"Whereas the great Glut of News-Papers, that are of late publish'd on Saturdays, is grown almost as a common Nuisance ..."

-- *British Mercury*, 1715



# cabinet government

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## **cabinet papers**

*London Gazette*

*Review*

*Examiner*

*Post-Boy*

*Mercator*



## **in-house journalists**

*Defoe*

*Swift ...*



## Economic Shifts

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And what can we expect that's brave and great,  
From a poor needy Wretch, that writes to eat?  
Who the success of the next Play must wait  
For Lodging, Food, and Cloaths, and whose chief  
care  
Is how to sponge for the next Meal, and where?  
John Oldham, 1679



## The "Age of Authors"

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The present age... may be styled, with great propriety, the Age of Authors; for, perhaps, there was never a time when men of all degrees of ability, of every kind of education, of every profession and employment were posting with ardour so general to the press...

Samuel Johnson, 1763



## Economic Shifts

Modern notions of intellectual property, publishing, authorship, etc.

Cf Oliver Goldsmith, 1761, "The Distress of a Hired Writer":



"...that fatal revolution whereby writing is converted to a mechanic trade; and booksellers, instead of the great, become the patrons and paymasters of men of genius... Can any thing more cramp and depress true genius, than to write under the direction of one whose learning does not extend beyond the multiplication-table and the London Evening-post?"



## Economic Shifts

### But Goldsmith adds:

For my own part, were I to buy an hat, I would not have it from a stocking-maker but an hatter; were I to buy shoes, I should not go to the taylor for that purpose. It is just so with regard to wit; did I for my life desire to be well served, I would apply only to those who made it their trade, and lived by it.







## Economic Shifts



Writers (ostensibly) freed from direct dependence on patronage. Symbolized by Samuel Johnson's rejection of Lord Chesterfield's offer of patronage for the *Dictionary*:





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Writers (ostensibly) freed from direct dependence on patronage. Symbolized by Samuel Johnson's rejection of Lord Chesterfield's offer of patronage for the *Dictionary*:



Is not a Patron, my Lord,  
one who looks with  
unconcern on a man  
struggling for life in the  
water, and, when he has  
reached ground, encumbers  
him with help?



# Emergence of the Public

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"[In the late seventeenth century] . . . a new cultural space developed, . . . a 'public sphere' in which private individuals came together to form a whole greater than the sum of the parts. By exchanging information, ideas, and criticism, these individuals created a cultural actor -- the public -- which has dominated European culture ever since. Many, if not most, of the cultural phenomena of the modern world derive from [this period] -- the periodical, the newspaper, the novel, the journalist, the critic, the public library, the concert, the public museum.. Perhaps most important of all, it was then that 'public opinion' came to be recognized as the ultimate arbiter in matters of taste and politics."--Tim Blanning, *The Culture of Power*



## Defining "the Public"

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### **public, n.**

Am. Her: The community or the people as a whole. **2.** A group of people sharing a common interest: *the reading public*.

OED: The community as an aggregate, but not in its organized capacity



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Ratio of occurrence in major newspapers:

<i>the American people/public</i>	4 to 1
<i>the Russian people/public</i>	3.5 to 1
<i>Iraqi people/public</i>	25 to 1

Goog Scholar hits for *the 19<sup>th</sup>/nineteenth-century public*: 1300;  
*the medieval public* 128



# What interests do members of a "public" share?

*Am. Her:* A group of people sharing a common interest: *the reading public.*

Google hits for:

*the reading public (352k); the filmgoing/movie going public (152k hits); tv-/television watching p. (755); the blogging public (1090 hits)*

*BUT the stamp-collecting public (25); the fishing public (2); the bowling public (1)*

"At AFFTA, we represent the industry's interests to the fishing public, legislators, and the media."

"Most, if any of these programs provide little or no cross marketing or local brand recognition, so the bowling public has no idea where to go."



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Occurrences in major newspapers, 2005:

<i>American people</i>	2660
<i>American public</i>	1350 (1:2)
<i>Iraqi people</i>	940
<i>Iraqi public</i>	37 (1:25)

cf. ? *The medieval British public*.

**“The press created the public”: G. Tarde**



## Publics and "Public Opinion"

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End of c. 17 (Britain): emergence of new social domain independent of state and private life: new role for "public opinion" to replace and complement authority of state. "Mediates between society and the state" (Habermas)





## Publics and "Public Opinion"

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"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. 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." Jürgen Habermas



# Social Background: Who were the public?

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## "the Town":

"a class of comparatively educated and polished persons, large enough to form a public, and not so large as to degenerate into a mob, distinct from the old feudal nobility, and regarding the life of the nobles with a certain contempt as rustic and brutal, more refined again than that class of hangers-on to the Court, of merchants and shopkeepers stamped with the peculiarities of their business..." Leslie Stephen



# Coffeehouse Society

"The coffee-house... admits of no distinction of persons, but gentleman, mechanic, lord, and scoundrel mix, and are all of a piece, as if they were resolved into their very first principles."  
Samuel Butler, 1667





# Coffeehouse Society

Now being entered, there's no needing  
Of compliments or gentle breeding,  
For you may seat you any where,  
There's no respect of persons there.

*A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses,*  
1661





# The emergence of a public discourse



"Rank and privilege" in theory set aside, and discourse becomes ostensibly impersonal:

"...when any work is addressed to the public, though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances." David Hume, 1757



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Cf modern sports-talk radio



## Publics and "Public Opinion"

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"It is certainly right and prudent to consult the public opinion. ... If the public opinion did not happen to square with mine; if, after pointing out to them the danger, they did not see it in the same light with me, or if they conceived that another remedy was preferable to mine, I should consider it as my due to my king, due to my Country, due to my honour to retire ... but one thing is clear, that I ought to give the public the means of forming an opinion." Charles James Fox, 1792

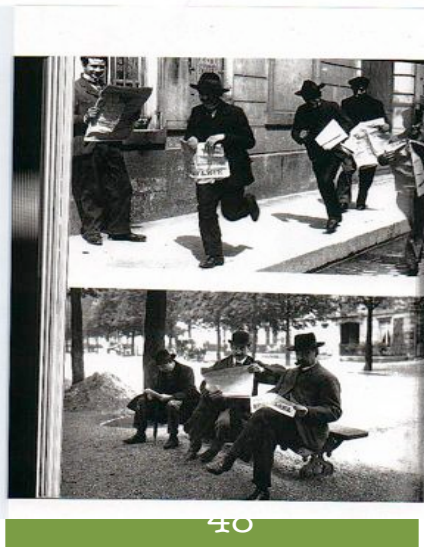


# Print and the Creation of "Imagined Communities"



[Britain] has become a nation of readers. --Samuel Johnson, 1781

The newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life...creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations. -- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.





## Assignment 4: Due Mon. 3/16

The Royal Society was founded in England in 1660. It still exists today and claims to be the oldest scientific society. Thomas Sprat (1635–1713), the author of the principal work you have to read, was a student of one of the founders. He joined the Society in 1663 and was asked to write the Society's history. In this book, then, we have a contemporary, insider's account of the founding of a very influential society, one that people argue was at the center of the "scientific revolution." Henry Stubbe (or Stubbes, 1605–1678) was another contemporary, but embittered by the Royal Society's failure to take some of his "scientific observations" seriously he turned into one of its major opponents. His *Legends No Histories ...*, from which you are to read a short section, was written as a direct response to Sprat's book. (His opposition wasn't purely a result of his bitterness. He had been a companion of the great philosopher Thomas Hobbes and Hobbes was a principled opponent of the Society and its methods.)

## **Assignment 4:**

### **Due Mon. 3/16**

The texts are a challenge, but manageable with patience. Take them slowly--neither is very long. Note passages that don't make sense to discuss in class, but keep on reading. As you go on, what is at first confusing may become clear (or irrelevant). In the section of Sprat you are to read (beginning "I come now to the Second Period of my Narration" on p. 60), Sprat lays out a little of the underlying philosophy of the society, beginning with their "resolutions" and their "purpose"--this is the "Model" (or method) of scientific investigation which he thinks is better than any other that has come before (which he has spent a good deal of the earlier pages criticizing). Question: As he explains this model, does Sprat seem to you to be talking about science as we think of it today? Provide some evidence from the text to support your view

# Assignment 4: Due Mon. 3/16

## The HISTORY of the

preceptive idea is not in proper, for I suppose  
 one to undergo: For it would not very desire too  
 much of such Time: but it would grow, to make  
 them able more successful in Philosophy, than in  
 some others, by being long accustomed to command  
 the opinions, and direct the senses, of their Schol-  
 ars. And as to the other particular, the large ex-  
 pence, which he is oblig'd to the maintenance of his  
 College: It is visible, that it is a difficult thing, to  
 draw money into willing to draw an equal sum  
 out, which had long been in another place, or to  
 send it out of their own parts, to the supporting  
 of any new Design, while it does nothing but  
 promise, and hope: that, in such a case, it were (it  
 may be) more advisable, to begin upon a small stock,  
 and to add by degrees, than to spend great things  
 at first, and to wait too much before time, all in  
 one lump together. However, it was not the want-  
 ing money: but, that the change of the  
 Age, that is, the desire. His project is to be like  
 himself, and to make such of the  
 other particulars of his design, the Royal society is  
 now passing in practice.

I came next to the second Part of my Narra-  
 tion: when it is possible, to give an account of what  
 they did, all they were publickly oppos'd, discourag'd,  
 and oppos'd by Royal Power. And I said, that I  
 shall here produce many things, which will prove  
 their attempts to be worthy of all Mans encourage-  
 ment: though they was oppos'd to the interest,  
 may be resolv'd the frequency is still above the  
 building, than the frame itself. But in my return  
 upon this Part, being come to the top of the Hill, I  
 began to smile, and to apprehend the greatness of

## ROYAL SOCIETY.

my situation. For I perceive that I have had my Narra-  
 tion finish'd, by so long, and so excellent a speech,  
 as is not to be wonder'd at, which shall be  
 a great all the more, that I have acknowledg'd  
 to have been ignorant. Now, though this were really  
 so, as the case is, yet I question, how it will  
 look, after it has been deliver'd by my unskillful  
 hands. But the design of my thought to have de-  
 scrib'd me in the beginning. It is now too late to look  
 back: and I currently apply my self to what past to-  
 day, which a Great Man has promis'd to be impossi-  
 ble to see done, than there is time to expect  
 to finish it, in any other language. To this I  
 must give the best, and rest my self to leave  
 my Countrymen, that they would interpret my fail-  
 ings to be such as they are, and not  
 condemn, or differ I could not will: and that they  
 would take the measure of the Royal society, not  
 from my late description of it; or from the  
 name, and reputation, of some of those Men, of  
 whom it is compos'd.

I will leave, in the full place, several more few  
 Words, the whole piece of their design: which  
 I shall here leave to their own hands, to make  
 their purpose to be done, to make publick benefit,  
 of all the Works of Nature, as yet, which concern  
 within their reach: that in the perfect Age, and per-  
 fection, may be able to put a mark on the Earth,  
 which have been thought of by long persecutions:  
 to reduce the Truths, that have been neglect'd: to  
 publish them, which are already known, to more  
 reasons: and to make the way more publick, to  
 what remains unobserv'd. This is the compass of their  
 Design.

1687. V.  
 of most of  
 the kind  
 1777

