



The Emergence of the Public



**History of
Information i103
Geoff Nunberg**

Feb. 11, 2010



Today's Itinerary

From Gutenberg to Samuel Morse: An IT lull?

The birth of the modern informational system

The Interpenetration of the spoken, the written, and print

The salon, the coffee-house & the 'virtuosi'

The spreading use of print

Emergence of the public

"News" and public opinion



Today's Teasers

What was this tree called and why?





Today's Teasers

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



Today's Teasers

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





Today's Teaser

Who is the singer talking about?



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 Teasers



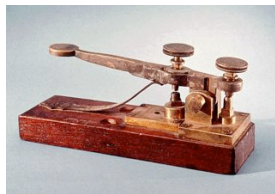
Mme. de Pompadour

Who is the singer talking about?

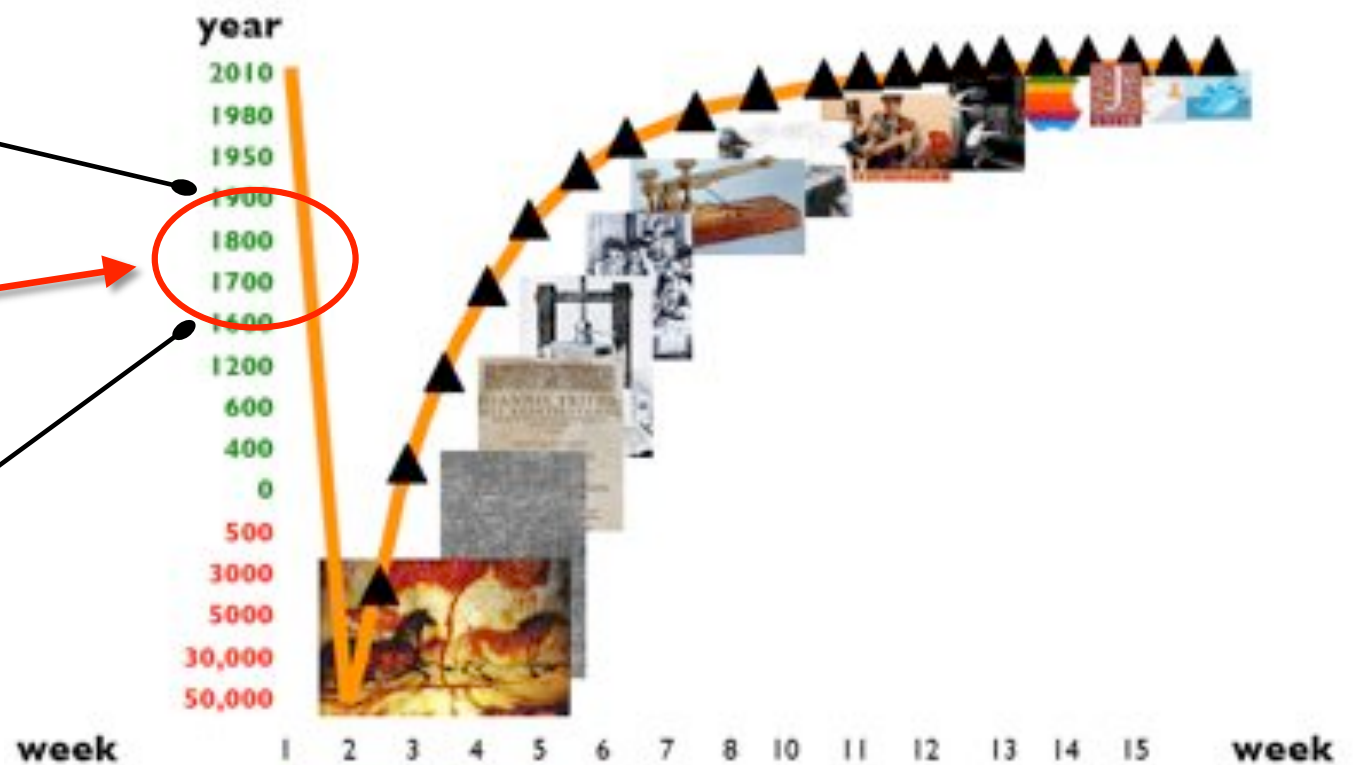
That a bastard strumpet
Should get ahead in the court,
That in love and in wine,
Louis should seek some easy glory,
Ah! there he is, ah! there he is
He who doesn't have a care.



Where We Are



an IT lull?



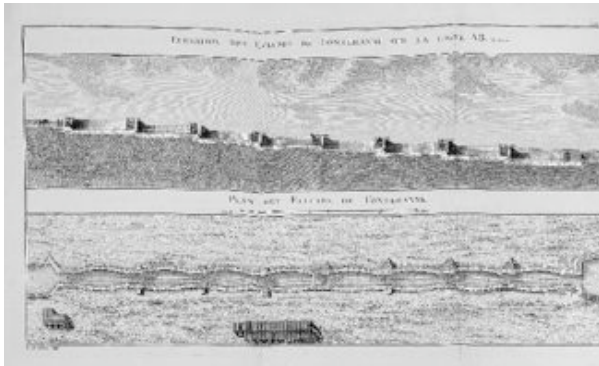


The Emergence of the Modern "Informational System"



17th-18th c. Technology

Improved means of diffusion of information:





The Emergence of the Modern "Informational System"

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 advertising, intellectual property, propaganda, the scientific society (and science itself), the modern dictionary and encyclopedia, etc.— 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 political & social significance of "information"



"Print culture" – a multimedia society



The doctrine of supercession: "Ceci tuera cela"

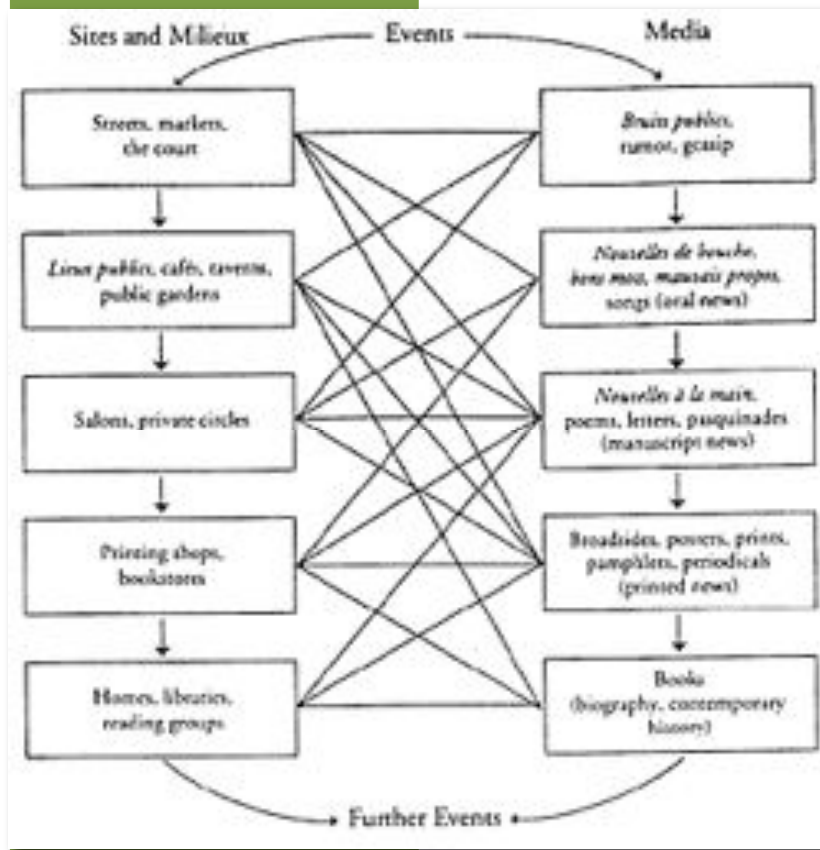
The archdeacon silently considered the giant edifice, then with a sigh extended his right hand toward the book that was open on the table and his left hand toward Notre-Dame, casting a sad look from the book to the church. "Alas," he said, "This will kill that."





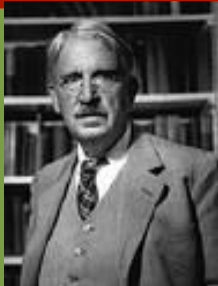
Print, Writing, & Orality

"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 technologized cultures are "multi-media"

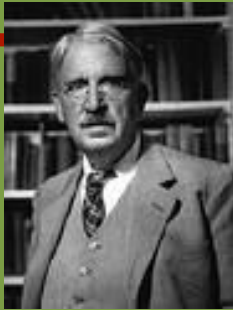


Cf modern interaction of print/broadcast,
intermediate oral forms...

"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



All technologized 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

But where is "mouth-to-mouth" in the age of Facebook & Twitter?

Cafe owner asks patrons to log off, talk

[« Back to Article](#) | [Buy Photos](#) | [More Photo Galleries](#)





New Contexts of Communication



The birth of the salon



The salon (or *conversazione*): gathering held at (usually fashionable) houses with mix of society, artists, writers, scholars & discuss politics, literatures, etc.





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

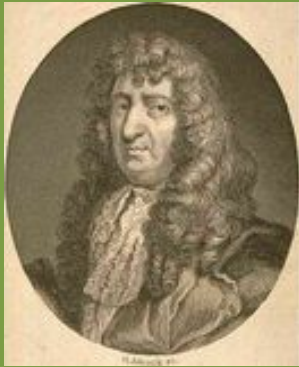
"The coffeehouses bundled news and coffee together as a means of attracting their customers" – Brian Cowan

A loathsome Potion, not yet understood,
Syrrop of soot, or Essence of Old Shooes,
Dash'd with Diurnals, and the Books of News?
Broadside poem, 1663





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



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



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 Caterpillars 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"



"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



The spreading use of print



Growing Use of Print

Size of personal libraries

Personal library of typical French magistrate, 15th c. 60 books

Montaigne, late 16th c. 1000 books

Montesquieu, early 18th 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") |

New & Expanded Print Forms

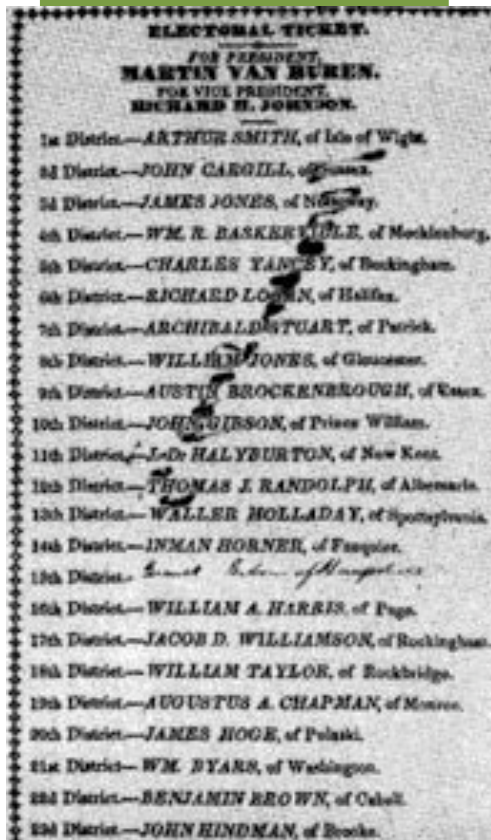
17th-18th c. see rise of chapbooks, broadsides, ballads, almanacs, pamphlets, etc.



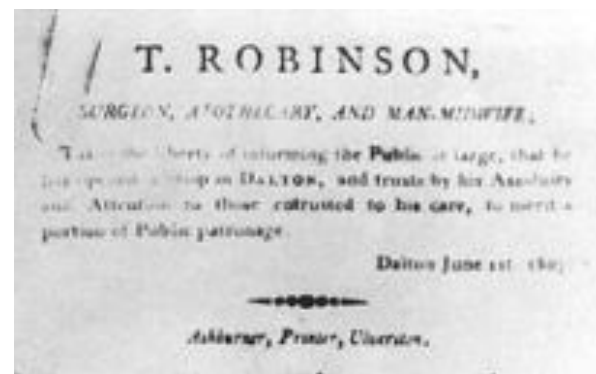


New & Expanded Print Forms

17th-18th c. see rise of chapbooks, broadsides, ballads, almanacs, pamphlets, etc. Also: earliest printed handbills, labels, posters, handbills, forms, indentures, receipts, tickets, ballots, etc.



US Ballot 1840





The Rise of the Periodical Press

Europe, 16-17c

Venice: *Notizie Scritte* [bought for a "gazetto"]

Netherlands: *Nieuwe Tydinghe*, 1605 (weekly from 1617 and thrice weekly from 1621)

Frankfurt: *Frankfurter Postzeitung*, 1615

England: *Coranto or Weekly Newes*, 1622

France: *Gazette de France* 1631

Turin: *Successi del mondo*, 1645

Leipzig: *Einkommendeg Zeitung*, daily 1650

Spain: *Gaceta Nueva*, monthly, daily 1661

British America: *Publick Occurrences*, 1690

Russia: *Vedomosti*, 35 x per year, 1702



The Rise of the Periodical Press

1695 -- abolition of the Licensing Act

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

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.





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





The Rise of the Periodical Press

1695 -- abolition of the Licensing Act

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

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.





The Rise of the Periodical Press

"Any Londoner who wanted to read his newspaper in English had a dozen to choose from. On Monday he could select A perfect Diurnall, Certain Informations, or Aulicus ... Tuesday he had The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer; Wednesday, The Weekly Account or the newly revived A Continuation ... and Thursday a choice between Britanicus and Civicus. Friday brought forth three papers ... On Saturday the reader either acquired The True Informer or went newspaperless. On Sunday he rested."

Frank, Beginnings of the English Newspaper



The invention of "news"

"We had no such thing as printed newspapers, in those days, to spread rumours and reports of things; and to improve them by the invention of men, as I have lived to see practised since. But such things as those were gathered from letters of merchants, and others, who corresponded abroad, and from them was handed about by word of mouth only; so that things did not spread instantly over the whole nation as they do now. But it seems that the Government had a true account of it, and several councils were held, about ways to prevent its coming over; but all was kept very private."--Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Years*





What makes for "news"



Seriality

Periodicity

periodical, journal, daily, weekly, monthly, annual...

Currency

courant, postvoice,

Independence

intelligence(r), informer, observer, spectator, guardian

Source

Lloyd's News, Defoe's Review ...

Completeness

full, complete, entire ("all the news...")



Spectator (1710)...

Thus I live in the world rather as a Spectator of mankind than as one of the species; by which means I have made myself a speculative statesman, soldier, merchant, and artisan, without ever meddling with any practical part in life.... I never espoused any part with violence, and am resolved to observe an exact neutrality between the Whigs and Tories, unless I shall be forced to declare myself by the hostilities of either side. In short I have acted in all the parts of my life as a looker-on, which is the character I intend to preserve in this paper.



form



1691, *Athenian Mercury*

1693, *Ladies Mercury*

1695, *Flying Post*

1696, *Post Man*



before the year 1715 a newly founded newspaper
[excluding Dailies] ... would be printed in the
format and style originated by Robert Baldwin for
The Post Man of 1696.

Morison



Does news makes the people uppity?

"Lackeys, stable lads, odd-job men, gardeners and porters sit together and chatter about the news in the public prints... So they often think themselves better than the town mayor because they think they know a lot more than he does about every matter of state" Steiler, *The Pleasure and Utility of Newspapers*, 1695

[illegible][illegible]



The "Age of Authors"



Emergence of modern notions of intellectual property, publishing, authorship, etc.

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

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*:





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*:

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?





Economic Shifts

"Writing is become a very considerable branch of the English commerce." Defoe, 1725

Samuel Johnson receives £1575 advance for the *Dictionary*; David Hume receives £1400 for one volume of *Hist. of Britain*; £6000 paid for copyright of account of voyages of Captain Cook.

"Sir, if you talk of it as an object of commerce, it will be gainful; if as a book that is to increase human knowledge, I believe there will be not much of that." Johnson to Boswell



Emergence of the Public



Emergence of the Public

"[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"

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

But definitions ignore the participation in collective discourse via the media, concern with common social & political values.



Defining "the Public"

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

But definitions ignore the participation in collective discourse via the media, concern with common social & political values.

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 nineteenth-century public*: 1300; *the medieval public* 128

The reading public vs. the stamp-collecting public



Publics and "Public Opinion"

"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?

"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

The "public sphere" as an idealization...



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 emnity 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

"Civility: of conversing in quiet one with another, without being ingag'd in the passions, and madness of that dismal Age."

Sprat, *History of the Royal Society*, 1667



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 emnity 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

Cf modern sport-talk radio...



Publics and "Public Opinion"



"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*.

