

5HUM0271 lecture 3: The politics of sociability and the 'public sphere'

Structure of the lecture:

- Coffee houses and sociability
- Habermas's public sphere
- The press

The coffee house –

c.1650 – first coffee house in England (allegedly) opened in Oxford; by 1739, London alone had 551 coffee houses.

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962)

- Conceptual framework
- Shift in power
- Rational, critical discourse = →
'.....',
- New arenas of communication:

A culture of association and a new form of politics - sociability

The press:

1695 – Licensing Act lapses

By 1740 there were about 400 printing outlets in nearly 200 towns. In the 1620s there were 6000; in the 1710s, 21,000 titles were published in England; by the 1790s, this had risen to over 56,000.¹

244 provincial newspapers were started in 55 different towns during the eighteenth century.

By 1760 Londoners had access to four daily newspapers, and a further half-dozen published three evenings a week – 3 to 5000 copies an issue. 244 provincial newspapers were started in 55 different towns during the eighteenth century; by 1760, the provincial papers were selling a total of 200,000 copies a week

rise of the novel – Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* of 1740 went through 5 editions in 12 months; Henry Fielding's *Amelia* of 1751 sold 5000 in its first week.²

The Tatler, 1709

Gentleman's Magazine

¹ Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 73, 86.

² Porter, *Enlightenment*, p. 73.

***The Spectator*, 1711-14**

Task 1: Read this extract from no.10, 12 March 1711, 'The Reception of *The Spectator*', and consider why historians have used this paper as an example of the bourgeois public sphere:

...It is with much Satisfaction that I hear this great City inquiring Day by Day after these my Papers, and receiving my Morning Lectures with a becoming Seriousness and Attention. My Publisher tells me, that there are already Three Thousand of them distributed every Day: So that if I allow Twenty Readers to every Paper, which I look upon as a modest Computation, I may reckon about Threescore thousand Disciples in *London* and *Westminster*, who I hope will take care to distinguish themselves from the thoughtless Herd of their ignorant and unattentive Brethren. Since I have raised to myself so great an Audience, I shall spare no Pains to make their Instruction agreeable, and their Diversion useful. For which Reasons I shall endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible, both Ways find their account in the Speculation of the Day....

Problems of the 'public sphere' model

1. Coffee houses not opposed to
2. Nor were coffee houses.....
3. More general problems with the 'public/private' distinction.....
4. Who was excluded from the public sphere?.....

Further reading:

Brian Cowan, 'Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere', *Eighteenth-century Studies*, 37.3 (2004)

Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness and the interpretation of the British Eighteenth century', *Historical Journal*, 45.4 (Dec 2002), 869-98 [Historiographical review]

Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), chs. 10 and 12.

Iain McCalman, *Radical underworld: prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (2nd edn. Oxford, 1993)

Sources: *The Spectator* - <http://meta.montclair.edu/spectator/>

For a lighter read, see:

<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/8/coffeehouse.php>

History of the newspaper -

<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/news/concisehistbritnews/britnews18th/index.html>