

## Introducing Book Networks and Cultural Capital: Space, Society and the Nation

Leslie Howsam

Volume 2, numéro 1, 2010

Book Networks and Cultural Capital: Space, Society and the Nation  
Réseaux du livre et capital culturel : territoire, société et nation

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/045311ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Groupe de recherche et d'étude sur le livre au Québec

ISSN

1920-602X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce document

Howsam, L. (2010). Introducing Book Networks and Cultural Capital: Space, Society and the Nation. *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, 2(1).

### Résumé de l'article

Le premier article, « Introducing Book Networks and Cultural Capital: Space, Society & the Nation » vise en premier lieu à expliquer le thème de ce troisième numéro de *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, codirigé par Leslie Howsam et Jane McLeod. Ce thème s'est dégagé d'un colloque de l'Association canadienne pour l'étude du livre / Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture qui a eu lieu en 2009, à Ottawa, dans le cadre du Congrès des sciences humaines. En second lieu, on y trouve une mise en contexte des huit articles que compte le numéro et un bref aperçu de ceux-ci qui fait ressortir une analyse tripartite des réseaux : ceux des sociétés dont les membres sont en interaction directe, ceux des « communautés imaginées » dans lesquelles la lecture a une dimension identitaire et, enfin, ceux, anachroniques, qui surgissent lorsque les livres sont relus et réinterprétés sur une période de plusieurs décennies, voire de quelques siècles.

# INTRODUCING BOOK NETWORKS AND CULTURAL CAPITAL: Space, Society and the Nation

Leslie HOWSAM  
University of Windsor

ABSTRACT

The opening article, “Introducing Book Networks and Cultural Capital: Space, Society & the Nation,” has two purposes. The first is to explicate the theme of this third issue of *Mémoires du Livre / Studies in Print Culture*, co-edited by Leslie Howsam and Jane McLeod. That theme emerges from a conference where several of the papers originated, a meeting of the Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture / Association canadienne pour l’étude de l’histoire du livre, held in 2009 in Ottawa at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. The second purpose is to contextualize and provide brief introductions to the eight articles, linking them in a tripartite analysis of networks – face-to-face societies, imagined communities where reading creates or reinforces identities, and the anachronistic networks that emerge when books are re-read and re-interpreted across a span of decades, or even centuries.

RÉSUMÉ

Le premier article, « Introducing Book Networks and Cultural Capital: Space, Society & the Nation » vise en premier lieu à expliquer le thème de ce troisième numéro de *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, codirigé par Leslie Howsam et Jane McLeod. Ce thème s’est dégagé d’un colloque de l’Association canadienne pour l’étude du livre / Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture qui a eu lieu en 2009, à Ottawa, dans le cadre du Congrès des sciences humaines. En second lieu, on y trouve une mise en contexte des huit articles que compte le numéro et un bref aperçu de ceux-ci qui fait ressortir une analyse tripartite des réseaux : ceux des sociétés dont les membres sont en interaction directe, ceux des « communautés imaginées » dans lesquelles la lecture a une dimension identitaire et, enfin, ceux, anachroniques, qui surgissent lorsque les livres sont relus et réinterprétés sur une période de plusieurs décennies, voire de quelques siècles.

The study of book cultures has drawn extensively upon the concepts of book networks and of cultural capital, as well as ideas about space, society and nation. Pierre Bourdieu and others have written about how publishers and authors create and manipulate cultural capital, in their several “fields” of literary production”. Equally influential, Robert Darnton has offered a “communication circuit” to demonstrate how authors, publishers and readers – and others – shape and even control each other’s experience of books and periodicals in the cultures in which they live. D. F. McKenzie, with his theory of bibliography – the study of books as material objects – reconceptualized as “the sociology of text” has brought textual scholarship into juxtaposition with studies of society. Meanwhile studies of book culture have been mapped in spatial terms, both with conventional maps (Blayney, Raven 2001) and with computer-generated Geographic Information Systems. (MacDonald and Black) And historians of the book have engaged with Benedict Anderson’s idea of nations as “imagined communities,” not least because Anderson’s communities are made up of individuals who read the same novel, or the same newspaper, and hence identify themselves as people of the same nation. (Cheah, 4) Capital and networks, society, space and nation – all these concepts have been in play for many years in the interdisciplinary study of the book.

The title of this introductory article to the third issue of *Mémoires du Livre/Studies in Book Culture* was determined by the title of the 2009 conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture/Association canadienne pour l’étude de l’histoire du livre. That title was, in turn, shaped by the title chosen for the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences held at Carleton University in Canada’s capital, Ottawa, that year (“Capital Connections: Nation, terroir, territoire”). Although both these titles carried the freight of institutions, for example their careful attention both to bilingualism and to contemporary intellectual trends, Jane McLeod and I have found that they also worked remarkably well to bear the weight of ideas about the place of books in networks of human communication.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of networks, in particular, has been used extensively by scholars of book culture, for working with the mediation of relationships between readers that transcend the boundaries of space. Transatlantic networks, for example, have been theorized by James Raven and by David Armitage and

Michael J. Braddick. The metaphor of a network is worth unpacking: in an older sense it derives from the distribution of hydro-electric power, a structured system with wires intersecting across a grid. Hierarchical models such as organization charts are one kind of network; another is the circular sort of diagram that Darnton drew up, when he first envisaged a “communication circuit” to visualize, or model, the history of the book in historian’s terms. More recently the concept of an “inter-net” in “cyber-space” has come to dominate our notion of how a network might function – with multiple nodes made up of individuals with a certain kind of power, or with something to say, and lines drawn between those nodes, representing relationships and transactions.

The eight essays that make up this issue all address the theme in different ways: three discuss face-to-face networks of actual existing communities; three more are about networks as imagined communities in a contemporary world; and the remaining two focus on anachronistic networks that emerge when books are re-read and re-interpreted across a span of decades or centuries. I introduce each essay briefly below, after a brief comment on the organization and the national context out of which they appeared.

CASBC/ACÉHL (Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture/Association canadienne pour l’étude de l’histoire du livre) was founded in 2004 with the express purpose of bringing “book history” to the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities.<sup>2</sup> The Congress itself is a peculiarly Canadian institution, convening as it does many of the “learned societies” in the country each spring, for ten days of concurrent and overlapping conferences. The infrastructure of registration, buildings and meeting rooms, name badges and travel arrangements is shared collectively. Some of the larger societies, such as the historical and literary associations, are large enough to meet alone every year; but smaller ones, like CASBC/ACÉHL, benefit greatly from the opportunity to share resources. And Congress in turn benefits from the rich mixture of ideas and approaches. The only problem for participants is to figure out how to attend two or three or four lectures being presented at exactly the same time, in sessions organized for two or three different societies’ meetings!

Canada and Québec have a rich tradition of studying *l’histoire du livre*, communication theory, bibliography, *bibliologie*, printing history, literary

history, and book history. Much of this happens within scholarly associations that include book culture and print networks within their larger mandate, such as medieval, Renaissance, early-modern, Victorian or modern writing, or Canadian, Quebec, British or American or another literature, or communication, economics, politics or society. In terms of what might be called book-specific organizations, the two most significant are the Bibliographical Society of Canada/Société Bibliographique du Canada and Le Groupe de recherche et d'études sur le livre au Québec. Now disbanded in a formal sense, but still an important informal network, is the group of people who came together to edit and write a *History of the Book in Canada/Histoire du livre et de l'Imprimé au Canada*. (Fleming and Lamonde) *HBiC/HLIC* was the bibliographical and textual realization of a peculiarly Canadian situation. In this country we combine and debate the western world's two approaches to the study of the book. In a sense, *CASBC/ACÉHL* exists to re-formulate that collaboration, extending it beyond specifically Canadian topics. We are hospitable to Canadian scholarship on the (global) history-of-the-book, as well as to the histories of both the Canadian book and of "the book" in Canada.

One of the founding nations of the book, so to speak, is the French "histoire du livre" tradition dating back to the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* and the work of Lucien Febvre and H.-J. Martin. It has flourished in Québécois academic culture, especially at l'Université de Sherbrooke. The other was maintained in the English and library studies departments of various Anglo-Canadian universities (notably the University of Toronto) and practiced the skills of bibliographical analysis first developed for the study of Renaissance texts. The merger of these two disparate traditions, with a third dimension in the Innis-McLuhan approach to communication, and a fourth in the incorporation of First Nations textuality, has given Canadian scholarship a rich flavour. (Warkentin) Scholars in other countries work self-consciously, of course, to transcend the boundaries created by language and of intellectual culture in their own academic formation. But enjoined as we are to read and listen to scholarship from colleagues who share a citizenship (and a funding body), but work with different scholarly assumptions, Canadian scholars are particularly cosmopolitan. Such a complex collaboration is challenging, but it is also deeply rewarding, and already three years after the publication of *HBiC/HLIC*, new work is emerging that further explores the dynamics it highlighted. One such

example is Carole Gerson's *Canadian Women in Print* (2010) and another is the project for a "Dictionnaire historique des gens du livre au Québec" now underway.

I hope this brief excursion into the place of CASBC/ACÉHL in Canadian and global scholarship will help to frame the diversity of the articles that follow.<sup>3</sup> A pattern of three kinds of networks emerges from this set of articles: face-to-face networks of people working together to make, distribute or read books and periodicals; networks of people living at the same time, but linked only by their imaginations; and networks of people living decades or even centuries apart, anachronistic networks of readers linked by imagination but disconnected in time as well as space. This plan of organization, rather than a strictly chronological or rigidly geographical one, seemed to make sense.

First, then, articles about face-to-face networks – one might even stretch a point and call them "in-your-face networks." These are communication systems where relationships were shaped by real-time, not imagined, encounters. Julie Fredette writes about one such group of poets, a loosely-associated cenacle, or "society of solitaires," a twentieth-century Anglophone literary group in Montreal. A cenacle is a clique or circle of writers (the word derives from the "upper room" in which the Last Supper was shared). Fredette uses a combination of literary and social theory to analyze the relationships of the "Jubilate Circle, but also incorporates the importance of the book as a material and commercial object by stressing the role of publishers and of poetry series.

If poets can share the politics of literature, printers can share the politics of labour, and of conflicting power brokers, especially at a time of national upheaval. They can even die for the way they practice their trade. In "Evolving Loyalties: A Provincial Printer in Revolutionary Bordeaux," Jane McLeod focuses on Simon Lacourt, who was executed during the Terror. Lacourt was implicated in two networks: first that of the provincial printers who moved from working for the old régime to that of the revolution; and second, a complex set of local politics and family relationships which came to undermine his privileged, but still fragile, position. McLeod provides an audience of book historians, who may not have read all the recent literature on French printing history, with an update on how the laws about

clandestine literature worked, in the provinces and in Paris, before and after 1789.

Face-to-face networks of readers complement the connections made by writers and printers. Despite Benedict Anderson's evocative comment about how reading happens in a solitary way, "in the lair of the skull", some readers have a different practice, one of conversation and even the extraordinary experience of a whole city reading the same book at the same time. DeNel Rehberg Sedo writes about "Cultural Capital and Community in Contemporary City-wide Reading Programs" and draws upon Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital to theorize about the dynamics of the one-book/one-city phenomenon. Although Rehberg Sedo's work, and that of her collaborators, is contemporary and sociological, it nevertheless builds upon the historical basis of studies of reading in relationship to authorship and publishing in earlier periods.

The next three articles are about the book network as imagined community. In Sydney Shep's article, "'Smiley, you're on candid camera': Emoticons & Pre-Digital Networks" the people in question are printers, and the community is one about which even book historians know very little, the fellowship of printers at work in their craft and trade. Shep's article recounts the recent history of the "smiley" and other "emoticons" in the digital world, where even the most naïve writer is a sophisticated user of fonts and point sizes. Her primary interest, however, is the ways in which nineteenth-century and earlier printers played with type in ways that made expressed their identities as workers, as crafts people, and as readers. They read each other's trade journals, and used them to share the inside jokes of a peculiarly literate trade. Printers formed a community, not only face-to-face in the print shop, but a community of the imagination that helped shape their professional and political identities.

Readers, too, formed a community. In Susann Liebich's article, "Connected Readers: Reading Networks and Community in early Twentieth-century New Zealand" that community is global, but English-speaking and resolutely British. The concept of a "British world" has been used by recent scholars to distinguish the British empire of conquest, the Anglo-American culture in which the United States loomed so large, and the British empire of settlement. (Buckner and Francis) Liebich's network is one based on

shared reading, not only over cups of tea in a New Zealand town, but also in correspondence between a father and daughter who are separated by the exigencies of colonization but connected by reading the same books, and reporting to each other on the communities in which they lived.

Communities of readers were not always based on imaginative literature; shared religious belief could make stronger cultural glue than a mutual appreciation for novels or poetry. Mary Lu MacDonald discusses “Denominational Publishing in Early Canada: Two Unitarian Periodicals.” Here the focus is on journals written, published and read by – and for – a small confessional community, and on the potential for reading to create and preserve identity. MacDonald’s methodology and her choice of subject introduce two themes to this issue. She studies the periodical press, not the book-publishing efforts of this particular faith community, thus reminding us of the importance of periodical print culture in providing readers with a recurring message. MacDonald writes in English, about an English-speaking community based in Montreal and hence surrounded by Francophone print culture, thus subtly reminding us of the complexities of studying the history of Canadian publishing.

The last two articles are based on the fact that the idea of a book can persist for many years, even though transmuted into a form the author and the first publisher and readers might hardly recognize. Shelley Beal tells a remarkable story in “Translation and Re-translation : The Memoirs of Eugénie de Montijo, Ex-Empress of France.” Here, the idea of a French book, ideally an autobiographical memoir or perhaps a volume of biographical reminiscences, was hatched in the mind of an American, conceptualized within an Anglo-American literary publishing structure, and authored – after a fashion – by a distinguished woman who refused to write or authorize it. The book nevertheless appeared, in 1920, in English and four European languages not including French. Beal’s article is a reminder of the importance of translation in the process of book publication, an aspect too often forgotten when the “cultural capital” is that of writers and readers, rather than that of publishers who operate in a global marketplace.

Although a historian of the book can easily see the connection between Beal’s story of the genteel memoirs of a French empress and of the lurid fantasies of American science-fiction fans, a scholar not versed in book



scholarship might wonder at their juxtaposition. Yuri Cowan's "Recovering the Barbarians : Reprinting ' Forgotten Fantasy' in the 1970s," however, uses the same framework of material textuality and commercial considerations to develop his analysis as do other articles in this issue of *Memoires du Livre/Studies in Book Culture*. Cowan uses the archival records of the twentieth-century publishers, along with textual and paratextual material from the books themselves, as well as his own correspondence with the series editors, to show how late-Victorian works of fantasy were re-packaged for an audience raised on Tolkien. The fact that the books were out of copyright, as the works of the romantics had been during the Victorian writers' time, was an important commercial consideration. (StClair)

As co-editors of this third issue of *Memoires du Livre/Studies in Print Culture*, and as current and past presidents of CASBC/ACÉHL, Jane McLeod and I are proud to have made this contribution to scholarship in the long and distinguished history of the book in Canada and in the world.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

Leslie Howsam is University Professor in the Department of History at the University of Windsor. She is currently President of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) and past-president of the Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture/Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'histoire du livre. Her latest books are *Past into Print: the publishing of History in Britain 1850-1950* (2009) and *Old Books & New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book & Print Culture* (2006).

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> It was Isabelle Lehuu, of the department of history at l'Université du Québec a Montréal who conceptualized the conference theme.

<sup>2</sup> The web address of Congress is <http://www.fedcan.ca>. CASBC/ACÉHL can be found at <http://www.casbc-acehl.dal.ca>. The association was founded at the Winnipeg Congress at the University of Manitoba in 2004, but at the two previous Congresses (Toronto 2002 and Halifax 2003) the founders had organized symposia at which the interest was tested. CASBC/ACEHL joined the Canadian Federation for the Humanities in 2009. Both the symposia and the association itself were profoundly shaped and magnificently supported by the contribution of Dr Mary Lu MacDonald.

---

<sup>3</sup> Four of them were first presented as brief conference papers at the Ottawa Congress in 2009. Jane McLeod's and Sydney Shep's were given at the Toronto 2006 and Vancouver 2008 meetings of CASBC/ACÉHL respectively; I had the opportunity to read Shelley Beal's PhD thesis on the work of a transatlantic literary entrepreneur and persuaded her to prepare one of its component parts as an article; Yuri Cowan's 2009 conference paper was in the course of publication elsewhere, but he was able to let us have another essay from his research.

## Bibliographie

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso, 1991.

Armitage, David and Michael J. Braddick (eds.). *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Blayney, Peter W. M. *The Bookshops in Paul's Cross Churchyard*. London: The Bibliographical Society, 1990.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.

Buckner, Phillip and R. Douglas Francis, eds. *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006.

Cheah, Pheng, "Grounds of Comparison," *Diacritics* 29:4 (Winter 1999).

Darnton, Robert. "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65-83.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. *The Printing Press As an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Fleming, Patricia L. and Yvan Lamonde, eds. *History of the Book in Canada*. 3 vol. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004-7.

Gerson, Carole. *Canadian Women in Print 1750-1918*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.

Howsam, Leslie. "Book History Unbound: Transactions of the Written Word Made Public," *Canadian Journal of History/ Annales canadiennes d'histoire* XXXVIII. April/avril 2003, 69-81.

---

Macdonald, Bertrum H. and Fiona A. Black. "Using GIS for Spatial and Temporal Analyses in Print Culture Studies Some Opportunities and Challenges" *Social Science History* 24:3 (fall 2000) 505-536.

McKenzie, D. F. *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; first published 1986.

Raven, James. "Mapping Print Culture from Eighteenth-Century London," in *Mappa Mundi: Mapping culture / Mapping the World*, ed Jacqueline Murray. Windsor, ON: University of Windsor Working Papers in the Humanities, 2001.

Raven, James. *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic literary community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811*, Columbia, S.C., University of South Carolina Press, 2002.

St Clair, William. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Shep, Sydney J. "Books without borders: the transnational turn in book history," in *Books without Borders*. Vol. 1: *The Cross-National Dimension in Print Culture*, ed. Robert Fraser and Mary Hammond, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Warkentin, Germaine. "In Search of "The Word of the Other": Aboriginal Sign Systems and the History of the Book in Canada." *Book History* 2 (1999): 1-27.