

*Frenchness in the History of the Book:
From the History of Publishing to the
History of Reading*

ROGER CHARTIER

FRENCHNESS EXISTS: it is a distinct cultural style; and it conveys a particular view of the world.' This diagnosis comes from a historian who is thoroughly familiar with France, its roguish booksellers and its cat massacres, its peasant storytellers and its hack writers: my friend Robert Darnton. But let me pursue this statement, which characterizes the French world vision as 'a sense that life is hard, that you had better not have any illusions about selflessness in your fellow men, that clear-headedness and quick wit are necessary to protect what little you can extract from your surroundings, and that moral nicety will get you nowhere.'¹ That description, which some people could, no doubt falsely, read as that of the academic world—the Parisian version naturally—does it hold for the discipline that unites us here today, that is to say, the history of the book? Or, more seriously, can one recognize in the evolution of studies on the book conducted in France over the past forty years specific traits and original trajectories

This paper was given as the fifth annual James Russell Wiggins Lecture in the History of the Book in American Culture, held at the American Antiquarian Society on September 30, 1987.

1. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York: Basic Books, 1984, p. 61 (tr. *Le grand massacre des chats. Attitudes et croyances dans l'Ancienne France*, Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1984, p. 63).

ROGER CHARTIER is director of studies at
the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

Copyright © 1988 by American Antiquarian Society

sufficiently clearly marked to constitute 'a Frenchness in the history of the book?'

Before attempting to respond to that question, I must confess a two-fold embarrassment. The first comes from the sad conviction that I will betray the program of these series of lectures dedicated to the American Antiquarian Society's Program in the History of the Book in American Culture. Having worked solely up until now on European material, mainly French, occasionally Spanish, I am all too little acquainted with the history of the American book. And a great part of what I am familiar with I owe to the American Antiquarian Society, which invited me to participate in the conference 'Needs and Opportunities in the History of the Book in American Culture,' whose papers have been published this year.² To repay a portion of my debt, I would like to propose today certain research principles, guidelines for an investigation that may perhaps assist the project, undertaken under the direction of David Hall, to publish a multivolume history of the book in American culture.

The second source of my embarrassment is based on my realization that although bibliography is probably the most fundamental of sciences, it can, however, become wearisome, especially when it leads to a lengthy oral enumeration of names and titles. For this reason I do not propose to offer in this paper a recapitulation of French contributions to the history of the book over the past few decades. I feel all the more justified in that such bibliographical and critical restatements have regularly accompanied scholarly developments since 1970, coming sometimes from native practitioners while at other times from foreign colleagues, attentive readers of French historians and themselves renowned specialists of the history of French publishing, colleagues such as Robert Darnton, Raymond Birn, or Wallace Kirsop.³ My proposal is else-

2. David D. Hall and John B. Hench, eds., *Needs and Opportunities in the History of the Book: America, 1639-1876*, Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1987.

3. Robert Darnton, 'Reading, Writing, and Publishing in Eighteenth-Century France. A Case Study in the Sociology of Literature,' *Daedalus* 100 (1971): 214-56 (also in Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, Cambridge and London: Harvard

where: to reflect on two series of connected particularities. On the one hand, I wish to address the particularities of the history of the book as a discipline, as it has been conceived, developed, and transformed in France since Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's seminal book *L'Apparition du Livre*, published in 1958.⁴ On the other, I wish to examine the particularities of French publishing itself, dealt with as a long-term phenomenon and as characterized by its most significant ruptures. To accomplish this, I will rely not only on my own experience but even more on the experience, one could say adventure, of codirecting with Henri-Jean Martin an *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, whose four volumes, ranging from the period of manuscripts to the mid-twentieth century, appeared in 1982, 1984, 1985, and 1986.⁵ This task taught us a tremendous amount about how to consider the book—its production and its commerce, its forms and its uses. I would like to share with you this knowledge, collectively developed by all those who worked on these volumes.

Twenty or twenty-five years ago, it would probably have been easier to define what was 'Frenchness' in the history of the book.

University Press, 1982, pp. 167–208); Roger Chartier and Daniel Roche, 'Le livre, un changement de perspective,' *Faire de l'Histoire*, eds. Jacques Le Goff et Pierre Nora, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, vol. 3: 115–36 (tr. in *Constructing the Past. Essays in Historical Methodology*, eds. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, with an introduction by Colin Lucas, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985, pp. 198–214); Raymond Birn, 'Livre et Société after Ten Years: Formation of a Discipline,' *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century* 151–55 (1976): 287–312; Roger Chartier and Daniel Roche, 'L'histoire quantitative du livre,' *Revue Française d'Histoire du Livre* 16 (1977): 3–27; Wallace Kirsop, 'Literary History and Book Trade History: The Lessons of *L'Apparition du Livre*,' *Australian Journal of French Studies* 16 (1979): 488–535; Roger Chartier, 'L'ancien régime typographique: Réflexions sur quelques travaux récents,' *Annales E.S.C.* (1981): 191–209; Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?' *Daedalus* 111 (1982): 65–83; Roger Chartier and Daniel Roche, 'Livres et presse: Véhicule des idées,' in *Septième Congrès International des Lumières: Rapports Préliminaires / (Seventh International Congress on the Enlightenment: Introductory Papers)*, Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1987, pp. 93–106.

4. Lucien Febvre et Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du Livre*, Editions Albin Michel, L'Évolution de l'Humanité, 1958 and 1971 (tr. *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450–1800*, London: NLB, New York: Schocken, 1976).

5. Henri-Jean Martin et Roger Chartier, eds., *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, Paris: Promodis, 1986. Vol. 1, Le livre conquérant. Du Moyen Age au milieu du XVIIe siècle, 1982; vol. 2, Le livre triomphant. 1660–1830, 1984; vol. 3, Le temps des éditeurs. Du Romantisme à la Belle Époque, 1985; vol. 4, Le livre concurrencé. 1900–1950. 1986.

Distinguishing itself from the history of printing (which was classically the history of an invention and its diffusion, the history of a technique and its evolutions, and the history of the most famous and rarest books), the discipline, while still young and conquering, associated itself enthusiastically with the constitution of long series of the printed production of a city or the entire kingdom during a century. Borrowing the concepts and tools of economic history, the history of the book sought clearly to delineate the long- and short-term cycles in the publishing conjuncture, to assess its periods of growth and its moments of recession. Drawing up statistics of titles either from books that are currently preserved, from the *Direction de la Librairie's* registers of privileges and permissions or, more recently and for the nineteenth century, from the information published in the *Bibliographie de la France*, the history of printed production conducted in this fashion conformed perfectly with the dictates of quantitative history that was then dominant. As in studies of prices and trade, births and deaths, the goal was to create long series of homogeneous, repetitive, and comparable data.

The results of such undertakings have been considerable. Firstly, such projects established the lasting scarcity of printed titles in the French kingdom: between 500 and 1,000 in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and only 2,000 at the end of the ancien régime; the growth in numbers came later with 7,000 titles in 1830 and 15,000 in 1890.⁶ Secondly, they also determined the fundamental changes that transformed printed production in the ancien régime. Two curves give an indication of these changes. The first is that of religious books, which constituted a third of the published titles in the first half of the seventeenth century, half in the 1680s, a third once again around 1730, but only a quarter

6. Henri-Jean Martin, 'Economie, politique, et édition,' *Le Livre français. Hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, un bilan établi sous la direction de Julien Cain, Robert Escarpit, and Henri-Jean Martin, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1972, pp. 53-63; Frédéric Barbier, 'The Publishing Industry and Printed Output in Nineteenth-Century France,' *Books and Society in History. Papers of the Association of College and Research Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts Preconference*, ed. Kenneth E. Carpenter, New York and London: R. R. Bowker Company, 1983, pp. 199-230.

in 1750 and a tenth in 1780. The second curve is that of all those works that can be classified in the category science and art. Their growth in the eighteenth century is inversely related to the decline of theology and devotional literature. The production of science and art book doubles between midcentury and the Revolution. Given that the other categories (law, history, belles-lettres) occupied the same position for two centuries, the essential discovery of this serial history of the book has been, therefore, this major reversal that secularized, belatedly but radically, all printed production, which the religious book had dominated during the high waters of the Catholic Reformation. In its place appeared more and more of those books that created new relationships between men, nature, and the social world.⁷

'Frenchness' in the history of the book could also be diagnosed through another symptom: the primacy given to social history. Here again, the history of publishing merely reflected a major tendency of French historiography beginning in the 1960s. Social history had become the dominant sector, statistically treating data from fiscal and notarial archives in order to reconstitute (generally on the scale of a city or a region) the hierarchy of wealth, the composition of estates, and socioprofessional differences. French history of the book has been doubly tributary to this emphasis put on social classification. On the one hand, it has proposed a social history of those who made books: the publishers ('marchands libraires'), the masterprinters, the compositors and pressmen, the typefounders and the binders. For different periods from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the world of the book trade has been treated as a socioprofessional group for which one needed to know the economic status, the marriages, the mobility (or immobility) in both a geographic and social sense, as well as the multiple cleavages (between masters and journeymen, between Parisians and provincials, between inheritors and newcomers, etc.) within that world.

7. Henri-Jean Martin, *Livre, pouvoirs et société à Paris au XVIIe siècle (1598-1701)*, Geneva: Droz, 1969; François Furet, 'La "librairie" du royaume de France au XVIIIe siècle,' *Livre et société dans la France du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1965, pp. 3-32.

At the same time, the history of the book 'à la française' has sought to be the history of the unequal distribution of printed matter in society. To accomplish this, one had to be able to reconstitute the libraries that different social and professional groups owned and established. As a result, certain types of documents have been privileged: the inventories of books mentioned in the estate inventories drawn up by notaries, the printed catalogues of public auctions, or, more rarely, depending on the hazards of archival finds, booksellers's account books, which register all of their sales on credit. Such sources have permitted the construction of a whole series of new cultural indicators that enable one to discover social differences. These include the presence or absence of books in inheritances, the widely differing dimensions of collections, and the importance devoted to the major bibliographic categories in the libraries owned by each social group. Thus the unequal possession of the book and the contrasts between the libraries of different social milieux have been perceived as clear indicators of the divisions that fragment a society, separating those who are familiar with books from those who remain foreign to print culture, and revealing cleavages even within the educated elites: between priests and laypeople, nobles and bourgeois, titled nobles and officeholders, men of talent and men of commerce.

Economic and social, based on numbers and series, this French history of the book has thus developed an original approach, centered on the conjunctures of printed production, on its uneven distribution in society, and on the professional circles of printing and bookselling. Little by little, collective projects, dissertations, and monographic studies have fulfilled this program both for Paris and provincial cities. Nonetheless, certain doubts have come to weaken its underlying certitudes. The first one, introduced early on by American historians of the French booktrade, questioned the conclusions reached about the production and circulation of the book in the kingdom based solely on authorized production, such as it is revealed by the permission and privilege registers, the catalogues of library sales or notarial inventories. In fact, from the

sixteenth century on, foreign publishers based along the frontiers or even elsewhere supplied the French market by publishing prohibited works and secretly importing them. In the second half of the eighteenth century, it is conceivable that one out of two books in French, or even more, were published outside of the kingdom.

This publishing in French outside of France had decisive effects. It profoundly modified the very conditions of national publishing activity by providing a refuge for those French publishers obliged to seek exile, most frequently because of their Protestant faith. Moreover, it severely challenged the Parisian publishers's enterprises, and it encouraged ambitious (and sometimes doubtful) alliances between foreign publishers and certain provincial booksellers or printers who were jealous of the Parisian monopoly. It also permitted the publication on a grand scale of texts that the kingdom's monarchical, ecclesiastic, and parliamentary censors wanted to suppress because they represented heterodoxical thought or because they attacked the very bases of Christian and absolutist society. For far too long, French-style history of the book neglected the significance and weight of the publishing that occurred just outside the country. Quantitative significance initially: one can estimate that in the 1760s the number of books counted in the official registers of the 'Administration de la Librairie' represent only 40 percent of French book production, as opposed to 60 percent for those prohibited books that are published without authorization, and pirated books that are published under false addresses and without printing permission.⁸ Intellectual weight secondly, these surreptitiously distributed and eagerly sought-after titles introduce both innovation and criticism, modify the relationship to traditional authorities, deprive ancient symbols of their meaning, and undermine the foundation of established power. One had to take this illicit production into account in order to fulfill the program proposed by Lucien Febvre in the preface of *L'Apparition du Livre*, that is to say, 'examine the influence and

8. Henri-Jean Martin, 'Une croissance séculaire,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, pp. 94-103.

the practical significance of the printed book during the first three hundred years of its existence.' But to acknowledge such books was also to lessen the 'Frenchness' of the history of the book, a 'Frenchness' identified with the serial treatment of the kingdom's administrative and notarial archives.

Moreover, there was growing skepticism about quantitative methods. Counting books in order to trace production curves or to sort them within different bibliographical categories can be informative. But is this sufficient to establish the history of the book as cultural history? An initial confidence in numbers and series has had to face the objections that were made against the pretensions of a quantitative history of cultural objects, which one can designate, to borrow the famous but unfortunate expression of Pierre Chaunu, as 'statistical history at the third level' (or 'histoire sérielle au troisième niveau').⁹ The critics legitimately denounced the dangers of such a reductionist project, with its supposition that cultural and intellectual entities are either immediately perceivable as countable objects (in this case books that are put into series), or else that they can be apprehended in their most exterior and least individual expression (here, for example, for the books of a given series, through their belonging to a general bibliographical category).¹⁰ Although this quantitative approach is essential to discover the general structure of production or of a collection, it cannot in and of itself reveal the manner in which texts have been understood and utilized. To recreate these processes, one needs other questions and other approaches that have long been foreign to French history, concerned as it was with counting titles or examining their uneven distribution in libraries rather than tracing the characteristics and effects of the way they were read.

9. Pierre Chaunu, 'Un nouveau champ pour l'histoire sérielle: le quantitatif au troisième niveau,' *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel*, Toulouse: Privat, vol. 2: 105-25.

10. Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1976, pp. xix-xxii (tr. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, pp. 257-63.

A third factor has shaken the 'Frenchness' in the history of the book: French historians of the book have realized that the economic and social history of printed matter to which they were attached had remained indifferent to the objects themselves. The example of physical bibliography as practiced by English and American scholars, an example the French were slow to appreciate, makes clear the cost of this indifference. In the first place, it prevented understanding precisely how a book is fabricated, the rules or limitations that affect a printing office, and even the work processes of printers' journeymen, compositors, and pressmen. By neglecting the forms of printed objects, forms that in themselves reveal the conditions of their production, scholars studying the social history of the book failed to realize what should have been one of its principal interests, that is to say, the comprehension of working practices and printing office customs.

Moreover, this indifference to the printed object severely encumbered a project that sought to recognize how a society or a group reads. It implicitly postulated that the forms through which a text is apprehended are not important for grasping its meaning. In this fashion, the history of the book, while both serial and quantitative, remained strongly dependent on the oldest of literary studies: studies that consider the text as an abstraction, as if it exists apart from the printed words through which it is read and, at the same time, studies that consider reading as another abstraction, as a universal process without historical variations. But texts are not deposited in books, whether handwritten or printed, as if in a mere recipient. Readers only encounter texts within an object whose forms and layout guide and compel the production of meaning.

For far too long, French historians considered the material study of the book as descriptive erudition, certainly respectable and appropriate for bibliographers, but not particularly useful for a retrospective cultural sociology. This blindness was unfortunate in that it prevented historians from recognizing that the physical layout of the printed page, the modalities of the relationship be-

tween the text and what is not text (glosses, notes, illustrations, indexes, tables, etc.), or again the very construction of the book, with its divisions and markings, were so many essential elements necessary to reconstitute the meanings invested in a text.¹¹ Through neglect of those arrangements and variations in 'typography' (in a broad sense of the term), which both absorbs the reader and orients the act of reading, French history of the book prevented itself from responding to one of the fundamental questions it sought to address: that is to say, in what manner did the circulation of more and more printed texts modify thoughts and sensibilities?

Such was the situation of the history of the book in France eight years ago, when I undertook with Henri-Jean Martin to organize our *Histoire de l'Édition Française*. On the one hand, dealing with the accumulated results of expert monographic works enabled one to envision a major synthesis that links the printing shop, the craftsmen of the book trades, and the private library. On the other hand, research conducted outside of France (often concerning French books of the ancien régime) stimulated doubts that undermined methodological certitudes, underlined the limitation of the standard knowledge, called out for one to consider the books themselves, not just to count and categorize them. And finally, the need appeared for a history of the act or acts of reading as the inevitable extension of book history. The 'Frenchness' in the history of the book probably lost some of its glory because the new paths to be explored had already been opened elsewhere by others who were not concerned with or who were critical of the tendencies that had dominated all of French historiography (and not only that of the history of the book)—which it is convenient, if not always exact, to identify with the *Annales* school. But at the same time, the ambitious program laid out in *l'Apparition du Livre* was more amply met, since it chose to consider the printed book as a commodity—an object produced by a specific technique and

11. D. F. Mackenzie, 'The Book as an Expressive Form,' *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, The Panizzi Lectures, 1985, London: The British Library, 1986, pp. 1-21.

characterized by its own forms—and as a new means of cultural communication.

A new way of considering the history of the book was thus built on the basis of this experience and these doubts, an approach that affirmed certain crucial ideas I would now like to present. Paradoxically, the first one breaks with the seminal book of Febvre and Martin. Its title, *L'Apparition du Livre*, and certain assertions in its preface (for example, 'The book is a relative newcomer to occidental societies. It began its career in the mid-fifteenth century.') closely associated the invention of printing with the birth of the book. Later, this idea was reformulated into the hypothesis of a 'communication revolution' or a 'media revolution,' or else seeing it as 'a cultural demarcation point' that opened a 'new cultural era.'¹² In contrast to this idea, the *Histoire de l'Édition Française* (and other published works since then) insists that a strong continuum links the age of the manuscript to that of the printed book. A number of traits that were considered characteristic of printed books and, therefore, of the coming of the book can be found in manuscripts, at least during the last centuries of their preprinting existence. The profound transformations that occurred in the structures, the organizations, and the uses of the book-object cannot be tied to its manufacturing techniques. To understand these changes requires a longer-term perspective, which would place the important rupture of the mid-fifteenth century in perspective with other changes. For example, the substitution of *codex* for *volumen*, or of the book divided in quires for the scroll book in the first centuries of the Christian era, or the abandonment of papyrus for parchment and then paper, commonly used in France from the mid-thirteenth century on, or, again, the advances of silent reading at the expense of the traditional practice of oral reading.

The passage from 'scribal culture' to 'print culture' loses its revolutionary aspect when it is placed within the long-term history

12. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change. Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 39, 26, 33; and her study *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

of the book (which Gutenberg did not invent). On the contrary, it becomes apparent just how much the printed book is heir to the manuscript. This heritage concerns initially the form of the object itself. First, all of the marking systems that one is tempted to associate with the invention of Gutenberg are in fact largely anterior (for instance, descriptive signs, such as signatures or catchwords at the bottom of the page, which should permit one to fold up the quires in the right order).¹³ The same is true of those marks that guide the act of reading, such as numbering the pages, the columns and the lines; those that highlight the articulation of the page (through the use of decorative initials, rubrics, or marginal letters); those that institute not only a spatial but an analytic relationship between the text and its glosses; those that graphically mark the difference between the very text and the commentaries on it. Since the *codex* is composed of quires, which can be leafed through, and organizes a clear delineation of the text it bears, it is easily indexed. This is not the case for the *volumen*, which is consulted with difficulty and where locating a text remains problematic. Concordances, alphabetical tables, and systematic indexes all become widespread during the age of the manuscript. The rational organization of written material is thus invented in the monastic *scriptoria* and the universities, and then reproduced by printers.

Secondly, during the last centuries of manuscript books a long-lasting hierarchy of formats is created.¹⁴ This hierarchy distinguishes the folio, which must be set down to be read and which is, therefore, a university and reference book, from the humanist

13. M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, London: Edward Arnold, 1979; James Douglas Farquhar, 'The Manuscript as a Book,' *Pen to Press: Illustrated Manuscripts and Printed Books in the First Century of Printing*, by Sandra Hindman and James Douglas Farquhar, Baltimore: University of Maryland and The Johns Hopkins University, 1977, pp. 11-99; Jean Vézín, 'La fabrication du manuscrit,' and Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, 'La naissance des index,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 1: 24-47, 76-85.

14. Armando Petrucci, 'Alle origine del libro moderno: libri da banco, libri da bisaccia, libretti da mano,' *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 12 (1969): 295-313 (and in *Libri, scrittura e pubblico nel Rinascimento. Guida storica e critica*, ed. Armando Petrucci, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1979) and 'Il libro manoscritto,' *Letteratura italiana* 2, Produzione e consumo, Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1983, pp. 499-524.

book, which is a more manageable quarto and which offers the classic texts as well as the new literary texts, and finally from the *libellus*, a portable pocket-size or bedside book that is put to many uses, both secular and religious, and that serves many less sophisticated readers. The printed book is the direct descendant of these distinctions, strictly associating the format of the book with the kind of text and the method of reading. The comment of Lord Chesterfield, cited by Roger Stoddard, confirms this statement: 'Solid folios are the people of business with whom I converse in the morning. Quartos are the easier mixed company with whom I sit after dinner; and I pass my evenings in the light, and often frivolous chit-chat of small octavos and duodecimos.'¹⁵

Printing does not create a new object; it does not bring about new gestures; it does not disturb the relationship with the written word. Naturally, it does permit texts to circulate on an unprecedented scale, partly because the cost of producing books diminishes so drastically once it is spread out over five hundred or a thousand copies of the same edition and not limited to a unique copy. In addition, printing shortens the production time, which had remained lengthy as long as the book was hand-copied even after the invention of the *pecia* and the copying of separate quires.¹⁶ As a result, each reader has access to a greater number of books and each text reaches a greater number of readers. Printing transforms the condition of a text's transmission and reception through the production of a great number of copies of the identical (or almost identical) text. Nonetheless, it does not constitute, in my opinion, the same sort of rupture as that which occurred during the second and third centuries A.D. At this time, occidental men were forced to relearn completely how to use the book, which had changed in its form, organization, and possible uses. This first revolution fashioned a relationship to writing, an intellectual

15. Roger E. Stoddard, 'Morphology and the Book from an American Perspective,' *Printing History* 17 (1987): 2-14.

16. Carla Bozzolo and Ezio Ornato, *Pour une histoire du livre manuscrit au Moyen Age. Trois essais de codicologie quantitative*, Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980.

technology, and a repertory of attitudes and practices that have associated up until now (but for how much longer?) the communication of texts with the circulation of a specific object—the book divided in quires (or its derivative, the pamphlet, the periodical, the newspaper). The relation to the written word created by the codex was not fundamentally modified by the innovations in the way in which books were made since the mid-fifteenth century.

Another strong reason exists to link print culture with that of the manuscript. Long before Gutenberg, a new visual and silent method of reading appeared in the occidental world that broke with the vocalized or mumbled reading that most readers were obliged to use. Paul Saenger has offered a chronology of the advances of this new competence.¹⁷ It first appeared in late antiquity in Christian milieux and progressively penetrated the British and then the Continental monastic *scriptoria* between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. Later in the thirteenth century, silent reading spread to the university and scholastic world before conquering the aristocratic laymen a century and a half later. This thesis can nonetheless be challenged. Isn't silent reading in Greek and Roman antiquity more frequent than Paul Saenger imagines?¹⁸ One can also extend his argument to encompass the most popular and least educated readers of the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries who remain obliged to read out loud. At any rate, his argument calls attention to a decisive cutting-off point. Silent reading does in fact establish a freer, more secret, and totally private intercourse with the written word. It permits more rapid reading, which is not impeded by the complexities of the book's organization and the relationships established between the discourse and the glosses, the quotations and the comments, the text and the index. It also permits differential uses of the same book: given the social or ritual context, it can be read aloud for others or with others, or else it can be silently read for oneself in the

17. Paul Saenger, 'Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society,' *Viator, Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13 (1982): 367–414.

18. Bernard M. W. Knox, 'Silent Reading in Antiquity,' *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 421–35.

retreat of the study, the library, or the oratory. In the Book of Hours, for example, there are typographical differences between those parts that are designated for ecclesiastical use (and thus communal declamation) and other parts that nourish personal devotion based on silent reading.¹⁹ The revolution in reading thus preceded the revolutions in the book: that which at the end of the Middle Ages replaced the handwritten book with one that was printed and composed with movable types, but perhaps also the revolution that at the beginning of this era replaced the scroll by the *codex* (even if one can legitimately imagine that the new form given to the written word was brought about by a new way of reading in the Christian communities).

One must reaffirm the necessity and pertinence of a long-term approach that concentrates on the continuities between scribal and print culture against the perspective that hastily attributes to a single technical innovation (that of the printing type and press) cultural transformations that must be linked either to transformations in the book's form or to changes in the ways of reading. Such an approach permits one to understand the enduring dependencies between the printed book and the manuscript but also to grasp how the abandonment of certain inherited forms and the creation of new ones marked the printed book's progressive emancipation. Thus roman type replaced gothic letters, thus marginal notes and then infrapaginal notes replaced glosses. From this perspective, the classic division that distinguishes the incunabula from other books loses all pertinence, at least in France. It is in the 1530s, and not in 1500, that the printed book undergoes the major changes that make it more than the mere copy of a manuscript produced by another technique.

Moreover, the relationship between the printed word and the manuscript must not be considered solely in terms of the substitution of one for the other. 'Print culture' does not suddenly erase

19. Paul Saenger, 'Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages,' *Scrittura e Civiltà* 9 (1985): 239-69 (tr. 'Prier de bouche et prier de coeur. Les livres d'heures du manuscrit à l'imprimé,' *Les usages de l'imprimé (XVe-XIXe siècle)*, ed. Roger Chartier, Paris: Fayard, 1987, pp. 191-227).

all of the products of 'scribal culture.' Handwritten books remain numerous in the ancien régime—clandestine texts by Protestants, Jansenists, or freemasons; books of secrets (social or esoteric, political or magical); 'philosophical' manuscripts that convey the bold-est of texts or handwritten gazettes that are simultaneously competitive with and dependent on those that are printed. More generally, and for a longer period of time, many objects combine both handwritten and printed characters. This is the case for printed objects that are designed to incorporate other writings (such as almanacs, which insert blank pages between the pages of text and become, in this fashion, diaries).²⁰ This is the case when personal writings are left on the book as if to appropriate it by occupying the empty spaces of the inside front or back cover, the title pages, the pages without text, or the margins.²¹ To understand the printed book, one cannot consider it in splendid isolation; on the contrary, one must place it within the context of a total history of written objects, understood either in their long-term history or for a specific period in all of their diversity.

A second idea underlies the chronology of our *Histoire de l'Édition Française*: that which designates the three and one-half centuries that separate the introduction of the printing press in the kingdom (in 1470, with the workshop of the Sorbonne) and the 1830s as the 'typographical ancien régime.' Two aspects characterize the long-term stability of this period. On the one hand, the process of manufacturing books scarcely changes. In structure, if not in size, the printing workshop remains what it has been from the outset and is obliged to resolve the same problems. These include furnishing paper (whose cost constitutes the greatest expense involved in book printing), the hiring of necessary workers, and the adjustment of compositors's and pressmen's work. When innovation exists, it fails to transform fundamentally the methods of printing. It solely concerns the organization of composition

20. Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs 1500-1800, Astrology and the Popular Press*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979, p. 30.

21. Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word. The Rise of the Novel in America*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 75-79.

work (with the shift in the sixteenth century from 'continuous production'²² to 'concurrent production' and with the appearance in the eighteenth century of the companionship or 'paquet' system, which links the job of a head worker, who is responsible for layout and proofreading, with that of a team of typographers who only furnish the raw pages)²³ and the number of presses that multiply in the major workshops. (In the year II of the French Revolution, Panckouke's workshop contained twenty-seven presses.)²⁴

On the other hand, between the mid-fifteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, printing activity remains controlled by commercial capital. The powerful booksellers dominate production; they seek and frequently obtain protection by the state, which offers them both privileges and patronage. They dominate the master printers from whom they order the printing of their editions. They control the book market by developing a book trade that enables them to sell not only their own productions but also those of their colleagues (obtained through commercial exchange). Finally, they impose their practice on the author, who is paid more frequently in copies than in cash, and who can even disappear when they deal with pirated editions and reeditions.

From these two circumstances of technical stability and the domination of commercial capital follows a third characteristic of the period: edition quantities usually consist of between one and two thousand copies. Publishers hesitate to tie up their valuable fonts; they fear not being able rapidly to sell their stock, which must then be stored at great expense; they want to free up the largest possible portion of the capital. And then the fact remains that, above a certain limit, under these technological conditions, increasing the number of copies does not significantly reduce the unit price of the sheet.²⁵ All these reasons help to explain the

22. Jean-François Gilmont, 'Printers by the Rules,' *The Library*, sixth ser., vol. 2, no. 2 (1980): 129-55.

23. Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment. A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie 1775-1800*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 216.

24. Robert Darnton, 'L'Imprimerie de Panckouke en l'an II,' *Revue Française d'Histoire du Livre* 23 (1979): 359-69.

25. Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972,

limited edition quantities, which are another fundamental characteristic of the typographical ancien régime.

During the nineteenth century, two periods of change bring about a new economy of the book in France. The first, in the 1830s, is a technical breakthrough, the industrialization of book production. The steam-powered mechanical press (which enables one to print 1,000 sheets an hour rather than 150), the paper-making machine, and the binding machine all revolutionize the work of paper-makers, pressmen, and binders. This is not, however, sufficient to revolutionize printing production. Certainly, the number of published titles increases annually, but the edition quantities remain modest (in the mid-nineteenth century, the average edition is only 3,000 copies),²⁶ and publishing remains dominated by the traditional genres and titles. Between 1816 and 1850, the three bestsellers of French publishers are La Fontaine's *Fables* (with approximately 750,000 copies), Abbé Fleury's *Catéchisme Historique* (almost 700,000 copies), and Fénelon's *Télémaque* (about 600,000 copies).²⁷ The real rupture occurs later in the second half of the nineteenth century. Composition and illustration techniques are in turn industrialized with the appearance of linotypes and then monotypes and the progress of photoengraving. But even before these innovations occur, the production level changes scale, increasing to over 12,000 titles per year in the middle of the 1850s, and reaching 15,000 at the end of the century. The quadrupling of edition quantities in fifty years accompanies this growth in the number of printed titles.

The key to this evolution lies in the emergence of new categories of readers who expand the book market dramatically. From Guizot to Ferry, schools (but not only schools) had made Frenchmen literate, diminishing the traditional distance between cities and

pp. 160-63; Henri-Jean Martin, 'Les tirages au XVIIIe siècle,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 2: 102.

26. James Smith Allen, *Popular French Romanticism. Authors, Readers and Books in the 19th Century*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981, pp. 134-35; Frédéric Barbier, 'Une production multipliée,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 3: 102-21.

27. Martyn Lyons, *Le triomphe du livre. Une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du XIXe siècle*, Paris: Promodis/Éditions du Cercle de la Librairie, 1987, pp. 76-104.

the countryside, making reading a quasi-universal competence. The three fundamental figures of nineteenth-century mythology—the child, the woman, and the people—symbolize these new classes of print consumers, seeking to read for pleasure or for instruction, for distraction or for school.²⁸ Under the Second Empire, a complete restructuring of the world of publishing serves to meet their needs. The transformation in newspaper distribution is probably the most striking development. Despite the efforts of Girardin in the 1830s, the newspaper had been accessible only to a relatively wealthy clientele because it remained expensive and was sold by subscription. Thanks to its diminished cost (a sou per copy), as well as the large circulation that the railway and post office systems could ensure, and because of the possibility of buying each issue separately, the newspaper became the most popular form of reading. A whole series of new printed objects, which are not really books, are now offered to these new readers. These objects include the daily, with its detachable serials that could be collected and bound; the weekly and bimonthly magazines or newspapers that only publish novels; the part-issue novels that are sold by installments; and, finally, novels at thirteen and then four sous. Book-newspapers or newspaper-books, these unaccustomed products attract a mixed clientele, but one that is certainly largely popular and feminine.²⁹ After 1860, therefore, if the printed word extends its reach to an entire society, offering appropriate or supposedly appropriate reading to everyone, this hegemony is accomplished by a profound transformation of the publishing economy, which concentrates less on the book and more on objects liberated from its domination: the newspaper, the periodical, the magazine.

Despite this, it seem to us that 1830 remains a significant break, and we retained it in order to separate the second and third volumes of our *Histoire de l'Édition Française*. One might ask, why?

28. Jean Hébrard, 'Les nouveaux lecteurs,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 3: 470–509.

29. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien. Lecteurs et lectures populaires à la Belle Époque*, Paris: Le Chemin Vert, 1984.

To justify this division, one must reexamine the project's definition, which was that of a history of *publishing* and not of a history of the book. The various themes that the latter had explored in multiple dimensions needed to be reorganized as functions of the process that lent them unity. The publishing activity that chooses or orders texts, controls the operations by which texts become books, and assures their distribution among buyers is clearly the fundamental process where the interconnection occurs between the history of techniques and the history of production, the sociology of the book trade and the sociology of reading, the physical study of books and the cultural study of texts. This concept of publishing has thus been placed at the heart of our project. Necessarily, this raises questions about its historical variations, the successive forms that it takes, and the ruptures that mark its trajectory.

In the long-term history of the book, three modes of publishing seem to succeed each other. The first one precedes printing and considers publishing as the public performance of a text whose manuscript has been verified and authenticated by the author. Public reading before a university, a notable, or a king's court, the sending of an ornate copy to a powerful patron, giving the work to an institution (such as a religious order) that takes upon itself to distribute it, the occasional sale or the renting of a manuscript to a bookseller are all different manners of 'publishing' a text in the Middle Ages.³⁰ Each one signifies that the author authorizes the circulation of his text and permits new copies to be made outside of his control. I emphasize this form of publishing in part because it manifests the continuity between the manuscript and the printed book. Both one and the other are reproduced in either tens or hundreds of copies from a corrected, revised, and authorized text—the *archetypum* or *exemplum* of the manuscript age, which is used as a reference copy and as the model that can be imitated. This initial process does not completely vanish in the age of 'print culture,' since reading by authors or, more generally,

30. Pascale Bourgain, 'L'édition des manuscrits,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 1: 48-75.

vocalized reading of handwritten texts (some of which remain as manuscripts, others of which are printed) remain one of the means to render a work public, to 'publish' a work in the society of the literary salons and the learned academies. This usage has not been lost, as present circumstances indicate.

In the 'typographical ancien régime,' between the mid- fifteenth and first third of the nineteenth century, publishing activity was above all commercial. A variety of examples embody this manner of publishing: the solidly wealthy Parisian and Lyonnais publishers in the age of humanism,³¹ the capital's wealthy booksellers in the seventeenth century, which the royal power pampers and to whom it grants privileges and issues orders,³² as well as the powerful typographical societies installed on the outskirts of the kingdom in the eighteenth century. Two logics inform this style of publishing. The first of these is that of commercial capitalism regulated by supply and demand: the old-style book trade can be considered as a commercial enterprise that requires large initial capital, audaciousness, risk taking, and exclusive attention towards sales. But at the same time, this form of publishing remains caught in the logic of patronage. All of the ancien régime publishers, even those who publish prohibited texts (one thinks, for example of the consortium that produced the Neuchatel edition of the *Encyclopédie* studied by Robert Darnton), seek the goodwill of the monarchy's authorities, since they are the ones who distribute registered or verbal permissions, protect against rivals, tolerate or forbid titles. The administrative regime of the old-style book trade, with its different categories of permissions and privileges, the censorship before printing, and the policing of books leads no doubt to the strong links between publishing and the government. But this connection probably expresses something more profound: an ancien régime mentality (shared by a number of writers) that considers that any enterprise is undertaken at the expense of a rival, that

31. Annie Parent, *Les métiers du livre à Paris au XVIe siècle (1535-1560)*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1974; Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Le monde de l'imprimerie humaniste: Lyon,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 1: 254-77.

32. Henri-Jean Martin, *Livre, pouvoirs et société*, vol. 2: 662-731.

links, without contradiction, liberty (of commerce and ideas) with the protection of the state (dispensing positions and favors), and that associates risky speculations and accepted dependencies.

Publishing as an autonomous profession and the publisher as we now know him appear tardily in France, probably around 1830. Two conditions had to be met before this could occur. On the one hand, publishing had to emancipate itself from the commerce of retail bookselling with which it had previously been confused. On the other hand, the total process of book-making (from the choice of the manuscript to the technical solutions, from the aesthetic choices to the commercial decisions) had to be concentrated in the hands of a single man. It is not surprising, therefore, that the appearance of the publisher is linked to the success of the illustrated book, which, more than any other, requires a strong cohesive unity in both the project and its execution. The publisher Léon Curmer testifies to this in his address to the jury of the exhibition of French industrial products in 1839: 'Book trade (*librairie*) as one understands it in general, is nothing other than the exchange of money for printed sheets which the binder then delivers in volumes. The book trade perceived in this fashion had lost the intellectual character which our predecessors had given it [. . .] Today the book trade has acquired another importance, and it owes this to the publishing profession which has appeared since the introduction of illustrated books [. . .] The publisher, as the intelligent intermediary between the public and all those workers who create the book, must know every detail concerning the work of each person [. . .] This profession is more than a job, it has become a difficult art but one which largely compensates for its difficulties by the intellectual joys it procures at all moments.'³³

Such a text attests clearly to the invention of a profession that is recognized as such and that defines itself in two ways: first, by separating itself from the technical practices of printing and the commercial practices of the book trade and, secondly, by position-

33. Odile and Henri-Jean Martin, 'Le monde des éditeurs,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 3: 158-215, quotation, p. 182.

ing itself among intellectual and artistic activities. In this fashion, practitioners sought to confer an unprecedented legitimacy on this new profession, similar to that that authors claimed. Inevitably, this generated tension between an intellectual ideal—which meant that the publisher spent most of his time reading manuscripts, meeting authors, and building up his stock (which became his unique warehouse)—and the reality of the constraints that weighed on his economic activity. The chronic fragility of bank credits in nineteenth-century France, avid competition, only made worse by advertising, and the new requirements of authors, who more and more wanted and needed to live by their writing were all threats to publishing.

Bankruptcies, like those that occur around 1830 and again at the end of the 1840s, and once again during the 'book crisis' in the 1890s, delineate the risks of the new publishing profession. But at the same time, each crisis period in the nineteenth century becomes the basis for innovation. After the morose 1830s, publishers invent new objects and reduced formats (such as the Charpentier classics in 1818). They borrow from newspapers the formula of illustrated books published in installments, which are then sold cheaply and launched with lots of publicity. Similarly, the bankruptcies prior to 1848, which mark the failure of the romantic project of offering the most attractive forms of books to the most popular of readers, open the way to the huge successes of the second half of the century. These include the publication efforts of Louis Hachette, Pierre Larousse, and Jules Hetzel, all three of whom satisfy the new reading demands, which are focused on school books, children's books, yellow-back literature ('littérature de gare'), and encyclopedic works. Finally, the major upheaval of the end of the century, which can be interpreted as a crisis of overproduction, has a twofold effect. It forces a drastic winnowing of established publishers, separating those who have the strength to resist the blow from those who cannot survive economic hard times. It brings to the forefront two new publishers who will dominate literary production between the wars (the Éditions

Nouvelles, founded by Bernard Grasset in 1907 and the Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française in 1911, which becomes Gallimard eight years later).³⁴ Because of the crisis, the structure of publishing requires strengthening. The era of publishers as conquering entrepreneurs who invent a profession fades into that of the publishing houses, organized in departments with distinct and complementary skills (literary direction, production, commercial marketing, advertising).³⁵ To what degree does this trajectory and this French chronology, which highlight three definitions and three highly different forms of publishing activity, hold for other countries? Only similar national publishing histories currently in progress will permit one to decide.

The reevaluation of the concept of publishing went along with that of the concept of reading. We have already said that the French history of the book implicitly considered reading as a practice that was always similar to what it is today and as a passive reception of messages that printed texts transmit. The revision has been twofold and fruitful. In the first place, understanding sociocultural cleavages solely through statistically measurable indicators (such as literacy rates or the book's unequal presence in different social classes) has appeared too shortsighted. Inspired by a cultural sociology more sensitive to uses than to distributions, the history of the book, changed into the history of reading, has sought to reconstitute the contrasting manners in which different readers apprehend, handle, and appropriate texts in books. Thus were defined the program and the principles of a history of the ways of reading, perceived in their chronological variations and their sociocultural differentiations.

Certain fundamental oppositions have oriented this approach. We have already considered that which contrasts reading aloud with reading done silently with the eyes alone, without the mumbling that the Latins termed *ruminatio*. This opposition accounts

34. Elisabeth Parinet, 'L'édition littéraire, 1890-1914,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 4: 148-87.

35. Elisabeth Parinet et Valérie Tesnière, 'Une entreprise: la maison d'édition,' *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, vol. 4: 122-47.

at the same time for the profound transformation of intellectual practices in educated circles, whose readers are silent before the invention of printing, and for the persistence of a profound cultural gap, which marks off the most disadvantaged readers by the fact that they have to read aloud to understand what they are reading.

Second contrast: between reading in solitude, in a retreat or in secret, and public reading. Because it is the case in our society, reading has traditionally been perceived as the act, par excellence, of individual intimacy, a fundamentally private practice. And, of course, both texts and images testify to the strong rapport between the act of reading and a retreat from the world. But one must also recognize that other types of reading do exist, which are not done in solitude, which are not solitary, and which are not silent. This perception has recently stimulated interest in France in institutions where one can read without buying and where the encounter with the book is done in a collective space, institutions such as the collections opened to the public, the reading societies (*'cabinets de lecture'*), the municipal libraries (fed by the revolutionary confiscations), as well as the popular libraries with their contrasting philanthropic or associative inspirations. Simultaneously, new attention has been given to all forms of oral reading that are understood not only as the means of bringing written culture to the illiterate but also, most especially, as a form of familial, worldly, or scholarly sociability, done by the literate for each other. From the carriage to the tavern, from the salon to the academy, from the close circle of friends to the household group, numerous occasions arise between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries where reading aloud for others is an ordinary and expected gesture. It is clear that reading is not only an expression of intimacy or privacy but is also the bond and the expression of social ties.³⁶

Third contrast: the recognized difference between educated

36. Roger Chartier, 'Leisure and Sociability. Reading Aloud in Early Modern Europe,' *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, eds. S. Zimmerman and R. Weissman, Associate University Presses (forthcoming).

reading and 'popular' reading. The patient collection of what the humblest readers have said or written about their reading, like the reconstitution of the implied reading inscribed in printed objects (aimed if not exclusively at least massively at popular readers) has permitted the characterization of a different manner of reading that is not that of the virtuosi of the book. This popular reading requires explicit and repeated signs, numerous titles and headings, frequent summaries and images. It is only at ease with brief, complete sequences, seems to require only minimal coherence, and proceeds by the association of textual unities (chapters, fragments, paragraphs), which are themselves disconnected. Discontinuous, approximate, hesitant: this way of reading guides editorial strategies in giving form to the printed objects offered to the largest numbers, and guides the work of adaptation, which modifies a text when it is given to new, less educated readers in a new and less costly form. This other manner of reading also defines a specific relationship to print culture, a specific mode of comprehension that creates a cultural frontier based on the varying uses made by different classes of readers of the same texts rather than on the unequal distribution of these texts in society.³⁷

Today, if these macroscopic oppositions are to maintain their validity, they must be refined by shifting attention to smaller-scale differences. To recognize these differences supposes, for example, that one consider the specific status assigned to a particular book in a given milieu, whose use defines what all reading should be. Such books include the Bible in Calvinist and pietist Protestantism, almanacs and books of secrets in certain rural societies, the novel for many urban citizens after 1750, or even Rousseau's books for an informed elite.³⁸ Such an approach requires one to rethink

37. Roger Chartier, *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987 (tr. *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

38. David D. Hall, 'The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600-1850,' *Printing and Society in Early America*, eds. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench, Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1983, pp. 1-47; Daniel Fabre, 'Le livre et sa magie,' *Pratiques de la lecture*, ed. Roger Chartier, Marseille: Rivages, 1985, pp. 181-206; Robert Darnton, 'Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of

the very definition of social differences. Faithful to the major categories established by social history, French history of the book (and of reading) has remained captive to a manner of organizing oppositions between groups in terms of their socioeconomic differences. This explains the favor accorded to the antipathy between elite and popular culture that has been the object of so many studies. The long-term history of practices of reading teaches us, however, that there exist other equally important divisions that are also social but that highlight other cleavages: between men and women, between urban and rural citizens, between Catholics and members of the Reformed faith, but also between generations, professions, and neighborhoods. In this way, the history of print culture can in turn help social history reformulate its own concepts.

But the history of reading's purview is not limited to this. It is informed by an apparent contradiction: either it affirms the total control of the text in its power to constrain the reader (but then reading can no longer be considered an autonomous practice, and its variations lose their significance) or else it postulates the reader's liberty to produce his own unique sense beyond the text itself. But then the history of reading takes the risk of scattering into an indefinite collection of separate and irreducible experiences. The intention of the history of the practice of reading is to transform this apparently insurmountable contradiction into a functioning tension. It seeks to identify for each period and each milieu the shared modes of reading that model individual gestures, and it places the processes by which a reader or a group of readers produce their own meaning of a text at the center of its interrogation. The construction of meaning, which varies historically and socially, is thus understood to be at the intersection of, on the one hand, the particularities of readers endowed with specific competencies, identified by their social position and their cultural

Romantic Sensitivity,' *The Great Cat Massacre*, pp. 214-56 (tr. 'Le courrier des lecteurs de Rousseau: la construction de la sensibilité romantique,' *Le grand massacre des chats*, pp. 200-38).

a field of research — a frame of reference — that defines all processes of the production of meaning as involving differentiated and fluid relationships that arise from simultaneous or separate variations in the text itself, the fashion in which it is printed, and the method of reading (silent or oral, sacralized or secular, communal or solitary, public or private, rudimentary or virtuosic, etc.) A somewhat paradoxical connection, given what had been the 'Frenchness' in the history of the book, has formed between the study of the materiality of printed objects, the reflection on textual forms and strategies, and the history of cultural practices. This connection establishes a new mode of history that ties together hitherto unrelated areas of knowledge, that looks for the most socially rooted differentiations in the most formal apparatuses, that invites to the same task historians of the texts, physical bibliographers, and historians of sociocultural cleavages. A new 'Frenchness' may be born from this unprecedented intertwining of national and foreign traditions, from this return to the text and the object, which does not abandon the *Annales* tradition. But even better, one may see here the creation of a new community of knowledge that is not restricted to national frontiers.

And this all the more, since the questions that the history of the book, of publishing, and of reading may reformulate, are not themselves enclosed within national territories. The circulation of printed texts and the practices of reading, in the variety of their expression, are at the core of all of the major evolutions that transformed European and even Occidental civilization between the end of the Middle Ages and the present day. The first of these is the process of civilization as Norbert Elias has identified it.³⁹ This process links the construction of a modern state, and the dispositions (as characterized by their practice of reading), and, on the other hand, the textual and physical forms of those texts

39. Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und Psychogenetische Untersuchungen*, Basel: Haus zum Falken, 1939, Bern: Verlag Francke AG, 1969, and Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978–79 (tr. *The Civilizing Process, Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978 and 1982). Vol. 1, *The History of Manners*; vol. 2, *State Formation and Civilization*.

appropriated by reading. This observation permits us to articulate social formations that it creates (for example, courtly society), with changes in the rules and norms that control individual conduct. Printed material plays an essential role in this inculcation of new constraints that rein in the emotions, censure impulses, and raise the threshold of modesty, because it discriminates between legitimate gestures and those that are no longer legitimate, and because it carries the new civility taught in schools and presented in popular literature beyond the narrow world of courtly society. To understand how a new way of being in the world can have been imposed on an entire society calls for attention to the social places where it is communicated (the court, the family, the school, the church). But also one must examine both the books and the use made of them, since books transcribe and transmit this new way of being.⁴⁰

The second major trajectory of the evolution of Western civilization that involves the book is the creation of a private sphere of existence, separate from communal controls and freed from the authority of the state. For Philippe Ariès, the knowledge of reading and writing, the more intensive circulation of both manuscript and printed writing, and the diffusion of silent reading—which creates an intimate and secret relationship between the reader and his book—are all necessary conditions for affirming the very notion of privacy.⁴¹ Certainly, as we have mentioned, reading aloud for oneself or for others, together with reading with others for work or for diversion, are practices that resist the process of privatization or that propose an example which is not that of the individual retreating from the world. Nonetheless, it is the now personal relationship with the written word that gives rise to a new piety, which radically modifies the relationship of men to the sacred, as well as experiences that permit the construction of an

40. Roger Chartier, 'Distinction et divulgation: la civilité et ses livres,' *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime*, pp. 45–86 (tr. 'From Texts to Manners. A Concept and Its Books: *Civilité* between Aristocratic Distinction and Popular Appropriation,' *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, pp. 71–109).

41. Philippe Ariès, 'Pour une histoire de la vie privée,' *Histoire de la vie privée*, eds. Philippe Ariès et Georges Duby, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986, vol. 3:7–19.

inner self. From this perspective, the aim of a history of reading is to trace a mobile and unstable frontier between private and public and also to offer a definition of the different forms of interlocking and competitive privacy: individual intimacy, familial intimacy, and convivial sociability.⁴²

But the practices of reading are also at the center of a process that sees the emergence of a new public space confronting the authority of the State, a 'political public sphere,' to borrow the expression of Jürgen Habermas.⁴³ Following Kant, this can be defined as a space for debate and criticism, where private citizens make public use of their reason, in complete equality, no matter what their social condition, and without being limited in the exercise of their judgment. This 'political public sphere' first appeared in England and then in France and the rest of the Continent. It was born of more or less institutionalized forms of sociability originating with the Enlightenment (salons, clubs, cafés, masonic lodges, literary societies) and it was made possible through the circulation of the printed word. Listen to Kant: 'I mean by the public use of our reason that which one uses as an *intellectual* before an audience *which reads*.' Public opinion is identified here as a community of readers who make double use of the printed word: in the close-knit conviviality of common readings, which consolidates new forms of intellectual sociability, and in solitary but shared reflection, which the circulation of the book authorizes. Perceived in this way, the history of reading is one of the major themes in the formation of modern political culture, culture that affirms the legitimacy of criticism against the power of the prince and that models that civic community on the basis of communication and the discussion of individual opinions.

Of these three trajectories, all of them concern France but none of them is unique to her. To understand them from the perspective of practices of reading requires, necessarily, a comparative ap-

42. Roger Chartier, 'Les pratiques de l'écrit,' *Histoire de la vie privée*, vol. 3: 112-61.

43. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuwied and Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962 (tr. *L'Éspace public. Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, Paris: Payot, 1978).

proach. And this brings me to a concluding statement. It might seem that the history of the book at this time is closing in on national territories with the flowering of these individual projects of histories of publishing. Undoubtedly, each country should bring to light the state of its particular research and should design the programs of projects to be undertaken. Still, it seems to me that such enterprises reveal their true significance only if they shed new light on the evolutions that have marked, differently and at different times, all of European and American societies. The history of the book, which became the history of publishing and then the history of reading, can teach us a great deal about the way in which, between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, the conditions of the exercise of power changed, how cleavages between groups and classes developed, how cultural practices and ways of being in society have evolved. Rather than characterizing the 'printing revolution' with its specific traits, it is more pertinent to understand how the book and its uses, before and after the printing press, have given a unique character to the major evolutions that have transformed society on both sides of the Atlantic.

The 'Frenchness' in the history of the book is probably no longer what it has been: the critics from without, the doubts from within, broke apart the identity constructed in the 1960s around a social and serial history. The field of research of French historians—who consider that production, circulation, and the appropriation of books is a fundamental aspect of the history of civilization—is no longer unique to them. They share it with others who locate themselves between textual studies, the history of reading, and studies of the artifacts themselves. Should one then say today that 'Frenchness no longer exists' in the history of the book? Maybe, unless one can consider as typically French the desire to put the history of print culture at the service of wide-ranging questions, the taste for long-term evolutions, and the attempt to link 'case studies' to macroscopic interpretations. Is this enough to define a new 'Frenchness'? I shall let you determine that.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.