

TECH2503 Community Media Production

Lecture Thirteen – Being Social and Collaborative

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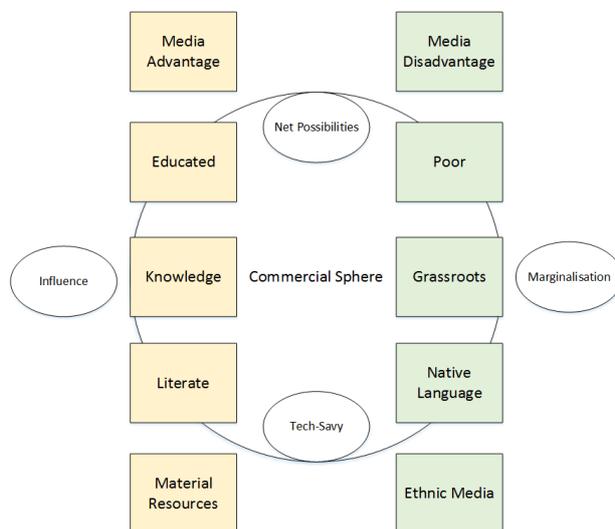
1 Introduction – Changes to the Mediascape

“Is independent, alternative, or community media filling the void of local commercial news for these groups? How exactly is the deregulated local mediascape affecting grassroots communication efforts and with what consequences for democratic communication more generally” (Bernadette Barker-Plummer & Dorothy Kidd in Howley, 2010, p. 318).

“Changes in media structure, then, are likely to have consequences for democratic processes” (Bernadette Barker-Plummer & Dorothy Kidd in Howley, 2010, p. 319).

“We asked them about their communication goals, strategies and technologies and about their experiences of recent changes in the local media environment” (Bernadette Barker-Plummer & Dorothy Kidd in Howley, 2010, p. 319).

1.1 Marginalisation



“Other poorer, grassroots groups find the commercial sphere closed or closing to their voices and are turning more to native language or ethnic media sources. Similarly, it is the most-resourced groups – in terms of education, knowledge, media literacies, and material resources – that are best positioned to take advantage of the possibilities of net communications. For the most part tech savvy and resourced groups, in fact, the Web may offer a new form of influence” (Bernadette Barker-Plummer & Dorothy Kidd in Howley, 2010, p. 325).

“How new sites of communication, such as social change Web sites, blogs, online art, or video upload sites, connect to existing democratic communication flows?” (Bernadette Barker-Plummer & Dorothy Kidd in Howley, 2010, p. 325).

2 Trade-Off Theory

“Environmental pessimists claim we must give up our modern way of life to save the planet. Environmental optimists reply that the problems can all be solved within the existing system at modest cost. The one thing they agree on is that sacrifice is necessary to achieve environmental goals” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 269).

“To claim that society must choose between industry and crafts is to concede that the existing industrial system is the only possible one, an essentially determinist position. It assumes there can be no reform of modern industrialism based on the invention of alternative technologies compatible with the health of the environment. Such a reform would reconstruct the industrial system through the incorporation of new values into industrial design” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 269).

2.1 Modernity & Technology

“The individualism and freedom we value so highly depend not only on political democracy but also on the technological achievements that support communication and transportation, and leave time for education in childhood and beyond. In sum, modernity and technology are mutually interdependent” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 270).

“There are enough problems with cost/benefit analysis to cast doubt on its claims. The current value we place on the various elements of trade-offs may not make much sense in scientific or human terms. Organisations tend to hide or exaggerate costs that might interfere with their plans, and it is difficult to know how to place a monetary value on such things as natural beauty and good health. But these values must be translated into economic terms to enter the calculation” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 271).

“Trade-off arguments are thus often based on flimsy estimates of costs and benefits” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 271).

3 Technological Determinism and Neutrality

“This philosophy of technology assumes two connected principles, technological determinism and the neutrality of technology” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 272).

“It is usually the case, as economics claims, that one can’t optimise two variables. To optimise A, some of B must be sacrificed. While this seems obvious in daily life, it involves some questionable background assumptions in policy applications” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 272).

“Economists can deploy technical tools that enable them to extend the notion of trade-offs to include purely theoretical alternatives that figure in no actual calculus of well-being. This confuses the issues in public debate over live options” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 272).

3.1 Ceteris Paribus

“There is a second assumption in the background of the trade-off approach. To make sense of talk about trade-offs, all other things must remain equal. This assumption is called ‘*ceteris paribus*.’ If laws change, if prices change, if the relation between goods changes, then the original calculation of the trade-off is invalidated” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 272).

“But, extend the time horizon to historical spans and it is not at all plausible that things will remain equal. It is thus not surprising to find that the trade-off approach fails to explain past causes of epoch making change that resemble contemporary environmental regulation, such as the abolition of child labour. Such changes cannot be understood on the model of a personal budget” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 272).

“Applied uncritically, *ceteris paribus* overlooks the possibility of such advances. Thus it implies that development proceeds along a fixed track from one stage to the next without the possibility of branching out in new directions inspired by political interventions. This view is called technological determinism” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 273).

Ceteris Paribus

Also commonly translated as "all other things equal", learn more about this latin phrase and its application in economics. https://youtu.be/N_3cYkb9I6c

4 Technological Reforms

“Deterministic applications of trade-off theory serve not only to challenge environmentalism but many other technological reforms. For example, until recently most management theorists were convinced that there was a trade-off between worker participation and productivity. Technological imperatives supposedly condemned us to obedience at work. Similar arguments in medicine kept patients in a passive role. In the early 1970s women demanding changes in childbirth procedures were often told they were endangering their own health and that of their babies. Today many of the most controversial changes have become routine, for example, partners admitted to labour and delivery rooms” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 273).

“Over and over technological reform is condemned as morally desirable perhaps, but impractical. Over and over the outcome belies the plausible arguments against reform” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 273).

4.1 Neutrality

“Determinism is often accompanied by the belief in the neutrality of technology. It is said that technology is a pure means, appropriately judged only by the formal value of efficiency” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 273).

“Together, technologic determinism and the neutrality thesis support the idea that progress along the one possible line of advance depends exclusively on rational judgements about progress. Since only experts are qualified to make those judgements, environmentalists obstruct progress when they impose their ideological goals on the process of development. Where goals conflict, one or the other must be sacrificed, environmental protection or technological advance – in Mandeville’s terms, virtue or prosperity” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 273).

5 Social Change

“Technological development can switch tracks in response to constraints. On its new track, it may achieve several goals that were originally in conflict along its old one” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 273).

“Determinism misses the cultural dimension of this historical change” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 275).

“In everyday life, our goals are nested in hierarchies. But sometimes, particular actions or objects we pursue belong to several different hierarchies where they may have somewhat different meanings. In the steamboat [community media] case, an individual decision may well differ from a communal one because the community relates the options to different goals than do the individuals. Trade-offs are further complicated where these goals are associated with different decision procedures, each

procedure introducing a different bias into the choice. Individual market based decisions led to different conclusions than collective political decisions because individuals and governments situate safety [participation] in different goal hierarchies” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 276).

6 Alternative Paradigms

“National unity is not an individual economic concern but a collective political one” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 276).

“Economic considerations are sometimes undercut by the instability of the problem definition associated with particular technologies. For there to be a trade-off account, the options must be stabilised” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 276).

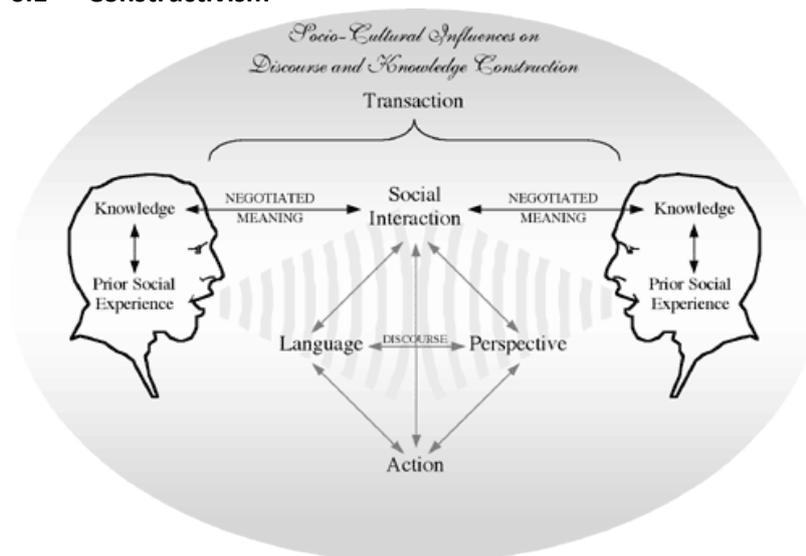
“There were two slightly different and competing problem definitions, one at the individual and the other at the collective level, and it was not clear what the problem was until it was finally settled. In this case the decision about what kind of technology to employ could not be made on the basis of efficiency because efficiency is relative to some known purpose. If the purpose is in question, efficiencies cannot be compared” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 276).

An Introduction to Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

The historical development of scientific discovery was not linear, but cyclical, punctuated by revolutions that signalled major shifts in scientific understanding. There are recognisable periods, both of normal science and of extraordinary science. Watch Macat's short video for a great introduction to Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, one of the most important books ever written on the history and philosophy of science.

https://youtu.be/O_oDFvklkyY

6.1 Constructivism



“Various versions of constructivism argue against technological determinism that there are many paths of development and that the choice between them is social and political and not a simple matter of efficiency. A way of life that is expressed in design. Values are thus embedded in technology” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 276).

“Progress is not reducible to a succession of rational choices because criteria of rationality are themselves in flux” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 277).

“Kuhn’s solution to this conundrum was the notion of paradigms, by which he meant a model for research. Such models have tremendous influence on those who come afterward. For example, physicists found in Newton not just a correct theory of gravitation, but a way to do physics that prevailed for several hundred years” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 277).

“Normal science, Kuhn argued, is research within the established paradigm. The technological equivalent is the pursuit of efficiency in conformity with what I call technical codes, the codes that govern technical practice. These codes materialise values in technical disciplines and design” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 277).

7 Inherited World-Views

“At every stage in the history of their discipline experts inherit the results of earlier technical controversies and struggles” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 277).

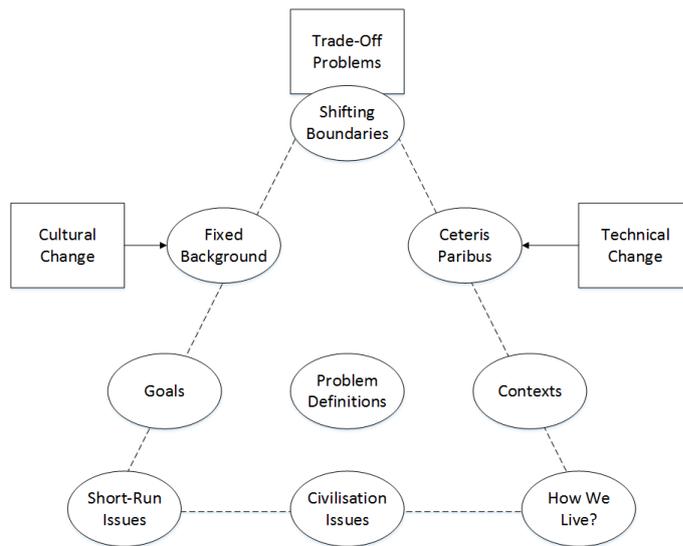
“This gives rise to a characteristic illusion of autonomy. In fact the autonomy of these disciplines is limited. Their past is not a succession of decisions identifying the scientifically validated ‘one best way,’ but rather it is the result of social choice between several good ways with different social consequences. There is thus what might be called a technological unconscious in the background of the technical disciplines. This is what makes determinism so plausible, but it also leaves it vulnerable to historical refutation” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 277).

“We need an exercise to free up our imagination of the future in which our present prejudices will become obvious for what they are” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 277).

7.1 Social Technology

“The new strategy was based on a theory of ‘social technology’ (Neder, 2008). Instead of privileging large scale industry and agribusiness, under the assumption that there is one universal path of development, the theory of social technology is based on two constructivist premises. First, technological design is said to be relative to social criteria reflecting the needs of specific social groups. Design guided by criteria of capitalist development will be different from design guided by the needs of poor farmers. Second, successful design is not only efficient at producing goods but also integrates with the social system in a way which allows its spontaneous reproduction over time. Applied to Brazil’s situation, the theory of social technology leads to the notion that social inclusion as a criterion of development can shape new technological designs which can be integrated to the lives of family farmers in a sustainable way” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 278).

8 Social Uptake



“What is truly innovative in the theory of social technology is the idea that modern knowledge can serve the poor by working with them to develop technologies that will have successful social uptake. Social technology is a third alternative to populist rejection of modernity and technological determinism, according to which all problems are solved by the provision of the latest technology” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 279).

“I have identified several problems with the trade-off approach. First, it ignores the significance of the shifting boundaries of the economy... Second, the trade-off approach assumes the fixity of the background, *ceteris paribus*, but technological change over the long time spans of history invalidates that assumption. All things are not equal in history since cultural change and technological advance alter the terms of the problem. Third, the trade-off approach obscures differences in problem definition and goals reflecting different contexts of decision. There is no absolute context from the standpoint of which an unbiased evaluation is possible.... Fourth, the trade-off approach confuses short run economic considerations with civilizational issues. These latter concern identity, who we are and how we want to live” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 279).

9 Inherited Interventions

“Environmental considerations were not included in earlier technical disciplines and codes and so today they appear to come from outside the economy. It is this heritage of indifference that makes it necessary to formulate concern for the environment as a value and to impose regulation on industry” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 280).

“It seems likely that the ideological form of environmental values is temporary. These values will be incorporated into technical disciplines and codes in a technological revolution we are living unawares today. Environmentalism will not impoverish our society. We will go on enriching ourselves but our refunctions of prosperity and the technologies instrumental to it will change and become more rational in the future judgement of our descendants. They will accept environmentalism as a self-evident advance” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 280).

10 Shifting Boundaries

“But when the boundaries of the economy shift, so many cultural and technical consequences follow that it makes no sense to look back with an eye to costs and benefits. In the only sense in which it is significant for policy, effects on social wealth must be measured with respect to the fulfilment of actual desires, not theoretical constructions” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 280).

“One might object that in failing to appreciate theoretical trade-offs, we ignore economic realities, but that is a short-term view. This type of cultural change is eventually locked in by technological developments” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 280).

“In sum, economics can help us navigate the flow of wealth but it cannot tell us where to place the dams that change the course of that flow” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 281).

“Technological revolutions look irrational at first, but in fact they establish another framework of rationality, another paradigm” (Feenberg, 2016, p. 281).

11 Network Collaborations

“By amplifying community interconnectedness, Intranets promise to enable new forms of political democratic engagement that expand on present day networks and models of cooperation. Intranets are often decentralised and ad hoc with no one entity owning the entire infrastructure or controlling the expansion of or access to the infrastructure. These arrangements create new challenges for surveillance, command, and control as well as new opportunities for participatory media and information dissemination” (Sascha D. Meinrath & Victor W. Pickard in Howley, 2010, p. 328).

“Intranet technologies create new possibilities for how information is produced, disseminated, and archived by creating a peer-to-peer infrastructure that parallels the rise of peer-to-peer technologies, services, and applications” (Sascha D. Meinrath & Victor W. Pickard in Howley, 2010, p. 329).

“The Internet, generally speaking, was conceived as and remains an open designable technology. One can ‘add, embed, contain or surround the artefact with other technology in a way that radically changes it’ (Stolterman, 2002, p.45)” (Sascha D. Meinrath & Victor W. Pickard in Howley, 2010, p. 335).

“The emergent roles of Intranets enabled by the internet, digital television, cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and other digital media are providing a powerful set of tools which challenge and shift social economic behaviour” (Sascha D. Meinrath & Victor W. Pickard in Howley, 2010, p. 338).

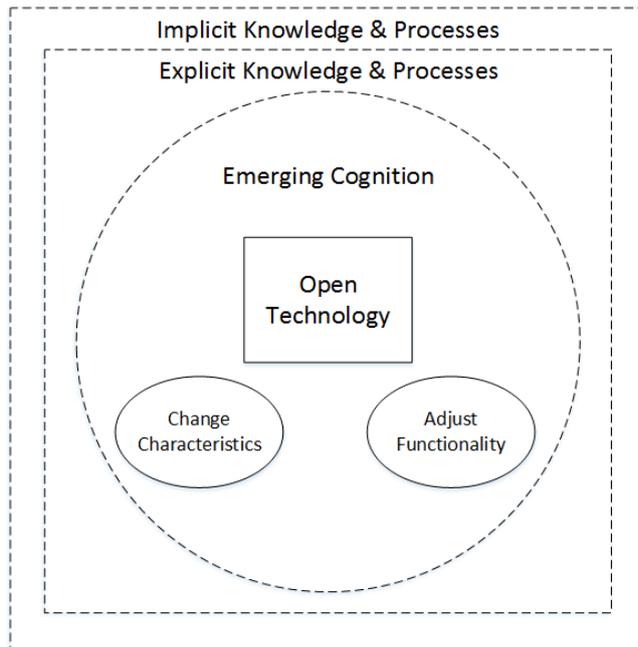
12 Open Technologies

“Stolterman (2002) defines the important attributes this: ... An open technology allows the user to continue changing the technology’s specific characteristics, and to adjust, and or change its functionality. When it comes to an open technology changes in functionality pose a question not only of change in the way the existing functionality is used or understood but also of a real change in the artefact’s internal manifestation” (Sascha D. Meinrath & Victor W. Pickard in Howley, 2010, p. 335).

Levy explains that “whether we are producing useful documents, clarifying or improving shared symbolic structures, spreading the most effective methods and practices or raising individual and collective awareness of the emergent cognition for the community, we will almost always find our-selves

confronted with the problem of explicating implicit knowledge and processes.” What Levy suggests, then, is that an organisation has to look at the way that it supports conversation and the sharing of tacit knowledge, as much as the way that it shares formal and previously established knowledge.

Levy believes that “we need to promote organisational and technical environments conducive to transparency, flexible reorganisation of skill networks and continuous collaborative creation of immediately usable knowledge.” This means fostering a dialogue within an organisation that is trusting and allows people to comprehend the differences between knowledge that is explicit and clear, and knowledge that is implicit and emergent.



13 Inherited Social Knowledge

Levy argues that as individuals we inherit the benefits of the collective knowledge of our society, such as the institutions and the tools that are used to give shape and order to social life. Schools, civic institutions, the media, and so on, are all examples of this inherited field of knowledge, as we do not create them anew, but inherit them and add to them or change them as we engage with them. Alternatively, according to Levy, we also inherit ‘distributed processes of problem solving, decision making and knowledge accumulation’.

These processes have emerged from the conversations and interactions that take place in society. Levy suggests that in a democracy, as well as recognising individual forms of intelligence we are also able to recognise collective forms of intelligence as contributors participate in these decision-making process and the collaborative production processes of an open society. A society that allows people to make a contribution of their own free will, rather than being forced or having a sense of discipline imposed on them.

14 Open Source Collaboration

Levy gives the example of the Open Source movement as one in which work is based on free collaboration between programmers and designers who share a common desire to exchange ideas, knowledge and techniques in the production of software. Levy cites Wikipedia as an example in which ‘authors, readers and editors exchange roles to further the dissemination of knowledge’, and are therefore a ‘striking example of the power of collective intelligence emerging from a civilised creative conversation’. Levy believes that collective thinking opens-up more space for individual critical

thinking, rather than imposing a form of standardisation and conformity because we have a moral obligation to enrich and return knowledge back to our community for the common good. As Levy argues, 'collective intelligence can only be productive by combining or coordinating unique elements and facilitating dialogue, and not by levelling differences or silencing dissenters'.

15 Knowledge Producers

Knowledge producers are therefore required to understand and to manage their activities in the digital environment in ways that cope with the varied and abundant flows of knowledge that are around us. All that can be known can't be learnt by any single person, so according to Levy, we have to learn ways to control how we attend to information, how we define and order our priorities and how we develop an effective level of competence in the know-how that we think we will need. A wiki is therefore a useful place for us to develop our skills as knowledge producers in that we can use a wiki to organise, share, technically support, reorganise and collaborate with others who are interested in similar forms of knowledge. Wikis can be thought of as a 'collective memory' in which the implicit and local know-how that is embedded in our conversations is transformed.

16 Social Conversations

"Whatever the future may have in store, one thing is certain. Unless local communal life can be re-stored, the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent problems: to find and identify itself. But if it be re-established, it will manifest a fullness, variety and freedom of possession and enjoyment of meanings and goods unknown in the contiguous associations of the past. For it will be alive and flexible as well as stable, responsive to the complex and world-wide scene in which it is enmeshed. While local, it will not be isolated. Its larger relationships will provide an inexhaustible and flowing fund of meanings upon which to draw, with assurance that its drafts will be honoured" (Dewey, 2016, p. 232).

"Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But the winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions which affect association and their dissemination in print is a precondition of the creation of a true public. But it and its results are but tools after all. Their final actuality is accomplished in face-to-face relationships by means of direct give-and-take" (Dewey, 2016, p. 232).

17 Technologies of Cooperation

According to Rheingold virtual communities are "technologies of cooperation" (Rheingold, 2012, p. 151) that enable people to collaborate more effectively because they are able to coordinate, share and give attention to their common goals. As Rheingold describes, "collaborators develop and agree on common goals, share responsibility and work together to achieve those goals, and contribute to resources to the effort" (Rheingold, 2012, p. 154).

Rheingold describes Elinor Ostrom's principles of collaborative participation in virtual communities that override "basic social dilemmas by constructing systems of norms and self-policing social contract" between collaborators (Rheingold, 2012, p. 152).

18 Self-Governing Groups

A self-governing group, according to Ostrom is one that takes account of several emergent design issues:

- Groups boundaries are clearly defined.
- Rules governing the use of collective goods are well matched to local needs and conditions.
- Most individuals affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
- The right of community members to devise their own rules is respected by external authorities.
- A system for monitoring member's behaviour exists; the community members themselves undertake this monitoring.
- A graduated system of sanctions is used.
- Community members have access to low-cost conflict resolution mechanisms.
- For common pool resources that are parts of larger systems: appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organised in multiple layers of nested enterprises" (Rheingold, 2012, p. 152).

According to Rheingold, knowing the difference between the terms "coordination, cooperation and collaboration" is essential to develop working strategies for collective action (Rheingold, 2012, p. 153).

19 Summary

"Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator. Publication is partial and the public which results is partially informed and formed until the meanings it purveys pass from mouth to mouth. There is no limit to the liberal expansion and confirmation of limited personal intellectual endowment which may proceed from the flow of social intelligence when that circulates by word of mouth from one to another in the communications of the local community. That and that only gives reality to public opinion. We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium" (Dewey, 2016, p. 233).

The history of tea in Britain - Professor Markman Ellis, Dr Matthew Mauger, Dr Richard Coulton

In 2015, it was announced that researchers from Queen Mary University of London found what they believe to be the oldest tea in Britain. The dried green tea was acquired in China, around the year 1700, by ship's surgeon James Cuninghame, who subsequently gave it as a gift to the famous physician and collector of curiosities, Hans Sloane. In this video, the research team discuss the significance of their discovery and their work as historians of Britain's favourite drink.

<https://youtu.be/tTsWjM2yO7A>

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