Emergence of the Public Sphere

History of Information, July 21, 2010

Administrivia

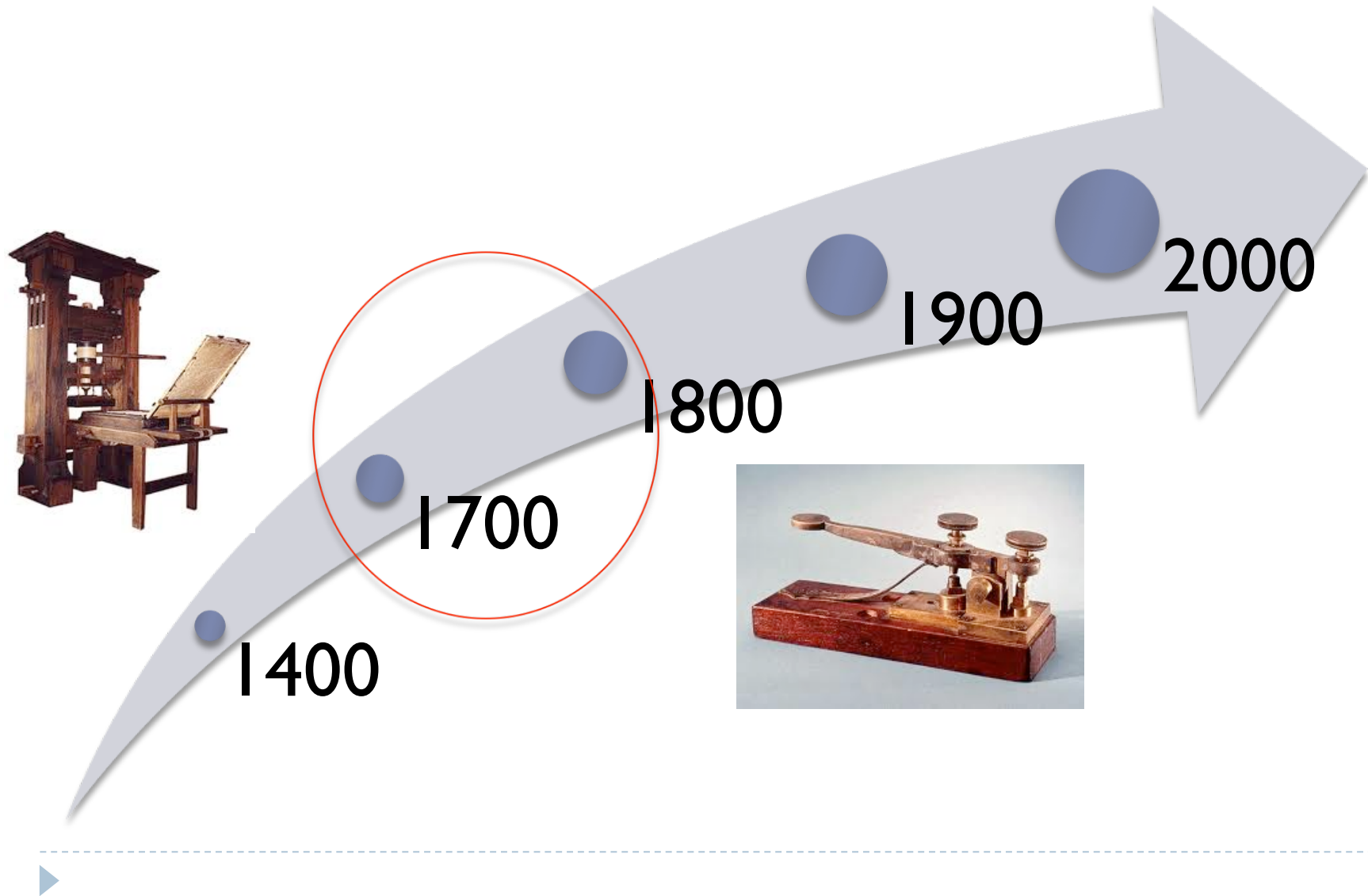▶ Technology

▶ Midterm Friday

Quiz #2

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1. According to Darnton, what do we learn about the information age by examining 18th century France?

2. Name two major claims in Cowan's work on the British Coffee house. Be specific.

3. As clearly as possibly, explain how Cowan and Darnton are critical of notions of "print culture" and the "information age".

▷

An IT Lull?

1400

1700

1800

1900

2000

Technologies – the 17th-18th C. Portfolio

▸ Canal

▸ Printing Press

▸ Sailing Ship

▸ Sextant

▸ Roads

▸ Mail

   ▸ All improved diffusion of information

▸

The Emergence of the Public

▸ "[In the late seventeenth century] . . a new cultural space developed, ... a 'public sphere' in which private individuals came together to form a whole greater than the sum of the parts. By exchanging information, ideas, and criticism, these individuals created a cultural actor -- the public -- which has dominated European culture ever since. Many, if not most, of the cultural phenomena of the modern world derive from [this period] -- the periodical, the newspaper, the novel, the journalist, the critic, the public library, the concert, the public museum… Perhaps most important of all, it was then that 'public opinion' came to be recognized as the ultimate arbiter in matters of taste and politics.

   -Tim Blanning, *The Culture of Power*

"The Public"

▸ What is it?

▸ How does it vary based on culture/space/time?

▸ Google: "The American Public"

  ▸ 47M results

▸ "The North Korean Public"

  ▸ 277,000 results

▸ "The 19th century public"

  ▸ 888K results

▸ "The medieval public"

  ▸ 45K results

▸

L'Etat vs. Le Nation

- "Of all the manifold failings of the French monarchy in the 18th century, the most serious was its inability to sense the growing authority of the nation...Louis XIV might wll have said L'Etat, c'est moi, but Louis XVI could not say La Nation, c'est moi."

    -Tim Blanning, Culture of Power

▸ **England**

  ▸ 1649 - revolution leading to the execution of King Charles I
  ▸ 1660 Charles II restored to the throne
  ▸ 1665 plague – ~100,000 dead
  ▸ 1666 fire

▸ **France**

  ▸ 30 Years' War (1618-1648)
  ▸ Franco-Spanish War (1653-1659)
  ▸ Franco-Dutch War (1672-1678)
  ▸ And Versailles!
    ▸ Louis XIV could afford to ignore the signs of discontent; successors could not

Two "Publics"

- Against this backdrop, we see two distinct public spheres emerge

Coffee

"When foggy Ale, leavying up mighty trains
  Of muddy vapours, had beseig'd our Brains,
  Then Heaven in Pity . . .
  First sent amongst us this All-healing Berry"

  -anonymous, 1674

Samuel Pepys

▸ Diary 1660-9 provides snapshot of daily life during Restoration

▸ Frequenter and beneficiary of Coffeehouse society

▸ Twitter: @samuelpepys

▸ Web: http://www.pepysdiary.com/

Coffeehouse Society

- Initially treated more as private clubs
  - "air of exclusivity and aloofness"

- Tension between scholarly pursuit and "fashionable wit"
  - Post-Restoration zeitgeist contributed to perceived need to "reassert authority over discourse and culture"

- Still, "Penny Universities" offered **access**
  - Social
  - Informational
  - "fiction of equal status"
    - How is this similar to today's social media? What does it mean to follow or friend a person of higher status (or at least celebrity)?

Virtuosi

▶ "In a word, the virtuoso stops at the very point where the genuine scientist really begins…the quality of delight and the special kind of curiosity on which it thrives, namely wonder and admiration for the rare, the strange, and the incredible."

   - Houghton, The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century

▶ "[T]he reverence for antiquity, and the authority of men who have been esteemed great in philosophy … have retarded men from advancing in science….

   - Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum, 1620*

▶

Knowledge and the Virtuosi

▸ "I content myself with the speculative part of swimming; I care not for the practical. I seldom bring anything to use.... Knowledge is my ultimate end."

- Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, in *The Virtuoso, by Thomas Shadwell, 1676*

Virtuosi and The Royal Society

▸ "Though the Society entertains very many men of particular Professions; yet the farr greater Number are Gentlemen, free, and unconfin'd."

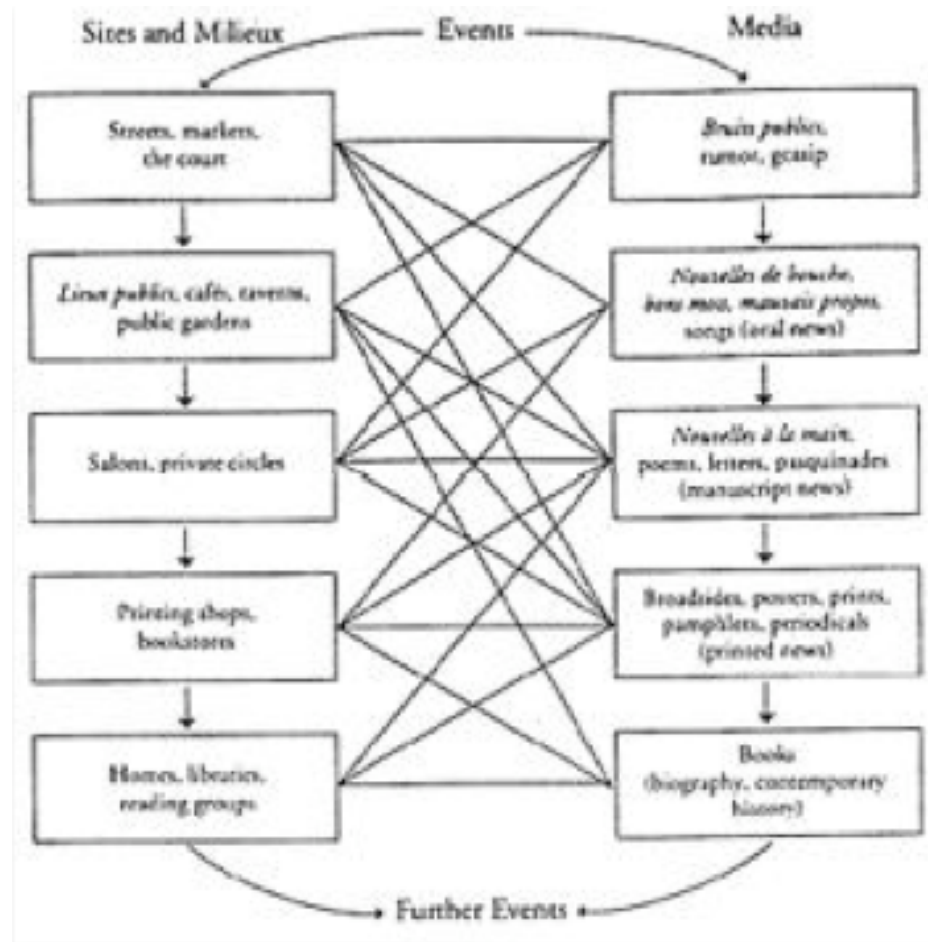Sprat, Thomas. *The History of the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge London. 1667*

▸ Momentum toward formalization

▸ Adoption of uniform scientific practices

▸ Establishment of print publishing expertise

▸ Institutionalization of recognition/reward

▸ Reflecting modern notions of "authorship", IP, etc.

▸

Multimedia Societies

▶ "It makes no sense, I think, to separate printed from oral and written modes of communication, as we casually do when we speak of "print culture," because they were all bound together in a multi-media system."

   -Robert Darnton

18th C. Paris' Multimedia Society

▸ What forms of media were used?

18th C. Paris' Multimedia Society

▸ What forms of media were used?

  ▸ Voice

  ▸ Scraps of paper

  ▸ Newsletters

  ▸ Books

▸ Gossip, song, poetry, narrative

▸ Mashup/Remixing

Multimedia and Technologized Societies

- c. 1979 Iran: Followers of Ruhollah Khomeini distribute printed pamphlets and cassette tapes to nurture dissent, culminating in Shah's overthrow

- 2009 Iran: Blogs, mobile phones, social media (Twitter, YouTube, flickr) used to publicize crackdown on election uprising
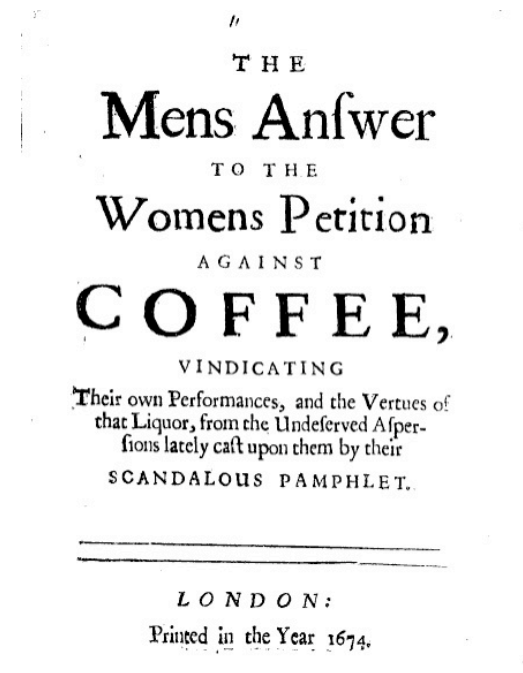
Growing Use of Print

- Number of titles printed in England:
  - (from Wm. St. Clair, *Reading Nation)*

  - 1630s – 600
  - 1640s – 1,600
  - 1650s – 1,200
  - 1660s – 800
  - 1670s – 1,000
  - 1680s – 1,500
  - 1690s – 1,400

Expanded Use of Print

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

▸ Also: earliest printed handbills, labels, posters, handbills, forms, indentures, receipts, tickets, ballots, etc.

THE

Mens Anſwer

TO THE

Womens Petition

AGAINST

COFFEE,

VINDICATING

Their own Performances, and the Vertues of that Liquor, from the Undeſerved Aſperſions lately caſt upon them by their

SCANDALOUS PAMPHLET.

LONDON:

Printed in the Year 1674.

News

- What is News?

News

- Seriality
- Periodicity
- Currency
- Independence
- Source
- Completeness

Darnton's "News"

1. insider gossip at court
2. general rumor in Paris
3. incorporated into nouvelles
4. printed as a scandalous book
5. and finally cycles back to the court itself

Multimedia Societies and "secret du roi"

- Is this revolution, or is it merely airing leaders' dirty laundry?
  - What is the line of demarcation between "political folklore" and the public's need to know?