

6.933J/ STS.420J First Paper Assignment

Papers due in Session-6

In a well-written, carefully argued paper of 3-4 pages (~1000 words), answer one of the following two questions. To support your argument, use evidence that is as specific as possible (including quotations), and include footnotes to tell the reader where your evidence is from. When drawing explicitly on Latour, make citations of the text and indicate the page numbers.

Please note: if you choose to answer the question about the September 11 disaster, please do not use the paper to vent emotions or opinions. Nor is the assignment an attempt to abstract or intellectualize these terrible events. Rather, the goal is to make careful, rigorous arguments, and hence to focus difficult and complex reactions into a constructive, educational exploration of a topic that affects us all, namely technology and society.

1. What are the technological aspects of the event that happened on September 11 and/or its aftermath? Can we distinguish the "technical" factors from the "social" factors? How may we think about our technologies differently after this event? You may choose one specific technology to focus on in your answer. You are encouraged, but not required, to use Latour's method to conduct your analysis.
2. Give an example of a technological innovation that can be described by a Latourian network. Explain some of the links and associations in that network, and how they are created and maintained. You might choose one aspect of Latour's ideas to focus on. Are there dimensions of the story that are not well captured by Latour's ideas? What are the limitations of his approach? Illustrate your argument by drawing specifically on Latour's text. The example is preferably but not necessarily from your own engineering experience.