

THEME 3: TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL FORMS

TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL FORMS PAPER

So, what do we need for this paper? Crucially, a definition of INFRASTRUCTURE.

Infrastructure: "A collective term for the subordinate parts of an undertaking; substructure, foundation; spec. The permanent installations forming a basis for military operations, as airfields, naval bases, training establishments, etc."

Infra: "A. In prepositional relation to the n. represented in second element. 1. Denoting 'below', 'beneath' (i.e. 'lower down than') in respect of local situation or position."

And we hear a lot about infrastructure in the current conflict in Iraq. In the wake of the United States takeover, as you might recall that there was a lot of looting and, more than this, a destruction of INFRASTRUCTURE; people ripped up pipes, roads, material things connected to Saddam Hussein's government. I think this surprised the American government in part because they thought that INFRASTRUCTURE was APOLITICAL. The idea would be that Iraq would be liberated and then Americans and others — not least Iraqis — could use the infrastructure that was left behind. But people seem to have associated the infrastructure with the previous regime. The lesson here might be that INFRASTRUCTURE is POLITICAL.

And that's the message of Latour's book, *Aramis*. But before we get into that, let me offer you three parables, stories about infrastructure.

1. Having trouble? Check for known outages or problems with the MIT email infrastructure.

INFRASTRUCTURE is SOCIAL

2. Time Zones: Abstract Infrastructure

INFRASTRUCTURE is about IDEAS of SOCIAL ORDER, SOCIAL FORMS

3. Alfred Ely Beach's Secret Pneumatic New York City Subway of 1867

(pp. 183, 184). Never became a full infrastructure

INFRASTRUCTURE has to be MAINTAINED; it can fall apart.

Trains

Latour, Bruno. 1996. *Aramis, or The Love of Technology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Latour calls this book scientifiction, a tale meant to caution us against TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM. Darwinian model of technological change.

The big question in this book, which is a kind of *murder mystery*, is: who killed Aramis?

"There are two models for studying innovations: the linear model and the whirlwind model. Or, if you prefer, the diffusion model and the translation model" (p. 118)

Latour prefers the translation model. It will not do to blame "society" — *what is that?* or one individual (p. 134)

Engineers make hybrid beings (p. 175)

You have to enroll people, engines, things.

"The only way to increase a project's reality is to compromise, to accept sociotechnical compromises" (p. 99)

What was Aramis?

Your task for today's in-class group activity: resurrect, rebuild Aramis.

Three groups to be kept in mind:

passengers/consumers
government
economists/insurance

film excerpts about cars: *Minority Report*, *Speed*, *Thelma and Louise*.