Investigative Report: Following the Connections

For this project, you will write an investigative piece on a project of your own choosing. This is a research paper that will look like investigative journalism. The assignment is inspired by concepts from Bruno Latour explored in Marilyn Cooper's article "How Bruno Latour Teaches Writing," and is loosely modeled on the assignment she describes there. The final paper will be 8-10 pages, double spaced, but there will be smaller steps along the way.

Basic concepts from Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT):

- None of us acts alone. Everything we do is part of an Actor-Network.
- Actor-Networks are made up of both human and non-human actants, such as animals and computers. From this perspective, we might see the novel corona virus as an actant.
- An Actor-Network is made up of intermediaries and mediators. An act flows through an intermediary without being changed. However, the input and output of a mediator is not the same, so the act is transformed to an extent.
- Actor-Networks are constantly being formed and unformed.
- We study an Actor-Network by describing it, not interpreting or explaining it.

Building Projects Doomed and Wondrous

One example of this sort of investigation can be seen in the *New Yorker* article "Donald Trump's Worst Deal" by Adam Davidson. The subtitle describes the gist of the article: "The President helped build a hotel in Azerbaijan that appears to be a corrupt operation engineered by oligarchs tied to Iran's Revolutionary Guard." This article focuses mainly on the funding for the project, but the main question is "How did an empty Trump-branded luxury hotel that has never opened get built in Azerbaijan?" One possible focus for your investigation could be a building, a pipeline (as in Cooper's article) a monument, a statue, a national park, a dam, or any other big construction project, controversial or not. How did it get there?

Books Great and Not So Great

We think of famous literature as the project of a single author's genius. However, the only way we know about a work is if it gets published. Emily Dickinson's poems might never have left her bedroom. There is only one manuscript of the Pearl poet's work, so we might never have read *Gawain and the Green Knight* if that manuscript had not survived. Charlotte Bronte had to use a pseudonym and pretend to be a man in order to get *Jane Eyre* published. A recent example of a book that does the kind of investigation you might do for this project is *Who We're Reading When We're Reading Murakami* by David Karashima. This book traces how an obscure Japanese writer became world famous due to the work of editors, publishers, and translators. So, another kind of project you might do is to choose a literary work and trace the network of people who brought it to publication. Why is it we know about this book?

Decisions and Discoveries, Great and Small

Some decisions made by political leaders, corporate CEOs, scientists, and other leaders are remembered because they had a big impact, for good or ill, on the world, a company, an organization, or a community. The decision might lead to an event, a policy, a law, or some other outcome. We also remember individuals for important discoveries that change our understanding of the world. However, behind these decisions or discoveries there is a network of people, equipment, funding sources, etc. that influenced the work and made it possible. For your project, you might choose one of these decisions or discoveries and trace the network behind it.

Steps in the Process

1. Choose a project. If you have an idea that is not quite like the suggestions above, ask me about it.
2. Research the network with web searches and in the library databases.
3. Your sources are part of the network you are tracing. Explore the works cited pages looking for connections. Look up people you find mentioned in the articles. Find out about technologies involved. The technologies you are using to do this research are also nodes in the network.
4. Organize the information in whatever way makes sense for the network you are tracing.
5. This project is endless because networks extend everywhere. Keeping working until you have enough description to fill 8-10 pages.
6. Although this project is about tracing and describing an Actor-Network, not interpreting it, after your description, include an additional paragraph describing any conclusions you might draw from doing this work.

We are spending four weeks on this project, so there should be time to share a draft of your results with your writing group in the third week of the project.