STS 200 WRITING LAB
TOPICS FOR WEEK 2 DISCUSSION

- Administrative matters:
  - Updates on weekly memos and student presentations
  - Assignment of writing groups
- Comments on Memo 1 papers
- Components of a successful paper:
  - Review each of these components
  - As part of this process, examine excerpts from papers in *Intersect*
- Discussion of student topics and questions
- Next step: memo on STS relevance (due January 19th)
- Final task today: writing groups exchange e-mail addresses

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

- Weekly memos: just submit them electronically
- Student presentations:
  - Work-in-progress presentations during weeks 7 and 8
  - The idea is to give you useful comments before you finish writing
  - 8-10 minute presentations before McGinn, Slayton, and Windham, followed by 5 minutes of feedback
  - We will set up several sessions, so that you can pick a time that works best for you

WRITING GROUPS: STS 200 – SECTION 1

- Group 1: Bui, Carr, Crichton, Dildy
- Group 2: Henry, Hodges, J. Jackson, T. Jackson
- Group 3: McGillicuddy, Nogales, O'Hara, Richardson
- Group 4: Sanders, Singleton, Sittler, Treseder
- Group 5: West, Wigo, Witherspoon, Yean

WRITING GROUPS: STS 200 – SECTION 2

- Group 1: DuChene, Georgette, Hopkins, Kuczynski
- Group 2: Lacob, Loukas, Pam, Reynoso
- Group 3: Ruhl, Sampson, Santos
- Group 4: Scheller, Scott, Tarn
- Group 5: Wiesen, Williams, Wong

SOME GENERAL POINTS

- Again, pick a topic that interests you and identify a specific question within that topic:
  - Focus on an outcome or phenomenon that you find puzzling or interesting
  - The goal is to tell a story about what happens
- Pick a topic and question with an STS focus:
  - Either how society (individuals, groups, organizations) shape technology or the impact of a technology on society
  - This can include why people behave the way they do and how that behavior shapes the resulting technology
  - It is OK to consider who is in control of shaping a particular technology or how a particular technology impacts different groups in different ways

COMMENTS ON MEMO 1 PAPERS

- To repeat: it is vital that you get assignments in on time
- My initial reactions to your Memo 1 papers:
  - Good, interesting topics
  - The research questions are often way too broad
  - You need to narrow down to a specific, doable question (although you may find yourself redefining your question as you go)
- Example of narrowing down to a specific question:
  - Begin with a general topic: e.g., the impact of the Internet on privacy
  - Next, what intrigues you? E.g., how Facebook is used by employers
  - Then, a specific question: Are students changing their behavior? Are users pushing Facebook to protect privacy? Is employer use of Facebook real or an urban legend?
  - Pick a question where information is available.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL PAPER

- Introduction (including your question)
- Literature review
- Methodology (research design)
- Analysis (your evidence and argument, presented in one or more sections)
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

THE INTRODUCTION

- Your paper's Introduction can be organized as follows (although there are many ways to do this):
  - The first paragraph can present your topic and suggest why it is important or interesting (e.g., the iPod and iTunes are major developments in how people buy and consume music)
  - The second paragraph can present your specific question about this topic (e.g., how exactly have iTunes and the iPod affected, say, artists, recording companies, music listeners generally, or specific groups?)
  - The third paragraph can summarize your argument (e.g., "This paper argues that…" or "This paper explores the hypothesis that…")
  - The fourth paragraph can summarize your approach in this paper (e.g., the methodology and evidence you use to answer your question)
  - The fifth paragraph can summarize your paper's findings/argument/conclusion

EXAMPLE: JUDD ANDERMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The events that unfolded on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, simultaneously shocked a nation and changed the world. Indeed, the executive summary of the 9/11 Commission Report begins, "At 8:46 on the morning of September 11, 2001, the United States became a nation transformed," ("Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Executive Summary," 2004, p. 1). In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, wars have been waged, civil liberties upended, and a vague uneasiness, an undefined fear, continues to hang over our hearts and minds. 9/11 catapulted a new and terrifying risk into the limelight; 9/11 made the threat of terrorism manifest for a stunned public and an unprepared federal government.

My aim in this paper is not to describe the terrorists' plot and acts in detail, nor will I discuss historical antecedents or political motives involved; instead, I wish to explore 9/11 and its discourses within the context of our modern-day risk society. I will focus on the role played by the internet in shaping, enabling, coupling or juxtaposing, and filtering individual and institutional preparations and responses to September 11. How was the internet used to prepare for and manage this risk? How has it since been used to communicate knowledge of this risk or similar threats? Which institutions and individuals have been key players? How, if at all, has the internet, which has rapidly become one of the most pervasive technologies of this age, changed our relationship to risk?

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- Looking at the existing literature serves two purposes:
  - Don't reinvent the wheel; you can build on what others have done
  - The goal of a research paper is to build on, and add to, the literature (e.g., by presenting an argument different from current understanding, by adding a new case study, etc.)
- In your paper, briefly identify what the existing literature does and does not say about your question
- In Memo 3, I am asking you to identify at least 15 references, 10 of them annotated

ANDERMAN'S LITERATURE REVIEW (EXCERPT)

Risk scholarship has typically adopted one of two views concerning the nature of risk. The first perspective suggests that risk is an objective, quantifiable phenomenon: "Technico-scientific approaches to risk, emerging from such fields as engineering, statistics, actuarialism, psychology, epidemiology, and economics, bring together the notion of danger or hazard with calculations of probability. They define risk as 'the product of the probability and consequences (magnitude and severity) of an adverse event [i.e., a hazard]' (Bradbury 1989, p. 382)," (Lupton, 1999, pp. 17-18). By contrast, a social constructionist viewpoint emphasizes the ways in which risks and risk perceptions are constructed by individuals and groups in a particular social context. The realist, objectivist view is readily apparent in much of the literature that has emerged from the psychometric paradigm. The psychometric study of risk was launched in 1969, with the publication of Chauncey Starr's seminal "Social benefit versus technological risk." Starr, an engineer, employed what has subsequently been labeled a "revealed preference" approach: "The analysis is based on two assumptions. The first is that historical national accident records are adequate for revealing consistent patterns of fatalities in the public use of technology. (That this may not always be so is evidenced by the paucity of data relating to the effects of environmental pollution.) The second assumption is that such historically revealed social preferences and costs are sufficiently enduring to permit their use for predictive purposes," (Starr, 1969, p. 1232).

METHODOLOGY

- How are you going to answer your question?
  - If you want to explain *why* something happened as well as describe *what* happened, what is your idea here about cause and effect?
  - What data/evidence would support or disconfirm your argument
  - Where do you get relevant data/evidence and how will your analyze it?
- Two types of methodologies:
  - Literary approach (includes discourse analysis): what is the relevant evidence from available sources?
  - Social science approach: what is your hypothesis (an if-then statement about cause and effect), what types of evidence would confirm or disconfirm it, and what evidence will you gather? Two variations:
    - Quantitative research design: collect and analyze statistical evidence
    - Qualitative research design: using interviews and other data, either compare two or more cases or construct a single "theory-informed" case study

ANDERMAN'S METHODOLOGY

Methods

My research began with web searches for 9/11-related materials. From the outset, I intended to collect and evaluate both expert/institutional and non-expert/lay discourses in order to compare and contrast these streams of risk knowledge. For each source, I sought to (1) identify the key participants and stakeholders, (2) assess the explicit and implicit motives, and (3) analyze the discourse in the context of the competing claims and ideas regarding risk in the academic literature. This discursive analysis included interpretations of language use, medium/format, multimedia content, substantive content, and rhetorical strategies.

THE ANALYSIS

- Here you want to tell your story: what happened (or might happen) and, if part of your question, why did it happen this way?
- As you tell your story, present your data/evidence and say how it supports your thesis/hypothesis; create an argument and build to a conclusion

CONCLUSION

- Your should then write a brief section summing up your findings/argument/conclusion. Repeat your questions and say what your analysis concluded.
- If you wish, you may also include an additional paragraph or two discussing the implications of your findings (e.g., implications for individuals, organizations, society or implications for future STS studies)

EXAMPLE: ANDERMAN CONCLUSION

My research also suggests that the internet has played a critical role in the recent history of our risk society. The internet dramatically improves availability and access to information, and as a result, it affords everyone armed with a personal computer and a modem with the knowledge required to transform unseen threats into visible risks. In this way, the internet "levels the playing field," so to speak, by bringing expert and lay discourses into closer contact and enabling the emergence of a class of "amateur" or non-traditional experts, like bloggers and forum-ites, who provide alternative, and often no less reliable, streams of knowledge and information. Information on the internet is simultaneously generated, filtered, transmitted, etc. by both powerful, hegemonic forces, like Google, and individual users on their home computers. Given the glut of information passed on by this diverse array of actors, information quality and vetting have become primary concerns; risk is only made manifest *and* somewhat manageable, if it all possible, in the presence of knowledge. Thus, the internet has changed our relationship to risk by facilitating the proliferation of massive amounts of information and transforming the expert/non-expert interface.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Your paper should also include a bibliography, citing the books, articles, and Web sites you have used
- For this paper, you should use the format of the American Psychology Association (APA) – although you may also use Chicago A or Chicago B, if you wish

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ABOUT THIS PROCESS?

- Is this discussion clear? What is not clear?
- What specific steps are each of you going to take?
- What specific challenges or difficulties are you facing as you select your paper's question and begin your research?

NEXT STEPS

- Next memo (due next Tuesday): grounding your paper in STS
  - The Handbook of STS can help, as can STS journals
  - You also can look at notes from past classes and ask your professors
- Last task for today: members of writing groups should exchange e-mail addresses