The study of infrastructure by the humanists and social scientists was incubated some twenty years ago in the field of STS (science and technology studies). Interest in infrastructure has ballooned since then, with STS scholars entering into conversation with area studies, post/colonial studies, and other scholarship on the “Global South.” These conversations have produced dramatic new understandings of what “infrastructures” are, how to theorize them, and how to analyze them as conduits of social and political power. This course offers a graduate-level introduction to these conversations, drawing primarily on works from STS, anthropology, history, geography, and (to a lesser extent) architecture & urban studies.

Course requirements

Talking & listening

This is a discussion seminar. Its success depends on the commitment and involvement of all members. Therefore, you are expected to arrive thoroughly prepared to participate actively in all discussions. Participation is not just about talking – it’s also about listening. This is particularly important with a multi-disciplinary group: we must speak in ways that others can understand, hear unfamiliar concepts and engage with them seriously, and avoid the temptation to show off esoteric knowledge with fashionable jargon. Attendance is mandatory. Absences should occur only in case of dire need and should be cleared in advance if at all possible.

Reading & viewing

Reading all the material is essential. Before you plunge in, I strongly recommend reading Paul N. Edwards, “How to Read a Book,” available on Canvas or in the “Pedagogical Essays” of the author’s website: http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/essays.html. Even the most accomplished and experienced students, postdocs, and faculty find this guide useful for getting through large amounts of reading in limited amounts of time.

As is typical of grad seminars, most of your work involves reading academic books and articles. In addition, we will be experimenting with two other modes of expression: (1) Many sessions include a series of “small bites”: these are brief essays written by academics for broader audiences, published in a variety of new online venues (such as limn, Somatosphere, Aeon, The Conversation, and others). (2) Several sessions also include collections of photography – some by professional photographers, others the fruit of collaborations between photographers and scholars. We will talk about how to approach these materials on the first day of class.

Most material is posted on the Canvas site. For copyright reasons, this does not include the following books, which are available for purchase online (check for used editions!) or through the bookstore, and are also on reserve in the library:


Leading class discussion

Twice during the quarter – usually in partnership with another student – you will present on a selection of the recommended readings and lead class discussion:

1) Together with your presentation partner, choose material from the recommended reading box. You should each aim to read about 100-150 pages worth of material, which generally works out to 3 articles or a good chunk of a book. Each partner should choose something different to read.

I’m happy to consider requests to read materials outside the box. You can draw from the “additional sources” list at the end of the syllabus, or propose something else entirely. But you must clear all such requests with me a minimum of 10 days before your scheduled presentation. Requests should include a brief explanation of why your proposed readings are suited to the session in question.

2) Write brief (800 words max) think piece that links your readings to the material considered by the whole class. Post this essay to Canvas by 8 pm the day before class, and bring a single paper copy to hand in during class time.

3) In conjunction with your presentation partner, prepare a 1-page handout as an aid to class discussion. This handout should list what you consider to be the three or four most significant analytical points for the week’s common reading. For each point, add a brief comment linking it to the background reading done by you and your partner. The handout should also offer 2-3 questions designed to provoke class discussion. Write the handout in outline or bulleted form (rather than continuous prose). Do not exceed 1 page. Please bring enough paper copies of the handout to distribute to all class members.

At the beginning of that class session, the presenter(s) will spend no more than 20 minutes (total) presenting their think pieces and elaborating on the discussion questions. These presentations MUST be delivered without reading from a text (a skill you should all be practicing). All presenters should participate equally.

Writing

Weekly posts. Starting with our second meeting on January 17, you must post a response to the readings for every session in which you are NOT leading the discussion. Posts are due on Canvas by 2 pm the day before class. Aim for 500 words; do not exceed 600 words. You can assume that we’ve all read the texts, so do not
summarize the readings. Instead, pick a theme that cuts across several of the readings and engage with that theme analytically, drawing on examples from the texts. *These posts should be carefully written and argued.*

Our class discussion will be more productive – and more fun – if you read and think about each other’s posts before class. So, sometime between 2 pm on Wednesday and 11 am on Thursday, please post a brief response to two other posts. These responses can be as simple as a question, and should not exceed 50 words. The goal is simply to get your brain warmed up for the discussion.

**Final project.** The final project will be a “short bite” of around 2000 words, not including notes. The precise topic is up to you (it must fit within the ambit of the course), but the genre should be modeled on the “small bites” format we’ve been reading in class. The main difference is that you will use notes, in which you’ll offer the scholarly infrastructure behind your claim. We will discuss this assignment further in class.

You must discuss and clear your topic with me by February 7. Proposals (consisting of a 1-page description of your topic, along with an annotated bibliography of 6-8 items) are due in class on Thursday, February 21st. We will workshop these in small groups. **Please also email these proposals directly to me as a Word attachment.**

**Final papers are due March 21st by 1 pm, by email as Word attachments.**

**Honor Code, Fundamental Standard, and Learning Needs:**

All students are responsible for fully understanding and following the Honor Code. Students must also abide by the Fundamental Standard. If you have any questions about plagiarism and the honor code, you should speak directly with me and/or visit: [https://communitystandards.stanford.edu](https://communitystandards.stanford.edu).

Students eligible for accommodations should register with the Office of Accessible Education (563 Salvatierra Walk, [https://oae.stanford.edu](https://oae.stanford.edu)). You must inform me during the first week of class of any accommodations you require. Rest assured that I have a lot of experience – both personal and professional – addressing accommodation requests. I will help to the fullest possible extent, and will respect your confidentiality.
Class schedule

1/10  Week 1: Introduction


1/17  Week 2: Foundations


Photography:

Find a photo that represents an aspect of infrastructure in the global south of particular interest to you. Enter the highest resolution version you can find into the common slide deck by 9 am on Wednesday, 16 January, and include a brief caption (Photographer & source, plus <25 word descriptor).

Please take a look through the common slide deck before class.
1/24  Week 3  Energy and Water


Small bites (choose 3):


Photography (choose 1):


Recommended:


1/31      Week 4      Mobility


Small bites (read all):


Recommended:


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2/7  Week 5  Racialized Knowledge Infrastructures


**Short bite:**


**Photography:**


**Recommended:**


2/14  Week 6  Security


No short bites or photography this week.

Revised:

Recommended:


2/21 Week 7 Project proposals due

2/28 Week 8 Toxicity


Small bites (read all):


Photography:

Find a photo that represents an aspect of toxicity in the global south of particular interest to you. Enter the highest resolution version you can find into the common slide deck by 9 am on Wednesday, 27 February, and include a brief caption (Photographer & source, plus <25 word descriptor).
Please take a look through the common slide deck before class.

**Recommended:**


### 3/7 Week 9 City Shit


**Small bites (choose 3):**


**Photography:**

#SelfieDéchets and/or #selfielixo (or other garbage selfie hashtags from the global south)

Recommended:


3/14  Week 10  Capital, Austerity, Debt


Read together with 2 pieces of journalism:
Nick Deaden, “Africa is not poor, we are stealing its wealth,” Al Jazeera, May 24 2017


Small bites (choose 3):


Park, Emma and Kevin P. Donovan. “Between the Nation and the State.” Limn 7 (July 2016).


Photography:


Recommended:


SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Web

https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/thematic-series/the-nature-of-infrastructure/

https://tapuya.la/2018/05/02/frail-modernities-latin-american-infrastructures-between-repair-and-ruination/


Khalili, Laleh. The Gamming (blog). thegamming.org


Special issues:

Rogers, Dennis, Bruce O’Neill, eds. “Infrastructural Violence” Special Issue, Ethnography 13, no. 4 (2012).


https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/19354940/19/2 ...


Books and Articles


Benton, Adia. *HIV Exceptionalism: Development through Disease in Sierra Leone* (Univ. of Minnesota, 2015).


Elliott, Denielle, with Davy Kiprotich Koech. *Reimagining Science and Statecraft in Postcolonial*.


Schipper, Frank, and Johan Schot. “Infrastructural Europeanism, or the project of building Europe on infrastructures: an introduction.” *History and Technology* 27, no. 3 (2011): 245-264.


Storey, Angela. “In the Sand: Water, Land, and Infrastructure in Informality.” *Engagement*


Von Schnitzler, Antina. “Infrastructure, Apartheid Technopolitics, and the Temporalities of

