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Office Hours: by appointment
Sidney Smith Hall, Room 3018

POL 410/2391: THE POLITICS OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Thursday 9:00-11:00am

Course Description

Infrastructure—its presence and absence—is at the centre of many contemporary political struggles. At the same moment that we are witnessing unprecedented global investment in infrastructure as an economic development strategy, basic support networks for collectively life and social reproduction are missing, inadequate or in disrepair. Increasingly interdependent socio-technical networks of water, waste, transportation, electricity, information, and logistics thus fundamentally shape how we live now and into the future, and how we distribute resources, opportunities, and power. In response to this ‘infrastructure turn,’ cities and nation states—as well as citizens and corporations—are developing new tools to envision, plan, manage, and finance infrastructure. Attention to these dynamics has taken on extra urgency in the context of the fragility and uncertainty generated by on-going environmental, political, and public health crises.

This course examines the politics of infrastructure through a range of methodological approaches and empirical sites. It considers how infrastructure is produced and governed through power-laden processes, and how infrastructure shapes the material relations of ecology, citizenship, territory, authority, sovereignty, subjectivity, and collective action. In particular, the course foregrounds recent works of critical spatial analyses which highlight infrastructure’s inherently uneven capacity to connect and to provide for some people and territories while at the same time disconnecting and disenfranchising others. A guiding principle of the course is that articulating a more-just future necessitates understanding the role of and place of infrastructure.

Course Objectives

- To establish a solid understanding of substantive issues, key trends, and timely developments related infrastructure politics
- To foreground the highly uneven and differentiated geographies of infrastructure provision, and to trace how various hierarchical structures—such as race, class, gender, and colonialism—are interwoven with infrastructure
- To become familiar with key theoretical debates in the field of infrastructure studies and to evaluate the strengths and weakness of various disciplinary approaches
- To improve academic skills of critical analysis, interpretation, argumentation, research, facilitation, and communication

Requirements

Participation

Our classroom is designed to be a safe academic environment where ideas are devised, debated, and deconstructed. A university is an important place to debate difficult issues—and in doing so, to challenge others, to appreciate unfamiliar viewpoints, and to reflect upon and deepen one’s own

convictions. All students are encouraged to exchange ideas openly in a rigorous and respectful manner. Please be generous with yourself and your peers.

As a seminar, this course will be directed **by and for students**. It is essential that you take your role as active participant and collaborator seriously. The success of the seminar is dependent on the group's ability to work together and, through intelligent discussion, develop an understanding of the material that you would not have come to on your own. A seminar is an ongoing and open conversation that unfolds through our shared collective engagements. Each member of the class therefore carries the burden of responsibility for the quality of the discussion and the quality of learning. Good discussions tend to occur when participants study the texts closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of others, and are considerate to their peers and interlocutors.

Students are expected to attend all classes. However, merely attending seminar is not sufficient to earn participation marks. Students will be evaluated on consistent and meaningful contributions and engagements. In addition to speaking in class, examples of participation include contributing to the group chat (if online), circulating relevant texts and applied content (news articles, multimedia clips, personal essays, events and conferences, journals, calls for papers etc.), providing reading and lecture notes for absent colleagues, attending office hours, initiating asynchronous online discussions, workshopping colleagues' assignments, and sharing learning resources.

Reading and Critical Responses

The readings are the foundation of the course. Students should read all the required materials before class and be prepared—with notes—to discuss the major issues raised in the material. Students wanting to delve more deeply into a topic should feel free to do further research through tracing the conversations and literatures explored in the required reading (see, for example, this guide on citation searching: <https://libguides.brown.edu/searching/citation>). Students are expected to read closely and with a critical eye.

In addition to completing the weekly readings, you must submit a total of 4 critical reading responses (5-6 pages each). Students should use these papers to reflect closely on a text or series of texts and to develop their own ideas. Papers must be turned in on the day the readings will be discussed. Students may choose which weeks to turn in a response and in what order, although the first response must be turned in by February 26th and students may not turn in a response on the day they are facilitating discussion.

- Response 1: In this response, you will provide annotated notes on one chapter of the required text. Using either in-text tools such as highlighting and comments, or hand-written or typed notes, your response should include: definitions for all keywords and concepts; an identification and paraphrased explanation of main arguments; a summary of important evidence; and your own interpretations and reflections on the analysis presented (see, for example, this [guide](#) to note-taking and this [guide](#) on annotation). If turning in written notes, each point or series of points should be referenced with the appropriate page number.
- Response 2: In this response, you will select and explain 5 significant quotations from throughout the text (e.g. do not make all 5 selections from a single chapter). In choosing your quotations, you should focus on passages that are particularly poignant and memorable, that provide clear articulations of the author's core arguments, and/or that exemplify an author's original perspective and analysis. Copy each quotation in full and provide a full

citation. For each quotation, you should then introduce the passage and the context of its appearance, explain in your own words what the author is saying, and analyze its significance with respect to the themes of the text as a whole.

- Response 3: In this response, you will review a film screened in class. Focusing on one or more of the main ideas or themes, your response should critically engage with the film and its treatment of infrastructure politics. How does this film relate to other texts we've considered so far? How does it engage the overarching questions guiding the course?
- Response 4: In this response, you will reflect on what lessons the text offers with respect to the politics of infrastructure. NB: This must be more than a description or summary and should instead interpret and analyze one or more of the main ideas, concepts or arguments presented in the reading (see this [guide](#) for an outline of how to write a critical response paper).

Seminar Facilitation

Each student is expected to lead the seminar discussion at some point during the semester. Seminar facilitation will be done individually or in small groups of 2-4. A schedule of will be established the first day of the course. Those facilitating discussion on a given day should prepare a *concise* presentation (approximately 20-30 minutes) as well as questions or activities to stimulate discussion and inspire the exchange of ideas. Your introductory presentation should at a minimum summarize the readings, but should also include an account of why the reading is important, what it tells us about infrastructure, and the value and shortcomings of different methodological and theoretical frameworks. You might consider some or all of the following:

- An introduction to the topic or reading. Who wrote the piece? When? With what purpose in mind? Why is the text relevant to the class?
- The author's background and their intended audience. In what disciplinary tradition is the author situated? What literatures inform their analysis and to which existing scholarly debates are they contributing? What is their methodology?
- An analysis of how various readings of the course are connected to one another. How is this text similar to others we have read? On what points do they diverge? How might each extend/challenge each other? What would various course authors have to say to one another in a conversation?
- A critical account of the reading. This is not just a matter of telling the group "how you feel" about the text, but should argue something based on evidence. Was the text convincing? Why or why not? What assumptions underlie the analysis? Are these assumptions tenable? What is made visible (or invisible) through this interpretation? Does the author enable us to think in new and useful ways about infrastructure and politics? How might this text be situated within the larger framework of the class and the main debates within infrastructure studies? Try to be specific (textual passages are always helpful) and provocative (raise points that you think might be of interest to others in the class as well) in your analysis.
- NB: Being critical does not mean you should focus on telling us all the ways the author is wrong. Focus instead on carefully attending to the authors arguments on their own terms, situating these arguments within a scholarly conversation, and drawing out the implications, significance, applications, and limits of the analysis.

The remainder of class will be spend discussing the course material. Facilitators should ask questions, introduce concepts, clarify and order ideas, encourage connections, promote collective

understanding, and direct the conversation. Facilitators may do this through a variety of activities and methods as they see fit (e.g. small group work, pair and share, close readings, staged debates, concept mapping, free writing, agenda setting, applied scenarios etc.).

Evaluation

The grade for the class will be determined as follows:

Participation	30%
Reading Responses (x4)	40%
Seminar Facilitation	30%

Academic Policy

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and achieving course goals. The assignments in this course are designed to give you an opportunity to learn important skills and concepts by making honest attempts through your own thinking, writing, and hard work. Academic dishonesty in any form will thus not be tolerated.

For a complete list of offences, see section B of the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Use of Generative AI

All submitted assignments in this course (response papers, presentations, research proposals etc.) must be original work authored by students. It is not permitted to use AI to generate text. Any use of AI in written work (e.g. copyediting, outlining, summarizing) must be disclosed. This course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development and to help you reach course learning outcomes.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Any assignments received after the due date will be penalized 5% per day or part thereof. However, if you have extenuating circumstances that are affecting your ability to meet deadlines, please speak with me as soon as possible. Reasonable extension requests for written work will be granted provided you contact me well in advance and have a revised plan and timeline for completion.

Contested Grades

I take very seriously the responsibility of grading and commenting on your work. I am happy to discuss evaluation criteria and strategies for improvement at any time. If you judge a received grade to be inaccurate (with respect to the grading guidelines given by the Faculty of Arts & Sciences and the assignment prompt) and would like your assignment to be re-graded, you should submit to me a detailed written account of why you think the grade is inaccurate, along with the original graded assignment, within one week of the first day assignments are returned to students. Please note that re-reading a paper for the purposes of reconsidering the grade implies your acceptance that the grade could also drop based on further evaluation.

Office Hours

Office hours will be held online or in person (SS 3018). Please email me for an appointment.

Email Policy

Please use your U of T email for course related correspondence. Be sure to include a meaningful subject line that includes the course code. I will try to respond to email within 1-2 working days. I do not typically reply to emails within 24 hours of an assignment due date.

Other Resources

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please approach the Accessibility Services Office <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let them and me know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course. If there are any additional ways I can assist your successful learning in the course, please feel free to contact me directly.

Libraries

The U of T library system is an extraordinary resource for accessing information, conducting research and enhancing your learning. You should make every effort to take advantage of the various library services available to students. I especially encourage students to consult with librarians for assistance on research projects.

Writing

The University of Toronto offers an extensive collection of resources and tools to aid students in academic writing. I strongly suggest that you familiarize yourself with the workshops, tutoring services, and advice guides provided at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>. Information about the English Language Learning program (ELL) is available at <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>.

Health and Wellness

Health & Wellness offers University of Toronto students a wide range of medical and mental health services to help support you in achieving your personal and academic best. To find out more and to access supports, please visit <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness>. If you are feeling distressed, see particular supports (including those for mental health) at <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/task/support-when-you-feel-distressed/>

College Registrar and School of Graduate Studies

For undergraduate students, your college registrar is available for both general academic advising and personal problem solving. Your college is responsible for holistic advising that takes into account all the elements of student life: academic, personal, financial, and more. If you are facing challenges or have questions about how to succeed at the University of Toronto, this office should be your first point of contact.

For graduate students, holistic advising is available from the School of Graduate Studies and from Departmental graduate offices.

Readings

There are eight required books for the class. Many are available online through the U of T library system and can be accessed through the course Quercus site.

- Goh, Kian. *Form and Flow: The Spatial Politics of Urban Resilience and Climate Justice*. MIT Press, 2021.
- Khalili, Laleh. *Sinews of war and trade: Shipping and capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula*. Verso Books, 2021.
- LaDuke, Winona, *To be a Water Protector: The Rise of the Windigo Slayers*, Columbia University Press, 2020.
- Mattern, Shannon, *A City is not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences*. Princeton University Press, 2021
- Moss, Timothy. *Remaking Berlin: A History of the City Through Infrastructure, 1920-2020*. MIT Press, 2020.
- Riofrancos, Thea. *Resource Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador*. Duke University Press, 2020.
- Stehlin, John. *Cyclescapes of the Unequal City: Bicycle Infrastructure and Uneven Development*. University of Minnesota Press, 2019.
- Von Schnitzler, Antina. *Democracy's Infrastructure*. Princeton University Press, 2016.

Weekly Schedule

January 08	Introduction
January 15	Campus Closure—No class
January 22	Von Schnitzler, Antina. <i>Democracy's Infrastructure</i> . Princeton University Press, 2016.
January 29	Stehlin, John. <i>Cyclescapes of the Unequal City: Bicycle Infrastructure and Uneven Development</i> . University of Minnesota Press, 2019.
February 5	In class Film: <i>Misleading Innocence - Tracing What a Bridge Can Do</i>
February 12	Moss, Timothy. <i>Remaking Berlin: A History of the City Through Infrastructure, 1920-2020</i> . MIT Press, 2020.
February 19	Reading Week—No class
February 26	Khalili, Laleh. <i>Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula</i> . Verso Books, 2021.
March 5	Riofrancos, Thea. <i>Resource Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador</i> . Duke University Press, 2020.

March 12	Mattern, Shannon. <i>A City is not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences</i> . Princeton University Press, 2021.
March 19	LaDuke, Winona. <i>To be a Water Protector: The Rise of the Windigo Slayers</i> , Columbia University Press, 2020.
March 26	In Class Film: <i>Watermark</i>
April 2	Goh, Kian. <i>Form and Flow: The Spatial Politics of Urban Resilience and Climate Justice</i> . MIT Press, 2021.