There’s a problem with infrastructure – electricity networks, water supply systems, pipelines, ports, roads, and railroads. Most of us would agree that infrastructure should be a public thing, serve society, and allow for better life, communication, and activity. Yet infrastructures are often hidden, subterranean, and therefore prone to exploitation and hijacking. The anthropology of infrastructure aims in part at making it more visible and at deciphering the complex interaction between things, society, and politics. But anthropologists end up unearthing more than utility networks and urbanism plans. They stumble upon the very power of inanimate things to orient our experiences, from the most intimate (having sex) to the least material of them (browsing the internet). From politics to ethics and back, this course will explore our relationship to infrastructure. There is no prerequisite for this class, but students are expected to conduct intensive fieldwork on one piece of Boston infrastructure.

1. Teaching and Learning Methodologies: This course is organized around readings, lectures, classroom discussions, and fieldwork. The required readings are often difficult, and the aim of the course is to help you understand the broader anthropological, historical, and political debates that our authors are part of, and to offer a lucid interpretation of their texts and positions. Close reading of the texts, class discussion, and field research are at the core of this course’s methodology: you are expected to read all the week’s texts in advance, to think about them carefully, to participate actively in our discussions, and to use what you’ve learned from both the texts and the discussion in your field research. The learning outcomes will be assessed through in class participation, weekly reflections, three written assignments, and one oral presentation. You are expected to attend all classes and to engage in critical discussion and field research.

Submit work on time. You must complete all assigned coursework to pass the course. It is your responsibility to submit all assignments before the due date by email. No extension will be granted. Work not turned in, or turned in after the due date without a documented explanation will receive an F.

No tolerance for plagiarism. Academy integrity is the acknowledgment of what we owe to other writers and researchers. Plagiarism is the non-acknowledgment of our sources and ranges from improperly quoting to paraphrasing to copying an author without admitting it. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all cases will be submitted to the university. For more information on academic integrity at Brandeis University, see: https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html

No electronic devices. Studies have shown that we perform better, as thinkers and writers, with pen and paper than when offered the possibility to check our Twitter and Facebook feeds. Let’s be better thinkers. No use of laptops, tablets, or cellphones is

Address your concerns and issues during office hours. If you experience difficulties with the readings and the assignments, see me as soon as possible. Office hours are opportunities to discuss the course material, get my advice and help on how to best work on assignments, and inform me of issues you may have with the course.

2. Learning Outcomes: There is no prerequisite for this course. You will learn how to conduct fieldwork on infrastructure in Boston. You will acquire knowledge of most of the prominent issues related to the anthropology of infrastructure, with a focus on the politics of infrastructure. Under my supervision, you will conduct fieldwork, record at least one interview, and turn fieldwork material into successful assignments.

3. Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

4. Statement of time required: Success in this 4-credit course is based on the assumption that you will spend a weekly average of 9 hours of time outside of class in preparing and completing course assignments.

5. Assignments:
Your success in this class hinges on the completion of a fieldwork project on one piece of Boston infrastructure. Therefore, you are strongly advised to keep close records of your field research in the form of field notes. I recommend you immediately purchase a notebook that you'll take to the field and in which you'll write down your notes and observations. These notes will be crucial to the success of all your assignments.
   a) In class participation. (10% of the final grade)
   b) Weekly reflection: you will write a short reflection on the week’s readings and on your field research. Feel free to discuss what intrigued you, interested you or shocked you most in the texts, and to describe your week’s most striking or telling fieldwork moment. Any length between one paragraph and one page. Assignment due every Monday at midnight. (10% of the final grade)
   c) First assignment (around 1,500 words): you will submit your first field notes about the piece of infrastructure you are studying this semester. Assignment due on February 14 before class. (20% of the final grade)
   d) Second assignment (around 2,000 words): using fieldwork data and secondary literature, you will write a brief history of the infrastructure you decided to study during the semester. Assignment due on March 14 before class. (20% of the final grade)
   e) Third assignment (around 3,000 words): you will conduct a recorded interview about the infrastructure you are studying this semester. We will discuss in class the choice of your interviewee and the methodology. Your paper will be an edited transcription of the interview (around 2,500 words) following an introduction (around 500 words). Assignment due at the end of the semester. (30% of the final grade)
f) Oral presentation: you will present your fieldwork project. Presentations are 10 min. long and will be followed by a short Q&A session. **Presentations on April 20, 25, 27 and May 2. (10% of the final grade)**

6. **Class texts:**
During the semester you’ll read four books from cover to cover:

In addition to these four books, you’ll read a few articles on infrastructure:

7. **Additional bibliography:**
To kick-start and fuel your field research on Boston, make sure to consult these:

On the theory and anthropology of infrastructure, keep these handy:

Finally, here are miscellaneous articles on specific infrastructures; they might inspire you in the course of fieldwork:

8. Course Schedule:

**Week 1 – Why an Ethnography of Infrastructure?**

January 17  
Introduction

January 19  


**Week 2 – Tearoom Trade, 1**

January 24  

January 26  
*Tearoom Trade*, chapters 3-4, p. 45-80.

**Week 3 – Tearoom Trade, 2**

January 31  
*Tearoom Trade*, chapters 5-6, p. 81-130.

February 2  
*Tearoom Trade*, chapters 7-8, p. 131-166.

**Week 4 – Tearoom Trade, 3**

February 7  

February 9  

**Week 5 – Aramis, 1**
- February 16 *Aramis*, chapters 2-3, p. 51-123.

**Week 6 – Aramis, 2**

**Week 7 – Aramis, 3**
- March 7 *Aramis*, chapter 7 and epilogue, p. 251-301.

**Week 8 – The Undersea Network, 1**
- March 16 *The Undersea Network*, chapters 2-3, p. 64-137.

**Week 9 – The Undersea Network, 2**
- March 21 *The Undersea Network*, chapters 4-5, p. 138-197.
- March 23 *The Undersea Network*, chapter 6 and conclusion, p. 198-234.

**Week 10 – Prehistory of the Cloud, 1**

**Week 11 – Prehistory of the Cloud, 2**
- April 4 *A Prehistory of the Cloud*, chapter 3, p. 79-110.

**Week 12 – Presentations**
- April 20 Final presentations
- April 25 Final presentations

**Week 13 – Presentations**
- April 27 Final presentations
- May 2 Final presentations