

Austin Jia

The Infrastructure of Insanity

Course Description:

What is infrastructure, and how does it systematically discriminate against people of disability? For starters, infrastructure is not just a physical construct. It is much more than just architecture; it is the way society is organized in all the realms of our lives. In this House Course, we will travel across the major domains of infrastructure, from the incarceration system to the job market. Our journey will bring us face-to-face with questions that emerge in a context that most of us haven't yet explored deeply. How does the relationship between disability and infrastructure limit agency and political protest? How does the incarceration system structurally disenfranchise its mentally-disabled patients? What are the ingrained biases that guide how police officers treat people of disability? How does our education system force disabled students to meet unfair standards with fewer resources?

To contextualize the answers to these questions, we will look to Judith Butler, Michael Rembis, Margaret Price, and others who have written on different aspects of the relationship between disability and infrastructure. Our exploration will introduce us to concepts that seem difficult to grasp at first, such as ableism, relational vulnerability, and power-knowledge systems. Fear not! This class is not purely theoretical; we will constantly ground our conceptual analyses in tangible infrastructural systems, from prisons to schools. Over the course of analyzing writers, texts, and infrastructures, students will use Sakai Forums as a space for original and interactive discussion. Students will also be asked to complete a research project based on, but not limited to, our readings and discussions.

Course Requirements:

This House Course is graded on the S/U basis. A grade of satisfactory in this course requires satisfactory completion of all assignments of this course including the 1500 word research paper, the activism project, and six forum posts and replies. Students will also be expected to participate actively at each class. Students are required to attend all classes to receive a passing grade, but one absence is permitted if advanced notice is given for illness or other obligations.

Course Schedule

Week 1 Topic: Introduction

Activity/Discussion: Review syllabus and expectations for the house course. Introduce major readings and assignments. Go around the room and have each student contribute their preconceived notions of infrastructure. What do they think constitutes infrastructure before taking this house course? What are their preconceptions of the relationship between infrastructure and disability?

Week 2 Topic: Defining Infrastructure

Reading Due: Jessica Lockrem and Andonio Lugo, *Infrastructure* from the Cultural Anthropology Magazine

Merriam-Webster definition of “infrastructure”

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/infrastructure>

Oxford definition of “infrastructure”

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/infrastructure>

Macmillan definition of “infrastructure”

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/infrastructure>

Writing Due: Discussion Forum 1: Defining Infrastructure

Activity: Divide students into groups of three. In each group, students should make a table of all the social institutions and structures that constitute “infrastructure.” List justifications, characteristics, and examples.

Discussion: What are the ways in which society organizes itself? What kinds of experiences are possible for people of different backgrounds? Conclude the activity by bringing all the groups together. Discuss, as a class, the range, depth, and intricacies of “infrastructure”. Assimilate these conclusions with the dictionary definitions to establish an operable definition of “infrastructure” that will contextualize the discussions of the rest of the semester.

Week 3 Topic: Infrastructure, The Body, and Disability

Reading Due: Judith Butler, *Vulnerability and Resistance*: 39:00 to 41:00

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbYOzbfGPmo>

Nancy J. Hirschmann and Beth Linker, *Civil Disabilities*: Introduction

Vera Chouinard, *Making space for disabling differences: challenging ableist geographies*

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1068/d150379>

Writing Due: Discussion Forum 2: Infrastructure, The Body, and Disability

Activity: Draw a large Venn Diagram on the whiteboard. Title the first circle “The Body” and the second circle, “Infrastructure”. One by one, students should come up to the board and write down one element that they feel belongs in each of the three sections of the Venn Diagram, based on the readings they prepared for class.

Discussion: Base the class discussion on the Venn Diagram. When does the body act as an entity separate from infrastructure, and when does the body only exist in relation to the infrastructure that supports it? Play the clip from Judith Butler. What is her argument on the dependency between body and infrastructural/environmental conditions, as well as the vulnerability that that relationship introduces? Refer to Hirschmann and Linker and Chouinard to introduce disability into the discussion. How is the relationship between an able body and infrastructure different from the relationship between a disabled body and infrastructure? Refer to Hirschmann and Linker. Why is the social model more apt than the medical model in capturing how disability is socially produced and socially experienced? What are the boundaries and dichotomies drawn by our current conception of “citizenship”, and how do we make it less exclusionary? Refer to Chouinard. What is an “able-bodied geography”? What are the social and economic dimensions that she explores?

Week 4 **Topic: Infrastructure, Agency, and Protest**

Reading Due: Judith Butler, *Vulnerability and Resistance*: 10:00 to end

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbYOzbfGPmo>

Johanna Hedva, *Sick Woman Theory*

<http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>

Writing Due: Discussion Forum 3: Infrastructure, Agency, and Protest

Activity/Discussion: Students will examine the relationships between infrastructure, agency, and political protest. Students will begin by discussing the concepts presented in Judith Butler’s presentation. Is our performative agency restricted or enabled by institutions and broader dimensions of social normativity? How does this relational vulnerability determine the parameters of our protest? Students should then apply their conclusions to Johanna Hedva’s article. What are the overlaps between Butler’s and Hedva’s interpretations of vulnerability? How does Hedva circumvent these limitations to empower disability protest??

Week 5 **Topic: Psychiatric Architecture**

Reading Due:

Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*: Chapters 2 and 3

Patricia Wen, *Architecture and therapy merge at new mental hospital*

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/health-wellness/2012/08/15/architecture-and-therapy-merge-new-million-state-mental-hospital/MFPyiEAr9QY7rmd2nLHVL/story.html>

Writing Due: Discussion Forum 4: The Evolution of Psychiatric Architecture

Activity: Split the class in half. One half will prepare a presentation of pre-modern psychiatric architecture, based on the Carla Yanni readings. How does the size, the degree of seclusion, the quality of the facilities, and the structural barriers between patients and staffers symbolize societal biases against insanity? Make sure to cover both the Kirkbride and Cottage Asylum architectural plans. The other half will prepare a presentation on modern psychiatric architecture, based on the Boston Globe article on the Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital. How do the

facilities and housing conditions represent modern assumptions about the causes and proper treatments of insanity?

Discussion: After the presentations, open up discussion to the class. Does the class believe that assumptions about insanity have changed based on the evolution of psychiatric architecture?

Week 6 **Topic: Sidewalks and Wheelchairs**

Reading Due: Zoltan Istvan, *We Should be Repairing Disabilities, not Sidewalks*

https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/in-the-transhumanist-age-we-should-be-repairing-disabilities-not-sidewalks

Emily Ladau, *Fix Discriminatory Attitudes and Broken Sidewalks, not Humans*

https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/fix-discriminatory-attitudes-and-broken-sidewalks-not-humans

Writing Due: None

Activity: Mock Debate. Split the class in half. One half will prepare, to the best of their ability, a compelling statement on behalf of Zoltan Istvan. Include his arguments about transhumanism, evaluations of fiscal and social cost, and his priorities for society. The other half will prepare a rebuttal to this statement. Be sure to address specific faulty assumptions and logical deductions.

Discussion: Debrief on the debate. Why was the Istvan statement more difficult to write? Which of his assumptions about disability are valid and invalid? Why was the Ladau rebuttal easier to write? As citizens of a progressive society, are we already predisposed to agree with some of her arguments? Which arguments need more attention in society?

Week 7 **Topic: Madness and Mass Incarceration**

Reading Due: Michael Rembis, *The New Asylums: Madness and Mass Incarceration in the Neoliberal Era*

Jennifer M. Kilty, *Governance through Psychiatrization: Seroquel and the New Prison Order*

Writing Due: None

Activity: Brief lecture on Foucault and the “Carceral System”

Discussion: Refer to the Rembis’s section on Foucault. What are the power-knowledge systems that undergird the carceral system? Be sure to discuss the role of deinstitutionalization and neoliberalism. How does the carceral system disenfranchise the mad? Be sure to discuss how knowledge-power systems leverages an “insidious normalizing power” to decide norms, legitimizes the power to punish “social enemies” that deviate from those norms, and criminalize madness by isolating insanity in a strictly punitive dialogue. Refer to the Kilty text. Discuss the parallels between madness and gender in the context of carceral disenfranchisement. How is the gender binary an example of Rembis’s concept of power-knowledge structures? Discuss how historically, men had the power to define sane behavior and prescribe treatments. Also be sure to discuss the hysterization and over-medicalization of women, and how these historic trends denied women biological agency and supported the normalizing power of the gender binary.

Week 8

Topic: Madness and Mass Incarceration Continued

Reading Due: Adrien Furnham, *The Anti-Psychiatry Movement*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sideways-view/201505/the-anti-psychiatry-movement>

Linda J. Morrison, *Acknowledging C/S/X Through Narrative*

<http://www.radpsynet.org/journal/vol5/Morrison.html>

Judi Chamberlin, *On Our Own*: Introduction

Writing Due: Discussion Forum 5: Madness and Mass Incarceration

Activity: Divide the class into two groups. Each group should spend ten minutes presenting the Anti-Psychiatry and the C/S/X movements.

Discussion: This class is intended to shed light on the movements and solutions that have been mobilized to address the infrastructural failures of carceral system. After the group presentations are done, come together as a class to discuss the interplay between both movements. What are their common goals? What are their fundamental beliefs? Be sure to discuss the specific treatments and assumptions that these movements take issue with. With the C/S/X movement, be sure to draw from Morrison's article to exemplify the differing narratives that empower the mentally ill, including the "Heroic Survivor Narrative" and the "Grassroots Advocate Narrative." Finally, refer to Chamberlin's introduction and evaluate patient-controlled alternatives as a solution. How do these alternatives abolish the authoritarian and hierarchical structures of traditional carceral systems that cause traditional patients to feel worthless, confused, demoralized, and powerless? How do these alternatives validate the pain and anger of ex-patients and harness these forces for change? What are the specific legal rights and constitutional guarantees that Chamberlin advocates for?

Week 9

Topic: Madness and Education

Reading Due: Margaret Price, *Mad at School*: Introduction

<https://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/9780472071388-intro.pdf>

The Institute for Higher Education Policy, *Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities*: Chapters 5-8

<https://www.ahead.org/uploads/docs/resources/ada/Opportunities%20for%20Students%20with%20Disabilities.pdf>

Writing Due: Discussion Forum 6: Madness and Education

Activity: During the first fifteen minutes of class, each student will assess the 11 criteria that define academic success, including rationality, criticality, presence, participation, resistance, productivity, collegiality, security, coherence, truth, and independence. Have them write in their notebooks how these criteria systemically advantage non-disabled students.

Discussion: Open the class to discussion. Why does Price believe that these criteria intersect problematically with disability? Consider the difficult questions. What does "participation" mean for a student undergoing severe social anxiety? What does "presence" mean for students restricted to home by crippling mental or physical disabilities? What does "coherence" mean for students who suffer from dyslexia and do not think in linear progressions? Now, refer to the

Institute for Higher Education Policy booklet and discuss other structural disadvantages for disabled students. How do mentally-ill students with “invisible disabilities” struggle with skeptical administrators that deny them the proper accommodations? How does the correlation between mental illness and financial distress exclude disabled students from accessing the benefits of vital but costly secondary education? How do architectural barriers on campuses exclude disabled students from accessing support facilities and lecture halls that provide important educational services to non-disabled students? What are the legislative solutions?

Week 10 **Topic: Madness and the Market**

Reading Due: Heather Stuart, *Mental Illness and Employment Discrimination*, Introduction
<http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/542517>

National Alliance on Mental Illness, *Road to Recovery: Employment and Mental Illness:*
Introduction

<https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Publications-Reports/Public-Policy-Reports/RoadtoRecovery.pdf>

Writing Due: Discussion Forum 7: Madness and the Market

Activity/Discussion: Students will engage in a socratic seminar on the relationship between mental illness and employment discrimination. Refer to Stuart. What are the ingrained biases of employers that preemptively handicap the disabled in their job searches? How are stigmas and expectations of mental illness that embedded and reinforced by workplace structures? How do outdated federal policies and mental illness disclosure requirements discourage the disabled from entering the job search in the first place? What are the sociostructural barriers and built-in economic disincentives that block the concept of competitive employment from coming up in mental health discussions? Refer to the National Alliance on Mental Illness booklet. How do traditional vocational services need to be changed to better address these infrastructural challenges and serve the mentally-ill? The discussion of employment discrimination covers less material than in previous classes; use remaining time to brainstorm on the research paper.

Week 11 Topic: Madness and Law Enforcement

Reading Due:

The Atlantic, *How Misunderstanding Disability Leads to Police Violence*

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/05/misunderstanding-disability-leads-to-police-violence/361786/>

S.E. Smith, *Talking Intersections with Race, Disability, and Police Violence*

http://meloukhia.net/2016/06/talking_intersections_with_race_disability_and_police_violence/

Randy Borum, *Improving high risk encounters between people with mental illness and police*

Writing Due: Research Paper First Draft

Activity/Discussion: Discuss the readings, keeping in mind several essential questions. How does insufficient training and ignorance about the needs of disability lead to human rights violations and inappropriate uses of force? How can the internal practices of the law enforcement system be improved, on both an individual and systemic dimension, to handle disability encounters with more justice? Use the last thirty minutes of class to refer to S.E. Smith's blog post and discuss the intersectionalities between race, disability, and police brutality.

Week 12 Topic: Resolution

Reading Due: None

Writing Due: Research Paper Final Draft

Activity/Discussion: Students will have 3-5 minutes each to present and answer questions about their research papers. Students will pick a project they liked and react to it in class.