

Infrastructure, Maintenance, and Labor
STS 6614
Spring 2018
Monday 2:00-4:45

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This course examines historical and social scientific studies of maintenance and repair, a topic that has existed quietly in various Science and Technology Studies literatures for some time but has recently received more attention. The seminar will begin by exploring theoretical and historiographical overviews and frameworks for approaching maintenance and repair before moving onto three thematic hubs: maintenance, labor, and infrastructure. Finally, the class will end by connecting these themes to two closely related topics: disasters and the environment.

Requirements:

- Active class participation, including consistent attendance, completing readings in sufficient time to reflect on the week's topics, speaking during class, and engaging the ideas of other students and the instructor. Participation will also include giving feedback on drafts of your peers' final research paper. (@20%)
- Lead part of two weeks' discussions. This is NOT a presentation. Instead you should endeavor to spur conversation and participation with appropriate challenges, questions, or activities (20%)
- Four 2-page response papers to the weeks' readings. We will talk about what these can/should look like and when they should be done. (20%)
- Final Research Paper. Each student will write a final empirical, theoretical, or historiographical/lit review paper on the subject of their choice, negotiated in consultation with Vinsel. You will also give a brief (about 10 min.) presentation on the paper on the last day of class. (40%)
 - You may choose to write two or more shorter papers in lieu of a final research paper. These could include essays written for popular audiences in the style of *Aeon*, *Pacific Standard*, or *Logic Magazine* or some other format. Building on Douglas Harper, it could also include visual sociology/ethnography of maintenance or repair. The possibilities are many, but we would need to work them out early through consultation.

Schedule

Week 1 (January 22): Frames 1 – Maintenance Historiography and Theory:

Edgerton, *Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), Introduction and Ch. 4, “Maintenance”; Andrew Russell and Lee Vinsel, “After Innovation, Turn to Maintenance,” *Technology and Culture*, forthcoming; Jérôme Denis and David Pontille, “Material Ordering and the Care of Things,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 40, no. 3 (2015): 338–367; Steven J. Jackson, “Rethinking Repair” in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society* (2014).

Week 2 (January 29): Frames 2 – Social Aesthetics:

John Levi Martin and Ben Merriman, “A Social Aesthetics as a General Cultural Sociology” in the *Routledge International Handbook of Sociology of Art and Culture* (2015); Simpson, Hughes, and Slutskaya, *Gender, Class, and Occupation: Working Class Men Doing Dirty Work* (Palgrave, 2016); skim(!) John Levi Martin, “What Do Animals Do All Day?: The Divisions of Labor, Class Bodies, and Totemic Thinking in Popular Imagination,” *Poetics* 27, no. 2-3 (March 2000): 195–231; Blake Ashford and Glen Kreiner, “How Can You Do It?: Dirty Work and the Challenge of Constructing a Positive Identity” (just read 182-5 of the pdf).

We will talk through how to approach the readings for Week 2. Among other things, I would like the group to carve up Simpson, Hughes, and Slutskaya book and have pairs/trios tackle selected chapters.

Week 3 (February 5): Maintenance 1:

Julian E. Orr, *Talking about Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job* (Cornell University Press, 1996); poke around Vol 26, Issue 12 (December 2006) of *Organization Studies*, which marked the 10th anniversary of *Talking About Machines*, and at least read all of Orr’s contribution to the issue.

Week 4 (February 12; Vinsel out; Prof. Wisnioski, guest instructor): Labor 1:

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Basic Books, 1983)

Week 5 (February 19): Maintainers 2:

Kevin Borg, *Auto Mechanics: Technology and Expertise in Twentieth-Century America* (Johns Hopkins, 2010); also read 2 papers of your choice from The Maintainers conferences at themaintainers.org and be prepared to discuss both the content and the disciplinary approach of the pieces you’ve read.

Week 6: Maintenance 3 (February 26):

Douglas Harper, *Working Knowledge: Skill and Community in a Small Shop* (Chicago, 1987); excerpts from Harper’s *Visual Sociology*.

Schedule Cont.

March 5: Spring Break

Week 7 (March 12): Labor 2:

Venus Green, *Race on the Line: Gender, Labor, and Technology in the Bell System, 1880-1980* (Duke, 2001); Sarah T. Roberts, "Commercial Content Moderation: Digital Laborers' Dirty Work" in *The Intersectional Internet* (Peter Lang, 2009).

Week 8 (March 19): Labor 3:

Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New Press, 2012).

Week 9 (March 26): Infrastructure 1:

Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioral Scientist* 9, no. 3 (1999) and Geoff Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (MIT Press, 1999).

Week 10 (April 2): Infrastructure 2:

Harvey and Knox, *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise* (Cornell, 2015); Dmitris Dalakoglou and Penny Harvey, "Roads and Anthropology: Ethnographic Perspectives on Space, Time, and (Im)Mobility" in *Roads and Anthropology: Ethnography, Infrastructures, and (Im)Mobility*.

Week 11 (April 9): By-Week, Work on Final Paper and Individual Consultations

Week 12 (April 16): Infrastructure 3:

Jameson W. Doig, *Empire on the Hudson: Entrepreneurial Vision and Political Power at the Port of New York Authority* (Columbia, 2011).

Week 13 (April 23): Environment and Disasters 1 - Environment:

David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta* (University of Washington, 2011) and Ashley Carse, "Nature as Infrastructure: Making and Managing the Panama Canal Watershed," *Social Studies of Science* 42, no. 4 (2012).

Week 14 (April 30): Environment and Disasters - Disasters:

Kim Fortun, *Advocacy After Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders* (Chicago, 2001) and Scott "Angel" Gabriel Knowles, "Learning from Disaster?: The History of Technology and the Future of Disaster Research."