

Infrastructure | Time | Aesthetics: An Exploratory Workshop

Universität Konstanz, Bischofsvilla, 4-5 December 2025

The workshop assembles scholars from across the humanities to explore new ways of thinking about sociocultural dimensions infrastructure, with a focus on questions of time and aesthetics. The following reflections are not meant to delimit the scope of the workshop but rather to encourage further lines of inquiry.

Infrastructures are conventionally understood as material networks that unfold in space. More recently, scholars in various disciplines have inquired into the temporal dimensions of infrastructure, asking questions such as: When and how does something become infrastructure, or cease to be? To what extent is infrastructure processual rather than static, fluid rather than fixed? How does infrastructure become routine or spectacle, visible, or invisible? Moreover, infrastructures are entangled in sociocultural conceptions of temporality (past and future, speed and slowness, modernity and obsolescence)—conceptions that infrastructure helps devise, shape, and establish. Infrastructure is often conceived as stable and enduring, but in order to endure it needs continually to adapt and transform.

Beside deepening these temporal understandings of infrastructure, our workshop aims to relate them to questions of aesthetics. The aesthetics of infrastructure range from the embodied sensations they evoke (*aisthesis*) to socially negotiated expectations of their shape, design, and effect. The aesthetic dimension of infrastructure too has long been discussed in spatial terms, with studies focusing on the design and visual reception of built infrastructure. More recent scholarship has complemented this focus by asking what kinds of temporal experience infrastructure enables: routine, quietude, acceleration, linearity, flashbacks, futurity, etc. This line of questioning suggests expanded understandings of infrastructure as, for example, an ensemble of interrelating processes (“the symphony of the metropolis”) or as a narrative rather than a material structure. It also brings into view the historical development of infrastructures and of aesthetic responses to them.

Program

Thursday, 4 December 2025

6.30 pm Keynote: Paul Saint-Amour (University of Pennsylvania): Land Infrastructures of the Deep Interwar

8.00 pm *dinner at Constanzer Wirtshaus*

Friday, 5 December 2025

Input statements and discussion

9.00 am Isabell Otto (Media Studies): Infrastructures of ‘Flowing Subjects’

10.00 am Achim Landwehr (History): Chronofereces: A proposal for describing temporal infrastructures

11.00 am *coffee break*

11.30 am Irmtraud Huber (Literary Studies): Infrastructural Intra-action

12.30 pm Timo Müller (Literary Studies): Infrastructural Poetics

1.30 pm *lunch*

New Work in Infrastructure Studies (American Studies doctoral workshop)

3.00 pm Melanie Frey: The Wilderness Narrative in Effie Price Gladding’s *Across the Continent by the Lincoln Highway* (1915) [chapter]

3.45 pm Jannis Buschky: Western Space and the Planet’s Interior in Edwin Lanham’s *Thunder in the Earth* (1941), or, “How many catfish to make a million barrels of oil?” [chapter]

4.30 pm *coffee break*

5.00 pm Pascal Ehrlich: Engines of Democracy: How the Automobile Influenced American Citizenship in Progressive Era Children’s Fiction [project]

5.45 pm Ashley Moser: In/Visible Infrastructure: Public Works and the Public Work of Utopia in the Science Fiction of Kim Stanley Robinson [project]

7.00 pm *Christmas market visit*

Select Bibliography

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- Volmar, Axel, and Kyle Stine, editors. *Media Infrastructures and the Politics of Digital Time: Essays on Hardwired Temporalities*. Amsterdam UP, 2021.
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