Summary

“The telegraph symbolically follows the railroad; the telephone, with kindred symbolism, follows the motor highway. So much for the business end of communication.” Lewis Mumford (1925)

Energy lines, water conduits, transportation nodes, roads and communication systems are the key physical and technological structures for the organization of modern cities. This seminar will focus on how these infrastructures are used by architects as both aesthetic and discursive elements in visionary proposals for cities. Starting from the late nineteenth century, the seminar group will draw on both primary historical sources and current analysis to engage in critical discussions on the role of the infrastructures in the rise of modern urban theories. We will explore how the devices developed by various inventors and corporations impacted the shared landscape and, in turn, how the professional practice of engineering was absorbed by modernist architects and urban planners and synthesized as a new kind of technological vision of both town and country. Course material will include architects’ writings, and history of technology, geography and media studies.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Describe and compare modern urban theories and the related specific vocabulary.
2. Critically analyze the assigned readings.
3. Make connections between issues in urban theories and other disciplines.

Required Texts


A course pack is available at the McGill bookstore, 3420 McTavish Street. Required texts are available for purchase at the same McGill bookstore. Required and supplementary texts are also on reserve in the McGill Humanities and Social Sciences Library.
Requirements

Attendance and Participation

Your attendance and participation are necessary in order to generate interesting and vigorous discussions. You are invited to react to the lectures, the readings and your colleagues’ work. Criticisms are welcomed, but be clear with your arguments and keep a constructive attitude.

Presentations

Each week one or two of you will be required to present and lead the discussion around the readings.

Term paper

At the end of the term (week 15) you will submit your formal scholarly paper composed of minimum 6000 and maximum 7500 words. A one-page proposal of your subject should be submitted by week 7. You can choose your subject within these three categories:
1. Focus on a particular question raised in the discussion of one of the authors (architect, historian, geographer…).
2. Focusing on one particular question, compare two or three readings discussed during the course.
3. Illustrate a meaningful case - an historical matter, an invention or an artifact - connected with the subject of the infrastructures and urban theories. Support the case study with theoretical material.
N.B. In consultation with the professor you may propose texts, topics or authors not on the course list.

All assignments may be completed in English or in French.

Evaluation

Attendance and Participation 25%
Presentations 25%
Final Paper 50%

Warning

Late papers will earn a reduced grade.
Activities for which you must be present (presentations) cannot be made up. If you know you will be absent you have to arrange with your colleagues to provide a replacement. Notify your professor of the trade. If your absence is for medical reasons, please make an arrangement with me.
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

L’université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l’on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l’étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity/)).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

### Topics and Readings

#### Week 1 (7 Sept)

On the Meaning of Infrastructure


#### Week 2 (14 Sept)

Mechanization of the American Landscape


Supplementary readings


#### Week 3 (21 Sept)

Electrification


Supplementary readings


**Week 4 (28 Sept)**

Lewis Mumford and Regionalism


Supplementary readings


**Week 5 (5 Oct)**

Territorial and Technical Transformations


Supplementary readings


**Week 6 (12 Oct)**

No Class – Recuperation on November 12

**Week 7 (19 Oct) Proposal for the Paper due**

Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century


Supplementary readings


**Week 8 (26 Oct)**

Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century


Supplementary readings


**Week 9 (2 Nov)**

Methodology Session

**Week 10 (9 Nov)**

Techno Cities


* Week 10 (12 Nov)
Visit Montreal Underground City – Replacement Class for October 12

** Week 11 (16 Nov)**
Telecommunications and the City


** Week 12 (23 Nov)**
New Geographies


** Week 13 (30 Nov)** Final Paper Due