

Masterclasses GLOSAR #1 & #2

***INFRASTRUCTURAL
TURN AND***

***FEMINIST
INFRASTRUCTURAL
CRITIQUE***

Infrastructural turn

acção artística e curatorial envolvida com lugares extremos
Inês Moreira (CEAA-ESAP)



14 de março de 2025 às 14:00
Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto
Audatório do Pavilhão Sul



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Masterclass Glosar #1: Infrastructural Turn⁴

By Inês Moreira

(CEAA-ESAP)

Exploring the reality of designs that create “other”⁴ infrastructural conditions for cultural, artistic and curatorial practices, Signe Meisner and Rachel Mader (2020) follow the lines of freethought, particularly the second of Irit Rogoff’s links, i.e., that of critical action in/on institutions. They map initiatives and places that, whilst they are aware of the categorical definitions identified by Western infrastructure, embrace their fluidity and frame new shapes, writing:

“...recently emerged approaches to infrastructure and organizing in the arts and critical cultural studies have attempted to redefine the meaning of practices engaging with the parameters they are interwoven with and surrounded by as critical or even radical action. Such practices even become platforms for collective, cross-disciplinary inquiries and for art and social action to merge as crucial sites of experimentation between embodied experience, social struggle, and collective appropriations of space.” (Christensen & Mader, 2020, p.06)

³This text is an excerpt from the original published in Portuguese: Moreira, I. (2025, maio). Infra-estruturas críticas: Cuidando de sistemas em transição. *Jornal Arquitectos*: Publicação periódica da Ordem dos Arquitectos, 266, 36-47.

⁴ The Seminar “Precarious Infrastructures: How to build institutions that escape the logics of touristification and urban service economies”: <https://projects.au.dk/insai/events/show-event/artikel/precarius-infrastructures>

They identify in their study of the “attitudes and strategies of how to interact with the infrastructural”, the appropriation of infrastructure, the creation thereof (self-organisation, participatory designs) and the infrastructure game, as well as modes of action, situated practices, the strength of informal ties and common practices manifested in a range of physical places, such as museums, cultural centres, biennials, self-organised spaces and others. According to the authors:

“When considered a performative enactment, the concept of infrastructure may work as a tool to make clear what’s at stake in radical forms of organization, practices of commoning, or in curatorial experiments in the art system. Performative, then, not only means to consider the infrastructural as something fluid and constantly changing, but also as something malleable, which those living and acting within can shape” (Christensen & Mader, 2020, p.06).

Elke Krasny and Sophie Lingg underline the “infrastructural turn” (identified by Meisner and Mader in the arts) and analyse how it extends to architecture and ecology. Reading them results in infrastructural criticism reaching new design and propositional dimensions, be it through the creation of new organisations and an interweaving with existing infrastructures, or the birth of what is regarded as a new field of knowledge:

“This infrastructural turn has not only led to cultural and art-based investigations of infrastructure, but also to the formation of infrastructural humanities, most broadly understood. In the contexts of art and architecture and their visual and spatial expressions with which we are concerned here, there has been much critical engagement of artists, activists, and critical spatial practitioners with the infrastructural condition, with a focus on both infrastructure for the arts, as well as how art based practices can question, appropriate, or even destroy existing infrastructures” (Krasny & Lingg, 2024, p.007).

Dedicated to the proposal of a Feminist Infrastructural Critique, the recent issue of FKW Journal underlines aspects that are usually considered to be less important and secondary by the heroic view of architectural and spatial creativity, but are absolutely inherent to the notion and operation of infrastructure, i.e., those of maintenance, repair and care:

“Feminist Infrastructural Critique manifests through an insistence on care, repair, and maintenance, as well as through resistance, refusal, protest, or, sometimes, attack. Through practices of use and resistance, new infrastructural imaginaries come alive in order to overcome infrastructural oppression, violence, and discrimination. Daily infrastructural labors are at the heart of Feminist Infrastructural Critique and new infrastructural imaginaries” (Krasny & Lingg, 2024, p.006).

It proposes an understanding of the daily action as a transforming micro-policy, revealing the maintenance and the resistance, in addition to the “other” forms of relationship, imagination and direct action on the environment and space. This situated response, oriented towards spatial action, it is important to revisit the notion of critical spatial practice as defined by Jane Rendell (2006) in Art and Architecture. Located where the concepts and languages of art and architecture intersect with theory and practice, Critical Spatial Practices (Rendell, s.d) unite three aspects — the critical, the spatial and the interdisciplinary expressed in the proposed designs for concrete spaces of the architects/engineers/collectives involved. The formulation of CSPs has allowed for the opening of non-binary tropes, such as art-architecture, theory-practice, writing-construction that are today more recognised and used by diverse ateliers, and architectural and art expressions. While 20 years ago the infrastructural turn may not have been a thing in architecture, the ideas, strategies and interventions contained in CSPs led to reinterpretations and articulated actions on sites, which, in turn, led to interdisciplinary practices. These have been the precursors of some of today’s initiatives.

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