

American and English Studies Workshop: Reading COVID-19 in the Anglo-American context

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb, September 26, 2020

Co-organizers: Croatian Association for American Studies (HUAmS) and Croatian Association for the Study of English (HDAS)

(In case of epidemic restrictions, the workshop will take place on-line.)

Key-note speaker: Professor Stipe Grgas (American Studies Program, University of Zagreb) (topic: tba)

We start off with a premise that the humanities and social sciences have a valuable perspective to offer on the ongoing global public health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, with special emphasis on the Anglo-American context giving rise to specific pandemic-related concerns.

Viruses have co-existed with humans taking them as their hosts and will continue to do so even after this pandemic, and their particular role in the biological chain is here to stay, given that they are “the major and the most capable ecological factors on earth” contributing to its biodiversity. What might stoke our imagination is thinking about viruses as hybrid forms, straddling the organic and the inorganic, totally dependent on survival and spreading on their organic (human) hosts. What is also fascinating about SARS-CoV-2 is that, as an RNA virus, it is prone to fast genetic mutability, is quick to reproduce and features as an extremely dynamic facet of the biosphere. Can the human capacity for adaptability match its fast-paced mutation?

Virus, however, is more than merely a biological form or a medical issue, but has become entangled with the course and forms of human civilization, playing the role of a historical and social agent. Viruses influence the outcome of vast social experiments (the colonization of the Americas; the scramble for Africa); the shape of societies (plague epidemics in the European Middle Ages); wars and revolutions (from the fall of the Chinese Ming dynasty to the course of the American revolution; the post-World War I map); they lay bare relations of power between states and empires (the decline of the Roman Empire); they nowadays affect the entire global economy in unprecedented ways.

We invite the workshop participants to retrieve from the Anglo-American cultural archive the memory and experiences of previous public health crises that wrecked societies and ushered change and upheaval or to comment on different aspects of the current health crisis and the ways it has been reflected in those societies.

Possible topics for discussion (not exclusive):

- We ask the participants to query about the future of unbridled globalization in the course of the current coronavirus pandemic – where do we go from here?
- What socio-cultural implications have been unveiled by the pandemic (the exposure of vulnerability of the developed countries and hi-tech societies; the collapse of solidarity and its restructuring along different lines; making visible glaring inequality gaps; the reevaluation of labor (from essential to remote forms of labor); the environmental issues; the recalibration of the liberal social order...)?
- How does the emergence and spread of SARS-CoV-2 stimulate our cultural and individual imaginary (SF, conspiracy theories, art and cultural production, virtual social and media platforms, film and literature)?
- How do we process the manifold and yet to be manifested mental and social consequences of the widespread, strict and comprehensive quarantine or shelter-at-home measures?
- Short- and long-term, what are the social and political repercussions of the pandemic on the discourse of privacy protection, individual rights and civil rights issues? How will the need to track down the infection or to implement a widespread vaccination policy in the future reflect on this?
- What are the geo-economic and geo-political implications of the coronavirus pandemic? Is this a “game-changer” in the global distribution of power? Does the pandemic and post-pandemic landscape mean the redrawing of the global map and the re-distribution of power and influence?
- How does this effect of “radical indeterminacy” and the inability to “map the future” might affect all aspects of our life, from existential, mental, spiritual to familial, social, political, and economic? Can it also mean “a clean slate,” “a new beginning”?

We invite proposals of up to 300 words, together with a short CV (one paragraph) and your affiliation, to be submitted by **August 15, 2020** to all the following addresses: scvek@ffzg.hr, tjukic@ffzg.hr, and jsesnic@ffzg.hr. The confirmation of acceptance will be sent by September 1, 2020.

We ask the prospective participants to limit their contributions to 15-minute presentations.

A peer-reviewed selection of papers will be published in an open-access digital publication, *Working Papers in American Studies*.

Workshop fee: 20 Euros

(The workshop fee is waived for all the members in good standing of both co-organizing associations, HUAmS and HDAS, as well as the members in good standing of AASSEE.)



HUAmS

Hrvatsko udruženje za američke studije
Croatian Association for American Studies



The Croatian Association for the Study of English

