GUSEGG 2027

Complexity, Engagement, and Trust:

State – Society - Religion

SEMINAR 1: COMPLEXITIES OF POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE AMERICAS

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Nicole Haring, University of Graz, Austria

Week 1: The focus on creativity at the beginning of this seminar sets the stage for conceptualizing inquiry and a longstanding human fascination with questions on the one hand, and political concerns, and the dynamics of culture, including language, memory, and literary culture, on the other. It serves as an anchor for exercises through which you will learn how to analyze political discourse in writing and talk in order to consider some of the ways that language is implicated in the reproduction of power, abuse, domination, as well as resistance and the reconfiguration of imaginaries. Subsequently, the concept of coloniality and critiques of human rights will be examined alongside important historical texts in which language shapes and reflects not only laws, political decisions, and institutional policies, but also the meanings of values, cultural norms, anti-racist epistemologies, and more inclusive approaches to humanism. The readings juxtapose academic scholarship with the work of risk-taking poets, such as Layli Long Soldier, Pedro Pietri, Martín Espada, Richard Georges, and Roque Raquel Salas Rivera, among others.

Week 2: Week 2 will continue these critical discussions by thinking with theories from Inter-American studies to engage with the historical, political, and cultural contact zones of the Americas. We will look at the hemisphere more closely to unravel the narratives that this world order brings forth. This journey will lead us into the terrains of mobility, migration, emancipation, freedom, and eventually decoloniality. Prose and poetry from the Americas will accompany us here to fill the gaps of the archive and help us document, speculate, and experience the past, present, and future. Finally, we will search for promising resistances, protests, and revolutions from which we can learn to reconfigure borders, human rights, solidarity, and the future. The second week will end with poetry, creative writing, and collective imagining.

By the end of the seminar, students will:

- comment on how works by specific poets, writers, and researchers have contributed to perspectives that value ethics and integrity;
- analyze texts and spoken discourse using the methods and tools of political discourse analysis;
- explain how risks taken by activists, scholars, and writers in the Caribbean and the Americas have impacted politics and culture;
- compare and contrast different understandings of freedom, describing their role in the histories of the Americas as well as their importance for the future;

- situate decolonial approaches within discourse on human rights, injustices, and resistance Use key concepts, such as patriarchy, coloniality, freedom, emancipation, abolition to frame concerns about the contemporary world order;
- develop critical faculties to think dialectically, critically and historically;
- imagine the future differently through thinking, reading, listening, writing, and experimenting with creative outlets.

SEMINAR 2: MEDIA AND POST-LITERACY: DEMOCRACIES IN TRANSITION

Mirko Petrić, Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Regional Centre Split, Croatia

This seminar module will discuss the relationship between media and politics in what has been described as a "post-rational age." An important feature of that age is "post-factual" or "post-reality" politics, appealing to emotions and deeply ingrained beliefs rather than to deliberation based on evidence and the rules of logical discussion. There is a widespread belief that new technologies and new media practices have significantly contributed to the current divorce of politics and reason. In this seminar, we will attempt to paint a clearer picture of the connection between media and politics in a context that further complexifies what Blumler (2016) described as the "fourth age of political communication."

However, instead of focusing exclusively on the effects of new media, we will also try to learn from the past by examining the complex relationship between media technologies and political practices evolving in different historical contexts. We will also thematize the changing notions of the public and private spheres in deliberative democracies. Special attention will be devoted to the role of the media in how election campaign strategies have evolved since the early 20th century.

By the end of the seminar, students will:

- learn about the notion of media archaeology and how the modes of analysis associated with it can be used to help understand the characteristics of the current 'fourth age of political communication;
- understand the role of the media in defining the political realities of the 20th and 21st centuries;
- understand the notion of the public sphere and its current transformations;
- develop a critical outlook on various approaches to studying the connection between media and politics (especially theories of technological and media determinism);
- gain an understanding of how media are used in political campaigns;
- develop a critical outlook on political campaigns;
- develop the ability to critically discuss the future of citizenship in the age of algorithms.

SEMINAR 3: ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECO(NOMIC) CRISES: PEOPLE, PLANET, AND PROSPERITY

Eva Bauer, University of Graz, Austria

Hermine Penz, University of Graz, Austria

Luis San Vicente Portes, Montclair State University, USA

Guest: **Birgit Bednar-Friedl**, University of Graz, Austria

In this seminar taught by an economist and two eco-linguists, the interdisciplinary focus will be on understanding the climate crises by discussing selected principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which were defined by the United Nations as an action plan for "people, planet, and prosperity." These SDGs address current challenges as interrelated emphasizing social, economic, and environmental aspects (https://sdgs.un.org/2030). By focusing on language and economy, this interrelatedness will be discussed by addressing the question of how environmental topics appear in texts and media, especially in terms of the economy, and how an ecolinguistics analysis can highlight to what extent (environmental) discourses may play a beneficial, ambiguous, or rather destructive role for the well-being of humans, other species, and the systems that support life on earth.

By the end of the seminar, students will:

- understand the principles of selected UN Sustainable Development Goals in terms of economic and environmental aspects by a focus on language;
- understand specific SDGs in terms of their regional, political, and economic challenges;
- understand the basic principles of economics and ecolinguistics;
- learn what role language has in relation to the environment;
- learn how to apply economic principles when discussing the climate crisis.

SEMINAR 4: MULTILINGUALISM AND CULTURE: NAVIGATING COMPLEXITIES IN LITERATURE

Marc Caplan, University of Minnesota, USA

Susanne Korbel, University of Graz, Austria

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SEMINAR 5: THINKING LIKE A CRITICAL GEOGRAPHER: SPACE, PLACE, AND MOVEMENT

Arun Saldanha, University of Minnesota, USA

Geography is a strange discipline. First, it straddles the divide between the physical, information and social sciences and includes long-standing interchanges with the developments in technology, policy, activism and art. Second, British human geography in particular went through a profound shift from the 1980s onwards, in which social theory and philosophy were engaged to build sophisticated conceptions of space, place, movement, landscape, identity, boundaries and so on. Phenomenology, Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, science studies, complexity theory, psychoanalysis and other theoretical frameworks have in turn been enriched by geographers. Third, in most countries, geography remains a predominantly descriptive and fragmented discipline, wherein interaction with the humanities and political/ethical commitments are less important than the ever-more powerful tools of geographic information science.

This course will introduce students to key texts in critical geography. Examples in the class will include commodity chains, smart cities, tourism, museums and raves. Students will do interpretive exercises and will be encouraged to involve their own intellectual and geographical backgrounds. Thinking like critical geographers means investigating the roots of how the world works – a world in polycrisis, steadily inching towards the possibility of general catastrophe. Critical geography does not take the patterns of the world for granted but remains open to difficult concepts and transdisciplinary discussions, with an eye on collectively steering global systems towards social and environmental justice.

By the end of the seminar, students will:

- appreciate how the critical-geographical perspective sharpens the view on any topic, just like the historical or evolutionary perspective does, for the simple reason that every topic has a spatiotemporal specificity;
- learned just how committed to "theory" (that is, continental philosophy and its ramifications in Anglophone humanities and cultural studies) human geographers are. Students will consolidate their critical readings skills, and hopefully learn from each other's criticisms, questions and uncertainties about the readings. However opaque or familiar a text, reading together with an open and self-honest mind becomes a social activity in its own right;
- Engaged with the most influential texts in human geography after it started seriously dealing with social theory and the humanities. Students will therefore come out of the seminar knowing much of the core of "the canon" of critical geography, while understanding every canon is selective and open to critique. Some recent texts are appended for discussing case studies;
- understand and embody what the "critical" in "critical geography" means: interrogating inherited legacies of thinking and researching; analyzing arguments carefully, their limitations and contradictions; being aware of how where we are (our positionality) affects how we know; and engaging various struggles for justice in the real world.

SEMINAR 6: ENGAGING WITH COMPLEXITIES: THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Katharina Scherke, University of Graz, Austria

Stina Bergman Blix, Lund University, Sweden

Week 1: Emotions and affect are social phenomena not only because they are shaped by our social existence, but also due to their significant influence on our future actions, unfolding group dynamics, and thus also on the emotional climate in our society as a whole. This seminar offers a brief introduction to some key concepts of the sociology of emotions, with a particular focus on the fundamental role that emotions play in helping us navigate the complexities of today's world, in stimulating (political) engagement, and in building – or destroying – trust in other people and institutions. Emotions have been judged very differently in the course of history within the social sciences and humanities: for a long time, they were regarded as hindrances to rational thought and action, only recently their contribution to all human actions (also to so-called 'rational' actions) has come into focus. A special focus will be given in the seminar to 'feeling rules', i.e. social norms and expectations for the expression (and also experience) of emotions in various social situations. It will be shown how these feeling rules are shaped by political actors, media and the cultural sector, and how they – together with emotional reflexivity – provide guidance in complex social situations. The usage of emotions in populist rhetoric will be a further topic for our discussions. We will examine how emotions such as nostalgia, anger, or shame are used to spark interest in populist parties and undermine trust in their political opponents.

Week 2: This week, we're going to explore the role of emotions in the service of rationality. Although research into emotions now generally agrees that feelings are present also in rational action, a deep-seated ideal of rationality as free from biasing emotion persists. This dichotomy between rationality and emotions has gained renewed momentum with the advent of AI and its promise of objective processes, unhindered by human interpretation and subjectivity. But how can we understand the role of emotions in rational behavior in a more nuanced way? Here, the growing body of research into the role of emotions in learning and decision-making can provide new pieces of the puzzle. Curiosity, interest, boredom, doubt and certainty are all examples of epistemic emotions that are necessary for taking in and evaluating information and making well-considered decisions. How are *epistemic emotions* expressed in social interaction, for example when researchers analyze their data or when judges reach decisions during deliberations? How can epistemic emotions further or hinder sound decisions? What does empathy do in rational deliberation, and do we need human empathy when we have empathic AI? To investigate this, we need to unpack different forms of rationality and how morality and rationality are interlinked and shape emotional logics and practices.

By the end of the seminar, students will:

- get an insight into the history of research on emotions in the social sciences and humanities;
- gain a general understanding of the sociology of emotions approach and of its key positions;
- get an insight into the usage of emotions within populist rhetoric;

- learn and critically assess different concepts of nostalgia and their application towards political rhetoric;
- get an insight into the research on rational emotions, and the utilization of emotions for rational purposes;
- learn and critically assess the production and rationalizing of emotions and empathy in science, law, healthcare, and climate change.