

THE CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES

Transdisciplinary Solutions

Edited by Žarko Cvejić,
Andrija Filipović and Ana Petrov

This volume will appeal to the reader interested in the so-called “long crisis in the humanities” and transdisciplinary approaches as a possible way out of this. It comprises a selection of 23 essays by both established and young scholars from the United States, Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, coming from a variety of disciplines, including aesthetics, anthropology, architecture, art, critical theory, ethnography, feminism, film studies, gender and queer theory, literary theory, Marxism, musicology, philosophy, and sociology, among others. What brings all these together here is the intention to advance transdisciplinarity, both in theory and in practice, in their scholarly work, as a possible solution to this purported crisis, the subject of heated debate in academia since the 1960s, revolving around the “crisis of the subject” and the humanities’ positioning as a field of research. The book examines the place of the humanities in contemporary society, and challenges the ways that issues that form the foci of various disciplines have been addressed in recent theoretical discourses. It reflects on the status of the disciplines in the humanities, and explores the links between history, culture, media, and art.

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978-1-4438-9782-2

www.cambridgescholars.com

Cover image *Provisional SALTA Ensemble: Dynamic Materialism*, photo-collage, 2016



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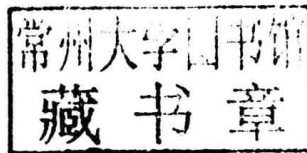
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and A. Pet

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9782-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9782-2

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INTRODUCTION

ŽARKO CVEJIĆ, ANDRIJA FILIPOVIĆ
AND ANA PETROV

In April 2015, the Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade, Serbia, hosted a major international conference to address the long-standing crisis in the humanities and reflect together on possible ways of transcending it. The conference saw presentations by some 50 scholars working in the humanities and related fields, both young, still in the early stages of their academic careers, and senior, more established thinkers from across Europe. The latter included Miško Šuvaković and Rastko Močnik, both from the Faculty of Media and Communications, as well as Marina Gržinić and Aleš Erjavec from the Institute of Philosophy in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The keynote speakers were Marina Gržinić and Lev Kreft (Department of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana) and the closing remarks were given by Terry Smith, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. In addition to Serbia, Australia, Slovenia, and the United States, the conference also gathered participants from Austria, Great Britain, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Israel, Norway, and Romania.

This book is a result of that conference, comprising a selection of essays about the crisis in the humanities and possible ways out of it by most of the scholars mentioned above, as well as a selection of the most provocative papers presented at the conference by younger and less established thinkers. The resulting collection of essays will interest all students of the humanities, especially those interested in its ongoing crisis, not only from Southeast Europe, but globally.

Since the early 1960s, there has been a heated debate about the alleged crisis in the humanities. The emergence of cultural studies opened not only new perspectives, but also posed many new problems. The so-called “long crisis in the humanities” has revolved, on the one hand, around the theoretical issue of the “crisis of the subject” and, on the other hand, the practical issue of the position of the humanities as a field of research in the

academia. This book examines the position of the humanities in contemporary society and challenges the ways the issues that form the foci of our disciplines have been addressed in recent theoretical discourses. Our intention was to reflect on the status of the disciplines in the humanities and probe the links between history, culture, media, and art.

The crucial question addressed here is the following: are the humanities really in crisis and, if yes, what are the features, causes, and possible outcomes of that crisis? The book discusses the characteristics and relevance of certain alternative contemporary transdisciplinary approaches that cut across traditional disciplines, such as, for example, neo- and post-Marxism, and their potential contributions to various theoretical paradigms of the 21st century.

Furthermore, since many have argued that we live at a time when the humanities have been reduced to a passive historical segment of the academia, treated as playthings for closed academic circles, we want to point out possible ways of opening the closed “high art” circles of the academia and reflecting critically on the perspectives of engaged art and scholarship. We want to examine the relevance of art practices in contemporary society, to define engaged art and establish its consequences.

Finally, some of the papers address the issues of producing individualities, collectivities, identities, and positions in the consumerist age and the position(s) of art in transdisciplinary transformations. Seeking to encourage contemporary theoretical approaches, we want to discuss the potentials of contemporary research of the audience’s body, the artist’s body, and the public sphere body in the context of new materialist studies, text/discourse studies, and other theoretical approaches in the humanities.

In line with the issues discussed above, the book is divided in three parts: 1) general discussions of the (purported) crisis in the humanities as a whole, as well as in individual disciplines; 2) more specific discussions of individual issues related to the crisis; and 3) discussions of the respective positions of the artist and the audience in contemporary art and media.

Part I begins with **Rachel Aumiller**’s critique of the privileging of seriousness in modern scholarship and particularly in the humanities, on account of its purported neutrality and objectivity, the resulting foreclosing of all other emotions and insights, and the potentially subversive and enriching potential of laughter, as discussed in Karl Marx’s dichotomy of laughter and seriousness. Then, **Žarko Cvejić** discusses the (still ongoing) crisis that swept (positivist) musicology in the 1980s, following the general breakdown of positivism in the 1970s, and transdisciplinarity as a possible way out. **Nikola Dedić** pursues a critique of the philosophy of the

event, whereby the event defines radically new, different ways of existence in the world; in other words, the event is the overcoming, transcendence of the ordinary and the everyday; referring to Stanley Cavell's thesis that negating the ordinary and the everyday leads only to a kind of "private language", Dedić argues that the basis of any social transformation is not to negate but rather, through the process of self-knowledge, to rediscover the ordinary and the everyday. According to **Aleš Erjavec**, the notion of aesthetics has undergone enormous transformations over the course of its development—the advent of postmodernism has changed not only the place and role of literature and the novel in culture(s), but also that of the fine and visual arts. With the advent of postmodernism, aesthetics discovered contemporary art, while we are witnessing the passage from literary to visual culture in the global culturescape. Departing from her latest book, *Necropolitics, Racialization, and Global Capitalism*, co-authored with Šefik Tatlić, **Marina Gržinić** reworks the main notions of what and how to think capitalism, politics, exploitation, aesthetics, and racialisation. In his essay, **Lev Kreft** shows that Marxist aesthetics has shared the same contradictions with philosophical aesthetics, including its entrapment in modernist philosophy of art; to change the perspective, he proposes to begin from Marx's critique of political economy, treating it as his only existing aesthetics. In her contribution, **Bojana Matejić** analyses the relationship and contradictions between humanist and anti-humanist aesthetics by way of comparing two theoretical paradigms: Herbert Marcuse's humanist approach and the anti-humanism of Jacques Rancière. **Maja Stanković** discusses the contextual nature of contemporary art, which could be observed as a crisis in art (as well as an indicator of the crisis in the humanities) or, alternatively, in terms of the emancipation of context, as one of the key features of contemporary art. **Vladimir Stevanović**'s article discusses the conceptual, thematic, and methodological possibilities of the aesthetics of architecture, in line with contemporary, discursively, and culturally oriented aesthetics. Stevanović discusses the historical relationship between aesthetics and aesthetic problematisations in architecture theory. **Miško Šuvaković** points to the problem of constructing and performing a new transdisciplinary school of the humanities and theory of art in the context of the ongoing global and local crisis, i.e., of the biopolitical disciplining of forms of life in the "gray zones of everyday life". Finally, **Mirjana Veselinović Hofman** argues that musicology has exceeded the scope of the study of music solely focusing on analytical and/or positivistic descriptions of musical phenomena because in the postmodern condition, musicology has

managed to fully articulate its genuine nature, revealing it by means of a contextual consideration of its factual findings, while the concept of transdisciplinarity may be critical in terms of preserving the interdisciplinary profile of musicology as a discipline.

Part II begins with **Marija Maglov's** essay, which deals with the potentials of Wolfgang Iser's concept of transculturality in re-examining discourses on the musical avant-garde and its survival in postmodernity and contemporaneity. **Aleksa Milanović's** essay is an attempt to point out the mechanisms of engendering social phobias regarding different, non-normative bodily forms, as well as the possibilities and abilities of the body to resist social oppression and overcome the limitations imposed on it by the dominant discourse. **Sanela Nikolić** looks at the *Tel Quel* group and argues that overcoming the traditional humanities, as a model of *reading and representing reality* in the capitalist social order, also required it to overcome rationalism, logocentrism, and existentialism in the philosophical and literary sense, the critique of structuralism in the scientific and theoretical sense, and, finally, to develop *semanalysis* as a general philosophical and scientific theory, as a universal epistemological model capable of including all those areas of human experience that were repressed in the traditional humanities. Still in the domain of literary theory, in her contribution **Dubravka Ćurić** discusses the (de)merits of Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti's theorisations of world literature and their critical reception by other literary theorists. **Ana Petrov** addresses the consequences and implications of popular music concerts in the post-Yugoslav space, arguing that concerts have historically served various collectivities as a means of coping with a problematic (historical, musical, emotional) past. In her contribution, **Lada Stevanović** poses the following question: are there some tabooed topics that are in and outside of the academia at the same time? To problematise the issue, she reflects on her research of laughter and gender in ancient Greek funerary rites.

Opening the final part of the book, **Andrija Filipović's** essay deals with the possibility of (re)imagining the subject(s) and political communities they make at the intersections of artistic practices such as video art and experimental film and the concepts of sexuality, the body, etc. Moving to the commercial side of film, **Oleg Jeknić** discusses the possibilities of using commercial movie recommender systems in scholarly research in the field of film aesthetics, arguing that data about viewers' aesthetic preferences could be used to construct personalised narratives. Moving from film to sound, **Biljana Leković** problematises sound art as a simultaneously trans-musical and trans-visual practice, or a

trans-art connecting music and the visual arts, as well as the competences of current musicology as the study of music to engage with it. **Dragana Stojanović** examines complex relations between the artist and the audience in the presence of an artificial body, exploring the fascination with automata, specifically in performance acts that induce a special type of crisis of all subjects involved. Moving from automata to holograms, **Aneta Stojnić** argues that the fast-developing phenomenon of holograms (as) performers offers us an opportunity to look at the changes that digital technologies have brought to the contemporary understanding of the body, as well as to examine how new subjectivities are created in the relation *between* apparatus and substance. Stojnić looks at the extreme example of the hologram as a new kind of performer that redefines the notion of “life” in live performance. Finally, from her dual position of a scholar and practitioner of bio art, **Polona Tratnik** draws our attention to bio art produced in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, arguing that modern scholarship has tended to misrepresent bio art as an exclusively “First World” phenomenon, neglecting all bio art from other cultures and regions of the world, along with its geopolitical and contextual specificities.

