Jelena Šesnić, University of Zagreb, Croatia - Sanja Runtić, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek, Croatia

Editorial to the HUAmS Section

From Classroom to the Public Sphere: New Methodologies and Approaches in American Studies

The texts before you were, in their shorter version, originally presented at the inaugural symposium of the Croatian Association for American Studies (Hrvatsko udruženje za američke studije), established in 2010 with the aim of bringing together researchers and academics in Croatian institutions of higher education that teach, research and are working towards their degrees in different fields comprising American Studies. The first and hopefully not the last symposium showcased a considerable number of Croatian Americanists, while hosting also a few guests from abroad, among them one of the keynote speakers, Professor Douglas Ambrose of Hamilton College, USA. The other plenary address was delivered by Professor Stipe Grgas of the University of Zagreb whose work has been a mainstay of American Studies in Croatia and beyond.

While Ambrose, as a historian of the early America and the antebellum society, revisits the importance of religion for the fateful conflict between the North and the South, especially as it is presented by some more recent views, Grgas delves deep into the very core of the disciplinary rationale finding there an interesting, even if unselfconscious, occlusion and evasion pertaining to the role of capitalism and the capitalist economy in the installment and development of American Studies. Thus both scholars, each tackling a different aspect of America, show how older approaches are continuously reinvigorated by the influx of new ideas and new interdisciplinary interventions. This gives the feel of a discipline constantly on the move and in the mood of reshaping itself. In this section, the reshaping is done by means of two major socio-cultural phenomena of long duration, religion and capitalism.

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In his interesting analysis of the HBO television series The Wire, Sven Cvek explores its pedagogical and methodological relevance for American Studies. Paradigmatic of the post-network television phenomenon, The Wire depicts American post-industrial social effects—the growing social inequality and insecurity, urban decay, the criminalization of poverty, and the decline of the welfare state. The author argues that by unraveling the interrelation of social forces and the political and economic infrastructures of neoliberal capitalism, the series provides not just a "diagnostic" but also a "heuristic" framework reminiscent of literature of social reform. The series' didactic potential, according to Cvek, is equally discernible from its trans-national perspective, fostered by a shared experience of social ramifications of the globalization of capital, and the proliferation of digital technologies and their uncommercial surrogates in non-U.S. contexts.

We hope that you will enjoy the following presentations of some aspects of the historical and contemporary America and their theoretical consideration.

Jelena Šesnić and Sanja Runtić



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