

# The Avant-Garde and the End of the World (An Introduction)

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Contemporary reflections on society, history and art are marked by the question of the end of the world. Our perception of this “end” is permeated with images of decay and loss but also with a vision of the apocalypse as a cultural, global and civilizational transformation. The international scientific conference, accompanied by an artistic program, “The Avant-Garde and the End of the World” focused on the dual meaning of this end—both as a dissolution and as the beginning of something new. Namely, only humans have a world, and it is precisely humans who have created the possibility for its end. We were interested in how the historical or contemporary avant-garde—both aesthetic and political—intervenes in it and may intervene in the near future.

We have considered the concept of the “avant-garde” as an unfinished project that encourages critical reflection and offers an alternative to the existing order. Although this term seems to be losing its significance today, it remains one of the key signifiers of experimental and intermedial art, which transcends the divide between art and life. The avant-garde resists the destruction of human and nature (capitalism and imperialism) and offers progressive social visions and radical emancipation from the weight of normative language, behavior, labor and creation. In this way, we have come closer to the original meaning of apocalyptic eschatology: not only the announcement of the end but also the revelation of images of the future that are already contained in the present world.

The contributions in this thematic section highlight various aspects of avant-garde practices that thematize, represent, or even challenge the image of the end. Their common thread is a reflection of the transition between past and future—the cases discussed rarely break entirely with the past but rather seek to establish new connections and reinterpretations. The avant-garde therefore does not function as a complete discontinuity but as a transformative practice that builds upon historical legacies while opening up new possibilities for artistic creation and social change. It appears as an ambivalent phenomenon—not only as a revolutionary artistic practice but also as a space for reflection on historical turning points and future possibilities.

In her article “Endings and Continuities: Avant-Garde and Meaning-Making,” Sanja Bojanić examines the avant-garde as an art form that reveals deeper layers of perception and interpretation through the deliberate destabilization of meaning. Drawing on examples such as Godard’s films, Goldsmith’s *UbuWeb* and Rothko’s artistic formula, she analyzes the mechanisms of meaning’s decomposition and reconstruction. In doing so, she raises questions about the role of art in the age of digital archives and artificial intelligence, challenging established intellectual traditions that treat classical book knowledge as the central place of theory and understanding. Her work emphasizes the temporality, fragmentation and intertwining of various artistic and archival practices that enable new ways of perceiving, creating and shaping meaning.

Emilija Vučićević, in the article “The Image of *Angelus Novus* in the Poetry Book *Ictus* by Bojan Vasić,” analyzes how Vasić, through Klee’s *Angelus Novus* and the composition of his poetry collection, establishes a dialogue with Benjamin’s philosophy of history. A key element is the motif of the train, which in Benjamin’s thought symbolizes the illusion of progress. In Vasić’s work, however, the rushing flow of history is halted by the figure of Matija Gubec—a character that disrupts the linear reading of history and, following Benjamin’s model, creates the possibility of messianic time.

Joseph Grim Feinberg, in “The Age of Free Jongleurs: The Art of the People and the Czech Avant-Garde,” examines the specific cases of the Czech avant-garde, particularly its engagement with folk art and the search for a new collective expression. Analyzing Poetism and the contributions of Karel Teige and Vítězslav Nezval, he reveals how avant-garde artists sought models for the future in marginalized cultural practices. These examples reject the notion of poetry as an elitist and detached activity from the people, instead demonstrating how the avant-garde integrates itself into everyday lived reality.

In “The Explosive Nature and Apocalypse of Russian Avant-Garde: Futurism vs. Bolshevism,” Ivana Peruško explores the tensions between avant-garde artists and the Bolshevik regime. She draws on Yuri Lotman’s semiotics of culture and the distinction between two models of cultural transformation: evolutionary, which builds upon previous structures, and revolutionary, which radically disrupts them. She shows how the Russian Futurists, in their desire to completely transform the world, ultimately confronted their own demise. Their radical aesthetic experiments clashed with the harsh political realities of the Soviet Union. Paradoxically, under the banner of the new, the old order

re-emerged—socialist realism, which, for example, revived monumental classicist forms in architecture.

In “The Decline of Atlantis and the Rise of the East: The ‘Revival in Flames’ in A. N. Tolstoy’s *Aelita*,” Antonio Milovina focuses on the literary representation of the end of civilization in Soviet science fiction. Tolstoy’s *Aelita* is not merely a novel about a journey to Mars but also an allegory about the decline and transformation of the West and the supposed revitalizing role of the East. Milovina situates his work within the context of the ideological currents of that time while also updating his insights through the lens of contemporary interpretations of these ideas—from Spengler’s theory of Western decadence to geopolitical tensions between East and West and transhumanist visions of the future on Mars.

All contributions in this series treat the avant-garde as a multilayered phenomenon—as a historical artistic movement, an aesthetic and social experiment, and a strategy for addressing the crises of the contemporary world. The diverse examples and analyses presented here reveal that the avant-garde tradition was not directed solely toward the future and revolution but, above all, toward the aesthetic and ethical practice of creating a better world.