

Variations of the End of the World

Introduction

What once came into existence has to end at some point. This fundamental idea of birth, existence and end is universal. The end of the world as an apocalypse belongs to the Christian imaginary specifically. This specificity is found in the Book of Revelation. Historically, it is another specimen of genre which flourished in Hebrew for centuries. It was borne from two needs that colour the style of narration and character of the imaginary: tumultuous times for Christians, persecuted as a minority with no power but to dream that one day they could find justice, and wishful thinking that salvation including this element comes about as soon as possible. The genre is a consolation in suffering and a spectacular vision revealed in the faithful soul. Tertullian had a similar but short revelation in the final passage of *De Spectaculis* (*Of Spectacles*)¹ (197 or 202 A.D.):

But what a spectacle is that fast-approaching advent of our Lord, now owned by all, now highly exalted, now a triumphant One! What that exultation of the angelic hosts! What the glory of the rising saints! What the kingdom of the just thereafter! What the city New Jerusalem! ... Which sight gives me joy? which rouses me to exultation? – as I see so many illustrious monarchs, whose reception into the heavens was publicly announced, groaning now in the lowest darkness with great Jove himself, and those, too, who bore witness of their exultation; governors of provinces, too, who persecuted the Christian name, in fires more fierce than those with which in the days of their pride they raged against the followers of Christ. ... What quæstor or priest in his munificence will bestow on you the favour of seeing and exulting in such things as these? And yet even now we in a measure have them by faith in the picturings of imagination. But what are the things which eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and which have not so much as dimly dawned upon the human heart? Whatever they are, they are nobler, I believe, than circus, and both theatres, and every race-course. (Tertullian, 1986, ch. xxx)

Tertullian was well-acquainted with the Book of Revelation, written in Greek, and offers interpretation of the Book of Revelation which could be understood and

¹ Later he embraced Montanism in the same apocalyptic manner and left it because it was not radical enough in understanding imminent and spectacular salvation.

accepted by anybody. This is condensation of the Revelation's influence on later approaches to the end of the world which developed many different views but kept consolation and salvation their constant.

The End of the World through History: A Short Introduction

In *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), when he arrived at the conflict between the Arts Faculty and the Law Faculty, Immanuel Kant turned immediately to the query "An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?" (Kant 1979: 141) That is why he called this task "repetition". He discussed the topic already in *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784) and elaborated on our hope for the better in *Critique of Judgment* (1790) (Kant 1963; Kant 1914). It is not inconsequential that his first encounter with the question of the possible progress of humanity occurred before the French Revolution, the second when it started, and the third with the Jacobin Reign of Terror and its no less bloody conclusion, when many hopes turned into pessimism again. One must also consider that separate parts of *The Conflict* were written at different times, and the whole bundle was published only after Prussian King Frederick Wilhelm – to whom Kant promised not to write on theology – died, and Kant believed he was released of the promise but had to wait for censorship to allow all three parts of *The Conflict of the Faculties* to appear in 1798. The part which covers the progress of humanity was very probably written in 1795, the year when *Le Directoire* was established to avoid the continuation of terror as well as a dictatorship government. This and other events after the fall of Robespierre suggested that revolution was over without reaching its end. Kant's question was at the same time repeating a broader framework of discussion with and against Leibniz's idea of ours as the best of all possible worlds, which was a reason for the appearance of the philosophical novel *Candide* by Voltaire. His approach to history's final stage was a mockery of Leibniz's idea in a way that portrayed the grimness of the world, and how foolish it is to believe that it can become perfect, together with humans who can turn into morally good beings.

Voltaire concluded that a good life means taking care of one's own garden ("*cultiver son jardin*"²) in the company of just a few real friends. The history of

² Voltaire, *Candide*, available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19942/19942-h/19942-h.htm> (01.07. 2024). Pangloss sometimes said to Candide: "There is a concatenation of events in this best of all possible worlds: for if you had not been kicked out of a magnificent castle for love of Miss Cunegonde: if you had not been put into the Inquisition: if you had not walked over America: if you had not stabbed the Baron: if you had not lost all your sheep from the fine country of El Dorado: you would not be here eating preserved citrons and pistachio-nuts."

"All that is very well," answered Candide, "but let us cultivate our garden" (2006: 169).

mankind, on the other side of such a miniature community, is not much more than a continuous bloodbath. Kant thoroughly names the only three possible variations of prophetic history. One can claim that the human race can expect continual degeneration or continual improvement or unending vacillation from better to worse and back, which denotes complete stasis with neither progress nor decadence (Kant 1979). One needs to add that after universal history was introduced as a subject at universities, futurology of the universal history of humankind could be discussed philosophically and on the level of relations between faculties. This occurred on May 25, 1789, just a month and a half before the start of the French Revolution, when Friedrich Schiller gave an introductory lecture on universal history at Jena University (Schiller 1988). The post of *Privatdozent* he received through Goethe's intervention, was not a lucrative employment. A Privatdozent needed to teach enough students who paid for his lectures, and if he succeeded repeating this practice over a longer period he might be accepted among full academic members. Schiller's success was overwhelming because of its novelty, and later due to its orientation towards the progress of mankind which made a meaningful connection between the academic subject of universal history and contemporary revolutionary events.³ But the idea that we progress through universal history towards salvation which awaits us on Earth as freedom of humanity and of each of its individual members, had to overcome the theological concept of heavenly life as the only progress we can make in terms of salvation. This view was inherited from the Church Father, Augustine of Hippo.

Augustin's traditional theological position was that there is no history worth discussing on Earth, and that the future of humankind will be decided during the history of the City of God and not by earthly events (Augustine 2000)⁴. They have no meaning for our salvation and offer no sign to be deciphered as a guidance towards the future. What counts as the sole historically progressive events are Cre-

³ It was Schiller's first lecture at his new position as Professor of History, a post which Goethe had arranged for him (though without compensation), in January of that year. The young Schiller's reputation was already such, that, the classroom was filled to the brim for his first lecture. A virtual march of hundreds of students occurred in the street, much to Schiller's amusement, to secure a lecture hall, before Schiller could begin. Schiller first introduced opposition between bread-fed and philosophical scholars. The first one is ruining science, academy and universality by taking into account only what is useful and applicable, the second one has: "Wherever he may stand and work, he always stands at the centre of the whole; and however far the object of his labours may draw him away from his other brothers, he is allied with them, and near them through a harmonically working understanding; he meets them where all enlightened minds find one another" (Schiller 1988: 258). Philosophically oriented scholar's standing "at the centre of the whole" is engaged in the progress of mankind, and that is where universal history comes to help.

⁴ In *Introduction*, Thomas Merton explains what the book is about: "This eschatological view of history contemplates with joy the running out of the sands of time and looks forward with gladness to the Last Day that will make manifest the full and final glory of the 'Whole Christ.' The City of God, for those who can understand it, contains the secret of death and life, war and peace, hell and heaven" (Merton 2000).

ation, Moses with God's Commandments, the birth and death of Christ, and the end of the world: events of the City of God. These are mankind's only progressive steps, while we are still waiting for the last one to take place: the moment when earthly history will come to an end and salvation will open our way to the heavens. In such a constellation, the end of the world may be a part of the final events but cannot be announced and recognized in advance through the appearance of this or that earthly sign. This world contains nothing to be deplored or even interpreted as the unwanted consequence of the "destructive" Christian faith. Such a relationship between earthly events (*saeculorum*) and a heavenly plan of salvation that includes a stage of apocalypse (announcement) was not acceptable in modernity, professing reformed faith in a historical duty of mankind to maintain the progress of this world towards perfection, and only when heaven on earth is achieved by our own abilities and endeavours, can God's plan begin to unfold. In the most Catholic France under Louis XIV, Augustine's view changed radically on the highest level of authority: the education of a Crown Prince. The Sun King looked for proper dressage of his *Dauphin* and engaged Bishop Bossuet as general organizer of the school for one – a gymnasium for his heir. Bossuet found teachers for all subjects but one: universal history from the Creation to Charles the Great – Charlemagne, chosen as the finale of discourse on history for his ideological usefulness as a simile for Louis XIV. So he wrote it himself. The guiding principle of the book is that humanity is progressing in history towards perfection through religions and empires that are becoming more and more perfect (Bossuet 1976). As Sun King, together with the victors and defeated parties of the Thirty Years' War, established a new Europe as an empire structure of universal history and nation-states, the immediate question was: was the destiny of such an imperial Europe to decline and fall as the Roman did, and what could be the significance of Europe's end of history?

Edward Gibbon, a generation older than Schiller, studied why the great Roman Empire came to an end, and concluded that Christian faith was not helping it, but its destruction came as a consequence of concentration of enormous wealth and power in the centre, i.e., in the city of Rome, without ability to do anything better than spent it on luxury and a life of ease on one hand, and turning people into clients of the rich and the state while management of the Empire and its security depended more and more on non-Roman migrants attracted by the city's wealth on the other. Gibbon researched this problem all his life to find out if the modern West European Empire would come to an end as the Roman Empire did and concluded that it could not because the European Empire across the world was organized in several sovereign states without an isolated centre, or, if any, this centre was a provisional and changeable site. Thus, if one fell, another could take over domination over lesser parts of the world, guiding Europe towards a brighter future. Augustine's concept of future was unending vacillation on Earth and continual improvement in Heaven; Roman Christians who arrived at his table as asylum-seekers had

a catastrophic demise of the Empire in mind together with Christian guilt or at least responsibility for it. Gibbon's conclusion was continual improvement on Earth which included the regular end of one or another European nation-state, while the European global empire remains untouched by this circular life cycle. And its mission was, of course, to guide less progressive human races to civilization:

This awful revolution may be usefully applied to the instruction of the present age. It is the duty of a patriot to prefer and promote the exclusive interest and glory of his native country: but a philosopher may be permitted to enlarge his views, and to consider Europe as one great republic whose various inhabitants have obtained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own, or the neighbouring kingdoms, may be alternately exalted or depressed; but these partial events cannot essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies. The savage nations of the globe are the common enemies of civilized society; and we may inquire, with anxious curiosity, whether Europe is still threatened with a repetition of those calamities, which formerly oppressed the arms and institutions of Rome. Perhaps the same reflections will illustrate the fall of that mighty empire, and explain the probable causes of our actual security. (Gibbon 1845)

Except for Augustin's positive meaning of the end of the world as an introduction to salvation (and punishment of infidels and sinners), all the other interpretations were in essence not Christian because they saw the end of the world as something dreadful and wrong, even catastrophic, or predicted eternal progress towards perfection or absolute freedom as the final stage of history. They preferred a stable empire in this world with all its vacillations, or, as enlightenment, collected arguments for an unending progress towards a better life here on Earth.

Another variation unprecedented in the West appeared in Eastern Orthodoxy as a hybrid of the mystical and scientific elaborations of Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov (1829–1903) who deeply influenced artists from Dostoevsky and Tolstoy to Tarkovsky, and philosophers from Berdyaev and Solovyov on, with special continuity of the artistic, theological, scientific and philosophical continuity within the works of Pavel Florensky and Alexey Losev. The idea of the end of the world as a futuristically positive event appeared in Russian avant-garde even before Florensky's lectures at the Vkhutemas during the 1920s, but it is accepted that Fedorov influenced some of Malevich's steps toward mystically meaningful abstraction prior to that, and that Florensky's pre-war lectures at the theological studies were known in avant-garde artistic circles as well. Still not known enough in the West, Fedorov's projection of humans into eternal beings including resurrection of the dead, and his idea of leaving Earth with its debilitating power of gravity gave momentum to Russian science in space travel. He included the solution of the conflict between East and West in his utopian orthodox layout, first and foremost as con-

ciliation between (Orthodox Christian) religion and (Western Godless) science which culminated in space travel. That human beings are to travel into the space of weightlessness is according to Fedorov an orientation that began with the first victory over gravity: the erect/vertical position of human beings. Long before Russian avant-gardists who followed his ideas, Fedorov included art into his plans for the perfect human race. Art's historic mission for which artists were thankful to Fedorov and continued to develop his view in three Russian artistic generations (the realism of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, symbolism/modernism of Bely and Blok, avant-garde of Florensky and Malevich), is described by Anastasia Gacheva:

In this way, the aesthetics of cosmism emphasize a projective, transformative property of art. Art realizes in a small-scale, preliminary, and "experimental" manner the principle of regulation that, Fedorov was convinced, should become the foundation for human activity in the world. This principle is radically opposed to the consumerist attitude toward the world, to the exploitation of earth's resources, which distorts nature rather than bringing harmony into it. Present-day art for Fedorov should be an experimental antecedent to the future universal creativity that will truly transform life. (Gacheva 2018: 7)

Without going into an entire exposition of Fedorov's renewal of orthodoxy in accordance with both religious mysticism and scientific positivism, one has to acknowledge that he is expecting the end of the world as it is possible here on Earth, a world that is dying under the influence of gravitation and because of the erroneous treatment of humans. Elimination of gravitation must be taken both literally as liberation of the body, and allegorically as the rise of human beings into outer space to become spiritual heavenly beings. This process of victory over the gravitational force includes the resurrection of the dead because there is no salvation from earthly gravity until all persons who died since the beginning of the world up to now receive new life. What is interesting is that here the end of the world figures as an optimistic and humanly positive step, quite as it is presented in the Revelation of St. John of Patmos. Apocalypse signifies revelation, and it is again typical that in the West it has become a foreboding announcement instead of realization of the salvational promise.

The Avant-Garde End of the World: Introduction of a Grid Table

A reverse perspective that introduces plural planes and visions after centuries of neglect and contempt (even in Russia when Peter the Great forbade further production of such a painting style enforcing a Western renaissance perspective) could simultaneously get more attention (and Western art history would vouch for that interpretation!) because its principle was so close to a Cubist approach. But for the "alternative reality" appearing before us in the form of iconostas and within

each of the paintings as its visual scripture, there is no Western source contemporary with Florensky's interpretation:

It is a strange thing that these 'illiteracies' of drawing, which apparently ought to throw any viewer who understands the 'obvious absurdity' of such a depiction into a rage, on the contrary arouse no such feelings of annoyance and are perceived as something fitting, even pleasing. Nor is that all: when the viewer has the chance to put two or three icons from about the same period and painted with approximately equal skill side by side, he perceives an enormous artistic superiority in that icon which demonstrates the greatest violation of the rules of perspective, whereas the icons which have been drawn more 'correctly' seem cold, lifeless and lacking the slightest connection with the reality depicted on it. (Florensky 2016: 202)

From a Western perspective, the Russian way remains enigmatic as a culture "born to be Westernized" (Buden 2013: 186) and at the same time creating "the Russian version of orientalism" (Malakhov 2013: 168): "What is happening here might be called self-orientalization, the process of transforming oneself into an exotic subject" (*ibid.*: 170). The mission of Russia to build a scientific religious compound harmonizing East and West was born from similar conditions and it inevitably influenced the Russian avant-garde idea of merging art and life praxis, if we utilize Peter Bürger's characterization (Bürger 1974).

But one would like to discover what apocalypse can become in the avant-garde context. Historical avant-garde developed its views on the end times during and after the First World War which was in itself the end of the world: after it, nothing was as it used to be. This includes empirical geopolitical change, such as the dissolution of three imperial giants of Austro-Hungary, Turkey and tsarist Russia. And it meant much more. Before the war it was still possible to believe in Europe's civilizing mission. Even with all the diseases of civilization it was still possible to expect that European high culture with its spiritual representation of eternal values would succeed in healing the most obvious weaknesses of the European order. The war proved that these were empty hopes: European culture was in itself one of civilization's diseases, or so thought avant-garde groups from Dada in Zürich and continuing in the immediate post-war period all around Europe. Immense popularity of Oswald Spengler's metatheory which denied any existence of world history and claimed that the European historical circle was already in dissolution went hand in hand with the divinization of the disruptive future coming from the Red East. The East, however, had a program of "catch up and surpass" the West by simultaneously expressing its own difference to bring Western historical progress to perfection. Such an approach prevailed even in Russian Marxism which can hardly be accused of nurturing Fedorov's ideas. One of the first Russian Marxists, Vera Zasulich, wrote a letter to Karl Marx to learn if Russia, as backward as it was, could overcome capitalism and enter socialism directly from a feudal society. Marx was so perplexed by this question that he did not answer at first, and only upon

Zasulich's insistence gave a Pythian response which enabled a more curious Russian way into heaven because he needed followers and did not want to disappoint them (Zasulich and Marx 1881). Russian avant-garde had an even more sublime project in mind, which was an expression of the direct influence of Fedorov.

To get an idea of this project let us begin with the presentation of *Victory Over the Sun* in 1913 at St. Petersburg's Luna Park theatre, overseen by the Youth Association. The event introduced Vladimir Mayakovsky's *A Tragedy* by Mayakovsky himself. In *Victory*, we have the sun as a symbol of oppressive order centralized around the rule of gravitation, and futurist space travellers who destroy its political order, i.e., a Copernican world to introduce open space without gravitation where "all is well that begins well and never ends." The end of the world is a new beginning to introduce unending space without gravity, i.e. without any necessity which would prevent absolute freedom. This is Fedorov's space in avant-garde attire. Where to put it in the story of the end times? First, we can compare the *budet* notion from Russia with *futurists* from Italy whose initiative influenced Russian avant-garde. The Futurist Manifesto from 1909 which appeared in English in the journal *Poesia* (April 1909) as a "Declaration of Futurism" was in essence a declaration of the world as it used to be, static and stable, and proclaimed the Italian notion of jumping on a *race-car which seems to rush over explosive powder*. The world that came to an end is the world of *passéism* (the world of the past, unable to embrace industry, speed, violence and war of the new world). To put *passéism* in opposition with futurism is presented with Christian historical logic when it compares the world before and after Christ, a world of no hope with a world progressing towards salvation. Declaration has it: "We are on the extreme promontory of ages! Why look back since we must break down the mysterious doors of Impossibility? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the Absolute for we have already created the omnipresent eternal speed"⁵. Living in the Absolute is for Marinetti what space travel(ers) are for Russian futurists and future constructivists, or, it is for Russian avant-garde what *De Civitate Dei* (City of God) is in relation to *De Civitate Terrena/Saeculorum* (the earthly city) for Augustine.

After the First World War, new interpretations of historical time and its conclusions appeared everywhere. Oswald Spengler was just one such philosopher, but by far the most influential. The title of his book from 1918 which appeared just a few months prior to the end of the war was self-explanatory: *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*). Without entering into his general idea of history that denies the modernist and enlightenment concept of incessant progress of the human race, it is important to say that Spengler rejects the existence of Europe as a historical entity and insists on the West (leaving Russia

⁵ All citations from Marinetti, 1909, no pagination.

and Eastern Europe out of the historical process).⁶ Ljubomir Micić, editor of the journal *Zenit* (1921–1926), had another perception: Europe was dying, and something new had to arise from the struggle between East and West to save it, namely, the Balkan *Barbarogenius*, a combination of anarchistic individualism and anti-civilizational destruction. He dismissed Italian futurism because it was too civilized, if individualist, and because it was fascist and glorified war and violence. On the one hand, his anarchistic beliefs could not accept Russian collectivism present in constructivism. Micić's views were at the same time eclectic, taking from all sides and publishing everything he could get (and was very successful in publishing contributions from all angles and groups, building an impressive network of exchange), while on the other hand he repeatedly insisted on some basic tenets. This is well visible in his approach to the West/East divide, for instance in his commentary *Zenitismuswerk* to Ivan Goll's poem *Paris Brennt* (Micić 1922). From Italian to Russian futurism and later constructivism, or to Micić's Zenitism, manifest ideological accents differ, but they all start with the end of the world: Europe, or the West with its enlightened progress destroyed itself, and its culture cannot help create a new beginning or renaissance.

They all reject institutionalized art or academism but keep a modernist structure of the old/new in function. The end is here because the old world must be destroyed together with its art. There is no need to engage much power into it: the old world is destroying itself, and the First World War has achieved that quite thoroughly. Anton Podbevšek, a Slovene avant-garde poet of the first generation known as *Novo Mesto Spring* from 1920, developed a peculiar position in relation to Italian futurist, Russian constructivist, and Micić's zenitist view on the end of the world. He agreed that Europe was coming to an end as proved by World War I but does not accept Marinetti's enthusiasm for the violent break and idolatry of war, nor does he subscribe to Micić's *barbarogenius*. Podbevšek understands the Slovene position in world history as that of another member of Europe together with its decadence and destruction. But it has a special function: that of the telegraphist on the Titanic of civilization, informing all the others how Europe is sinking to the bottom of the sea. Just a chronicler, not a captain, but he does not leave his sinking ship (Kreft 2000).

⁶ Here is his invective on Europe and Russia: "The word 'Europe' ought to be struck out of history. There is historically no 'European' type, and it is sheer delusion to speak of the Hellene as 'European Antiquity' and to enlarge upon their 'mission' to bring Europe and Asia closer together. It is thanks to this word 'Europe' alone, and the complex of ideas resulting from it, that our historical consciousness has come to link Russia with the West, in an utterly baseless unity – a mere abstraction derived from the reading of books – that has led to immense real consequences. In the shape of Peter the Great, this word has falsified the historical tendencies of a primitive human mass for two centuries, whereas the Russian *instinct* has very truly and fundamentally divided 'Europe' from 'Mother Russia' with the hostility that we can see embodied in Tolstoi, Aksakov and Dostoyevsky. 'East' and 'West' are notions that contain real history, whereas 'Europe' is an empty sound" (Spengler 1991: 5).

Introduction of a Grid Table

There are many different understandings of the end times. They differ in nomenclature, some calling it a catastrophe and others a step towards salvation. They can distinguish between an earthly and heavenly view of world history or deny that two worlds exist; they can negate that history belongs to this world or reject that the divine world has any special meaning for human history; and so on. A table can be put together from these specific positions. Augustine of Hippo kept an earthly perspective of the world completely apart from heaven's promise of happiness and acknowledged no event on this side of the world (*saeculorum*) as an announcement of good or bad fortune for humanity: earthly events simply do not concern us. His guests from Rome believed that there should be earthly historical events announcing the end of the world – the fall of the Roman Empire being one of the obvious signs. The people needed to know when to stop sinning and begin working on getting through the final judgement. If they knew that even now the world on the other side of heaven still exists after so many centuries without salvation as it was announced in apocalyptic teachings, they would stop believing in God's promise of deliverance. Kant was interested in the progress of humankind and did not favour direct involvement; his was a sublime position of beholder of the history of the world, and he did not enter theological discussions about heaven's involvement in the history of future. Fedorov wanted to reconcile East and West – Orthodox religion with enlightenment science, and salvation with progress. Avant-gardes differ among themselves by experimenting with more options but even so, all cases have the destruction of the existing world in common, followed by the dependence of total transformation of the world from an artistic ability to enter into ordinary life as its revolutionary power.

The basic structure of narrations about the end of the world which embraces the whole historical timeline is A – B – A'. This kind of chronotope (if Bakhtin's metaphor for literature is admissible but taken from Einstein's Theory of Relativity) brings time into the Garden of Eden, then falls into earthy pains and finally finds a way out. It is expected that the promise of salvation will be fulfilled together with the end of the world. All national (hi)stories are structured the same way to bring hope to nations in its progress towards better times. This model allows some variations, starting from a tragical one which reverses it, so that the last phase of the world is not an ascension into heaven, introducing a bitter end or in the least, endurance in meaningless existence without the prospect of improvement. The other option is circular when all events rise to their perfection and immediately fall back, descend and disappear. This is the process of different cultural circles in Oswald Spengler's morphology announcing the end time of the European cultural circle which reached its pinnacle long before the First World War. Taking the data from the table above (there are many other cases illustrating this type of narration which will remain unmentioned here), optimism concerning the end times depends

on how one understands the relationship between this world and the other, when the second can be the absolute other or a continuous extension of the world going through a metamorphosis/transformation. This includes acceptance or denial of Christian doctrine that does not hold the world in high esteem, stating that there is no death, (but for deserving Christians) rather an entrance into a better world through the gates which open on Judgement Day. It seems that most interpretations of the end of the world do not accept such an approach because they see it as a catastrophic event, but it is quite telling that St. Augustine and the Russian avant-garde are equally orthodox in this aspect. They both expect that our world must come to a complete and final end before salvation is possible.

Who?	Good or bad/evil end	Responsible or not involved	Two worlds or one	Event with prior announcement	Religious and mystical
Augustine	good	Of no importance	two	Not	Yes
Refugees from Rome	bad	Yes, responsibility	one	Yes	Yes
Kant	good (final cause)	No direct involvement	one (philosophy cannot intervene with the heavens)	Yes	No
Fedorov	good	Yes, activation	two (gravity – no gravity)	Yes	Yes
Russian avant-garde	good	Yes, activation, revolution	two	Yes (Manifesto!)	No
Zenit	three versions, one good	Yes	two	Yes (Manifesto!)	No
Podbevšek	bad?	No, passive reporting	one	Yes (active role)	No

Another aspect is that of religious and/or mystical narration. For instance, Augustine's theology is not a mystic one, while Italian futurism – not specifically mentioned here – is similar as it develops consequences of futurism vs. passéism

(*passatismo*) in all sorts of art but also arts of everyday life like fashion, food, attire, and many other domains without the aid of mystical forces. It also seems that Fedorov fused the mystical understanding of science with the mystical understanding of the end of the world to arrive at an optimal projection (Flaker 1982). This difference is also visible in the Russian rendering of futurism as it appeared demonstratively in 1913 with *Victory over the Sun*, where the Sun figures as a political principle of a centralized empire, and gravitation is accused of being a principle which prevents uprising against its reign. The previously mentioned *Budets* represented the revolutionary future to come when the *tzarist* – or to use a contemporary expression – totalitarian structure will be defeated and destroyed. Their final slogan offered another meaning of the end: all is well that starts well and never ends. One could say that this program, including Malevich's suprematist forms first introduced as scenographic elements for production, destroyed the chronotope of modernity and modernism introducing the termination of gravity of space travel as 'being in space'. This represents another world beyond the earthly and heavenly, a world where Nietzsche's utopia can become reality. Russian futurists immediately accepted revolution as a transformation of humankind and of Russia following its own utopian program.

But in other parts of the world including Western Europe, revolution failed and was defeated. Its Spartacan uprising and fall received a Dadaist commentary – a combination of a black mass for the bourgeoisie and *Jedermann sein eigener fußball* for the proletariat. Using Dadaist mockery, Dadaists announced the end of the world as a carnivalesque event filled with *Galgenhumor* and avant-garde spite. Destruction of the Austro-Hungarian empire brought about the creation of Yugoslavia as one of its results, and Yugoslav revolutionary movements were present briefly, while the communist message from Russia had strong support until the Party and any similar activity was banned by special law, as in Italy under Mussolini, but up until the Serbian king's dictatorship of the 1930s without a one-party rule. During the first half of the 1920s, Ljubomir Micić, the father of Zenitism, gave a universal sketch of avant-garde assessment of the situation at the end of the world. Micić's argument proceeded as follows: Italian futurism strove to heal the world with individualism and civilization, versus Russian constructivism that endeavoured to help the world through barbarity and collectivism. They were both wrong as civilization and collectivism are not a cure but the disease. To survive its own death, the world needed the Balkan *barbarogenius* combining barbarity and individualism. Micić did not receive much support within Slovenian avant-garde, despite attempting three times: the first wave (Podbevšek), the second (Kosovel), and the third (Černigoj). Podbevšek defined the Slovene function at the end of the world: the Titanic of European civilization was sinking, and during this macabre process a telegraphist painstakingly performs his duty reporting its movement until the ship ultimately sinks to the bottom. This telegraphist is the Slovene avant-garde.

If art's backbone, according to Friedrich Schiller, is playing a sensual game, and the impact of the game is that people become aware of their birthright to be free, and consequently of their right to overthrow all other games that enslave them in name of their masters, then all possible variations of the potential future of this conflict and hope for the better were played out, from the radical denial of any hope for this world, from hope established as characteristics of heaven, to the denial of heaven's right to dictate what this world is about. Avant-garde's versions, three of which were mentioned above, are radicalized: revolution against power of the centre is the only prospect, barbarianism annihilates civilized rules which defend the status quo, and individualism is a victorious hope against the control of collectivity over the person. If it fails, in times of defeat, avant-garde can at least send a report of the end of the world. In the late 1930s, it was said that there are only two kinds of games art can play in modernity: avant-garde and kitsch. Clement Greenberg presented a very broad concept of avant-garde as a politically sublime and subversive power, in accordance with a Trotskyist understanding developed by Trotsky, Breton and Rivera in Ciudad de Mexico in form of a manifesto. Art of absolute freedom is avant-garde art, be it directly political or not, and kitsch is art supporting existing power relations which must be overthrown. And among specimens of art that belongs to political power and have no power over the political of its own is – socialist realism as a Stalinist invention, but also popular commodity art forms like those of the Hollywood film industry. Later and after the Second World War, these conflicting arts were understood (by Clement Greenberg as well) under terms of binary division of the world between two empires as Western Freedom Art and Eastern Totalitarian Art. This binary worldview covered up the original avant-garde intention. In the 1960s, this metamorphosis of "avant-garde and kitsch" dualism turned original criticism of the cultural industry into neoliberal acceptance of commodification as the only acceptable realm of art. The paradox is that alternative art of the Sixties and later stems from the same roots as the (neo)liberal cultural industry. This example illustrates that avant-garde is only possible when the proletarian revolutionary movement is progressing and disappears when the class is defeated. Avant-garde builds on art which belongs to life as its combat power not just to render human rights to political freedom evident (Schiller) but also to form a politics of its own, the artistic and aesthetic political. When it does not, when it falls into the hands of the commodification of art, its ability to express what remains active at least in dreams about the end of this world as well as its power works in the opposite direction.

Contemporary art does not have a clear divide between art serving political power, and art activating the politics of art itself, denying political power its authoritarian patronizing of society by entering everyday life (taken together as *Alltag* – an everyday routine, and *Lebenswelt* – the world in which we are already in). Demarcating is becoming more problematic not because subversive art would

become less clear-cut but because authoritarian political power already began using avant-garde and radical modern language in its advertising decades ago. It was easy for Greenberg in the thirties and even the sixties when he repeated his diagnosis: political art serving to strengthen and support politics already in power was anti-avant-garde, eclectic classicism on all sides: in the United States as architecture of state buildings, in the Soviet Union as socialist realism, and in Germany as *Blut und Boden* combining kitsch taste with the same pseudo-classicist shapes. In contemporaneity, the image changed radically, and one is bound to read images and other narrations very carefully to decipher the interest that initiated the “creative industry’s” productive effort. That is one of the reasons why, at the end of the world, perspective of the universal is so important. Looking into this perspective over a hundred years ago would be seen as viewing art from the *sub specie aeternitatis* point of view (the perspective of the eternal). It seems contradictory to speak about eternity in the context of the end of the world, but it is a welcome point which makes the end of the world what it represents in avant-garde: complete destruction. Avant-garde has no program for this destruction to take place. It is what the existing world brings upon itself. Avant-garde is just reporting that the world is structured in a way that contains its progress towards auto-destruction. When this auto-destructive force endangers life, avant-garde enters everyday living to fight for its eternal continuity through revolutionary reversal. After this auto-destructive force survives its final crises, regrouping and reforming itself, avant-garde re-enters the realm of art to present its aesthetic power of free play, *dolce far niente*, disinterestedness, and the right to dream: “The world of art is that of another *Reality Principle*, of estrangement – and only as estrangement does art fulfil a *cognitive function*: it communicates truth not communicable in any other language; it *contradicts*” (Marcuse 1978: 10). At the end of the world, avant-garde challenges the end of the world with revelation of a possible better world with its poetics and abandonment of Institution Art. Avant-garde represents a concrete utopia in everyday life as a weapon of construction of a new world.

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SAŽETAK

VARIJACIJE NA TEMU KRAJA SVIJETA

Vizija kraja svijeta u kršćanskom imaginariju prisutna je u *Knjizi Otkrivenja*, posljednjoj knjizi Novoga zavjeta. Postoje različita tumačenja i vizije kraja svijeta, a cilj ovoga rada jest ukazati na one koje su uistinu izvršile znatan utjecaj na buduće interpretacije te su bile odraz konkretnoga povijesnog vremena. Ideja kraja svijeta pretpostavljala je različita tumačenja i autorske koncepcije, koji su bili osobito plodni u stvaralaštvu Tertulijana, Svetoga Augustina i njegovih prognanika iz Rima, Edwarda Gibbona, Immanuela Kanta i Nikolaja Fëdorova. Njihovi su primjeri organizirani u tablicu koja može poslužiti kao temelj za povijesno-avangardne interpretacije kraja svijeta. Ovdje su navedene tri ključne interpretacije koje su međusobno povezane tako što ih se može tumačiti kao tri opozicije – ruska avangarda, zenitizam Ljubomira Micića te slovenska titanska misija Antona Podbevška.

Ključne riječi: interpretacije kraja svijeta, avangardne varijacije, istočne i zapadne inačice, kraj kao tragedija ili spas, svijet nakon kraja svijeta