

The Rearguard of the Avant-garde (Editor's Note)

A quarter of a century ago, I started my first paper on the avant-garde with the following sentence: “The notion of the avant-garde is inextricably linked to the artistic attitudes of the 20th century.” I couldn’t imagine that avant-garde could still be alive in the 21st century – I thought at the time that it has definitely “left the stage.” The approach seemed to be confirmed by Dubravka Oraić Tolić (1990), who placed the end of avant-garde culture in 1968. The Croatian expert distinguished three phases of the avant-garde culture: artistic, political and philosophical. In her opinion, the artistic phase came in the years 1910–1935, when art was in the centre of culture, with painting having a significant impact on literature at the forefront, and with poetry playing the major role in the field. The years 1935–1955 marked the political phase of avant-garde culture. Its central model based on contestation was shifted from the aesthetics of destruction to destructive politics. At that time, in the opinion of the researcher, avant-garde literary work almost died out, and novels became the dominant genre. The third and last phase of avant-garde culture, the philosophical stage, lasted from the early 1950s to 1968, when the avant-garde artistic style ended. At that time, Oraić Tolić writes, there no longer exists a “stylistic formation” (Flaker), replaced by “isolated avant-garde tendencies that mix with the demands of contemporary mass media culture, knowledge of nature and technology.” In the distinguished phases, the following phenomena took place successively: aestheticisation, politicisation and philosophicisation of culture.

At the time of my first scientific encounter with the avant-garde, Zygmunt Bauman published his essay *Ponowoczesność, czyli o niemożliwości awangardy* (Postmodernity, on the Impossibility of the Avant-garde) (1994), in which the philosopher argues that in the spatially and temporally disordered postmodern world, there is no point in talking about the

avant-garde, since it can only be situated in relation to a specific order, while in postmodernity nobody knows “where is the front, and where is the back, and thus one does not know what is ‘progressive’ and what is ‘retrograde’” (Bauman). From today’s perspective, however, it seems that the avant-garde art, growing out from resistance against reality and unacceptable orders, as a “shock force of history,” is not the thing of the past. Magdalena Bogusławska convincingly writes in this issue about the avant-garde as a living and functional category, “allowing today both to develop the field of art (practice and reflection) and to influence and transform social reality.” In her interpretation, the avant-garde is a “wandering idea,” a cultural potential visible in relation to contemporary challenges. A good illustration of her thesis can be found in the Serbian culture of resistance and the activities of the Belgrade Centre for Cultural Decontamination. The avant-garde may have withdrawn from the cultural centre (Oraić Tolić), but it continues to function on its outskirts, where – as Zrinka Božić Blanuša writes in her article published in this issue – it becomes more radical. At the same time, however, the researcher uses the example of the avant-garde to undermine the dichotomy between the centre and the periphery, introducing temporality into the spatial concept of world literature. The Croatian literary theorist is interested in the avant-garde as an international and global phenomenon which constantly (in various forms and radical expressions) challenges art as an institution. If, as Pascale Casanova (cited by Božić Blanuša) says, “the only genuine history of literature is one that describes the revolts, assaults upon authority, manifestos, inventions of new forms of languages,” then history of literature thus described is precisely the history of avant-garde movements.

Reality shows that the avant-garde does not intend to “leave the stage,” on the contrary, its sensitivity, its ethical and formal radicalism, its experimentation, its irrationality, its uncompromising position, its faith in the power of transforming art and reality and in the penetration of the structures of life do not cease to inspire. It is also a response to the challenges of the contemporaneity. The perception of the avant-garde as a constantly living/active component/element of the historical and artistic process leads to the question on the validity of notions such as neo-avant-garde, retro-avant-garde, post-avant-garde, or even the rearguard, that we propose.

The intention of the originator of this volume of “Poznań Slavic Studies,” Anna Skibska, was to inspire the penetration of avant-garde phenomena in contemporary art, to explore the “avant-garde rearguard,” the pretext for which was a broadly understood centenary of avant-garde movements. In the invitation to participate in the “avant-garde rearguard” issue, she wrote: “The usage of this military term gains its motivation in the context of a certain rhetorical figure called metalepsis: in the literary-theoretical concept of Harold Bloom, metalepsis determines the condition of *belatedness* which regulates the power of literary (or, broadly speaking, cultural) tradition. What is more, this tradition is being recalled as if remained in the stage of its own formation [...]. Bloom’s condition allows us to rework creatively the artistic past which, enriched with the contemporary components, permanently returns in new shapes and modes, and the efficient activity of the rearguard (namely, the contemporary thinkers) is to guarantee the avant-garde’s vitality. [...] The unfading potential of the avant-garde, its unstoppable conduct, in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s terms, demands a rethink in the context of civilisation changes occurring over the last century. In the eccentric solutions established by the avant-garde movements, one should notice not only those changes’ announcement, but also a reservoir of alternative projects which remain immersed in the cultural non-memory” (Skibska).

Despite the call for a reflection on rearguard actions, tropes and movements, many submitted papers contain reflections on the artistic achievements of the Slavic interwar period. The so-called historical avant-garde still remains insufficiently interpreted and elaborated on. As a formation that “oversteps borders, that is open, process-oriented, mobile, surprising, sometimes chaotic, sometimes aporetic, unfamiliar, and at the same time, connected with life and human beings” (Czapik-Lityńska), it is constantly attracting attention. The volume is dominated by topics related to the Yugoslav (Serbian and Croatian) avant-garde. Another attempt at its synthetic approach proposes Barbara Czapik-Lityńska, an outstanding expert in avant-garde (utopian) imagination, who this time focuses on transgressions and synchronicity of avant-garde art, especially in its last super-realistic phase.

A significant gap in researches of Croatian futurism is filled by Nicoletta Cabassi, who focuses on the figure of Josip (Sibe) Miličić –

an author who remained ignored in Yugoslavia and died in unexplained circumstances during World War II – and his work, initially inspired by the Italian futurists Filipp Tommas Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni. Futurism, in its political and ideological entanglements, is also the subject of interest of Irvin Lukežić, who focuses on the activities of Italian artists in Rijeka. The Belgrade period of the biography of Croatian poet Augustin (Tin) Ujević in the context of research on space and flâneur figures is discussed by Sylvia Nowak-Bajcar. Anna Gawarecka also refers to the figure of the flâneur and to a relationship between the subject and space, which takes the reader to the world of Czech surrealism, focusing on the work of Vítězslav Nezval. Anna Horniatko-Szumilowicz writes about the Ukrainian avant-garde on the example of the little-known group “Twelve” active in the 1930s. Ukrainian literature is also explored by Yaroslav Polishchuk presenting “experiments with the avant-garde” by Odessa poet Boris Neczzerda. Galya Simeonova-Konach writes about the specifics of the Bulgarian avant-garde on the example of the “rodno izkustvo” (родно изкуство).

Texts aimed at penetrating avant-garde trends in works created after the period of historical avant-garde wrote Krystyna Pieniążek-Marković, Branislav Oblučar, Zoja Bojić and – aforementioned – Magdalena Bogusławska and Zrinka Božić Blanuša. The work of the Croatian representant of expressionism and new materiality, August Cesarec, became the basis for a reflection on the “extended” duration of expressionism in Krystyna Pieniążek-Marković’s article. Branislav Oblučar writes about the avant-garde after the avant-garde on the example of Croatian contemporary poetry.

The article by Zoja Bojić is an engaging text that enters areas unknown to the circle of experts on Slavic culture and Slavic avant-garde. Her study concentrates on the activities of Slavic (Polish, Czech, Yugoslav) artists in Australia.

The avant-garde continues to occupy researchers both in Poland and in other Slavic countries, there are conferences on the avant-garde organised and scientific papers published. The review article by Daria Nowicka presents a monograph on avant-garde intersemiotics, entitled *Widzenie awangardy* (Vision of the Avant-garde), published in 2018 in Poznań, and from Zagreb Marina Protrka Štimec reports a debate *Književne revolucije – naslijeđe avangarde u hrvatskoj književnosti* (Literary Revolutions – the

Legacy of the Avant-garde in Croatian Literature) lead by research team which implements the issued project. An article by Joanna Goszczyńska exploring manifestations of Gothicism in works by Ladislav Klíma is also connected (although very loosely) with the avant-garde question.

The issue also features review articles devoted to few important publications. Elena Daradanova writes about reception of Polish interwar literature on the example of second edition of the Polish poetry anthology by Panayot Karagyozov and a special issue of the „Literaturen vestnik.” Zdzisław Darasz analyses Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk’s work entitled *Sztuka marginesów. Chorwacki plakat polityczny* (The Art of Margins. Croatian political poster), the first on the Polish publishing market to discover the symbolic and knowledge-creating potential of the poster, devoted to its Croatian examples and their historical, socio-political and cultural intricacies. Izabela Lis-Wielgosz presents a book by Serbian researcher Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić *Sveto and propadljivo. Telo u srpskoj hagiografskoj književnosti* (Holy and Worldly... Body in Serbian Hagiography). Body turns out to be a theme that constantly occupies both artists and researchers. Beyond the topic section contains Mirosława Horda’s work on body language in contemporary Polish and Russian phraseology.

We are aware that this issue of *The rearguard of the avant-garde* is one of many voices devoted to the avant-garde. We also hope, however, that the analyses made, and questions posed in it make a significant contribution to the research on the phenomenon of the avant-garde, which is still alive today.

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