

Principles of Postgrowth in Avant-garde and New Media Art

Assoc. prof. Kristina Pranjic, PhD (University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia),
kristina.pranjic@ung.si

Assoc. prof. pETER Purg, PhD (University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia), peter.purg@ung.si

Does the Art-Science-Technology (AST) nexus bring, or does it at least evoke realistic solutions that could tackle the permanent crisis climate – and the climate crisis as such, scaling up exponentially toward biodiversity collapse prospects, and plummeting toward ethical and existential decay of mankind?

*Are such new thinking styles, intersectoral connections, and radical practices to be considered as **urgent avant-gardes of today** – or are they merely endlessly morphing conceptual bridges among different ivory towers, shaken already by the signs and signals of the ultimate doom?*

By addressing the sublime, the cutting-edge, the unthinkable, even ad-absurdum, bringing about welcome formal and methodological disturbance, art seems to have finally become an essential and well-balanced ingredient in the established AST blend – perhaps too commodified already, yet still believed to be the world-saving formula. Both science and art operate through questioning, critical thinking, observation, trial and experimentation, evaluation and repetition, however art does employ more radical “data-generation” methods such as intuition, imagination, inspiration, abstract sensing, embodiment, over-sensitivity, serendipity, storytelling, over-identification, radicalism, over-consistency, non-work, disnovation, etc. **Both, artistic thinking and artistic practice** needs to be integrated urgently, and more deeply into the Green Deal formula that has now been around for quite some years – with all the paradoxes of the recent year when wartime returned to Europe, as to infect and transform it essentially from within!

At the end of the epidemic, and at the wake of another European war, shattered by climate disasters, we seem to be facing a similar if not even worse zeitgeist to the one of the 1920's that called for a Bauhaus which eventually brought an important new social and cultural impetus. However back then there was no experience of the failures of the 20th century artistic and social utopias and movements! Nevertheless, the New European Bauhaus (NEB) seems to leverage a new (“green, social and beautiful”) optimism exactly upon the signifiers of the avant-garde. On the other hand, NEB became a concealment of the crisis of unsustainable development (CAE, 2020). It does not transgress, it even fails to provide an appropriate transmission of complexity of “the old” Bauhaus, in particular when applied to the European climate agenda and (both appropriating and expropriating) art (within the cultural sector). What we seem to lack is active knowledge about how un-sustainment is sustained, particularly across Sci-Art sectors.

One of the most important signifiers of how we do and think things, and how we ascribe value is growth. We can understand it as a centuries-old matrix of thinking that historically constructs Western-civilizational models of meaning-making, collectively and individually, from various institutional macro and microforms of society. The logic of growth is thus not only rooted in the rational categories that shape our concepts but also in the way we look at the world, how we describe, perceive, and represent it. Thus, the stubbornness to fight growth by reformulating capitalist parameters – for example, by establishing concepts like social, human, local, and sustainable “development” – can only lead to new ecological,

economic, and social failures. Besides, the (New) Extractivism does not harm only the Earth, it also devours human intimacy, social relations, our money, and peace of mind (Joler, 2022).

Agendas such as the New European Bauhaus for example, and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development do seem to be signs of a significant shift toward an awareness about social and environmental health, equality, and justice. However, we need to be critical of the very idea of sustainable development, which remains part of the Western economic imaginary of growth. The idea of sustainable development is clearly a mystified and ideologized one that does not bring about any radical turn in thinking but stems from the logic of a compromise. For that, it is too late now.

Consequently, it is unavoidable to start “decolonizing our imaginaries” (Latouche, 2015) in a radical way, refusing and replacing concepts that have brought us so near a catastrophe: radical change needs another economy; another view of science that would go beyond the concept of Promethean technoscience; another conception of life and death; a different conception of wealth and poverty; a different notion of time that would no longer be linear, cumulative, continuous; other conceptions of space; other intergenerational and gender relations; a different concept of work, placing social relations in the center, instead of efficiency or value accumulation (Latouche, 2004).

The alternative to the logics of growth was clearly offered by the introduction of concepts such as **post-growth and degrowth** that have been circulating the intellectual and activist domains as more or less idealist concepts since half a century now – yet becoming ever so realistic if not urgent just recently. To an increasing number of thinkers they appear as the only pathway to a realistically imaginable Future (Schmelzer et al, 2022). Meanwhile it also became clear that we will not achieve any drastic changes in human behavior if we do not address its phenomenological and epistemological implications that could provide us with new models for everyday life, and work.

Neutralizing the disastrous impact of our growth-based society would therefore mean actually using radical avant-garde methods as a unique combination of chance and plan, happening and controlled work in all aspects of thinking and creating for uncertain futures. The highly experimental **historical Avant-Gardes** as well as the later neo-avantgarde movements presented the most radical possibilities for changing the logic of thinking and perceiving reality, thus showing the opportunities to let new forms and relationships emerge. The Avant-Garde aimed at radical change, both at the conceptual/epistemological and at the level of the perceptual/phenomenological – which is precisely what we need to do today!

The avant-gardists’ propositions of the past century appear to have been precisely what we need today for a holistic “metamorphosis in being” as stated by Pasi Haikkurinen (2018, 2019), connected with the “practice of releasement” understood as the “new ethos” for degrowth society. What seems to be still missing here, however, is the acknowledgment of the importance of artistic disruption and the (re)establishment of art-thinking as the key innovative methodology that may provoke radical change in order to create a meaningful difference from what was (wrong).

If post-modernity is understood as the pivotal cultural programme of neoliberalism (Pfaller 2018), may there be such future bearing vectors of a new avant-garde narrative that respond to a revisited modernity marked by the increasingly notable concepts of post- and de-growth (Heikkurinen, 2021)? These articulate visions of a global de-modernisation may counter the over-accelerated techno-feudal (Varufakis, 2018) neo-colonialism as reflected in physical

(e.g. refugee crises) and virtual (e.g. fake news) displacement, both globally and even in terms of urban-rural divides (Virilio 2010).

Further sets of questions thus remain to be explored – possibly at the ReThinkable of **2023**:

May there be such contemporary avant-gardes that present a new global kinship, a creative cosmopolitanism, withstanding the anthropocene critique (Haraway 2016)? Can they be useful to critically question if not surpass the paradoxes of the neoliberally dominated cultural and creative industries (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002)?

Which are those new (inter)media and investigative artistic practices involving cutting-edge science and (both high and low) technologies that may revoke the transgressive aims of the historical avant-gardes, critically confronting the contemporary social and cultural values with their aesthetics-, ethics- and technics?

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Kristina Pranjić, PhD is a researcher and professor at both Arts and Humanities, University of Nova Gorica, working across fields of avantgarde art, semiotics and contemporary aesthetics.

pETER Purg, PhD is a researcher and professor at both Arts and Humanities, University of Nova Gorica, whose new-media art (thinking) practice ranges from performance to education and cross-sector activism.