

In My End is My Beginning

Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis

edited by

Asia Benedetti, Angelica Bertoli,
Andrea Golfetto, Maria Novella Tavano



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Abstract

The volume comprises a selection of papers presented at the 6th Postgraduate International Conference organized by the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage of Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Venice, 9-11 October 2024): *In my End is my Beginning. Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis*.

Both in the past and the present, humanity has been witnessing the collapse of its own identity, sociopolitical system and cultural order, as well as their restoration. In this imbalance, Ernesto De Martino acknowledges the roots of crisis, elaborating how the end of the world represents the culmination of the issue of existence, caught between the risk of downfall and the quest for redemption. At that moment, an apocalypse happens to reveal when a specific order needs to be replaced by new symbolic formations that correspond to the changed *Zeitgeist*. The vitality of an apocalyptic thinking, which continually transforms and produces new images of the crisis, leads us to consider a dimension in which the clash between the past and the future creates a generative power. In this liminal space between different meanings of 'crisis' and their translation into images, it is fundamental to consider what Walter Benjamin conceptualized as a dialectical image, a fragment wherein "what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (*Arcades Project*, 1999, 462).

The 6th Postgraduate International Conference was aimed at investigating the liminal space between different meanings of 'crisis' and 'apocalypse', discovering how, through multiple processes of translation into images, these notions reveal new, unexpected beginnings. This volume therefore investigates the image as a representation of this dialectical moment.

Keywords Apocalypse. Crisis. Dialectical Image. End. Beginning.

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Introductory Remarks

On October 9th, 2024, I had the privilege of inaugurating the 6th Post-graduate International Conference, an initiative fostered by the Ph.D. program in History of Arts at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. As new coordinator of the doctoral program, I shared this honor with Prof. Giovanni Fara, Director of the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, here representing the administrative headquarters of the Ph.D. program which co-finances this initiative.

For the sixth consecutive year, this time in the magnificent setting of Aula Mario Baratto - the lecture hall overlooking the Grand Canal from Ca' Foscari -, a willing group of our Ph.D. students organized a three-day conference on the history of arts. This year's organizing committee, consisting of Asia Benedetti, Angelica Bertoli, Andrea Golfetto, and Maria Novella Tavano, curated autonomously and with remarkable commitment a scientifically rigorous and successful event.

The conference stood out for its high academic standards, thanks to the excellent program organization, the depth and breadth of the selected presentations, and the extensive chronological span of the topics addressed - ranging from the Middle Ages to the present day. Furthermore, the diversity of interpretative approaches and the variety of national and international academic affiliations of the participating Ph.D. students demonstrate the interest in creating an opportunity for an interdisciplinary dialogue of wide scholarly reach.

The thematic choice, as reflected in the title drawn from T.S. Eliot's evocative verse "In my End is my Beginning" (1940), along with the subtitle, "Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis", also proves particularly relevant. Effectively, it conveys an overarching message of optimism, which revolves around the concepts of death and rebirth, end and new beginning. Even the term 'crisis' itself contains a positive connotation, as it precludes a turning point: not coincidentally, the Greek noun it derives from (κρίσις) means 'choice', 'discernment', 'judgment'.

To keep up with the conference tradition, the organizing committee has overseen the publication of the conference proceedings in a dedicated volume of "*Quaderni di Venezia Arti*", published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari. The open-access feature of the series ensures the immediate and global circulation of the volume, as was the case with the proceedings from the previous five editions. Therefore, I wish to all the authors a favorable dissemination of their scientific findings, and to all those interested in the topics discussed an engaging and stimulating read.

Congratulations to the organizers for successfully achieving this significant and impactful goal, and to all the participating Ph.D. students, who contributed with original and insightful papers to this initiative.

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In my End is my Beginning. Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis includes a selection of papers presented at the 6th Postgraduate International Conference organized at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage of Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Venice, 9-11 October 2024). Drawing from philosopher Walter Benjamin's concept of dialectical image, this volume develops the role of images of any sort of media which embody a turning point that allows a comprehensive narration of a specific rupture in history. 'Apocalypse' and 'Crisis' do not configure as mere descriptions of an ending, but rather open additional scenarios toward new historical and personal beginnings, here explored through the philosophical, artistic, historical, literary, or sociopolitical lens.



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