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The Tradition of Old Belief in the Context of Cultural Memory of the Avant-Garde

During the past two decades the inheritance of Old Belief has been enthusiastically discussed in Russia, for the most part in its religious, historical, and social aspects. In contrast, within the field of art history scholars have only begun to investigate this most important issue. In this article I would like to consider the influence of the cultural traditions of Old Belief on the formation of a new aesthetic and national self-consciousness in the beginning of the 20th century within the context of one of the major concepts of Dmitri Sarabianov's philosophy of art, namely his theory of "rupture" and "continuation" in the evolution of Russian art. The essence of this theory intersects with the idea initially explored by Lotman, in his book "Culture and Explosion" (1992), focused upon the mechanics of interaction of two types of fundamental processes, which Lotman deals with in his semiotics of culture, designating them "as opposition of explosion and gradual development."[1] The "original point of primary explosion", according to Lotman, appears simultaneously with the "turning point of the process", defining its direction in the history of culture. However, in the interpretation of Sarabianov, the semiotic "moment of explosion" transforms into a more elaborate concept of "breaking" or rupture with tradition, acquiring an ideological nature, while the mechanical idea of "gradual processes" changes into the historical concept "continuity (or discontinuity) of tradition":

Granted, the greatest contrast between deliberate rupture and inadvertent continuity can be observed in the 1910s, when the Russian avant-garde declared war on its predecessors, while at the same time, voluntarily or not,

[1] Lotman, Y.M. *Culture and Explosion*. New York, 2009. P. 138.

picking up on many of their undertakings. Among all situations of the avant-garde – this is the most demonstrative and intensive.[1]

Discarding the more abstract mechanics of Lotman's semiotic model, Sarabianov brings the situation of breaking or rupture into the historical plane of cultural memory, examining it within the capacity of the complex problem of the substitution of tradition and of the very existence of the traditional (conservative by definition) in the radical art of the avant-garde. He comes to the paradoxical conclusion of an "interdependent unity of *continuity* and *rupture*" in their general spiritual-intellectual dimensions; it would seem that this duo is unified by opposing concepts:

Anti-traditionalism became a distinguishing character of the avant-garde, although in fact it searched for alternative traditions – foremost in primitive and Old Russian art. It needs to be said that this heritage had remained unexplored by Russian painting for the duration of almost two hundred years. [...] These common features, circumventing the breaches, strengthened culture. The question arises: what better characterizes the mentality of Russian culture – the abundance of uncompromising ruptures, or the features that continually reestablish a connection? Still further questions arise: is there not in programmatic rupture a feigned determination, which does not conform to reality? Is this determination not provoked by continual self-comparison with the West?[2]

Much has been written of the influence of Old Russian icon painting upon the pictorial art of the avant-garde and modernism, beginning with Muratov and Punin, and concluding with the published studies of recent years, which thoroughly analyse the problems of tradition and innovation, therefore I will touch upon this issue in only one aspect here. Specifically the role of "alternative" Old Belief tradition in the "awakening" of cultural memory and forming a national mentality of the early Russian avant-garde. The culture of Old Belief, essentially emerging from Old Russian tradition, as well as in many ways becoming the alter ego of this tradition in the contemporary world to the avant-garde, would seem a unique phenomenon of such a "duality" of tradition and rupture. This culture presents an alternative to a western European civilizational model, and brings with it a possibility to escape from the dead end of self-reflection prompted by comparisons to the West.

Is it possible that the "schism" appears as the quintessence of such a break or "rupture?" Yes, but this ideological break was "reestablishing continuity", to use the formulation of Sarab'ianov. Indeed, namely due to fidelity to old tradition and the reluctance to "blend in" with the society that rejected this tradition, old believers – conservatives and traditionalists in essence – were perceived in the beginning of the twentieth century as radicals, "schismatics". Paradoxically one could liken the early avant-garde to a

[1] Sarabianov D.V. Situatsiia razryva v istorii russkogo iskusstva // Russkaia zhivopis'. Probuzhdenie pamiati. M., 1998. P. 61.

[2] Ibid., P. 62.

"schism", but exclusively in the sphere of art, as it preferred social and artistic marginalization to the loss of its own autonomy in settling into the accepted "mainstream".

It does not seem incidental that, above all, in the years of the most intensive development of the early Russian avant-garde, the neo-primitivism of Larionov and Goncharova chronologically coincided with the so-called "golden age" in the culture of Russian Old Belief continually for more than a decade, from 1905 to 1917. And the main issue here is not even that Larionov came from a family of Pomors, one of the most significant branches of priest-less Old Belief.

The rediscovery of pre-Petrine art and the active continuation of this Old Russian tradition in the living folk culture of Old Believer communities, especially in the North, strikingly reshaped the aesthetic and ideological discourses of the Russian avant-garde. Additionally, it led to a divorce with the dominant Eurocentric tradition in an attempt to find a new self-identity and to see the world anew. Thus, in the words of Dmitry Likhachev, "Old Rus' lived in parallel with that other predominant culture that considered it somehow non-existent. Rus' survived within multitudes of Old Believer communities, which created their own literary language in continuity with the carefully preserved old one, its own architecture, its own visual and applied art. There existed lubok prints and books […], the icon painting tradition continued, folk toys were created for every new generation forming children's tastes […]."[1]

This remarkable, and, as it may seem, unforeseen "memory awakening" and discovery of an "alternative" culture also pushed towards a renewed national self-conscious, which, for the first time since Peter the Great, claimed an integral self-identify rather than a torn one between West and East; between the Caesaropapist dogma of the Synodal period of "orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality", and Westernizer's hysterical repentance of the eternal evil and backwardness of everything Russian versus everything European, which had become tiresome after two hundred-odd years. I would argue that this awakening was directly connected to the fact that "the world of Old Belief", representing a large part of the Russian population, which had been under censorship since the 17th century, or to quote Muratov, "still locked hitherto", was "now opened".[2]

In 1906 Nikolai II issued a decree "On the order of forming and functioning of Old Believer and sectarian communities and on the rights and obligations of those who are a part of these communities who dissented from the Orthodox Church", in continuation of a series of his manifestos on religious tolerance and freedom of conscience of the previous year. Old Believers were given the right to freely practice their faith, publish books,

[1] Likhachev D.S. Russkaia kul'tura Novogo vremeni i Drevniaia Rus' // D.S. Likhachev. Vospominaniia. Razdum'ia. Raboty raznykh let. SPb., 2006. T. 2. P. 193.

[2] P. Muratov. Drevnerusskaia ikonopis' v sobranii I.S. Ostroukhova, Moskva, izd. K.F. Nekrasova, 1914, 450 numerovannykh eks. P. 5.

publicly perform religious rites, and, most importantly, to register as a legal body, which gave the right to own and manage property.

Finally, only after the years 1905–06 did a "breakthrough"[1] in discovering and understanding of the spiritual and aesthetic traditions of Old Rus', which had been "neglected" for centuries, become possible, and was connected with the names of art historians Muratov, Punin, Ainalov, as well as the artists of the early avant-garde: Kandinskii, Larionov, Goncharova, and the whole circle of neo-primitivists. By the end of 1905, due to the efforts of the Committee for the Patronage of Russian Icon Painting, which had been established in 1901, the first volume of old iconographic canons was published, which previously had been held under censorship owing to the depiction of a two-fingered benediction. In 1909, a private museum of old icons belonging to the famous Moscow collector and artist, Ilia Ostroukhov, was opened to the public. a year later, in December 1911, an exposition of icons that had been cleaned from all the over-painted layers applied since the reforms and mainly from the collection of Nikolai Likhachev was organized in connection with the Second All-Russian Convention of Artists in Petrograd (December 1911 to January 1912). The convention was in many ways focused on the concerns of national traditions of Russian art, and, in particular, towards the conservation and restoration of Old Russian heritage. In February 1913 there took place a much-discussed exhibition of Old Russian art, dedicated to the 300-year anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, assembled mainly from private collections, and organized under the auspices of the Moscow Imperial Archaeological Institute. Simultaneously with this exhibit, "The First Exhibition of Lubok" was held at the Moscow Art, Sculpture, and Architecture Institute, put together by D.N. Vinogradov – a friend of Larionov and Goncharova, where luboks from their personal collections were shown, including contemporary Old Believer luboks as well as the "new Russian luboks" of Goncharova created in the same tradition. In March, alongside the neo-primitivist exhibition "Target", Larionov assembled his own exhibition of icons and luboks, including lubok books, as well as shop signs and objects of urban as well as peasant material culture.

These events, which reflect the interest of the avant-garde towards various aspects of Old Believer tradition, can appear isolated and seemingly disconnected. However, from this perspective, they can be interpreted as an ongoing tendency towards primitivism: a fascination with folk culture and toys, the investigation and collecting of lubok by Kandinsky, Larionov, and Rogovin, the interest of Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov in the religious texts and oral traditions of Old Believers, the detailed study of the iconography of religious lubok by Goncharova, along with so-called "peasant" icons, including copper castings (Vygovskii and Guslitskii), as well as the development by Rozanova of a new model of hand-painted futuristic lithographic and hectographic publications based on techniques widespread among Old Believers.

[1] See: Sarabianov V.D., Smirnova E.S. Istoriia drevnerusskoi zhivopisi. M., P. 12–14.

Many to this day perceive the avant-garde solely from the perspective of formal innovation, forgetting about the new ideology of this movement, which informs all programmatic texts and manifestos of the years 1912–15. In this ideology the question of the self-identification of the artist – personal, artistic, and national – is brought to the fore. If the discovery of Old Russian icon painting in the beginning of the twentieth century was, according to the scholar of classic antiquity as well as Old Russian aesthetics Victor Bychkov, the "foremost discovery in the history of world art in the 20th century",[1] then in the evolution of Russian modernism and avant-garde, and in particular neo-primitivism, such a return – or, in the words of Sarab'ianov, "integration" towards a newly regained cultural tradition ("especially since the latter was their very own – Russian"),[2] – was indicative with respect to the national self-conscious of the artist, and goes beyond the scope of an aesthetic phenomenon.

In order to appreciate the full significance of this "rediscovery" of an alternative tradition, purged from national history for two centuries, for the formation of an artistic ideology and national self-identity of a new Russian culture, it is enough to compare the conception of Russian icon painting that existed at the end of the 19th century with our contemporary perception of Old Russian art, and to realize how different they are. For example, when we speak of icon painting and antique frescos today, we are immediately reminded of the Novgorod, Pskov, Vladimir, and Moscow schools of the 12–15th centuries, and the first name that comes to mind is Andrei Rublev. Nonetheless, until 1904–1905, when restoration work on Rublev's Trinity began, his name was practically unknown, not to mention other icon painters. Instead, even by the beginning of the 19th century, the icons of Simon Ushakov from the end of the 17th century, marked by their awkward attempt to merge traditional symbolics with naturalistic elements, were considered the best examples of Old Russian icons with a helping hand from such scholars as Buslaev.[3]

Nonetheless, by the year 1917, artist Victor Vasnetsov, who by no means belonged to the avant-garde, already connected the end of the 17th century with "the complete decline of tradition" and the end of the "creative" period of "our ancient national icon painting." In his landmark paper "On Russian Icon Painting", prepared for the Council of Orthodox Russian Churches in 1917, Vasnetsov, a member of the Committee for the Patronage of Russian Icon Painting since 1901, very precisely captured this change of historical paradigm occurring in Russian society. Before such an elevated audience he referred to Old Russian icon painting as "national art", "Russian icon painting is not only distinct from the Byzantine, but it has also acquired an autonomous existence and turned into the national art of the Russian

[1] Bychkov V.V. Russkaia teurgicheskaia estetika. M., 2007. P. 443.

[2] Sarabianov D.V. Avangard i traditsiia // Russkaia zhivopis'. Probuzhdenie pamiati. M., 1998. P. 297.

[3] P. Muratov. Drevnerusskaia ikonopis' v sobranii I.S. Ostroukhova, Moskva, izd. K.F. Nekrasova, 1914, 450 numerovannykh ekz. P. 4.

Orthodox people."[1] And here he adds, "It behoves us to remind ourselves that Old Believers preserved the art of old icon painting and Russian antiquity with particular care, and for the sake of justice we should express for this service a deep gratitude."[2]

Therefore, the history of Russian painting was rewritten around the years 1905–1910, and to no small degree owing to the activity of Old Believer collectors as well as a new generation of modernist and avant-garde artists and art historians. Up until this period, the only environment in which this alternative aesthetic tradition was preserved and cherished was among the Russian peasantry (and a certain segment of the merchants), being largely composed of Old Believer communities, primarily in the Russian North.[3]

"Old Believers, firmly holding on to the faith of their fathers, collected old icons either as sacred objects, or as rare and treasured relics," remarked Lazarev in his essay regarding the "discovery" of Old Russian icons.[4] "That is how the famous Postnikov, Prianishnikov, Egorov, and Rakhmanov collections came to exist. It is worth mentioning that at the same time as this long-term and diligent activity of individual Old Believer enthusiasts was taking place, both state and church agencies displayed complete indifference to Russian antiquity."[5] Moreover, in the opinion of Buseva-Davydova, contemporary scholar of Old Believer icon painting, the 20th-century resurgence of the traditional icon to its "Stroganov" iconography must be entirely credited to Old Believers.[6]

It is necessary to mention that the first researchers of Old Russian iconography, D.A. Rovinskii, F.I. Buslaev, and N.P. Kondakov, based their research completely on Old Believer archives and collections. Back then, towards the second half of the 19th century, the icon was not even being considered as an artistic phenomenon, but rather was investigated from the purely archaeological perspective. "In the 18th century," Pavel Muratov wrote with bitterness in 1914, "there was no place for the preservation of ancient traditions, chronicles, and icons. Within a few decades all that had been accumulated over centuries was scattered… Ancient icons were trashed in church basements or in bell towers. Painted over and distorted they remained only in forgotten churches in remote towns… The ancient icon disappeared completely from the life of the landowners, which prospered during the 18th century and the first half of the 19th. It would be of the

[1] Vasnethov, V.M. [Doklad] O russkoi ikonopisi // Deiania Sviaschennogo Sobora Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi tserkvi 1917–1918 gg.. (reprint) T. 5. M., 1996. P. 46.

[2] Vasnethov, V.M. [Doklad] O russkoi ikonopisi // Deiania Sviaschennogo Sobora Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi tserkvi 1917–1918 gg.. (reprint) T. 5. M., 1996. P. 48.

[3] Severnykh pisem, Likhachev v Apokalipsisakh o russkosti, Muratov o Severe.

[4] Lazarev, V. Otkritie russkoi ikoni i ee izuchenie // Russkaia ikonopis' ot istokov do nachala 16 veka. M., 2000. P. 12.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Buseva-Davydova I.L. Staroobriadcheskaia ikonopis' i ee granitsy: material k diskussii // Staroobriadchestvo v Rossii. Vyp. 4 M., 2010. P. 496–529.

utmost rarity to find icons of the 16th and even the 17th centuries which have been preserved in a present-day family of the gentry."[1]

Muratov has good reason to state that an appreciation of the aesthetic – or even religious for that matter – value of the icon as "contemplation in colour", (specifically, a perception of icon painting as an art) did not exist in Russian cultural discourse for over two centuries, "The *routine production* of icon painting did not only displace the *art* of icon painting in the end, but hid the earlier art from a whole series of new generations."[2]

The tragic consequences of Nikon's reforms and the Moscow Synod of 1666–1667, which ratified the reformed rituals and iconography, and imposed anathema on old books, icons, rituals, and all Orthodox populations who refused to observe church reforms, led to a religious schism which was expanded and resulted in an even larger cultural rupture beginning from the end of the 17th century.[3] After the Petrine decrees, and up until the end of the 19th century, hundreds of Greek, Byzantine, and Old Russian icons were destroyed as "schismatic" – that is, associated directly with the tradition of old orthodox faith, or Old Belief, and most of all in its cultural and socio-political existence as an ostracised and persecuted segment of society.[4]

Instead, by the 18th and through the 19th centuries, the implied volume, perspective, along with mimetic illusion, unthinkable and unacceptable for a traditional icon painter, and imitation of the real world (characteristic of the genres of secular painting), became integral features of the new canon of religious painting. This new iconographic "dogma" of the reformed church was approved by the Synod, and favourably perceived by the elites and its "enlightened" social circles. Unlike the situation in the secular arts, where Western influences greatly stimulated the development of the

[1] P. Muratov. Drevnerusskaia ikonopis' v sobranii I.S. Ostroukhova, Moskva, izd. K.F. Nekrasova, 1914, 450 numerovannykh ekz. P. 4.

[2] P. Muratov. Ibid., P. 9.

[3] Kozhurin K. Ia. Povsednevnaia zhizn' staroobriadtsev. M., 2014. P. 9. The author gives a remarkable quote from V.P. Riabushinskii's book, *The Old Belief and Russian Religious Feeling*, where he defines this phenomenon as a split between the culture of the peasant ("muzhik") and that of the "master": "A well-read, rich Old-Believer merchant, with a beard and in folk Russian dress, a talented industrialist, and the boss of hundreds, sometimes thousands of workers, at the same time an expert in Old Russian art, an archaeologist, collector of icons, books, manuscripts, who understands historical and economic issues, who is fond of his work, but who is also concerned with spiritual ideas, this person was considered to be a peasant, "muzhik"; while a petty clerical worker, shaved, in a Western camisole, who managed to grasp some snippets of an education, but in essence a man of little culture who often takes bribes, although by necessity, who secretly critiques and denunciates everyone who is above him, deeply despises the "muzhik", and is one of the predecessors of the upcoming intelligentsia, – this man, of course, is already "a master." (Ibid.)

[4] Damnations and anathema were acknowledged as mistakes and annulled only in 1971 by the act "Regarding the repeal of vows upon old ceremonies and on those who uphold them" at the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Russian national school of painting for the past three centuries, there were no positive outcomes of such impact in the field of icon painting, as Vasnetsov states in the above-mentioned report, "Not only did European influence fail to provide anything remarkable in our religious art, but it brought this art to an almost complete decline, turning it into a formal, lifeless thing."[1]

Nikolai Leskov, who touched upon the topic of Old Belief in *The Sealed Angel* and *The Enchanted Wanderer*, and who appreciated icon painting and described it in his own words as "Russian national art", recognized in this decline "the ultimate degradation of it to its present state of obscurity and disregard by the Church." Leskov continues, "the great majority either knows nothing at all about it, or are convinced that Russian icon painting is that sort of religious "daub" produced by jacks and gals in Kholuy, Suzdal', Palekhov, and Mstera."[2] As for aesthetics and the Russian cultural tradition, "not a single Russian painter engages in Russian iconography. He rejects the very thought of doing so as something humiliating, ludicrous, and not worthy of his artistic calling" attested Leskov in 1873, while discussing this quasi-existential shame of the Russian intellectual and an artistic mentality split, or "torn", between the idea of Eurocentrism and the nihilistic denial on the part of the intelligentsia of its own authentic 'Russiannness', as well as of all those centuries of the national past that went against European ideology of enlightenment and progress.[3] Wendy Salmond, an American scholar of Russian icon painting and applied art, very precisely defined this moment, commenting on the quite contemporary mentality of the "prohibitive" decrees of Peter I, which demonstrated the Russian consciousness's excessive self-reflection upon "the impression that Russian culture and religion made on foreigners."[4] Thus, for instance, the Petrine edicts of 1707 and 1722, and all the Synodal statutes that followed banning icon painters from creating images lacking "craftiness", which can be seen as ugly to the Western eye and provoke the "reproach of the holy Church from the heterodox."[5]

Returning to the context of the early Russian avant-garde, in a very similar "self-comparison", sometimes grown into an exaggerated juxtaposition of the Western to the Russian aesthetic, philosophical, and religious perceptions of the world, Sarabianov, paradoxically, saw the first step towards

[1] Vasnethov, V.M. [Doklad] O russkoi ikonopisi // Deiania Sviaschennogo Sobora Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi tserkvi 1917–1918 gg.. (reprint) T. 5. M., 1996. P. 47.

[2] Leskov N. O russkoi ikonopisi // Sobranie sochinenii v 11 t. M., 1957. T. 10

This article was first published anonymously in the journal "Russkii Mir", 254 (26 September 1873).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Wendy R. Salmond, *Tradition in Transition: Russian Icons in the Age of the Romanovs* (Washington: Hillwood Museum and Gardens, 2004), pp. 16–17.

[5] Polnoe sobranie postanovlenii po Vedomstvu pravoslavnogo ispovedaniia, t. 2. Postanovlenie 516. P. 293–294. Cited in: L.A. Uspenskii. Bogoslovie ikony Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi. Izdatel'stvo bratstva vo imia sviatogo kniazia Aleksandra Nevskogo. 1997.

what he calls "the conscientious aspiration to produce a certain act of national identification":[1]

A constant *presense of the West* as a positive or negative criterion gave an additional impulse for the rupture. However, even in those situations when the Western example was not considered a model for imitation (as it was, for instance, in the Russian avant-garde), the idea was not to circumvent it, but to overcome it from within.[2]

In regards to "overcoming", Sarabianov, it seems, addresses directly the issue of cultural memory as an instrument for the building of a national self-consciousness. In the early Russian avant-garde, this occurs through the "integration" of new radical Western modernist aesthetics, originated in defiance of the established cultural dogma of the preceding centuries of Eurocentrism, to the *autonomous* national cultural memory, still marginalized within Russian society, and strengthened by an anti-Eurocentric ideology as well.

Natalia Goncharova's words, spoken in anticipation of the second All-Russian Convention of Artists in 1911, sound in a similar vein:

"It seems to me that we are experiencing the most crucial moment in the existence of Russian art. The factors that define it are the strong influence of French art of the last decades and a strong increase in the interest towards Old Russian painting."[3]

The mechanics of interaction between tradition and the early Russian avant-garde are far from being unambiguous, and we cannot discount the factor of 'reverse' influence, which, following Benois and Grischenko, has been identified by Bychkov: precisely through "the efforts of the artist-innovators of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, starting with the impressionists and ending with the early avant-gardists, who placed primary emphasis upon the purely painterly language of colour, shape, and line… the artistic community was already prepared for the reception of this kind of art. In many elements of its artistic language, medieval icon painting resonated with the quest of the avant-gardists."[4] By agreeing with such an interpretation, we cannot deny the other side of the same phenomenon: maybe the first collectors of Matisse and Picasso, merchant-patrons of art Shchukin and Morozov, who came from Old Believer families and had been brought up to appreciate the abstract ideals of beauty of the old Russian spiritual tradition, were particularly attuned to the creative aspirations of French modernism, which had given up on a naturalistic imitation of the perceptible physical world? Old Russian heritage became a revelation and a source of inspiration not only for Russian artists. Matisse, who visited

[1] Sarabianov D.V. Avangard i traditsiia // Russkaia zhivopis'. Probuzhdenie pamiati. M., 1998. P. 297

[2] Sarabianov D.V. Situatsiia razryva v istorii russkogo iskusstva // Russkaia zhivopis'. Probuzhdenie pamiati. M., 1998. P. 65.

[3] Moskva o s'ezde // Protiv techeniia. 1911, 15 (39). 24 December. P. 2. Cited in: Krusanov A.V. Russkii avangard 1907–1932. Istoricheskii obzor. T. 1. Boevoe desiatiletie. Kn. 1. M., 2010. P. 379.

[4] Bychkov V.V. Russkaia teurgicheskaia estetika. M., 2007. P. 443.

Moscow on the invitation of Sergey Shchukin in the fall of the same year, 1911, made it his goal to familiarize himself with all accessible private collections of ancient icons.[1] According to the testimony of the famous Moscow collectors Ilia Ostroukhov and Shchukin, who were equally passionate about collecting both Russian antiques and contemporary Western paintings, Matisse was enrapt with the icons.[2] He shared his impressions in several interviews he gave to Moscow newspapers: "This is a genuinely great art. I am in love with their touching simplicity, which for me is closer and dearer than the paintings of Fra Angelico. In these icons the soul of the artists who painted them opens up like a mystic flower. And it is necessary that we learn from them an understanding of art."[3] "This is primitive, it is a true folk art. Here is the primary source of artistic endeavours."[4] Let's not forget that the tendency towards a rejection of Eurocentrism in culture was a characteristic feature of many different schools of modernism and avant-garde and, generally speaking, of Western European modernism. But if for Matisse old Russian icons were first and foremost fascinating due to the formal stylistic categories of artistic language, concordant with his exploration of the abstract in art, than for Goncharova, Larionov, and other neo-primitivists and futurists this newly "found" cultural tradition of Old Russia primarily carried within itself the potential for a new model of a resurrected national and aesthetic self-consciousness: "Great and serious art cannot avoid being national art. By ridding oneself of the heritage of the past, Russian art cuts itself from its roots."[5]

However, if Gauguin, Matisse, and Picasso searched for sources of new artistic inspirations in lands exotic for Europeans of that era, and in *the other*, *alien* "found" traditions, such as those of Africa and Polynesia, as well as Russia (in the case of Matisse), then in contradistinction to them, Russian neo-primitivists and futurists directed their aesthetic journey deep through the layers of time and into their *own, native* history. By definition such exploration could not be limited to the aesthetic sphere, and intruded into the sphere of national self-identity. It is not a question

[1] According to Irina Shevelenko, Matisse was the first to be able to see Russian icons of the 16th and 17th century during the Salon exhibition of 1906, when Diaghilev brought them with him to Paris. Diaghilev and Alexandre Benois included 36 icons from the Novgorod, Moscow, and Stroganov schools from the 16–17th centuries in the exposition of a retrospective exhibition of Russian art, *Salon d'automne. Exposition de l' art russe.* See: Shevelenko, I. "Suzdal'skie bogomazy", "novgorodskoe kvatrochento" i russkii avangard // Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 124 (6/2013).

[2] See: Rusakov Iu.A. Matiss v Rossii osen'iu 1911 goda // Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 14 (1973). P. 167–184.

[3] M. Sh. U Matissa. (Iz besed) // Rannee utro. 1911, 246. 26 October. P. 4. Cited in: Krusanov A.V. Russkii avangard 1907–1932. Istoricheskii obzor. T. 1. Boevoe desiatiletie. Kn. 1. M., 2010. P. 324.

[4] [B.n.] Matiss o Moskve // Utro Rossii. 1911, 247. 27 October. P. 5. Cited in: Kursanov A.V. Russkii avangard 1907–1932. Istoricheskii obzor. T. 1. Boevoe desiatiletie. Kn. 1. M., 2010. P. 324.

[5] Moskva o s'ezde // Protiv techeniia. 1911, 15 (39). 24 December. P. 2. Cited in: Krusanov A.V. Russkii avangard 1907–1932. Istoricheskii obzor. T. 1. Boevoe desiatiletie. Kn. 1. M., 2010. P. 379

of substituting one dogma for another, once and for all, in order to replace the memory of *nation* (or national ideology, in other words), sanctioned by the political and social authorities with a newly developed standard legitimized by the new cultural and intellectual elite and implanted into the public conscience. Rather, we talk here about the elemental cultural memory of the *people*, a memory ostracized, now reawakening, alive in its process of constant formation and revelation, at each stage suggesting a richness and polysemy of tradition, and therefore, a possibility of free choice. It seems to me that it is precisely this polysemy that was emphasized by Dmitry Likhachev in one of his essays, where he brilliantly compared Russian history and culture with "a river breaking its ice" where "the moving islands of the ice floe collide, move forward, while some get stuck for a long time, encountering an obstacle... The structure of Russian culture was not monolithic, under which it would have developed as a whole – relatively uniformly and steadily."[1]

[1] Likhachev D.S. Russkaia kul'tura v sovremennom mire // Novii mir, 1991.