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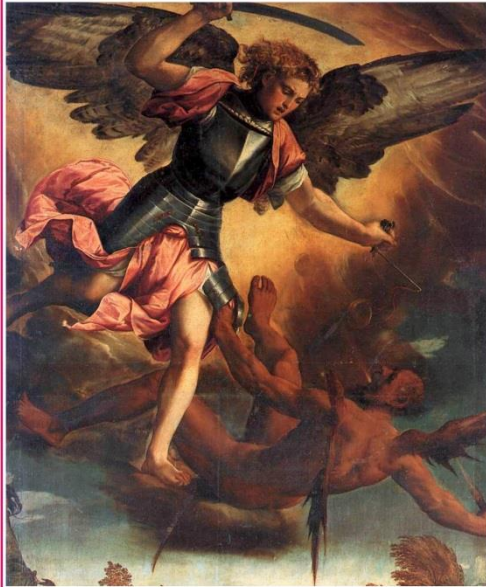
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# The Roaring Meeting Leontiev, Rozanov and Russian Modernism: The Aesthetic Method Transformation

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## Abstract

The article deals with the problem of the influence of Leontiev's aesthetic doctrine on a certain modernistic literature branch, known as new religious consciousness or Neo-Christianity via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, the conducted analysis also allows insisting on the historical and epistemological adjustment of the existing approaches to a number of phenomena in Russian literature and philosophy of the latter third part of the 19th– early 20th centuries. In conclusion, the main achievement of this article is the discussion of the practically unexplored problem of the genesis of original national characteristic features of Russian modernism.

**Keyword:** Aestheticism, Aesthetic, Christianity, Byzantism, Modernism.

*El rugiente encuentro de Leontiev, Rozanov y el modernismo ruso: la transformación del método estético*

## Resumen

El artículo trata sobre el problema de la influencia de la doctrina estética de Leontiev en una cierta rama de la literatura modernista, conocida como nueva conciencia religiosa o neocristianismo a través

de métodos de investigación cualitativa comparativa. Como resultado, el análisis realizado también permite insistir en el ajuste histórico y epistemológico de los enfoques existentes a una serie de fenómenos en la literatura y filosofía rusas de la última parte del siglo XIX y principios del siglo XX. En conclusión, el principal logro de este artículo es la discusión del problema prácticamente inexplorado de la génesis de los rasgos característicos nacionales originales del modernismo ruso.

**Palabra clave:** Esteticismo, Estética, Cristianismo, Bizantismo, Modernismo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of the genesis of Russian modernism and of the philosophical and aesthetic characteristics of Russian new trends in the period of their formation involves a certain difficulty and is far from being covered by paradigmatic messages about decadence and aestheism, Nietzscheanism and the totality of generally accepted ideological and literary Western influence on Russia. Thus, for example, the maxim Russian reflection of French symbolism, which gained almost axiomatic meaning in the course of time, was originally only a figure in the controversy between populist-positivist Mikhailovsky (1989), the author of a similarly named article, and an apologist of literary novelty, D.S. Merezhkovsky (1995), the creator of a first full-fledged manifesto of Russian modernism.

And the problem is that in his negations and affirmations, Merezhkovsky (1995), with all his vehement proclivity for European symbolism, chose to rely on his own national intellectual and artistic content, wherefrom it was deduced, as opposed to uncompromisingly rejected revolutionary democratic and positivist tendencies of the previous period, a religious-mystical dominant uniting the former Russian classics and the new content that was supposed to arise on its basis as being natural but much more conscious by implication, that is, modern completion of the national culture edifice. Such a rather complex configuration of thinking not reducible to student reflections of transient literary modes also distinguished a number of other, sometimes unconsciously modernistic claims of the 1880s – 1890s, associated with the names of Minsky, the last but not least, of Rozanov (1903) who, of his own volition but not without some reason, brought Leontiev's (1998) aesthetic theory into the same line.

With all the differences in approaches, the common denominator there, as in the case of Merezhkovsky (1995), was by no means decadence but rather, first, argued rejection of democratic emancipatory heritage of the 1860s – 1870s (Rozanov, 1903), and second, excluding perhaps only Minsky, an appeal to the national artistic and philosophical heritage, not excepting Slavophilism that was quite actively developed in its ontological, aesthetic, and messianic plans. In this regard, the intellectual legacy of Leontiev (1996) as a figure objectively standing at the dividing line between the Slavophilic-Pochvennichest and modernistic speculations is of

considerable interest. The goal of this research is exactly to analyze in detail the theoretical foundations of Leontiev's (1998) and modernistic views, respectively, as well as ways to adapt the aesthetic method by Leontiev (1996) to the needs of the emerging modernistic movement and consciousness.

It is obvious that the influence of Leontiev (1996) on Russian modernism is far from being the only one and, surely, is not even a half of it but is very significant, and its proper scientific assessment may well help to establish a number of original features and significant parameters of the modernistic consciousness in Russia, especially since, as will be shown below, Leontiev's (1996) ideas were present in the culture of Russian modernism and in many respects are still present in the existent scientific and philosophical discourse in Rozanov's (1903) deliberate reinterpretation, that is, in a deterministic and, moreover, a radical modernistic way.

## **2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

It was Rozanov (1903) who introduced into the Russian thought a message about inescapable dualism of Leontiev's (1996) nature and discerned in his theoretical constructions a roaring meeting of Hellenic aestheticism with monastic words about a strict after-death ideal or, in simpler terms, marked a counterpoint of aestheticism and Christianity, between which Leontiev (1998) swayed like a pendulum still leaning

toward aestheticism as a kind of protonomy law over the Christian Deuteronomy adopted later. A logical consequence of this foundational premise was Rozanov's idea of mere Nietzscheanism and, accordingly, non-Christian aesthetic amorality of Leontiev (1998), again allegedly naturally inherent in him: the unity of Leontiev (1998) and Nietzsche... is amazing, the analogy used is to a full degree, it notably reaches the last point.

Meanwhile, everything immediately appears in a different light and gradually falls into place if one takes into account the elementary logical inconsistency of the views shown by Rozanov (1903) that assume one of the three: either a dramatic thoughtlessness of Leontiev (1996) who did not understand the incompatibility of aestheticism and Christianity or, on the contrary, evil intentions under the guise of monastic piety or, eventually, being held captive by the extravagant collision of his own consciousness. In all the three versions, repeatedly voiced during the 20<sup>th</sup> and the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there is an implicit fixation on minimization of the intellectual and epistemological significance of Leontiev's legacy, sometimes carried out quite purposefully (Gaydenko, 2001; Vargas et al., 2019). Therefore, without an analytical restoration of true facts of the matter, the prospects for further consideration of the Leontiev (1996) and Russian modernism problem seem rather vague.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Leontiev's philosophical-publicistic and critical-aesthetic works reflecting the specifics of his aesthetic worldview, the works of Rozanov (1903) focused on Leontiev's texts, ideas and the phenomenon, as well as the correspondence of the two thinkers will be mainly used as material (empirical data). According to the research logic, both monographic and comparative analysis of these sources is envisaged. A description of Leontiev's (1998) aesthetic theory in the totality of its objective parameters, its epistemological and methodological significance, becomes the priority task. The next analytical stage is to establish the nature and the principles and to explain the reasons for a creative interaction of the traditional (Leontiev's aesthetic conservatism) and modernistic consciousness within the boundaries of the transitional cultural-historical era.

Accordingly, from a formal standpoint, the research corresponds to the greatest extent to the comparative and historical typological methods of analyzing literary and aesthetic realities. It consistently adheres to the historical principle when considering the material, supplementing this approach with the methods of logical-philosophical and aesthetic analysis as may be necessary. Since the paper is largely based on a dialectical denial of the commonly used approach to Leontiev (1996) outlined in the previous section, it is legitimate to speak at least about elements of an original author's methodology that is an alternative to the existing discourse and is objectively aimed at

identifying methodological foundations of Leontiev's (1998)'s views in all their mental specificity and development potential, which naturally leads to the study of the creative methodology of the Russian modernism in the vicissitudes of its formation.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Leontiev's (1998) principles of aesthetics and the needs of theoretical self-consciousness of Russian modernism. That movement, however, stating the truth of fact (the absence of any appreciable keenness on Leontiev's ideas in the Decadent environment), while he draws a well-defined typological parallel at the same time and, no less importantly, establishes an objective connection between almost similar mental processes taking place in different, sometimes not communicating cultural environments on the threshold of the upcoming new era.

The motives of modernist attention to Leontiev (1996), in addition to the aspects mentioned in the introduction — anti-positivist attitudes and appeals in their own purposes to the conditionally Slavophil semantic context are also determined by the sensing Leontiev (1996) as the creator of a new aesthetic quality concentrated in maximizing the life aesthetics. This quite fair perception based on an unambiguous understanding of a qualitative difference between modern Western European aesthetics (that same positivism) and



Leontiev's aesthetic views prompted modernists to look for some other ways and possibilities of aesthetic doing by analogy that ended up bringing to the life creation issues.

There has already been a fundamental divergence between the life aesthetics that grew on the traditionalist subject matter, and the modernistic life creation oriented towards the neo-Christian entirety of ideas. It is very significant that Leontiev's influence is found in the ideological and aesthetic constructions and creative systems of individuals who would later begin to preach the so-called new religious consciousness, and is close to nonexistent in classical aesthetes like Bryusov. Thus, the self-determined religious-aesthetic discourse in Russian modernism adopted from Leontiev (1996) a general construction and tempting messages of the life aesthetics, which is why it is appropriate to talk about a conditional unity of the paradigm exclusive of the Byzantine ideal. And it was excluded and replaced by the new religious consciousness (Yang et al., 2019; Soo et al., 2019).

Leontiev (1996) is not only and not so much the creator of an original aesthetic theory, but also the creator of a special aesthetic method of understanding the reality, which Rozanov noted repeatedly and very astutely. The essence of Leontiev's method is rough as follows. Leontiev (1996) proceeds from the statement of the universality and objectivity of the aesthetic principle and, accordingly, of a measure; the life aesthetics that is visible to all serves as a visible

embodiment of abstract ideal principles. It objectively reflects and substantially imprints the metaphysical foundations and laws of being. The aesthetic principle manifested in reality itself in the forms of social life organization and in history allows one to be held somewhat firsthand the mysterious, rationally incomprehensible essence of things, to foresee the qualitative specificity and dynamics of complex and diverse phenomena, lengthy processes,

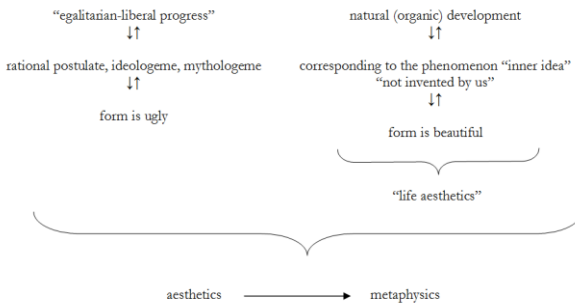


Figure 1: The scheme of Leontiev (1996)'s aesthetic cognition method

Leontiev (1996)'s aesthetic method, according to the belief of its creator himself, has a universal meaning and is suitable for everything but in the system of Leontiev's views it hardly exists outside the semantic field of Byzantism and naturally correlates with Byzantism rather than with Christianity. Even for Leontiev's contemporaries, say nothing of the younger generation of modernists, the apology of Byzantism seemed ostentatiously archaic; nevertheless, the concept content is by no means reduced to a retrospective historical and cultural-aesthetic ideal. Indeed, Byzantism is postulated by Leontiev (1996) as a special cultural and historical type in supplement of the

famous theory of Danilevsky, but this means that the traditional Slavophilic association Russia and Slavism is agnostically opposed to qualitative dissimilation of Byzantism as an original cultural and civilizational project historically assimilated, Slavdom as an elemental tribal mass determined.

Hence the present definition of Byzantism: it is a nationally, culturally, and religiously conditioned, not arbitrary, development model known by a centuries-old sensation, providing expanded reproduction and successive creative growth (splendid blossom) in all life spheres. That is why Byzantism as an integral tenet embraces (or even forms) the whole theory of Leontiev (1996), a set of his original ideas, and coupled with the aesthetic method (which receives not only illustrative and evaluation but also predictive functions in the area of Byzantism) acts as a cognition platform and program as an alternative to positivism and nearly the whole modern European secular rationality.

What the theory and practice of Russian modernism adopted from Leontiev (1996) was what was needed by the new people themselves, which met not only their immediate ideological needs but also the objective parameters of the modernistic consciousness. The counterpoint of the extremes of pagan aestheticism and the Orthodox faith was just needed there; such a supposedly Leontiev collision allowed for detailed and a kind of uninvolved reflection on the problems of their own creative work, and thereafter made it possible to

fulfill what even had never occurred to poor Leontiev (1996) – a synthesis of aesthetics and religion on the ways predefined by the dogmas of the new religious consciousness. The modernistic pattern was later also used to make an allegedly scientific interpretation of the ideological and creative heritage of Leontiev (1996), which was in fact a peculiar form to make use of this national conservative for the needs of modern liberal consciousness.

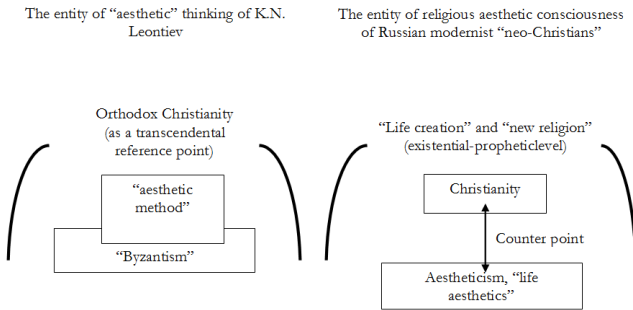


Figure 2: Derivation of religious-artistic modernism from Leontiev (1996)'s aesthetic thinking

### **Rozanov's myth of K.N. Leontyev: stages and causes of formation**

Rozanov (1903) composed the modernist myth of Leontiev (1996) in 1903 when he unconditionally maintained the stance of new religious consciousness himself, was an active participant in the Petersburg religious and philosophical meetings, in many ways

orchestrating their problematics by his polometaphysical topics, was a staff member of the Merezhkovsky (1995)'s journal *Novy Put* and the most intensively writing author therein; his *Family Question in Russia* and the second edition of *In the World of the Vague and Indeterminate* were published. And that is when, on the wave of this success he publishes a selection of premortem Leontiev's letters of 1891, accompanied by a foreword of his own and comments in the consistent modernistic religious spirit Rozanov (1903) in little-read but once famous *Russkiy Vestnik*, where F.M. Dostoyevsky, Leontiev (1996), as well as Rozanov (1903) himself had their works published in the first half of the 1890s.

A similar methodological transformation to the deemed Leontiev scenario towards consistent religious modernism as it turned out though was made by Rozanov (1903) in his own performer's biography, whose spiritual quest still had some explicit or implicit traces of Leontiev's ideological influence until the transition to the position of gender metaphysics and the new religious consciousness (the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>– 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). It can even be said that failed attempts of conservative life arrangement that befell Rozanov (1903) predetermined a certain existential resentment against Leontiev (1996), fully unleashed in the manner of a declarative parting with Leontiev's legacy.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The analysis obviously demonstrates the need for a clearly defined historical and systematic approach to the material, which in this case means a comprehensive account taken of the realities of the world outlook and oeuvre of Leontiev (1996) and the contexts where they manifest. On the contrary, the metaphysical attitude towards Leontiev (1996) (and not only him) that originates from the modernist environment and is very popular among scientists is practically devoid of scientific interest. At the same time, the example of Leontiev-Rozanov relationship is the best demonstration of that very roaring meeting of the conservative and modernistic consciousness whereby, at first glance, the successor simply exacerbates the modernistic trends already contained in the original (Leontiev's) teaching, but upon closer examination it reveals a complete elimination of the old consciousness and its replacement with the new one – with a conspicuous but extremely deceptive impression of preservation of the former aesthetic cover with all its recognizable attributes (Gonçalves et al., 2017; Selomo & Govender, 2016).

Thus, the article addressed a kind of dual goal: proposing alternative and easily verified principles of cognition of Leontiev (1996)'s unknown phenomenon at the baseline of his original views taken in the projection of the aesthetic method as opposed to the existing interpretations, the author provided a gnoseological background to the Russian modernism research. Therefore, in summary, the scientific and theoretical value of the article consists in a

thorough study of the problems of genesis and evolution, of the objective quality, of the mental-aesthetic and national specificity of the modernistic consciousness in Russia. According to the research findings, a general scientific prospect for future research of similar facts and phenomena in the indicated direction is emerging as an opportunity. In this perspective, the process of integration of Leontiev (1996)'s conservative heritage is examined in the paradigm of modernist religious aesthetics, which, in turn, should help the Western reader assess the mental and historical parameters of Russian modernism and how it interacts with traditional culture.

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