

## A ‘non-aligned’ intelligentsia: Timur Novikov’s neo-avantgarde and the afterlife of Leningrad non-conformism

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**Abstract** This article describes a logic of distinction and succession within the late-twentieth-century Leningrad-St. Petersburg cultural field, whereby consecutive intelligentsia mainstreams were replaced by their avant-garde peripheries. In this dynamic picture of socio-cultural transformations, I propose a working hypothesis of a repeated stratification of the field into an ‘official’, an ‘unofficial’, and a third ‘non-aligned’ intelligentsia. This hypothesis is tested in reference to the ‘non-aligned’ groups founded by the avant-garde artist and ideologue Timur Novikov (1958–2002). Three major shifts are described: from the politicized late-Brezhnevite early 1980s to the apolitical radicalism of Novikov’s New Artists; from this anarchistic underground, through the *perestroika* era, to the playful ‘classicism’ of the New Academy of Fine Arts in the 1990s; and from this postmodern international orientation to an arch-reactionary, neo-imperial posturing at the turn of the 2000s. Lastly, this ‘non-aligned’ intelligentsia is suggested as a possible precedent, or, indeed, a model for understanding other historically significant avant-garde peripheries, which commonly seek to distinguish themselves from (often mutually-exclusive) centres.

**Keywords** Russian culture · The field of art · Underground · Non-conformist · Timur Novikov · Non-aligned · Third space · Distinction · Late Soviet · Bourdieu · Intelligentsia · Leningrad · St. Petersburg

This article describes a logic of succession within the Leningrad-St. Petersburg cultural field whereby, repeatedly, over several decades, consecutive intelligentsia

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mainstreams were substituted by their avant-garde peripheries.<sup>1</sup> In this dynamic picture of socio-cultural transformations, I propose a working hypothesis of a repeated stratification of the field into an ‘official’, an ‘unofficial’, and a third ‘non-aligned’ intelligentsia.

This dynamic will be illustrated in reference to the ‘non-aligned’ groups founded by the artist and ideologue Timur Novikov (1958–2002). Three major shifts are described: from the politicized late-Brezhnevite early 1980s to the apolitical radicalism of Novikov’s New Artists [*Novye khudožniki*]; from this anarchistic underground through the *perestroika* era, to the playful ‘classicism’ of the New Academy of Fine Arts in the 1990s; and from this postmodern international orientation to an arch-reactionary, neo-imperialist position at the turn of the 2000s.

By observing the repeated disruption of competing dominant centres by this group, and its influence on successive mainstream cultural sensibilities, a hypothesis concerning the *double distinction* and *succession* of ‘non-aligned’ avant-garde peripheries from (often mutually-exclusive) centres will be tested.<sup>2</sup> This, it is hoped, will raise new questions about the role of similar radical yet ‘non-aligned’ intelligentsia movements and their historical significance.

### The New Artists and the changing of the non-conformist guard

The group of New Artists came into existence in a spirit of youthful insouciance and apolitical radicalism in 1982. This distinguished it not only from the staid institutions of conformist art of the period of late-Brezhnevite stagnation [*zastoj*], but also from the established older generation of politicized non-conformist artists.

In the early 1980s, the official Leningrad Union of Artists still nominally promulgated the doctrine of Socialist Realism. The Union’s primary function, however, was considered to be the provision of generous resources to artists demonstrating a degree of loyalty to the state. Self-designated ‘unofficial culture’ [*neoficial’naja kul’tura*] was excluded from major venues, but tolerated by the KGB in accordance with the latter’s policy of co-option and integration of ‘deviations’. Although this variously named ‘underground’, ‘parallel’, or ‘second’ culture

<sup>1</sup> The analysis in this article is based on field research for my forthcoming doctoral thesis and the multi-part exhibition ‘The Raw, the Cooked, and the Packaged: The Archive of *Perestroika* Art’ I co-curated at Kiasma, the Finnish Museum of Contemporary Art (Stodolsky and Muukkonen 2007). The term ‘avant-garde’ is employed in a descriptive and comparative manner, in line with its etymology and recent art-theoretical usage (e.g. Scheunemann 2005). The prefix ‘neo-’ in the title indicates that the movements under discussion are not of the early twentieth century, and invites comparison with similar post-war movements in the West.

<sup>2</sup> The scope of this article allows no more than a rudimentary outline of Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts. According to Bourdieu, social actors establish their positions within specific fields. These fields are structured by heteronomous and autonomous forces, which determine the relative value of different forms of economic, political, and cultural ‘capital’. Especially in cultural fields, processes of ‘distinction’ are instrumental in determining the ‘rules of the game’, which for Bourdieu are not binding laws, but regularities which (often implicitly) govern the way in which these forms of value can be deployed to best advantage in social ‘strategies’. A ‘logic of succession’ is a set of strategies whereby a given social actor achieves a dominant position within a field (see Bourdieu 1977; 1990a; 1993).

harboured contempt for what was considered the servile art of officialdom, non-conformist artists also sought recognition of their status and professional needs from the state. The predominant Association of Experimental Visual Arts [*Tovariščestvo eksperimental'nogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva (TEII)*], which grew out of the older generation's battles for the celebrated *Gaza-Nevskij* exhibitions of the 1970s (Andreeva and Kanajkin 1990), worked hard to achieve semi-legal status. Indeed, its manifesto of 1982 declared its first goal was to be granted full recognition by the authorities (Koval'skij 2006, 560).

The New Artists came to prominence within the non-conformist cultural scene as the avant-garde challengers of this uneasy status quo.<sup>3</sup> For them, the older anti-official generation mirrored the world of officialdom in several ways. These included the bureaucratic committees they formed, the politicized language they used, and the social comforts they strove for (Khlobystin 2008). The more these 'bearded elders' fought the Soviet state, the young artists jeered, the more they became the spitting image of their nemesis (this accusation of unwitting mimicry was later taken up in Serguei Oushakine's renowned essay on *samizdat* in 2001). The old-fashioned *intelligenty*, in turn, chastized the New Artists' anarchistic 'infantilism', and scorned their punk anti-aesthetics as talentless amateurism. Indeed, the group's *po-fig* [devil-may-care, up yours] attitude was acted out with boisterous nihilism. They illustrated their anarchic conception of freedom in their actions (rather than merely discussing it, as did the previous generation), and performed what they considered to be heroic acts of lawlessness. Drawing on Mikhail Larionov and Ilja Zdanevič's early avant-garde notion of *vsečestvo* [everythingness], the New Artists upheld the unity of art and all facets of life, satirising with *stiob* humour the tired, politicized battles between officialdom and anti-officialdom.<sup>4</sup> Their radicalized notion of artistic autonomy implied leaving the sphere of politics and ideology altogether. This became a remarkable strategy of distinction from the official establishment and the 'official unofficial' alike.<sup>5</sup>

The liberating spirit of Gorbachev's reforms in the second half of the decade gave the New Artists the opportunity to move to the forefront of Russian artistic movements. The outdated political dichotomies of the past were fast being eroded by *glasnost*' and *perestroika*.<sup>6</sup> Like parallel youth movements in the West such as Punk

<sup>3</sup> Prominent members of the circle founded by Timur Novikov in 1982 include Ivan Sotnikov, Vadim Ovčinnikov, Inal Savčenkov, Oleg Kotel'nikov, Sergej 'Afrika' Bugaev, Evgenij Kozlov, Vladislav Gutsevič, Andrej Krisanov, and later Georgij Gurjanov and Viktor Coj.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the founding of the New Artists may be dated to the creation of the so-called *Nol' ob'ekt* in 1982—a legendary *stiob* art-action. Novikov and Ivan Sotnikov simply put their names on a label beneath an empty frame in an exhibition, declaring it a 'Null object'. This sparked an absurdist drama involving TEII curators and their KGB watchdogs (Andreeva and Kolovskaja 1996; Stodolsky 2011).

<sup>5</sup> This differs from Alexei Yurchak's tendency to describe the late-Soviet generation as simply "not interested" in politics (Yurchak 2005, *passim*). The rejection of politics, I wish to emphasise (Stodolsky 2011), hovers between forms of a "learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*), a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles" (Bourdieu 1977, 19) and an "explicit ideology" (Yurchak 2005, 147).

<sup>6</sup> Novikov and Savčenkov graced the cover of the 1988 'Youth issue' of the art journal *Iskusstvo*. Reprinted on the inside cover, a resolution of the CPSU called for youth to be seen as an "active and initiative-taking force of *perestroika*" [активную и инициативную силу перестройки] and encouraged

and, a little later, New Wave, the New Artists flouted accepted aesthetic norms and undermined ideologically entrenched moral certainties. Drawing on the historical avant-garde and particularly on Larionov for inspiration, they developed neo-primitive and neo-expressionist styles. With time, they discovered kindred spirits in similar young movements in the West, such as the Italian Trans-avantgarde, the German Neue Wilden, French Figuration Libre, and North American Neo-Expressionism and graffiti art. Hailed as a fresh start by decision-makers with a newly progressive agenda, and gaining legitimacy by comparing themselves with their Western contemporaries as well as the historical Russian avant-garde, the New Artists began to displace the dominant establishment(s) of their elders.

The New Artists rose to fame at the epicentre of a new unofficial youth culture which spread like wildfire throughout the USSR. They fused and overlapped with the now legendary rock groups *Kino* and *Akvarium*, and Sergej Kurëkhin's avant-garde ensemble, the *Pop Mechanics*. The cult film *ASSA* (Solovëv 1988), closely based on the lifestyle and art of Novikov's circle, brought their aesthetics and (a)moral stance to a nationwide audience.<sup>7</sup> The film culminates in *Kino*'s Viktor Coj singing *My ždëm peremen!* [We're waiting for change!], which became the anthem of the mutinous '*perestroika* generation'. These phenomena transmitted the *habitus* of this highly-charged youth to audiences throughout the Soviet Union and the wider Eastern bloc, spreading its virile physical gestures, brash aesthetics, and rebellious yet escapist attitudes. These attitudes diverged sharply from the dominant Soviet culture of bowed submissiveness before authority. Likewise, this apolitical artistic energy was radically distinct from the dissident aesthetics of the stereotypical Soviet *intelligent* in the era of stagnation.

In the late 1980s monolithic Soviet ideology collapsed. With this, both its proponents and (negatively-defined) opponents lost their *raison d'être*. Having (positively) distinguished themselves from both antagonistic centres, the formerly peripheral artists were ideally positioned to fill the vacuum. Their strategy of double-distinction provided a clear logic of succession.

## Postmodernist internationalism

The anarchistic spirit of the early 1980s attained the position of the predominant non-conformist style by the turn of the decade, becoming the de facto 'unofficial mainstream' in the early 1990s. A prime example of this was the exuberant 'underground culture' which flourished in the first half of the new decade in the celebrated occupied house at Puškinskaja Street 10.<sup>8</sup> As it solidified its position,

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Footnote 6 continued

the creation of conditions for it to "gain independence as soon as possible" [как можно раньше обрeтaть сaмoстoятeльнoсть] (Molodežnij nomer, *Iskusstvo* 1988).

<sup>7</sup> *ASSA* was in fact the name of Novikov's studio/gallery in Leningrad.

<sup>8</sup> With *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the Soviet underground technically came to an end (Savickij 2002). As with the notion of the 'avant-garde', 'underground' is here used in a generic manner. The abandoned building at Puškinskaja Street 10 was taken over by artists, musicians, and alternative cultural spaces of all kinds. Prominent among the occupants were members of the New Artists and the TEII.

Novikov's circle gained a new degree of influence. Within the field of Leningrad youth culture, its power became hegemonic in the Gramscian sense: it was in a position to strongly influence the new 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu 1990a, 64–65; Gramsci 1991).

While the young Leningrad milieu of the early 1980s developed in parallel with Western trends, *perestroika* made the Western world accessible in the flesh. During this transition period, the New Artists nurtured exchanges with renowned artists including Andy Warhol, John Cage, and Robert Rauschenberg. They acquired a taste for Pop Art, and an understanding of Western conceptualism and postmodern practices. They also gained first-hand experience by travelling to the West, a rare opportunity for Soviet citizens. The circle which developed out of the New Artists in the early 1990s imported and popularized the latest Western trends at home. Novikov's network of friends and associates developed the infrastructure of a new youth lifestyle: from raves (*Gagarin pati* 1991) and clubs (*Tunel'* 1993) to drugs, clothes, and restaurants. A sub-group of the broader circle was steeped in postmodern theory, inviting prominent theoreticians to Russia such as Jacques Derrida, grappling with the issues of feminism (A. Mitrofanova and I. Aktuganova founded the *Cyber-Femin Club* in 1995), and developing new venues for cultural exchange, such as the journal *Kabinet* (Eds. V. Mazin, O. Turkina, and S. Bugaev). As a whole the *tusovka*—as such loosely interconnected groups were known—provided St. Petersburg with its first contacts with the most experimental and contemporary phenomena in art, philosophy, lifestyle trends, and music. It was a prime interface between East and West, mixing high and low culture, art, celebrity, and money, in what came to be known (in Western usage) as a typically postmodern mix.

In some ways, this new way of life was one whose fundamental *habitus*—collective entrepreneurship, cultural elitism, and moral permissiveness—the New Artists had already pioneered in earlier activities. Yet the changing circle's new partnerships with national and international elites placed them in an entirely new context.<sup>9</sup> Their upward mobility, in both socio-cultural and economic terms, led to a rejection of their previous 'squatter' attitudes, which now defined the non-conformist mainstream.

At the turn of the 1990s, the evolving group around Novikov became interested in the wider discourse of democracy. Many of the artists were homosexual or bisexual, and several displayed an interest in the rights of sexual minorities, feminism, and ecology. For a time there seemed to be potential for overlap with the liberal-humanist ideals of the older, anti-Soviet opposition. These 'progressive' stances, however, were often conscious ploys. The exhibition *Žensčiny v iskusstve* [*Women in Art*, 1989], for example, was promoted with a heavy dose of Western-inspired feminist rhetoric. This seemed a timely development, until it became evident that the artists involved were men in frocks who had assumed spoof female

<sup>9</sup> Their integration into national elites can be seen in their close partnership with the State Russian Museum, which first showcased their work in the exhibition *Territorija iskusstva* [The Territory of Art, 1991].

<sup>10</sup> See above, footnote 4.

names for the occasion. It was this type of *stio*b irony which had characterized the group since its debut.<sup>10</sup> The difference in the 1990s was that the Western ideology of political correctness replaced Soviet shibboleths as the object of the circle's satires.

In these ways the circle's image as forerunners of the impending future and taboo-breakers gained fresh impetus. It was marked by a renewed double distinction. On the one hand, Novikov's friends and associates distinguished themselves from their fellow-travellers and followers from the 1980s underground, now dominant in the non-conformist sub-field. Contrary to their previous anarchistic attitude they now established a rapport with the new state authorities and participated in the entrepreneurial logic of the international scene. On the other hand, they distanced themselves from the new post-Soviet liberal establishment by satirizing the ideological baggage of democratic political correctness.

### Neoakademizm

During *perestroika* and the period immediately thereafter, Novikov and other New Artists held numerous exhibitions in Western galleries and museums.<sup>11</sup> The so-called 'Russian Boom' in art was short-lived, however; the aura of exoticism and political struggle ensured by the Iron Curtain soon wore off. The New Artists realised that despite their elite status in Russia, competition on the international market was vast. In the case of Novikov, the lack of 'room at the top' for more Russians in the international art scene seems to have been a crucial reason for his next strategic shift, in which he broadly turned his back on contemporary Western trends.<sup>12</sup>

It was in this context that Novikov founded the so-called New Academy of Fine Arts [*Novaja akademija izjaščnykh iskusstv*]. His dramatic turnaround was completed by the opening of the Museum of the New Academy of Fine Arts in 1993. In a highly-stylized manner, the former punk, now a top-hatted dandy, issued a blanket condemnation of "modernism and postmodernism." With characteristically ironic mischievousness, he did not differentiate between these terms, confounding all sorts of artistic and historical distinctions, using them to describe abstract and avant-garde art of all kinds, in a simulacrum of the dismissal of the "degenerate art of the West" by Stalinist critics. In contrast, what Novikov pompously called the "eternal values of classicism" were associated in the vaguest, most general terms with pre-First World War European civilization, and ancient Greco-Roman aesthetic principles. The aristocratic, imperial city of St. Petersburg—so Novikov claimed—was one of the last bastions of a threatened classical culture.

<sup>10</sup> See above, footnote 4.

<sup>11</sup> For a complete listing see Khlobystin (2004).

<sup>12</sup> Novikov seemed to feel that Moscow Conceptualists such as Ilja Kabakov had "occupied all the seats" available to Russians at the pinnacle of the international art world (author's interviews with Novikov's confidants V. Mazin and K. Mitenëv, July 2004).

This new doctrine of *Neoakademizm* [Neo-academism] clearly distinguished Novikov's project from the Western styles dominant in Russia in the early 1990s. It reinforced the double distinction from the mainstream currents of the time, described at the end of the previous section: on the one hand, *perestroika*-era and progressive contemporary art were tarred with one brush as "lawless modernism/postmodernism"; on the other, Western democratic values were scoffed at from the vantage point of a new-age, aristocratic dandy.

The results were complex. From this renewed 'non-aligned' position, Novikov made 'classicism' and 'beauty' his battle-cry, and positioned himself at the vanguard of the liberation of an 'oppressed' culture. *Neoakademizm* thus paradoxically enabled Novikov to maintain an avant-garde pose. Aesthetically speaking, the New Academy's camp and kitsch remakes of classical tropes had a clear affinity with Pop Art and certain trends in international postmodernism.<sup>13</sup> Its retrospective orientation, by contrast, invigorated nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary Silver Age and Djagilev's *World of Art*. Donning a set of half-ironic aristocratic manners, members of the New Academy set themselves high above the fray of the everyday chaos and squalor of early 1990s Russia. In the context of the crass gangster capitalism of the streets, Novikov's evocation of classicism with its strict laws and venerable traditions impressed many as historically legitimate; for others, it was a stroke of genius.<sup>14</sup>

Western and westernizing postmodernist critics, by contrast, interpreted Novikov's *volte-face* as an ironic deconstruction of St. Petersburg traditions. Renowned for satire, he was assumed to be playing with the notion of the 'reinvention of tradition' with some sort of subversive intent.<sup>15</sup> The reverse also seemed to apply: *neoakademizm* was at times seen as a form of resistance to 'Western cultural colonialism'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, despite being an active player in the art market, Novikov used strong anti-market rhetoric. He also heavily criticized NGOs like the Soros Center for Contemporary Art, while happily accepting generous funding from them. This pastiche of a kitsch classicist revival, rhetorical anti-commercialism, and up-to-date Western glam-PR techniques made for a provocative and entertaining postmodern cocktail, suited to both national and international tastes. Despite or perhaps because of its playful irony, *neoakademizm* managed to pre-empt a reactionary drift in the Russian cultural field. Its seductive argument for neoclassical styles and aristocratic attitudes foreshadowed resurgent nostalgia for imperial restoration.

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<sup>13</sup> See Jencks (1980).

<sup>14</sup> Andrej Zorin, for example, has described it as such (personal conversation in Helsinki in 2006). For Novikov's programmatic and other writings see Novikov (1998; 2003; 2010; 2011).

<sup>15</sup> For an example, see Kovalëv and Arpiškin (2002).

<sup>16</sup> See the exhibition *Soprotivlenie i vozroždenie* [Resistance and renaissance, 1994] in the Marble Palace, Russian Museum.

## Novyj russkij klassicizm

While track-suits were the height of *novyj russkij* [New Russian] fashion at the turn of the 1990s, by the second half of the decade, the suits of Versace and Lagerfeld were *de rigueur*.<sup>17</sup> Novikov's neoclassical dandyism was fast becoming mainstream. Novikov riposted with a last significant ideological shift before his death in 2002, maintaining his vanguard status. It took the form of an ominous game with ultra-conservative aesthetics, raising his diatribe against modernism/postmodernism to fever pitch. The New Academy burned offending artworks in 1998 (in a performance commemorating Savonarola and his 'Bonfire of the Vanities') and broadly publicised its admiration for the totalitarian art of Hitler and Stalin (Novikov 1998, 53–70). The indulgent *cognoscenti* in the liberal press continued to hold on to the increasingly tenuous assumptions of implied satire and their classification of the work of the New Academy as postmodern carnival or farce (Stodolsky 2006; 2011). However, this arch-reactionary turn was not simply a laughing matter. Already in 1995 Novikov had shown explicit support for the Eurasianist theoretician Aleksandr Dugin, for example, who summed up his political views as follows:

Communism did not fully satisfy us; on the other hand, we see that liberal pseudo-democracies lack content and life. So isn't it clear why people are interested in fascism? (Chernov 1995)

In the second half of the 1990s, Novikov's new official credo of *Novyj russkij klassicizm* [New Russian Classicism] developed into an amalgam of kitsch classicism, imperialist visions, pious religiosity, glam-populism, and the glorification of authoritarian traditions (Stodolsky 2009). Adopting a tone of 'new seriousness' [*novaja ser'eznost'*], it was proclaimed as a sort of state ideology in embryo (Novikov 1996; 1998, 185).<sup>18</sup> Well before Vladimir Putin embarked on his attempt to restore Russian imperial power, Novikov had marshalled all the elements of a reactionary *rappel à l'ordre*.

This move to an ever 'darker' Russophile and Eurasianist politics was once more defined by several clear distinctions from mainstream currents. Firstly, the New Academy moved away from the previous internationalist outlook of Novikov's neo-classicist style (which had since become mainstream in the shops, offices, and clubs of Russia's major cities). Turning to traditional subjects such as saints and tsars, Novikov pressed for the restoration of what might be called the 'sovereignty' of the Russian cultural field (with all the geopolitical implications this term entails). Secondly, his reactionary rhetoric stood in sharp contrast to his own previous, and now 'unofficial mainstream', abhorrence of the politicization of art. In keeping with this politics of 'new seriousness', Novikov emphatically distanced himself from the

<sup>17</sup> Both designers were the subject of exhibitions at the Museum of the New Academy, showcasing their graphics and photographs respectively.

<sup>18</sup> One might recall that Yeltsin announced a public contest to define a new 'Russian idea' in 1996.

<sup>19</sup> For an example see Medvedev and Novikov (1999). For a discussion of the degeneration of *stiob* irony into cynicism and bad faith see Stodolsky (2011). The distinction between kynicism and cynicism was first made in Sloterdijk (1983).



'giggling' [*khikhikajuščij*] *stiob* irony for which he was so renowned, and issued highly politicized propaganda. This implied a radically retrograde ethic, albeit one which claimed a sense of humour of a Nietzschean or kynical kind.<sup>19</sup>

### 'Non-aligned' intelligentsias and patterns of succession

Following Timur Novikov's untimely death in 2002, disparate factions laid claim to his legacy. He was commemorated as a leader of the Soviet underground, a punk, a postmodernist, a 'darling of the West', a dandy, and an anti-Western Russophile (Stodolsky 2006). This 'patriarch' of the Petersburg scene had always been rewarded handsomely. The Russian Museum had granted him a rare personal exhibition in 1998; now he was immediately honoured with another, *in memoriam*. The Hermitage followed suit with a solo exhibition in 2008. His projects signified different things to disparate audiences and, as we have seen, his logic of succession was based on exploiting these either/or distinctions.

To recapitulate, in the Soviet 1980s, the New Artists formed what I have called a 'non-aligned' intelligentsia, which distinguished itself by its apolitical stance from a stratified field consisting of 'official' Soviet culture, and an 'official unofficial' opposition. In the transition period of *perestroika*, the changing circle established itself as a prime intermediary between East and West, while refusing to shoulder the ideological baggage of either the anarchistic underground or politically correct liberalism. This refusal was reinforced by the rejection of the modern/postmodern aesthetics which these two central intelligentsia currents shared. The New Academy offered in its place the ironic, neo-classicist mode of *neokademizm*. In its last manifestation, Novikov's group distanced itself both from its long-standing international and apolitical legacies. The 'new seriousness' of *Novyj russkij klassicizm* advocated a radically retrograde ethic of imperial restoration.

In short, the working hypothesis of a 'non-aligned' logic of succession by repeated strategies of double distinction may be broadly confirmed. Reducing a complex set of contingencies into a theoretical framework, however, naturally involves simplification. One might have emphasized multiple, rather than double distinctions—especially considering the explosive fragmentation of society in the post-Soviet period. Yet it is essential to take into consideration the effect of the group's binary strategies of representation on the field itself. The New Artists first established themselves in the context of the clearly polarized Soviet predicament. Having gained *de facto* institutional power, they translated this into *de jure* re-definitions of cultural values, rewriting the 'rules of the game'. Their continued reproduction of polarizing definitions, as we have seen, was pivotal to their subsequent logic of succession. Novikov's chosen position as a representative of the repressed avant-garde, a lost classical culture, or an impoverished imperial power further strengthened this logic of stark contrasts. In each case, the repressive forces were portrayed as mutually-defeating duopolies and/or as sharing fatal flaws. Provocatively timed and adroitly executed, these strategies of binary representation

<sup>20</sup> The relation between structure and strategy is brilliantly discussed in Bourdieu (1990b).

in part generated, and in part enabled, real socio-cultural oppositions.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, although one may dispute to what extent these oppositions were in reality binary or multiple, this only confirms the key contention of this article's hypothesis: that the circle constituted what may be legitimately called a 'non-aligned' intelligentsia.

The transformations described in this article are quite evidently not akin to the Hegelian model of synthesis following the *Aufhebung* [sublimation] of thesis and antithesis, although a fruitful comparison might be made to Homi Bhabha's notion of "third space" which draws inspiration from dialectical thought (Bhabha 1994). Instead one might employ the metaphor of a subterranean volatile gas, filling the vacuum between closed or ossified formations. When escaping under great pressure, it may explode, redefining entire strata. This explains the paradox expressed by followers who maintain that, despite all of his radical provocations, Novikov's "positive energy" took the "path of least resistance."<sup>21</sup>

Rather than occupy the centre, Novikov repeatedly shifted his position to champion a renewed peripheral or repressed position. The groups he founded consistently sought out taboo, radically 'other' territories, kept under lock and key by mainstream cultural politics and morality, or abandoned by the juggernaut of history. This, it would seem, is the natural *habitus* of an avant-garde underground. Indeed, with the return of authoritarian tendencies in the 2000s, new movements such as *Vojna* and *Protez* have arisen, assuming the role of a truly disturbing and disruptive force in the Russian cultural scene.

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<sup>20</sup> The relation between structure and strategy is brilliantly discussed in Bourdieu (1990b).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Konstantin Mitenëv, 2006.

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