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The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat

Serguei Alex. Oushakine

I think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system. This is perhaps what happened in the history of the Soviet Union.

Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice

At a certain point, the struggles of the dominated were so romanticized . . . that people finally forgot something that everyone who has seen it from close up knows perfectly well: the dominated are dominated in their brains, too.

Pierre Bourdieu, In Other Words

For years, Western academic studies of the Soviet Union focused on the dynamic of domination and resistance, and Soviet dissidents were at the center of these studies. The disappearance of the Soviet system dramatically changed this situation: not only did the dissidents fail to perform the role of active political subjects in post-Soviet Russia, but they also virtually ceased to exist as an object of Soviet and Russian studies. This essay is an attempt to bring back the dissident movement by revisiting samizdat documents that circulated in the dissident network from the late 1960s until the late 1970s. I will try to avoid, however, the long-standing Sovietology tradition of locating these texts exclu-

I want to thank Kim Lane Scheppelle, Olga Bain, Nicholas Dirks, Bruce Grant, Marilyn Ivy, Sherry Ortner, Irina Savkina, and an anonymous reviewer at *Public Culture* for stimulating comments on and useful suggestions for earlier versions of this essay. The International Exchange and Research Board (IREX) provided generous financial support through the IREX Alumni Small Grant Program.

Public Culture 13(2): 191–214

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sively within the context of dissidents' ideological struggle with the dominant political structure. Instead, I want to read them through the discursive web of Soviet society within which they were conceived (or caught?) and whose traces they carried. By analyzing the rhetoric of public political dissent in the Soviet Union, I suggest a Foucauldian version of mimetic resistance that significantly differs from the influential framework of hidden transcripts of resistance developed in the work of James Scott and appropriated by some scholars of Russian/Soviet society. Contrary to the tradition of locating resistance outside of the field of power—be these “hidden” areas in the underground, background, or foreground of the dominant—I argue that the oppositional discourse of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union manifested itself as very much a “surface” phenomenon. The oppositional discourse in a sense shared the symbolic field with the dominant discourse: it echoed and amplified the rhetoric of the regime, rather than positioning itself outside of or underneath it.¹

Forgetting Samizdat

Among the representations of the swift collapse of the Soviet Union, the word *glasnost* is probably one of the most familiar. Traditionally, *glasnost* is translated in English as *openness* and *transparency*. While being basically right, this translation misses one essential point. Etymologically *glasnost* derives from the Russian word *glas* (voice). Thus to exercise *glasnost* means to become a subject of public speech or, to put it differently, to conduct one's activity in the form of a publicly available discourse.

Certainly the word *glasnost*, often associated with the politics of Mikhail Gor-

1. In this essay I use two collections of samizdat texts. *Sobranie Documentov Samizdata* [Collection of Samizdat Documents, SDS] contains materials from the mid-1960s to May 1973. *Arkhiv Samizdata–Materialy Samizdata* [Archive of Samizdat–Materials of Samizdat, ASMS] contains materials from 1973 until perestroika. Both collections were accumulated by the research department of the U.S.-funded Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe (based in Munich) from 1971 until the early 1990s. They are now kept in the Open Society Archives in Budapest (see <http://www.osa.ceu.hu>) and are also available as bound photocopied collections at Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania. Documents in both collections have an assigned number (AC no.). Because documents are reproduced mostly, but not always, in chronological order, when quoting a document I will indicate its number in the archive and the date of its actual publication. The SDS materials are divided in volumes that do not indicate the date they were bound or photocopied; the documents from ASMS are reproduced as a series of issues with dates of publication. For the complete list of documents collected by Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe until 1977 see Albert Boiter, ed., *Polnyi spisok dokumentov: Arkhiv Samizdata* [The full list of documents: Archive of Samizdat] (Munich: Samizdat Archive Association, 1977). All translations of the samizdat materials are mine.

bachev, had been in use long before perestroika. In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev articulated the idea of openness and public criticism in his famous speech “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences” delivered to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party (CPSU).² Ironically, it was the Soviet dissidents—the “children of the Khrushchev thaw”³—who took Khrushchev’s appeal seriously and in the 1960s and 1970s became probably the most vocal and articulate advocates of the politics of glasnost. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a writer who is usually seen as the epitome of the Soviet dissident movement, wrote in his 1969 “Open letter to the Secretariat of the Writers’ Union of the Russian Federation”: “Glasnost, honest and complete glasnost, is the first and foremost condition for the healthy development of any society, and our society as well. And those who do not want glasnost for our country are simply indifferent to the fatherland.”⁴ Vladimir Bukovsky, another prominent Soviet dissident, in 1979 described the task of dissidents in the following way: “We did not play in politics, we did not invent programs for ‘liberation of the people.’ . . . The only weapon we had was glasnost. Not propaganda but glasnost, so that nobody could say afterwards ‘I did not know.’ . . . We were not expecting any victory—there was not the slightest hope of winning. But everyone wanted to have the right to say to his descendants: ‘I did all I could. I was a citizen and I always demanded legality.’”⁵ And yet, despite their major role in the struggle for glasnost and their profound influence on public consciousness in the Soviet Union, dissidents’ presence in post-Soviet Russian public discourse is close to nothing. Along with their disappearance, the study of samizdat texts in Sovietology also rapidly faded away. Somewhat surprisingly, the field of postcommunist studies that is emerging in and outside Russia—whether it explores the nature of what Thomas Lahusen

2. Nikita Khrushchev, “Speech by N. S. Khrushchev on the Stalin Cult Delivered Feb. 25, 1956, at a Closed Session of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party,” in *Khrushchev Speaks: Selected Speeches, Articles, and Press Conferences, 1949–1961*, ed. Thomas P. Whitney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963).

3. Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993). For a discussion of the history of the term “thaw,” which was coined by the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg and is today a common expression, see Julian L. Laychuk, *Ilya Ehrenburg: An Idealist in an Age of Realism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991), 258–71.

4. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, “Otkritoe pismo sekretariatu Souza Pisatelei RSFSR” [An open letter to the secretariat of the Writers’ Union of the Russian Federation], *Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata* (hereafter SDS), vol. 4, AC no. 297 (1969).

5. Vladimir Bukovsky, *I vozvrashaetsia veter* . . . [And the wind comes back . . .] (New York: Khronika, 1979), 248–49. Also published in a somewhat different form as Vladimir Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter*, trans. Michael Scammell (New York: Viking Press, 1979).

calls “late Soviet culture” or the roots of post-Soviet identity, culture, and discursive practices—has not so far expressed substantial interest in approaching the dissident movement from a cultural perspective.⁶ There are two major traditions that contribute to this reluctance to perceive of the dissident political movement as a subject of cultural analysis. First, there is a general tradition of associating the Soviet dissident culture exclusively with the domain of artistic artifacts. Second, there is a strong tradition of conceiving of any dissent in Russia or the Soviet Union within the frame of the intelligentsia versus the institutions of power. Let me briefly comment on these two traditions.

Sergei Kovalev, a prominent Soviet dissident, has called samizdat the “Internet-for-the-poor.”⁷ Samizdat emerged in the 1950s and was simultaneously a mechanism for reproduction of and an institution for dissemination of unavailable texts. By reproducing in a typewritten form never-published texts and texts that were out of print due to ideological reasons, samizdat activists overcame the shortage of literature created by the state monopoly on publishing. Andrei Synyavsky, a prominent Soviet writer and dissident, has reminded us that as a mass practice, samizdat started as the copying of the poetry of Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak, which was inaccessible in published form.⁸ Moreover, the term *samizdat* (which literally means self-made publication or self-publishing) became popular after the Russian poet Nikolai Glazkov began in the mid-1940s to put the word *samsebiaizdat*—that is, self-publication of one’s work—on the front page of his typewritten collections of poems.⁹ And yet, copying and disseminating lit-

6. Thomas Lahusen, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Late Soviet Culture: From Perestroika to Neostroika*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Gene Kuperman (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 2. In a recent collection of essays on post-Soviet Russia, Adele Barker proposed to shift the study of Russian culture from the analysis of the elitist dissident movement usually located by Western Sovietologists “on the fringes of official Soviet culture” toward the study of a “vast arena” of popular or mass culture situated *between* the party and the dissenting intellectuals. Barker, “The Culture Factory: Theorizing the Popular in the Old and New Russia,” in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev*, ed. Adele Barker (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 20, 23. For a similar tendency, see Ellen E. Berry and Anesa Miller-Pogacar, eds., *Re-entering the Sign: Articulating New Russian Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), and Nancy Condee, ed., *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late-Twentieth-Century Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

7. Vasilii Aksenov, Larisa Bogoraz, Leonid Borodin, Yulia Vishnevskaya, Igor Golomshchok, Sergei Kovalev, Roy Medvedev, Grigorii Pomerantz, Marina Rozanova (Synavskaya), Feliks Svetov, and Lev Timofeev, “Dissidenty o dissidentstve” [Dissidents on dissent], *Znamia* 9 (1998): 179.

8. Abram Terz [Andrei Synyavsky], “Iskusstvo i deistvitel’nost’” [Art and reality], *Sintaksis* 2 (1978): 113.

9. Natalia Gorbanevskaya, “Vstupitel’naya zametka” [An introductory note], *Kontinent* 52 (1987): 253.

erary work among friends was a major function of samizdat only until the mid-1960s. After that, samizdat became dominated by *political* documents: letters, petitions, commentaries, and transcripts of trials, pamphlets, and so forth.¹⁰ Such backbone publications of the dissident movement as *The Political Diary* or *The Chronicle of Current Events* consisted almost entirely of politically oriented documents.¹¹

It is precisely political samizdat that I want to look at in this essay. Besides a general attempt to demonstrate that “merely” political texts have significant cultural meaning, this choice is also determined by differences in symbolic strategies that samizdat art and political samizdat followed. As many participants in artistic samizdat pointed out, criticism of the Soviet regime was not their primary aim. Rather, artistic samizdat was an attempt to overcome stylistic restrictions of socialist realism by creating a “close circle of like-minded people who spoke their own language, inconceivable to others.”¹² Even when samizdat art tried to engage in a dialogue with dominant stylistic conventions, these attempts exhibited a dynamic different from that of the dissident movement. Recalling his experience of the 1970s, Soviet artist Ilia Kabakov wrote: “There was a new situation that until then seemed improbable: it had become possible not to follow the direction of the pointing finger of propaganda but to turn around in order to look at the very pointing finger itself; [it became possible] not to accept the music from the loudspeaker as one’s inescapable accompaniment but to look at, even gaze at, this loudspeaker. . . . Put briefly, all these horrifying means of propaganda that used to constantly gaze at us without allowing us to gaze at them became the objects of the gaze itself.”¹³ This return of the gaze did not happen in political samizdat: the pointing finger of the regime was not scrutinized, nor was the origin of the propagandistic music. Instead, the authoritarian compulsion to direct was closely imitated and reproduced. I analyze political samizdat’s mimetic attitude of the

10. Bukovsky, *I vozvrashaetsia veter* . . . , 273. Also see: V. P. [pseud.] “Novyi samizdat” [A new samizdat], *Kontinent* 52 (1987): 256. (It was a common practice for authors—especially those who stayed in the Soviet Union while publishing abroad—to use initials instead of their real names.)

11. Roy Medvedev, *An End to Silence: Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union: From Roy Medvedev’s Underground Magazine Political Diary*, ed. Stephen Cohen, trans. George Saunders (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982). Mark Hopkins, ed., *Russia’s Underground Press: The Chronicle of Current Events* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

12. Viktor Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata” [The golden age of samizdat], in *Samizdat veka* [The samizdat of the century], ed. Anatolii Streliaanii, Henry Sapghir, Vladimir Bakhtin, and Nikita Ordynskii (Minsk: Polifact, 1997), 346.

13. Ilia Kabakov, *60-e – 70-e* . . . *Zapiski o neofitsialnoi zhizni v Moskve* [The 1960s–1970s . . . Notes about the nonofficial life in Moscow] (Vienna: Wiener Slavistischer Almanach, 1999), 75.

dominated to the dominant in order to understand why and how this mimesis became subversive and resistant.

Along with the general reductionist trend to perceive the dissident movement through the prism of dissident artistic production, there was yet another methodological approach that helped to quickly exhaust the initial scholarly interest in dissent in the Soviet Union. There is a deeply rooted tradition of seeing the dissident movement as an example of the more-than-two-centuries-old, ongoing battle between the Russian intelligentsia and the institutions of power.¹⁴ In my interpretation of dissident resistance, I want to avoid this elevation of a concrete historical event to the level of an ahistorical archetype. By analyzing political samizdat materials, I instead argue for a Soviet origin to the forms and rhetoric of dissidents' resistance. I contend that the dissidents' public performance was largely framed by existing public discourses on Soviet law and civic and human rights. I demonstrate that it was through exploiting already present rhetorical devices elaborated within the dominant symbolic structure of state socialism that the dissidents were able to assume a certain symbolic and discursive position in the society and thus to represent themselves as political subjects. In other words, Soviet dissidents were remarkable not only because of their dissent but also because of the very Soviet expression of their political disagreement, and this very dependence on the regime they were struggling with determined the dissidents' strength and weakness.

The Prisoners of Glasnost

One of the most striking features of the samizdat materials collected by the Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe research department is a paradoxical relation between the usual perception of samizdat as an underground activity and the very public nature of actual documents. Strange as it may sound, publicity was an essential characteristic of Soviet dissent. From the very beginning, the human rights movement in the Soviet Union was a *public* movement, actively engaged in production, reproduction, and transformation of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "legitimate" linguistic practices, the "practices of those who are dominant."¹⁵

As dissidents themselves indicate, the Soviet human rights movement began

14. See, for example, Aleksandr Saveliev, "Politicheskoe svoebrazie dissidentskogo dvizhenia v SSSR 1950-kh–1970-kh godov" [The political specificity of the dissident movement in the USSR in the 1950s–1970s], *Voprosy Istorii* 4 (1998): 109–19.

15. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 53.

with a deliberate public self-exposure. On 5 December 1965—the day of the official celebration of the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Soviet Constitution—about two hundred people gathered in downtown Moscow with signs bearing two slogans, the first referring to the imprisonment of two samizdat writers: “We demand an open trial for Sinyavsky and Daniel!” and “Respect the Soviet Constitution!”¹⁶ Ludmilla Alexeyeva, an eyewitness to the event, calls it “the first demonstration in the history of the Soviet regime that was accompanied by human rights slogans.”¹⁷ In a sense, these two slogans framed the logic of the dissidents’ “legal resistance”¹⁸ throughout its history—with the dissidents’ insistence on open, public, glasnostlike activity, and with their appeal to closely follow the rule of law. Consider the style and rhetoric of arguments presented in another, less public, event. In 1966, twenty-five prominent Soviet intellectuals (the physicist Andrei Sakharov among them) wrote a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, then secretary general. The letter was widely circulated in samizdat but was never published by the official press. Pointing to several recent attempts to rehabilitate Stalin, the letter then stated:

We think that any attempt to whitewash Stalin can cause a serious split in Soviet society. Stalin bears responsibility not only for the numerous deaths of innocent people, for our lack of preparation for the [Second World] war, for the divergences from the Leninist norms of the party and the state life. Also, his crimes and wrongdoing distorted the idea of communism to such a degree that our people would never forgive him. . . .

. . . The issue of Stalin’s political rehabilitation is not only an issue for our domestic but also for our foreign policy. Any step towards his rehabilitation would undoubtedly lead to a new split within the world communist movement, now between us and communists in the West. From their point of view, such a rehabilitation would be considered as our capitulation to the Chinese [communist leadership]. . . . Nowadays, when we are threatened both by the activity of the American imperialists and the West Germans seeking revenge and by the leaders of the Communist Party of China, it would be absolutely unreasonable to create a pretext for a split, or even for new difficulties in our relations with the brotherly [communist] parties in the West.¹⁹

16. Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*, trans. Carol Pearce and John Glad (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 276.

17. Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 274.

18. Boris Shragin, “Sila dissidentov” [The strength of the dissidents], *Sintaksis* 3 (1979): 27.

19. “Pismo 25-ti deyatelei kulturi Brezhnevu o tendezii reabilitazii Stalina” [About the tendency

As in the case of the demonstration in support of the constitution, the petition, seemingly written in accordance with the letter and spirit of CPSU official doctrine, was taken as a manifestation of political disloyalty. Some signers were refused the necessary documents for travel abroad; for others, their chances to publish and/or perform their work within the limits of the official “cultural industry” were significantly restricted. But no public discussion followed; the Soviet authorities could not find any grounds for classifying this letter as anti-Soviet, anticommunist, or antigovernment—perhaps to a large degree because the dissidents’ discourse so closely matched their own. It seems as if the punishment was not preceded by the crime. And yet, despite its affinity with the official discourse, why did the dissidents’ rhetoric receive such a negative reaction from the regime? Furthermore, why did the dissidents use this particular type of language, these particular forms of arguments that, taken at face value, were not so different from the discourse of the communist authorities themselves?

In his pioneering study of Soviet dissidents, Marshall Shatz defines the dissidents as a “neo-intelligentsia,” which repeated the strategy of the “old intelligentsia” of the previous two centuries by questioning the principles of the existing political and social order.²⁰ However, despite its apparent resemblance to the old intelligentsia’s strategies, the rhetoric of the Soviet dissidents cannot be located within this tradition of never-ending opposition of the Russian intelligentsia to the power holders. Contrary to the practice of resistance performed by their apparent predecessors, the so-called neointelligentsia never succumbed to open and at times violent confrontation with the authorities. Nor did it offer an alternative view of development, as the old intelligentsia usually did: the rhetoric of dissent of such charismatic Russian intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Alexander Radishchev, Piotr Chaadaev, Alexander Herzen, and Vissarion Belinskii was rooted in a symbolic ground radically different from that of the regime, be this rhetoric antislavery, pro-Catholicism, or prosocialism.²¹ Similarly, in 1916–17 the rhetorical success of the Bolsheviks and other

toward Stalin’s rehabilitation: The letter to Brezhnev signed by twenty-five intellectuals], SDS, vol. 4, AC no. 273 (1966). (This letter is signed by twenty-five authors and is usually referred to as “The Letter of the Twenty-five.”)

20. Marshall Shatz, *Soviet Dissidents in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 140.

21. For an extensive discussion of the relations between the Russian intelligentsia and the Russian authorities see, for example, Ivan Ivanov-Razumnik, *Istoria russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli* [History of Russian social thought], vol. 1. (St. Petersburg: Tipografia M. M. Stasulevicha, 1914).

“revolutionary” intelligentsia was to a large extent determined by their anti-nationalist, antiwar, and, hence, antigovernment phraseology.²²

Unlike their forerunners, the Soviet dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s argued that the public actions of their movement were legal and were justified by the existing Soviet legal and ideological institutions. Dissidents questioned not so much the *principles* of the existing political order but rather their implementation. For the majority, the issue was not whether socialism was feasible at all; it was too real to have any doubts about its existence. Instead, to quote the title of an influential samizdat article, the main question was: “Is a nontotalitarian type of socialism possible?”²³ Defending their adherence to the idea and practice of already existing law, time and again dissidents explain, “The path from total revolutionary lawlessness (*proizvol*) to a situation where law prevails is paved by bad, compromised, even discriminatory laws. First of all, the enemy must be forced to begin the struggle on the territory that is legally suitable for you. For everything you do can be turned against you in a situation of a complete lawlessness. . . . Violence brings violence, an attempt to use lawlessness against lawlessness can do nothing but multiply lawlessness.”²⁴ This understanding of law, legality, and legitimized behavior constituted the core of dissent in the Soviet Union and radically distinguished the Soviet dissident movement from previous oppositional political movements in the Soviet Union or Russia. Instead of juxtaposing their discourse against official discourse, instead of distancing themselves from the sources of this discourse, the dissidents chose a strategy of identification with the dominant symbolic regime—a strategy of mimetic reproduction of already existing rhetorical tools.

The work of Major General Piotr Grigorenko well illustrates this mimetic strategy. In September 1961, fifty-four-year-old Grigorenko, a department chair in Moscow’s Frunze Military Academy, delivered a speech to a borough Communist Party conference in which he accused Khrushchev of creating a cult of his own personality, as Stalin had also done. To avoid such repetitions in the future, Grigorenko proposed reducing the salaries of top party and state officials and

22. See Edward Acton, “Revolutionaries and Dissidents: The Role of the Russian Intellectual in the Downfall of Tsarism and Communism,” in *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie*, ed. Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch (London: Routledge, 1997), 158–59.

23. Yurii Orlov, “Vozmozhen li socialism nenotalitarnogo tipa?” [Is a nontotalitarian type of socialism possible?], in *Samizdat veka*, ed. Streliaanii, Sapghir, Bakhtin, and Ordynskii, 321–32.

24. Vladimir Bukovsky, “Pochemu russkie ssoriatsia?” [Why do Russians quarrel?], *Kontinent* 23 (1986): 196.

introducing a rule for leadership rotation.²⁵ Soon after, Grigorenko was dismissed from his position and transferred to the Pacific Maritime province where, consistent with his critique of the party's norms, he became involved in a human rights movement aimed at returning the Tatar people to the Crimea peninsula.²⁶ As a result of this activity, in February 1964 Grigorenko was fired and locked up in a mental hospital. In August 1964, he was demoted to the rank of private, his pension was drastically reduced, and he was expelled from the party. In October 1964, after Khrushchev was dismissed from his position precisely for the reasons stated by Grigorenko, Grigorenko was released. The KGB, however, continued monitoring Grigorenko's public and personal life. In a 1968 letter to Yuri Andropov, then the head of the KGB, Grigorenko wrote:

Your creators of the last slanderous document write that [the group that I founded] was anti-Soviet, but they do not dare to put the group's name in writing. Well, I will do it myself. Our organization was called the Union of the Struggle for the Revival of Leninism.²⁷ And the goal that we set had nothing to do with undermining Soviet power. The aim was to get rid of all the deformations of Lenin's ideas, to restore the Leninist norms of the party life, and to return the real power to the *deputies of the working people's Soviets*. . . . Let those who consider our materials "anti-Soviet" publish them. If at any single open meeting working people tell me right in my face that at least one of these documents is indeed anti-Soviet, I will accept the fact that I am suffering from schizophrenia. . . . But you, dear gentlemen, will never dare publish these documents.²⁸

Again, as in the 1966 letter from twenty-five petitioners to Brezhnev, Grigorenko's argument did not go beyond the principles and ideas of official party doctrine. Rather it was based on clear rhetorical adherence to legitimate and publicly recognized symbolic references. By using such signifiers as "revival of Leninism," "restoration of Leninist norms," and "deformation of Lenin's ideas," the text remains within the boundaries of the politically acceptable and sayable while simultaneously subverting the monopoly of the authorities to utter, to produce, and to reproduce the dominant discourse.

25. Piotr Grigorenko, *Sbornik statei* [Collection of essays] (New York: Khronika, 1977), 17.

26. In the 1940s the Crimean Tatars had been forcibly moved to Uzbekistan due to the Tatars' alleged wartime collaboration with the Nazis.

27. The name of the union is a reference to the first Marxist circle founded in Russia in the end of the nineteenth century: the Union of the Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class.

28. Piotr Grigorenko, "Otkritoe pismo Yu. V. Andropovy" [An open letter to Yu. V. Andropov], SDS, vol. 8, AC no. 580, 9 (1969) (emphasis in original).

One way to interpret the specificity of samizdat is to use the theory of hidden transcripts developed by Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. In a sense, samizdat—this publishing activity “from under the rubble”²⁹—certainly bears an institutional and even metaphorical resemblance to what Scott defines as the “voice under domination.”³⁰ Indeed, some scholars of Soviet and Russian public culture find Scott’s framework quite attractive. For instance, Oleg Kharkhordin’s concept of *dissimulation*, which he uses to describe the public behavior of Soviet people, is based on theoretical presumptions similar to Scott’s.³¹ Several authors in a special issue of *Kritika* entitled “Resistance to Authority in Russia and the Soviet Union” employ the same theoretical scheme.³²

It seems to me, though, that the forms of Soviet dissent reveal the limits of the general theory of resistance that Scott and his followers try to develop. Despite their insistence on seeing the “hidden version” of resistance as outlining “a technology and practice of resistance analogous to Michel Foucault’s analysis of the technology of power,”³³ this theoretical tendency demonstrates a certain misrecognition of Foucault’s ideas of power/knowledge and discourse.

In his essay “Politics and the Study of Discourse,” Foucault stresses that it is important to see that “discursing subjects form a part of the discursive field—they have their place within it (and their possibilities of displacements) and their function (and their possibilities of functional mutation). Discourse is not a place into which the subjectivity irrupts; it is a space of differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions.”³⁴ There are at least two important points here. First, Foucault seems to suggest that subjectivity is not something extraterritorial in relation to the discursive field; instead, it is part and parcel of this field—it is an

29. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Mikhail Agursku, A. B., Evgeny Barabanov, Vadim Borisov, F. Kor-sakov, and Igor Shafarevich, *From under the Rubble*, trans. A. M. Brock, Milada Haigh, Marita Sapi-ets, Hilary Sternberg, and Harry Willetts under the direction of Michael Scammell (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975).

30. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 137.

31. Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 271–72.

32. “Resistance to Authority in Russia and the Soviet Union,” special issue of *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1 (winter 2000).

33. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 20.

34. Michel Foucault, “Politics and the Study of Discourse” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 58.

effect of discourse. Second, for Foucault, becoming the discoursing subject presupposes a certain subject position (dominant or dominated) and a certain subject function (production or reproduction of discourse) *within* this discursive field. With these two points in mind, my approach to the dissident resistance takes into consideration the resistance's historical and rhetorical specificity.

At first glance, samizdat—as a “means of underground communication”³⁵—did appear in direct opposition to Soviet censorship and did act as a printed version of hidden transcripts elaborated in, as Scott describes it, the offstage realm of the “relative discursive freedom” in which “resistance can be nurtured and given meaning.”³⁶ And yet, I would like to argue, there was no “wall” that separated the dissidents’ “onstage performance” from their “offstage” activity.³⁷ There was no “split” (as Kharkhordin would have it) that could disconnect their “public” and their “hidden” transcripts.³⁸ The “curtain” that separated a samizdat text from an officially published one was far from iron. Soviet poet Viktor Krivulin recently went so far as to say that Moscow “did not have a clear watershed between the official and nonofficial literary worlds . . . the field of culture was not doubled here but instead existed as a gradual continuum from underground to official recognition.”³⁹ In fact, it was often the case that *after* a text was in the public spotlight it would be published in samizdat—perhaps the opposite progression of what one might at first imagine. Before Solzhenitsyn’s 1963 novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was banned in 1974, it was published by a leading Soviet literary journal and was short-listed for the 1964 Lenin Prize in the field of literature and arts.⁴⁰ By 1966 nearly one million copies had been distributed in the USSR.⁴¹ The same principle holds true in regard to petitions: overwhelmingly, the letters published in samizdat were the same letters that the dissidents addressed to the leaders of the government and the party. A randomly

35. Acton, “Revolutionaries and Dissidents,” 156.

36. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 25, 20.

37. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 191.

38. Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 270.

39. Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata,” 354.

40. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963). For an English version see Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, trans. Max Hayward and Ronald Hingley (New York: Praeger, 1963). For the 18 February 1974 decision of the Glavlit (the Chief Department of State Secrets) to seize copies of this book from libraries and bookstores see A. Petrov, “Dokumenty iz arkhiva TsK KPSS po delu A.I. Solzhenitsyna” [Documents from the Archive of the Central Committee of the CPSU on A. I. Solzhenitsyn], *Kontinent* 75 (1993): 203.

41. Z. K. Vodop'anova and T. M. Goriaeva, eds., *Istoria sovetskoi politicheskoi tsenzury: Dokumenty i materialy* [History of Soviet political censorship: Documents and materials] (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997), 587.

selected volume of the samizdat materials collected by Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe contains seventy-six documents: forty-six (61 percent) are public letters and appeals, the remaining thirty (39 percent) are various commentaries, reports, and transcripts.⁴² As with the letters quoted earlier, when addressing authorities, the dissidents used the language of the dominant in their own writings.

As these facts suggest, the dichotomy between the public and the hidden that is so dominant in current studies of resistance is problematic, not to mention limited in its applicability. The samizdat texts were neither one-dimensionally public nor one-dimensionally hidden. The dissidents' resistance expressed itself in amplification of the discourse of the dominant, rather than in reversal of it.

This mimetic resistance performed by the Soviet dissident movement recalls the theological hermeneutic debates described by Hans-Georg Gadamer: a publicly available text (in this case, the Bible) is perceived as containing enough possibilities for being simultaneously claimed by the dominant and also by the subordinates as their own.⁴³ One can also see samizdat texts as examples of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a "hybrid construction," "a mixture of two *individualized* language consciousnesses . . . and two individual language-intentions as well: the individual, representing authorial consciousness and will, on the one hand, and the individualized linguistic consciousness and will of the character represented, on the other."⁴⁴ This mixture of intentions caused by being constituted by the authoritative discourse as well as by being constituted at a location different from that of the authorities finally produces a "replication" of the dominant discourse that "terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery."⁴⁵ This is the case, however (un)conscious and (non)deliberate this mockery might be.

In his perceptive analysis of Aesopian language in Russian/Soviet literature, Lev Loseff, a Soviet émigré and literary scholar, argues that to a large extent this mimicry is a structural effect of "the enormous disproportion" between the *mul-*

42. Twelve of the public letters and appeals were addressed to the United Nations and other international organizations; twenty-four to the Soviet government; and ten to the Congress of the CPSU, to its Central Committee and/or the Politburo. Arkhiv Samizdata–Materialy Samizdata (hereafter ASMS), issue 9, AC no. 623–99.

43. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 153–54.

44. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 304, 359 (Bakhtin's emphasis).

45. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 115 (Bhabha's emphasis).

tiplicity of codes used in the text and the *monotony* of its content.⁴⁶ I argue that the terrifying mimicry of the samizdat text, its shocking (speak)ability to reproduce the discourse of the dominant without merging with it, is a product of the same structural nature, albeit in a different form. The enormous disproportion between the monotony of samizdat's content and its political message was created by an obvious structural noncorrespondence between the dissidents' (subordinate) social location and the type of (authoritative) discourse they borrowed and tried to master. In other words, it was created by an incommensurability of the *locus* of enunciation and the enunciated *text*. It was only by subverting geographical presuppositions of the dominant discursive genre that samizdat writers succeeded in critiquing while also mimicking. It was precisely through this doubling of the place of origin of the dominant discourse—through this *displacement* of its primary source—that the dissidents could produce the destabilizing political effect.

Bringing together the public and the hidden within the frame of the mimetic resistance of samizdat texts elucidates why in the letters I quoted the purpose of the dissidents' struggle was far from securing the boundaries of the hidden, private space uncontaminated by power. Nor was it about policing the “frontier *between* the public and the hidden transcripts” which should have become, as Scott proposes, “a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate.”⁴⁷ Instead, the subordinate dissidents focused on the domain of the dominant in an attempt to take part not only in the process of reproduction of the dominant discourse but also in the process of its production. The issue in question was elimination of the gap between the site of enunciation and its type, between the subject position and the subject function. In the remainder of this essay, I argue that the dissidents' attempt to experience the dominant discourse not only as *acting on* them but also as *activating and forming* their subjectivity shaped—as well as limited—their role in Soviet society.⁴⁸

Imprisoning the Dissident Self

In March 1977, not long before the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was held in Belgrade, seven prisoners wrote an open letter to

46. Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature*, trans. Jane Bobko (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner in Kommission, 1984), 217.

47. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 14 (my emphasis).

48. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 84.

then—U.S. President Jimmy Carter.⁴⁹ Having stressed that the Soviet leadership would never start a dialogue with the opposition, the prisoners stated:

We demand that the Soviet leadership reconsider the sentences of those prisoners who are in jail due to their political views. As a natural outcome of such a reconsideration . . . , we demand complete political amnesty. Anticipating that the Soviet leadership will ignore [our demand and will not] solve the problem the way we propose, we demand to institute the “status of political prisoner” in the Soviet Union. The establishment of this status could provide political prisoners with conditions of imprisonment different from that of the criminals. . . .

. . . Resolutely defending our rights, we have decided to dedicate to the conference in Belgrade our voluntary beginning of the regime of “the political prisoner.”⁵⁰ . . . By beginning this action, we consciously start a new form of struggle against the barbarism legitimized in the Soviet concentration camps. . . .

. . . We protest against applying the same statutes to political prisoners and to criminals (bandits, thieves, murderers).⁵¹

This letter raises numerous questions. How can the prisoners’ appeal to the Soviet leadership to grant them an authorized political identity and a distinctive political status be understood and interpreted? What kind of mechanism of identity politics on the part of the dissidents is involved here? What could be potentially attractive to them in getting this confirmation of their subject position?

As I have indicated, when interpreting the origin and logic of samizdat resistance in the Soviet Union, it is helpful to construe power as constraining and at the same time producing the subject, to understand censorship as limiting and yet activating the possibility of speech. Foucault once suggested analyzing the GULag⁵² as “a politico-economic operator in a socialist state.”⁵³ I argue that the

49. The prisoners were not officially sentenced on political grounds; to avoid political sentences the authority used various euphemisms. Dissemination of leaflets, for example, was classified as “creating obstacles for public traffic.”

50. The prisoners began a one-hundred-day hunger strike at this time.

51. Sergei Soldatov, Vyacheslav Chornovil, German Ushakov, Mikhail Karpenok, Babur Shakirov, Nikolai Budulak-Sharygin, and Magonis Ravinsh, “Otkritoe pismo gruppi sovetских politicheskikh zakluchennih Predsedatelju Kongressa SSHA, Presidenty Dj. Karteru” [An open letter to the chairman of the United States Congress, President J. Carter, from a group of political prisoners], ASMS, issue 25, AC no. 3021 (1977).

52. GULag (known as “gulag” in English) is the Russian abbreviation for Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei [the Chief Administration of the Camps].

53. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 136.

phenomenon of socialist legality around which the dissidents built their political identity and their political strategy can be seen as a similar politico-economic operator. This operator simultaneously subjects dissidents to a certain discursive logic (the rule of law) and provides them with knowledge of the regime and with a position in regard to the regime. The dissident movement in that respect nicely illustrates Foucault's conclusion that "There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real. . . . It exists all the more by being in the same place as power."⁵⁴ When understood this way, the forms of dissident resistance—be it the prisoners' appeal to confirm their political status or the Soviet intellectuals' attempt to advise the Communist Party on how to avoid the split with Western communists—look absolutely logical. To become involved in a discourse is possible only by entering the discursive field that is already there, that is, only by accepting existing discursive conventions.

There is, however, a certain difference between *accepting* the rules and *being constituted* by the rules. Certain scholars miss the point by seeing the dissidents' failure in their inability to generate an alternative discourse.⁵⁵ The dissidents' discursive dependence on the regime reflects a fundamental fact of the dissidents' ontological—that is, discursive—proximity to the regime they chose to mirror. (Grigorenko even as late as 1977 persisted in deeming it necessary to start a "fruitful dialogue" between the Soviet authorities and the dissidents.⁵⁶) Because they insisted on being considered by the regime as its legal counterpart and opponent, the dissidents became "imprison[ed] . . . within the subject positions" they were so eager to protect.⁵⁷ By demanding that the government respect its own constitution and by pointing to the distortions and violations of law by the authorities, the dissidents used rights-based discourse with perplexingly paralyzing results. At one moment, they created a certain protection against the arbitrariness of the Soviet state—as Bukovsky put it, "we were the norm, they were the norm breakers."⁵⁸ Yet at the same time, this constitutive dependence of the norm on the possibility of its transgression turned the Soviet "norm breakers"

54. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 142.

55. See, for instance, Acton, "Revolutionaries and Dissidents," 160.

56. Grigorenko, *Sbornik Statei*, 90.

57. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 120.

58. As quoted in George Niva, "Nuzhno li plakat po dissidentstvu?" [Should we mourn for the dissident movement?], *Kontinent* 8 (1998): 238.

into the foundation for the political regime itself. As a result, the dissidents' discursive dependence on the regime prevented them from being the regime's reformers. For to bring in a rival discourse—what in fact amounts to a distancing of oneself from the dominant symbolic order—would have meant for the dissidents to locate themselves outside the system they wanted to influence.

As I have indicated, one of the problems with the public/hidden juxtaposition of the dominant and the subordinate is a corresponding reduction of available strategies of resistance to the “individual perfection of the mechanism for constant switching between the intimate and the official.”⁵⁹ In this conception there is also a concomitant reduction in the ability to shuttle “between two worlds; the world of the master and the offstage world of subordinates.”⁶⁰ Contrary to this geographically disjointed view, by developing the idea of mimetic resistance, I am suggesting a somewhat more integrative approach to the discursive construction of the dominant and the subordinate. Building on a Foucauldian understanding of power/resistance, I conceive of the dominant and subordinate as belonging to the same discursive field, as relating to each other intradiscursively rather than interdiscursively.⁶¹ While being differently positioned, the dominant and dominated draw on the same vocabulary of symbolic means and rhetorical devices. And neither the dominant nor the dominated could situate themselves “outside” this vocabulary. As Foucault reminds us, “There are no ‘margins’ for those who break with the system to gambol in.”⁶²

The idea of mimetic resistance helps to avoid yet another problem, usually demonstrated by the “switching” (onstage/offstage) theories of domination. Insisting on the possibility of bringing in a new, alternative discourse, these two-dimensional theories manifest a tacit admission of the fact that there is a “source” of power that can be isolated and withdrawn from the circuit of power relations and/or discursive exchanges. These theories require that there are other, unknown meta- and/or extradiscursive forces involved in the process of subjectification. To frame it yet another way, they assume that there is a possibility of taking up a subject position autonomous from the *symbolic order*—understood both as the domain of “speakability”⁶³ (as the symbolic) and as a hierarchy of available discourses (as the order).

As the dissidents' history shows, none of these forces made themselves appar-

59. Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 278.

60. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 191.

61. Foucault, “Politics and the Study of Discourse,” 58.

62. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 141.

63. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 133.

ent; no subject position outside of the existing discursive field was available to them. Within the existing “regime of truth,”⁶⁴ the dissident discourse that mimetically replicated (not without Aesopian twisting) the discourse of the dominant was probably the only one that could be accepted in that society as truthful. This is not, however, to say that the discourse of legality and glasnost defined the dissidents totally. The different biographies of the dissidents and the dominants were reflected in the different subject positions they occupied and the subject functions they performed within the symbolic field.⁶⁵ As Bakhtin reminds us, while the “authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it,” the vibrant hybrid speech of the subordinate is pregnant with potential subversion.⁶⁶

There can be various explanations for why rights-based and law-oriented discourse became the dominant regime of truth in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. One of the reasons could be a certain discursive break usually associated with Khrushchev’s 1956 report on Stalin’s cult, which started a slow return to the rhetoric of “norms” and “law.” Ironically enough—and yet very symptomatically—the same idea of the necessity of public (that is, glasnostlike) compliance with law was officially used to dismiss Khrushchev from his position. During Brezhnev’s rule, Khrushchev’s era was routinely labeled as a period of legislative arbitrariness. Even perestroika itself paid tribute to this rhetoric by proclaiming as its goal the establishment of the “rule of law” in the country.

It is difficult to say whether the Soviet dissidents’ adoption of the idea of law was a manifestation of this long-term modification of “the limits and forms of the sayable”⁶⁷ or a spontaneous response to a specific historical situation of the 1960s and 1970s. What is nonetheless clear is that through identification with rights-based discourse, the dissidents secured for themselves a strong political position,

64. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 131.

65. Alexei Yurchak makes a similar point when he talks about the “hegemony of representation” or “hegemony of form” that determined public expression in late Soviet society. In Yurchak’s scheme, the inability of the dominant discourse to fully determine the subject’s response also has a structural nature. However, instead of emphasizing the noncorrespondence between the subject position and subject function, he focuses on linguistic preconditions for subversion of the dominant epitomized in the “heteronomous shift,” that is, in the semiotic slippage in which the official signifiers are reproduced while the signifieds are shifted. See Yurchak, “The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretense, and the *Anekdot*,” *Public Culture* 9 (1997): 166, and Yurchak, “Hegemony of Form: The Unexpected Outcome of the Soviet Linguistic Project” (paper presented at the Social and Cultural Anthropology Colloquium, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., 16 October 2000).

66. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 343.

67. Foucault, “Politics and the Study of Discourse,” 59.

thus making the regime take their actions seriously. At the same time, the different functions performed by the dissidents and the regime within the same discursive field significantly influenced the style of the dissidents' argumentation. Unable to function as primary producers of the dominant regime of truth, the dissidents were able only to intensify its reproduction. The following samizdat document shows well how the dissidents articulated this difference in regard to the dominant type of argumentation.

In October 1969, Larisa Bogoraz, a journalist and human rights activist, sent a letter to the chair of the Soviet parliament with her comments on the law titled "The Basic Rules of Legislation on Correctional Institutions." After making extensive comments on the law, Bogoraz concludes:

Besides the fact that the document you adopted is unreasonably cruel . . . , it becomes even worse due to existing practice. So, I wonder: what is worse—bad administrators or a bad law? I believe it is a bad law; it is the guarantees that are supposed to secure execution of the law. Even during the time of the Stalin camps and prisons, the slogans about great justice were posted everywhere. But this did not prevent anyone from letting prisoners die from hunger, from torturing them, from murdering them. . . .

So, let the law be very cruel, but let it be law! Let human rights be reduced to the minimum, but where are the guarantees that even this minimum will be respected? . . . The prisoner is solely dependent on the administration.⁶⁸

The style of the letter certainly recalls the 1977 petition of the political prisoners quoted earlier—rhetorically, they both search for the same authoritatively sanctioned beginning that could be used as a point of a negative (the cruel law) or a positive (the status of political prisoner) identification; they are looking for a certain subject position that would allow them to articulate in a socially acceptable form their disagreement with the very regime that constitutes them. But, as I now show, this search for a subject position gradually moved toward a different, Western-oriented discursive field.

Changing Symbolic Markets

By the mid-1970s, as some historians indicate, the Soviet dissidents found themselves in a situation of crisis and despair. By making arrests and ignoring the dis-

68. Larisa Bogoraz, "Pismo k deputatam Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR" [The letter to the deputies of the Supreme Counsel of the USSR], SDS, vol. 8, AC no. 556 (1970).

sidents' protests, the regime managed to almost completely disarm them. This despairing situation was exacerbated later by an increasing political emigration and exile that became "the main form of struggle with the dissident movement," as Roy Medvedev called it.⁶⁹ These are just a few examples: Joseph Brodsky was forced to emigrate in 1972, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was expelled in 1974, and Bukovsky was deported in 1977. The samizdat archive of this period is full of documents similar to the "Open letter to the Soviet government" written by Yelena Andronova in 1977: "I understand it pretty well—my letter will change nothing, will move nothing, will result in nothing, and yet I see it as my duty to stop lying and stop being silent. . . . I do not demand anything from you—for I know you are deaf. And there is no way for me to be heard through the earplugs of your unwritten rules, unspoken laws, and meaningless slogans."⁷⁰ It might be this loss of hope for changing anything within the country, taken together with the flow of emigration, that finally changed the dissidents' rhetorical strategy and orientation. These changes became especially clear during a "public" discussion of the draft of the new Soviet Constitution.

In 1977, by publishing the draft of the constitution—which was supposed to mark the transition from the "state of workers and peasants" to the "all people's state"—the Soviet government started an orchestrated campaign of "popular approval" of the text. Dissidents took an active part in this campaign; however, the tone of their letters and the essence of their suggestions differed from their previous rhetoric. Thus, for example, twelve dissidents wrote in a collective letter to the politburo:

Article 2 says: "All power in the USSR belongs to the people." But Article 6 says: "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is the *leading* and directing force of the Soviet society, the nucleus of its political system. . . ." The party "defines the society's general perspective of development, the direction of *domestic* and *foreign* politics, and *directs* the great creative activity of the Soviet people. . . ." What is, then, left to the people's power?

Article 6 describes an actually existing situation in the country: power does not belong to the people or its representatives but to the party, or more precisely—to the politburo of the central committee. As to Article 2, it is there just for decorative purposes.⁷¹

69. Aksenov et al., "Dissidenty o dissidentstve," 183.

70. Yelena Andronova, "Otkritoe pismo sovetскому pravitelstvu" [An open letter to the Soviet government], ASMS, issue 19, AC no. 2967 (1977).

71. Viacheslav Bakhmin, Tat'ana Velikanova, Zinaida Grigorenko, Piotr Grigorenko, Orion

The dissidents went on, demanding that the constitution tell the truth and directly reflect “the supreme power of the party politburo . . . without any attempt to disguise the ‘partocratic’ character of power by reference to the people’s power.” As they concluded, “If there are monarchies, dictatorships, theocratic states in the world, why could there not be a state in which the supreme power is represented by a group of party leaders? Just do not call this democracy.”

The letter appears to contain almost all the typical features of the dissidents’ rhetoric: their appeal to the principles of glasnost (through references to “clarity” and “truth”), their fascination with law as the source of one’s identity and legal status (for instance, “partocracy” must be reflected in the constitution), as well as their remarkable ability to fully locate themselves within the domain of speakability defined by the regime they subject to their critique. At the same time, the letter reflects a gradual departure from the dissidents’ usual attempt to press the authorities to symbolically recognize existing discrepancies between its officially adopted position and practically conducted politics. Unable to engage the authorities in dialogue and to force them to respond, the dissidents attempted to channel the direction of the authoritative monologue by pushing the regime to assume (or recognize that it had assumed) a certain position of enunciation. When seen from this point of view, the appeal to introduce the status of political prisoner and the comments on the constitution indicate two different stages in the dissident movement. The rhetoric of the first stage was aimed at forcing the regime to articulate certain legal frames—legal parameters of public activity. During the second stage, dissidents tried to press the regime to perform the *act of public self-identification*. These two stages indicate a transition fundamentally rooted in the mimetic resistance of the subordinate—from the stage of being constituted by the regime to the stage of becoming a rival of the regime, from being classified as a subject to becoming a classifying subject.

Along with this rhetorical strategy aimed at introducing a new “political system of classification,”⁷² in the mid-1970s the dissidents started using the international media to increase pressure on the Soviet government. The open letter format drastically changed. The heading “To the Community of Western Countries” replaced the traditional heading “To the Leaders of the Party and the Government.”⁷³ Changes in the dissidents’ primary audience influenced a change in dis-

Kvachevskii, Aleksandr Lavut, Raisa Lert, Valentin Turchin, Gleb Yakunin, Larisa Poluektova, Irina Kaplun, and Rostislav Galetskii, “V Politburo TsK KPSS” [To the politburo of the central committee of the CPSU], ASMS, issue 23, AC no. 3008 (1977), 5–6 (emphasis in original).

72. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 170.

73. The 1976 open letter of Nina Bukovskaya about her son, Vladimir Bukovsky, is a good exam-

cursive content of the letters. The rhetoric of “glasnost and socialist legality” was replaced by the trope of a universal threat. Thus, in 1975, addressing the “Western community,” three dissidents wrote: “We want to warn the community of Western countries that the repression of humanitarian movements that the Soviet government undertook recently . . . is an obvious move towards a hidden confrontation with the West, towards a creation of a safe ground for such a confrontation. . . . We appeal to your understanding of the facts that you probably prefer to ignore: the fierce struggle for establishing an *absolute ideological uniformity in the USSR* has a direct relation to *your own future!*”⁷⁴ Or consider a rhetorically similar statement that was read during a 1977 press conference of the Russian Public Foundation for the Support of Political Prisoners. The discourse of socialist legality was replaced here by the discourse of *fictitious* legality. The authors of the document emphasized: “The world should understand that [Soviet] society has no rights, that it has only fictitious laws. The society whose regime has neither shame nor repentance—this society has military power. Such a society is always a potential threat to the world. . . . It is impossible to reach a condition of security or cooperation with a state based on unwritten or illegally written laws.”⁷⁵ As the text suggests, changing the addressee immediately resulted in changing discursive conventions. A new—Western—discursive regime activated and discursively encapsulated a form of subjectivity necessary for this regime’s recognition. Maria Rozanova, editor of the Paris-based dissident magazine *Sintaksis*, recalled recently that at a certain moment in her dissident past she had realized that “Behind the backs of the Moscow [human rights] fighters, foreign correspondents closely stood, waiting for new feats; and this was pleasantly exciting.”⁷⁶

In recent literature on postsocialist studies there have been attempts to interpret the dissident movement as a form of accumulation of moral capital.⁷⁷ As I

ple of this change. The letter is addressed “to the International Organization ‘Amnesty,’ London; to the International Committee for Protection of Human Rights, Paris; to the Society for Protection of Human Rights, Frankfurt am Main; to J. Gollan, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Great Britain, to All People of Good Will.” Nina Bukovskaya, “Otkritoe pismo” [An open letter], ASMS, issue 16, AC no. 2521b (1976).

74. Yurii Orlov, Valentin Turchin, and Tatiana Khodorovich, “Obrashenie k obshestvennosti zapadnuh stran” [An appeal to the public opinion of Western countries], ASMS, issue 26–27, AC no. 2160 (1975), 1 (emphasis in original).

75. Tatiana Khodorovich, “Vistuplenie na press-konferenzii 22/VI-77” [Presentation at the press conference held on 22 June 1977], ASMS, issue 25, AC no. 3018 (1977), 1, 3.

76. Aksenov et al., “Dissidenty o dissidentstve,” 187.

77. Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 107–8.

have tried to show, in the case of the Soviet dissidents the “starting capital” for this accumulation was often borrowed from the discursive repository of the dominant regime. Did this peculiar, borrowed origin influence the process of circulation of the capital itself? Was there any inherent danger of coming “devaluation”? As Bourdieu reminds us, understanding the power of discourse is closely connected with understanding “the mechanisms that produce both words and people who emit and receive them.”⁷⁸ In other words, symbolic potency is an effect of the correspondence between the subject’s position in the field of symbolic power and the subject’s position in the political or economic field. And that brings me to the question crucial for my analysis: What happens—politically and sociologically—when the relation of homological correspondence between the mechanisms that produce words and the mechanisms that produce people is absent, that is, when a person mimetically pronounces a discourse for which he or she has no authorization? Since, as Bourdieu rightly suggests, the “effect of symbolic domination” is predetermined by one’s willingness to recognize it,⁷⁹ it is logical to expect that the situation of the enormous disproportion between the locus of enunciation and the enunciation itself would necessarily result in the absence of recognition, too. Or, to put it differently, being constituted by the discourse of the dominant does not mean being recognized by the dominant; being similar to the dominant does not mean being homogenous with or homologous to them. Speaking the language of the authority is not the same as speaking authoritatively, as evidenced by the failure of the dissidents to force the Soviet officials to respond when the dissidents spoke their language.

However, the failure of the dissidents’ mimetic resistance to the Soviet regime did not result in nothing: the dissidents’ subject position—their status as discursing subjects—was recognized. What dissidents could not get from the regime was recognition of the subject function they aspired to have, that is, the function of the production of legitimate discourse. Eventually, this gap between “experience and expression”⁸⁰ resulted in gradual but steady drifting of the dissidents toward a different shore, a different (Western) symbolic market, where they did not have to symbolically compete with the dominant discourse of the Soviet authorities and yet where they were recognized as possessing certain symbolic capital. The dissidents’ attempt to use the rhetoric of the red menace was not

78. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Lauretta C. Clough (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 41.

79. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 209.

80. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 461.

unproblematic; however, it should be seen not as an act of competition with the analogous Western discourse, but rather as an attempt to find a different point of entry into the domain of speakability in the Soviet Union.

And yet, in the grand finale, the Soviet dissidents' ability to act as ultimate producers of the legitimate discourse was acknowledged. But this recognition came at their expense. In 1987, Alexeyeva observed that Gorbachev's speeches sounded extremely familiar, as if she had already read something like them "ten, twenty, or even thirty years ago in samizdat."⁸¹ In 1996, Sinyavsky was only partially joking when he wrote that "Gorbachev simply read his fill of samizdat and was fulfilling the dream of Soviet dissidents by becoming the first dissident in his own Politburo."⁸² The discursive flow of the rhetoric of glasnost came full circle. The Gorbachev regime, inconsistently and cautiously, did finally reappropriate the language of the dissidents—first of all, its openness and publicity. But turning politburo members into dissidents is not quite the same as filling a politburo with dissidents. While appropriating (mimicking?) dissidents' language, the regime avoided any public recognition of the discourse's authorship. Having borrowed the rhetoric of glasnost from the dissidents, the regime of perestroika simultaneously ignored the dissidents as political *subjects* and exhausted the subversive component of their mimetic resistance. In addition, the dissidents themselves, having rooted their identity in the position of the subordinate, failed to transform their dissent into a parliamentary opposition or an institutionalized party system. The mimetic resistance remained effective as long as mimesis was perceived by the regime as undermining its monopoly to produce legitimate discourse. "As soon as a certain level of freedom was achieved in the country," says Kovalev, "the dissident phenomenon was over."⁸³ Multivocality of perestroika destroyed the prior discursive monopoly of the regime and made mimesis—as well as its performers—redundant.

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81. Ludmilla Alexeyeva, "Gorbachev i dissidentu" [Gorbachev and dissidents], *SSSR: Vnutrennie protivorechia* [The USSR: Internal contradictions] 19 (1987), 58.

82. Andrei Sinyavsky, *The Russian Intelligentsia*, trans. Lynn Visson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5.

83. Aksenov et al., "Dissidenty o dissidentstve," 181.