

Chapter 2

One is the biggest number: estrangement, intimacy and totalitarianism in late Soviet Russia

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At midday on 25 August 1968, eight people gathered in Moscow's Red Square to protest against the military invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops.¹ According to a written account of one of the participants, Natalya Gorbanevskaya (2017 [1970]),² the eight protesters barely had the time to unfurl home-made banners that read – among other things – ‘For your freedom and ours!’ when they were roughly apprehended. They were beaten, bundled into KGB vehicles and taken to the notorious Lubyanka prison, a scene of many politically motivated arrests. A predetermined closed trial ensued. Most protesters were sentenced to several years in labour camps, but two dissidents, Natalya Gorbanevskaya and Victor Faynberg, were taken to psychiatric hospitals and later exiled to France.

During the trial of the Red Square protesters, Victor Faynberg was not put in the dock. Instead he was remanded in a hospital. During his interview with Dr Lunts and others, Faynberg allegedly displayed fascination with reformist ideas and came across as an arrogant person, convinced that he was right (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971, 201). He was diagnosed with ‘psycho-other-thinking’ (*shizoinakomysliye*). Natalya Gorbanevskaya (who brought a newborn baby to the Red Square protest) was diagnosed with insanity, acquitted and placed under her mother's care. Granted this reprieve, Gorbanevskaya compiled a collection of documents about the protest and the trial. She was re-arrested in December 1968 and, following an analysis of her poems for traces of mental health ‘pathologies’, was diagnosed with ‘sluggish schizophrenia’ by Dr Lunts. He claimed that Gorbanevskaya's schizophrenia

was so amorphous that it did not hinder her work and intellectual habits (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971, 54–6). Nevertheless, during the trial Dr Lunts insisted that Gorbanevskaya was dangerous to the public because she was not fully aware of her mental condition (63).

Legendary among dissidents, their historians and some Russian intellectuals, the protest had no transformative effect on Soviet politics (Komaromi 2012, 71).³ Nevertheless, for some human rights activists, constitutional rights defenders and civic activists, the event encapsulated a sustained effort to generate ‘a political otherwise’ through multiple conventional and experimental modes of dissent, including public truth speaking, embodied protest and ‘an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought’ (Povinelli 2012, 456). Nevertheless, the real significance of the protest was not its outcomes nor its critical content; the invasion of Czechoslovakia was and remained an ambivalent and troubling decision for many Soviet citizens and Party members. Rather the protest was subversive for its ability to materialise the repressive state as a felt, intimate presence (c.f. Ahmann 2018). Chloe Ahmann (2018) describes how protests can punctuate ‘sluggish temporalities of suffering’ (144), experienced as slow violence and attrition of political control in order to crystallise habitual, toxic environments into an event. Her argument strikes a chord with the post-Stalinist history of unspectacular state repression.

Analytically, the event exposed a tension between the Soviet ideological imperative for unity and a value of outsidership, or *vrnye*⁴ (Yurchak 2005), as a space of intellectual, artistic and moral autonomy and critique. Outsidership was a common principle of living within the Soviet system (128). However, dissidents reified the alleged cohesion (*splochnost*) of the Soviet people to claim repeatedly an exclusive capacity to think differently, speak the truth and act in accord with their conscience (Boobbyer 2005), understood as a universal ethical beginning unsullied by party politics. Gorbanevskaya’s memoirs of the Red Square protest (2017) mention her friends’ intent to split away and stand apart (*otmezhevatsa*) from the dominant univocal opinion (10) and unanimous support of the Party’s decisions (23).

Gorbanevskaya and others denied that sedition or even political motives had inspired their protest.⁵ Instead they reiterated a commitment to *inakomyслиye*, or ‘other-thinking’ (thinking differently). In their defence speech, the protestors spoke about the right to express critical views that diverge from commonly acceptable opinions (221–4), while the prosecution accused them of trampling on the ‘norms’ of existence (240) and literally ‘sound thought’ (*zdravii smysl*) of the Soviet people (256).

Although the Soviet repressive apparatuses were probably more irked by public displays of dissent rather than criticism per se (Field 1995, 277), ‘other-thinking’ was a proud self-attribute of dissidents then and now.

In contrast, for Soviet prosecution and psychiatrists, other-thinking was an instantiation of ‘oppositionism’ (Halfin 2001). Predictable within the Soviet conceptual premises of scientism, dissent and oppositionism were liable to be explained as ‘a mental predicament’ (Halfin 2001, 319), a temporary eclipse of reason and delusion that could be treated therapeutically. With Khrushchev’s formal notion that dissent was a mental illness (Brintlinger 2007, 4), the aetiology of madness was disengaged from social conditions; dissent was not a response to the state politics, but rather an anomaly that the state had a responsibility to eliminate. Thus there appeared a shift from politicising mental illness and dissent during the early days of the revolutionary state (Sirotkina 2007) to pathologising both.

A notion of dissent as pathology does not fully explain why some dissidents were sent to prison and others hospitalised. The criteria for differentiating between political and intellectual dissidents and ‘mad’ Soviet citizens remain obscure without documentary evidence of psychiatric deliberation, which might not have a written trace. For instance, both Gorbanevskaya and Faynberg had a prior history of referrals to psychiatrists which would feature on their files. These, taken into consideration with linear, deterministic theories of personality, served to prompt an interpretation of Gorbanevskaya’s participation in the 25 August protest as a medical condition rather than as a conscious political gesture. However, a possibility of casting political dissent as madness, even if hospitalisation was not the inevitable punishment, suggests that the Soviet state was interested both in diminishing the value of political dissent (and the status of its individual members) and in controlling the innermost recesses of human subjectivities. To do so it employed a variety of methods described by Halfin as ‘the hermeneutics of the soul’ (Halfin 2001, 316). At the same time, the treatment of dissent as madness implied a possibility of cure and rehabilitation, further complicating a narrative of ideological misuse of punitive psychiatry and imprisonment (c.f. Thomas 2014). Put simply, to pathologise dissent as madness was to deny its efficacy as a political gesture.

In addition to understanding the logic of representation of political dissent as madness, my current research in Moscow seeks to comprehend the paradoxical ontology (as the fact of existence) of totalitarianism as intimacy with the many and dissent as a claim to ‘other-thinking’

(*inakomysliye*) and estrangement from an abstract collectivity in late Soviet Russia – and, to some extent, today.⁶

First, how did dissidents succeed in producing a political value other than the status quo (Gratton 2014, 117), given the conditions of totalitarianism that presume all-encompassing control and total identification with the party state? The paradox lies within dissidents' claims to 'other-thinking' as a political statement rather than a mental predicament, together with their simultaneous affirmation of the existence of totalitarianism as actual and experiential workings of the state's power. Claims of totalitarianism would have signalled defeat of oppositional activities because dissent and other-thinking (*inakomysliye*) were considered logical impossibilities under the conditions of 'actually existing totalitarianism' (Bergman 1998, 251). If the Soviet state had been 'really' totalitarian, and so had exerted control over all aspects of Soviet life, how could dissidents have ever distanced themselves from the dominance of a regime that had such crippling effects as loss of moral judgement and political apathy (Bergman 1998, 257)? How could dissidents justify their own exception? How did they cultivate political, intellectual and artistic spaces of personal autonomy (Komaromi 2012) within the state or following their flight abroad?

Second, why was a small-scale protest such as this so troubling for the Soviet authorities? One explanation is that dissent as estrangement from the reified Soviet peoplehood contravened an ideological imperative of intimacy with the many. It posited the possibility of an alternative circle of intimacy with politically 'like-minded' (*edino-myshleniki*) persons who frequently disseminated their views through networks of family, friends and colleagues. Dissident circles cultivated a sense of togetherness and detachment from others through shared commitment to ideas, engagement in samizdat activities and the collection and distribution of money and food for political prisoners and their families, as well as everyday socialising. Numerous memoirs and interviews point to a pervasive 'fellow feeling' (Hankins 2019, 170), defined by Joseph Hankins as a historical 'connection through similar placements' (185). I would like to argue that, in Soviet Russia, those placements of dissent were marked by two political modes of intimacy, namely closeness to other dissidents and detachment from the abstract 'we' of the Soviet state.

The rhetorical 'circle of the We' (Hollinger 1993) extended to all Soviet people, despite countervailing tendencies toward differentiation and ethnic particularism, among other things (Slezkine 1994). As an overarching objective, the Soviet peoplehood was a communitarian

project premised on the notion of unity of all. Such a communitarian project presupposes a normative and psychological affinity or solidarity akin to claims of a prepolitical, affective ‘society’ or ‘nation’ (Levy 2017). Against the grain of the primacy of totality, dissent as estrangement openly challenged the premises of political unity of the workers, with its improbable commonality of ideas, values and practice. Thus the embodied intimacy of engagement with dissident activities and ideas posited a challenge to an abstract mode of intimacy with the Soviet ‘we’. In sum, the broadening and closing of intimate political circles allows us to reimagine dissent and totalitarianism as alternative forms of unity that shared a vocabulary of intimacy and estrangement but implied a difference in degree and scale.

Totalitarian intimacy

In extant scholarship, an effort to resolve the paradox of dissent under the conditions of totalitarianism is situated within a *realist paradigm*: either the Soviet party state was not totalitarian or dissidents were not free agents of other-thinking, as they saw themselves. For instance, Hannah Arendt defines ‘totalitarianism’ as absolute political control, including rectification of thought and effacement of socio-political antagonisms and contradictions (Arendt 1976 [1958], xxiii–xxiv). Totalitarianism signals the ‘enormity of the [state] power’ (Bergman 1998, 248) that subjugates any oppositional thought and activity.

In addition, Hannah Arendt’s classic definition of Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism underscores loyalty to a leader and concrete historical conditions of mass mobilisation of atomised individuals (1976 [1958], 324). For her, totalitarianism as a practical political action is successful in shaping an ideal-type character and concrete empirical product of totalitarian mechanisms of violent control of subjectivities: the ‘mass-man’ (Sigwart 2016). The mass, the mob, the crowd, the undifferentiated multitude constitute the subject of a totalitarian society and ‘the rebus of collective politics’ (Mazzarella 2015, 105–6). It vividly conjures an image of collective frenzy and fanaticism of ‘a swarm’ (Toscano 2010, xv). The pathos is menacing: totalitarianism and fanaticism are essentially the same because they cultivate a blind commitment to an abstract idea among the multitude of people (Toscano 2010, xix). The monotony of multitude is reiterated in spatial, architectural and design metaphors of flatness as invariance (Higman 2017), also conceptually associated with totalitarianism.

Guided by the above definitions, some historians look for historical evidence for or against the empirical reality of totalitarianism. A great deal of literature on totalitarianism enumerates traits and characteristics of a totalitarian society to ascertain what authoritarian orders fit such description (for example, Mirskii 2003). Conventionally fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao's China meet the criteria although, of necessity, the argument is circular: the key attributes of totalitarianism are deduced from a study of a totalitarian society which is re-affirmed as totalitarian *ipso facto*.

Soviet scholarship denied that the term had any relevance to the politics of the Soviet Union. It used totalitarianism as a synonym of fascism (Bergman 1998, 252), although the subtle parallels were drawn by a few Soviet historians from the 1960s onwards. Slavoj Žižek (2001) finds the term 'totalitarianism' unhelpful because, for him, it defeats the Left (4) and 'relieves us of a duty to think' (138) about socialism as anything other than a Gulag ideology. For him, the term has been misused as a denunciation mechanism of any radical emancipatory project and its utopian or universal credentials.

Žižek was not the only one to question the meanings, origins and implications of theories of totalitarianism in Soviet Russia, although others had their own, and different, purposes. Some dissidents, including a Russian writer with nationalist leanings, Solzhenitsin, believed 'totalitarianism' to be a Western imposition on authentic Russian culture. Others racialised totalitarianism as Russia's 'intrinsic' inclinations towards barbarism, submissiveness, tyranny and denial of personal freedom (Bergman 1998, 255).

Notwithstanding the term's problematic theoretical character, many Soviet dissidents of the post-Stalinist period applied it to their own historical experiences to contextualise disturbing encounters with the party state. Instead of theorising 'totalitarianism', the notion was thus adopted specifically to identify a felt experience of the repressive mechanisms of the Soviet party state. As many Soviet people questioned the nature of Soviet totalitarianism, for Soviet dissidents it had appeared as an undeniable materiality of court rooms, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, KGB officers and so on.

A comparable line of reasoning, this time about the reality of dissent, informs Benjamin Nathans' argument: that contrary to dissidents' self-understanding, their protest did not occasion a dramatic confrontation between 'official' and 'nonconformist' positions in the Soviet Union (Nathans 2012, 177). Serguei Oushakine (2001) suggests that political dissidents voiced objections to totalitarianism and unlawfulness of the

state practices that were identical to the critical discourses about *glasnost* among reformers within the Soviet government from the 1950s onwards. The same stock of questions worried Gorbachev-era politicians who had to explain their own capacity for critical thinking and prospects of socio-political restructuring. Some reformers doubted the empirical validity and scope of totalitarianism, seeking rather to qualify Soviet totalitarianism as partial and consensual (Bergman 1998, 265). Thus 'totalitarianism' was redefined as an aspiration rather than actuality. Nevertheless, it remained closely linked to nefarious socio-political and psychological effects of unlimited power, including the erosion of human autonomy and a lack of ethical judgement.

It follows that 'absolute ideological uniformity' (Oushakine 2001, 212) and the intimacy with the party state were an ideological projection, as political realities were inevitably diverse within and outside the Communist Party ranks. As a consequence, Oushakine contends, there was no 'external' position available to dissidents. What made dissident rhetoric an act of resistance was its 'locus of enunciation' rather than the message per se (204), as well as an intensification of the existing critical discourse and an appeal to universal truth and sincerity. In fact, the main demand among dissidents was a public acknowledgement of a simple fact of disagreement (212) and discrepancies between a designate and actuality. Dissidents thus demanded the recognition of the Soviet state as partocracy rather than democracy (211); this also resonated with a paradoxical call for greater realism and sincerity in literature and art dominated by heroic, embellished forms of so-called social realism (Kozlov 2013, 44).

Building on my own archival and ethnographic encounters, I agree with the above arguments: totalitarianism was not all inclusive, nor were dissidents unique in their critical capacities. Nevertheless, the stylistic ploy of 'things are not what they seem' is stifling. This means that the controversy over the empirical evidence for or against Soviet 'totalitarianism' turns a blind eye to the ideational significance of a deeper political principle of the primacy of whole and the intimacy with the many that dominated the Soviet conceptual universe. I suggest that, despite being exploited during and after Cold War enmities (Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009, 8), the notion of 'totalitarianism' points to the creation of an ethico-political value of totality and 'wholeness' that reverberated across pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russian utopian and folk theories, philosophy and ethics, as well as the administrative and economic practices of joint responsibility and collective ownerships (Stites 1989). Dissidents laboured not only against the state institutions,

but also against the ethico-political value of totality, to which they had juxtaposed *estrangement* as a way of life (Boym 1996).

For instance, the idea of the primacy of the whole underpins a constellation of notions of 'freedom' in Russian. The words *svoboda*, *mir* and *volya* all convey a sense of membership among one's own people, but with subtle differences (Humphrey 2007). *Svoboda*, for example, is not centred on an individual. It is rather predicated on 'an entry into a privileged political state of liberty, rather than a move out from captivity into an indefinite state called freedom' (Humphrey 2007, 2). In contrast, *mir* is an expansive concept that refers to a particular life world and limitless universe. If *svoboda* demarcates a bounded world, *mir* presupposes outward existence. Last but not least, *volya* merges boundless freedom with an individual will and despotic power, both unstable as they ebb or intensify (Humphrey 2007, 6–7).

In sum, contrary to Žižek, I would like to take the term *totalitarianism* seriously, but to shy away from the polemical controversy about whether the Soviet state was or was not totalitarian. Instead, I approach 'totalitarianism' as an imaginary or a conceptual topology of totalitarianism that mattered in the discursive fields of dissent regardless of its correspondence to reality or lack thereof.⁷ In addition, I aim to illuminate this conceptual topology as a philosophical problem of relating and prioritising parts and whole. Thus I suggest that the idea of the primacy of the whole and implicated notions of freedom through a privileged political membership permeated everyday thought, professional scholarship and political programmes of many participants in Soviet Russia. Wholeness and interconnected collectivity featured in post-Stalinist dissident writings (Komaromi 2015, 4), but as an alternative aggregate of friends and like-minded people (*edinomyshlenniki*), brought together by political and research activities and interests, as well as drinking, sexual relations, sleepovers, shared childcare and family holidays, underlaid with an exhilarating sense of conspiracy. Freedom was found in estrangement from the Soviet peoplehood and in intimate interactions within dissident circles, yet was imagined as a link with the rest of humanity and its alleged universal values.

In sum, a shift from totalitarianism to totality as a value allows me to elicit a deeper relational order of dissent as a transgression of the idea of the primacy of the whole. To flesh out the value of totality empirically, I draw on archival materials and studies of the political abuse of psychiatry in Soviet Russia that exemplify a much broader intellectual and socio-political history of fascination with totality in Soviet and European thought and practices. As we have seen, some dissidents in

post-Stalinist Russia were ‘punished with madness’ (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971) – that is, sent to the psychiatric hospitals that flourished in the post-Stalinist period.

From a pragmatic point of view, psychiatric hospitals embodied an excessive form of exclusion and isolation from the social. However, it is not entirely clear to me why and how the link between dissent and schizophrenia was justified in Soviet psychiatry and political settings. I would like tentatively to suggest that in Soviet psychiatry schizophrenia was broadly defined as withdrawal from reality and dissociation from a social collective, which in turn was a foundational concept of Soviet Marxist ethics. The diagnosis of schizophrenia was applied to dissidents who, according to their forensic psychiatry reports, failed to grasp the primacy of the whole. What we see is a reiteration of the logic of intimacy and estrangement from the many.

Unity of thought

In August 1968 the Soviet newspapers described the Red Square protestors as ‘*otschepentsi*’, with a pejorative meaning of splintering away from the whole. In Soviet newspapers the protest was constructed as a violation of the unity of the Soviet people and a betrayal of intimacy (or complicity, in the dissidents’ terms) with the party state in the face of ideological enemies. Gorbanevskaya’s memoirs contain numerous newspaper clippings proclaiming unwavering support for the invasion among Soviet citizens. On behalf of the vast and heterogeneous Soviet population, the newspapers spoke of unity, shared understanding (*obschaya positsiya*), socialist commonwealth, unshakable solidarity and unanimous approval of the Soviet actions (Gorbanevskaya 2017, 22–4, 30). In mainstream Soviet media the military intervention was construed as a moment of renewed ideological requirements for conformity with the state and with the Communist Party. Brezhnev’s doctrine of ‘developed socialism’ (Nathans 2011, 180) announced the arrival of the era of ‘genuine collectivism’ (183) and, crucially, its conditionality on the state’s control. In sharp contrast informal accounts, diaries and memoirs of political and other dissidents and ordinary Soviet people referred to the invasion as the endpoint of a liberal period that had proffered hope for an alternative, perhaps more liberal pathway for Warsaw Pact socialism.

Fully aware of the consequences, the eight protestors in Red Square saw no political utility in their actions (Gorbanevskaya 2017, 10).

They did not expect to achieve anything concrete and some continue to describe their actions as an ‘apolitical gesture’ (interview with Pavel Litvinov, December 2017). Even eyewitnesses were unaffected because they found the flashpoint protest puzzling: some thought the participants were Czechs (Gorbanevskaya 2017, 40) or Jews (45) disrupting public order. For the participants, the protest was not a means to any specific political end, but a compulsory action, a moral dictate of universal human conscience.⁸ Somewhat akin to the relentless but inconsequential letter writing of many Soviet citizens to the Party leaders, the 1968 protest was a well-considered gesture of dissociation (*otmezhevatsa*) from the presumed consensus (Boobbyer 2008, 134).

The consensus was an ideological construct and a somewhat exaggerated (some say self-serving) claim to exception among some dissidents. Many more Soviet citizens, including reformists within the Communist Party leadership, disapproved of the military intervention. For example, a sociological survey of attitudes to the invasion carried out clandestinely in a small Russian town from September 1968 to March 1969 revealed a profound ambivalence and intergenerational divide about the Soviet invasion (Zaslavsky and Z* 1981). The majority of younger people (between 18 and 30 years old) offered weak support, while about 47 per cent of the over 50s (who comprised ten people out of a sample of 352 respondents) approved of the Soviet-led invasion.

Even among the highest-ranking Soviet leadership, presided over by Brezhnev, the use of power did not seem inevitable or wise (Bischof, Karner and Ruggenthaler 2010). The Soviet government was deeply divided. Some members of the Soviet leadership feared that a military intervention would undermine the conciliatory rhetoric of Nikita Khrushchev and Aleksei Kosygin, both of whom felt that the antagonism between the West and the Soviet Union had shifted from military to economic competition (Bischof, Karner and Ruggenthaler 2010) that opened the door for socialist reforms and liberalisation. However, Leonid Brezhnev fanned public anxieties by emphasising the ideological differences between the West and the Soviet sphere. In Brezhnev’s rhetoric, Soviet socialism was perpetually threatened from outside and from within – by spies, dissenters, reformers and so on. Thus, despite initial equivocations about its goals and outcomes, the invasion became the crunch moment to silence the reformers within the Soviet Communist Party and dissidents among Soviet citizens.

Clearly the unity of thought was a projection of homogeneity that did not correspond to historical reality. However, the trope had felt consequences. Specifically, following a brief but optimistic (as it

is remembered today) decade of de-Stalinisation, the late 1960s and 1970s revived the persecution of 'other-thinking' (*inakomyслиye*) in a multiplicity of its forms. The term was applied to activists for human rights, religious liberties, Jewish migration, nationalist and ethnic self-determination, civic rights, socialist Leninist reformists and defenders of constitutional rights (Nathans 2007), as well as Jewish, German and Chinese '*otkazniki*', or refuseniks.⁹ It also encompassed writers, artists, actors, singers, philosophers, sociologists and others who did not necessarily oppose the socialist order, or even its partocratic structures, but simply engaged with experimental artistic genres, schools of thought and research methods. In the Soviet legal jargon, *inakomyслиye* signalled anti-Soviet agitation and perfidious representations of Soviet reality. In a targeted campaign against *inakomyслиye*, state institutions and agents would threaten, detain, interrogate, demote or dismiss from a job, exile internally or abroad and sentence people to labour camps, prisons and psychiatric hospitals that represented *inakomyслиye* as a mental illness.

Dissent and madness

After the Red Square protest, Natalya Gorbanevskaya and Victor Faynberg were sent to the psychiatric wards in Serbsky Psychiatric Hospital in Moscow (Faynberg was later transferred to Leningrad). Other protestors were sent to labour camps that remained a more likely destination for a political dissident. An avalanche of letters from dissidents, their families and friends brought to the attention of the Soviet government and international organisations that incarceration of *healthy*¹⁰ people in psychiatric wards constituted a blatant abuse of power and a betrayal of medical ethics. However, it has been argued that some Soviet psychiatrists may have genuinely believed that dissidents suffered from 'a mental anomaly' (Wilkinson 1986, 642). This later claim should not be misread as a justification of political abuse of psychiatry nor as a plea of innocence on behalf of Soviet psychiatrists. My question is rather what presuppositions and arguments made it possible to represent involvement in a seditious political activity as a mental problem?

Gorbanevskaya and Faynberg were examined in one of the most notorious organs and locations of forensic or criminal psychiatry (*sudebnaya psihiatriya*), the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry in Moscow. The referral to a hospital did not need justification (*neobosnovan*), which in itself was seen by dissidents as an illegal, unconstitutional practice. Dissidents did not know why some 'healthy persons'

(*zdoroviye lyudi*) were referred for psychiatric assessment as potentially 'schizophrenic' or 'insane'.¹¹ Objections to the hospitalisation of mentally healthy people in psychiatric wards is recurrent in the handwritten and typewritten letters frequently sent to the Soviet Ministry of Health or the Government, with copies passed to dissidents and samizdat activists in the late Soviet period. Many letters are preserved in the Memorial Society in present-day Moscow and other archives. Such letters describe a moment of detention that could start with a casual knock on the door and a request to follow the police (*militsiya*) or a security officer (*KGB*) to a hospital. A superficial physical examination, including a temperature and blood pressure check-up, could prompt a medical worker to prescribe a course of psychotropic injections (*psihotropiki*); these, according to many patients, induced sleepiness, sickness, headaches and immobility. The whole process was condemned by dissidents and their supporters as an unlawful violation of the Soviet Constitution. Furthermore, most letters presumed that the reasons for being sectioned were accusations and fabricated charges of anti-Soviet activities of prisoners and/or their family members. One could be rapidly discharged only to face disability and socio-economic consequences such as unemployment.

However, the Serbsky Institute where Gorbanevskaya and Faynberg were assessed was already a prison-like institution. A former tsarist police detention unit, it became a centre for research and a psychiatric prison in 1923. Its founder, Vladimir Serbsky, had championed the understanding of social conditions in mental illness (Bloch and Reddaway 1977, 36). By the 1970s the Institute was directed by Dr Lunts, a major authority in Soviet psychiatry. He is remembered as an 'utter bastard' by Moscow dissidents and their families and friends.

Dr Daniil Lunts defined mental illness as a failure to represent reality and act upon it (1970, 8). Symptoms included hallucinations and false convictions, accompanied by disengagement from reality or its inappropriate/wrong perception (*nepravilnoe ponimaniye*) (14) and their manifestations in anti-social behaviour (19). According to Lunts, Soviet forensic science was entrusted with a job of determining culpability, effective treatment and the reintegration of psychiatric patients into society, as well as safeguarding the public from dangerous people with mental health problems (19–20).

Some wards in the Serbsky Institute were classified as state secret 'specialised hospitals' (*spetsbolnitsi*), administered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs rather than the Soviet Ministry of Health. Dissidents wrote about doctors in white overalls with KGB shoulder marks underneath: the 'psycho-fascists' of Soviet medicine, according to some samizdat

letters. The image speaks volumes about a recurrent assumption about a dual reality that was genuine and deceptive. However, on a more immediate level of analysis, it also highlights the horror of psychiatric abuse with political aims and points to a fact that psychiatrists in Soviet Russia required political as well as medical qualifications (Bloch and Reddaway 1977, 44).

It is important to keep in mind that, as an alternative to Stalin's methods of mass repressions and executions, criminal psychiatric wards multiplied in the post-Stalin period. In 1978 Kosygin, by then Chairman of the Council of Ministers, ordered the construction of more than 80 new hospitals (some of which were never completed). In a postscript to his study on punitive medicine,¹² Alexander Podrabinek explained that not only political dissidents but any inconvenient person could be sectioned – including ordinary people who dared to criticise their management, exposed a violation of constitutional rights or administrative irregularities or attempted 'a flight abroad' by making inquiries at a foreign embassy. Forcible psychiatric treatment of dissidents, refuseniks (*otkazniki*), public figures, musicians, poets and ordinary people continued until 1988, when Article 70 on 'Anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation' and defamation laws of the Soviet Russian (RSFSR) Criminal Code were repealed.

Most dissidents were held together with the criminally insane, drug addicts and other people suffering from 'genuine' mental health illness. In letters passed to samizdat, some dissidents conveyed their distress at sharing a room with convicted killers. Other dissidents were shocked to witness people collecting their own faeces, screaming obscenities and being restrained and beaten by nurses, many recruited from former convicts. Thus psychiatric wards were not a more 'humane' form of political control – a view voiced at a public lecture in May 2018 in lieu of an explanation of why Gorbanevskaya, a single mother of two, was not sentenced to prison.

In fact a stint in a psychiatric hospital was often a preliminary stage (*etapirovaniye*) on the way to a prison camp. Some people were moved from prisons into psychiatric wards after suicide attempts, for example swallowing nails in a political prison. In a samizdat letter Semyon Gluzman, a Soviet psychiatrist who systematically studied abuse and was sentenced for his research, explained that, within the punitive system of Soviet prisons, suicide was a sign of despair rather than of mental illness. But material conditions in labour camps and psychiatric hospitals were often comparable. Food lacked nutrition and diversity, and food parcels from friends and relatives were frequently stolen. Patients were

treated with cold shower therapies while they practically suffocated in hot wards with bolted windows and no ventilation or fresh air. Isolation was commonly mentioned in letters republished in samizdat literature. Access to the toilets was often denied. In short, even though straight-jackets were not used, the general aim was to immobilise – that is, to restrict and slow down physical movement and intellectual activity.

As a result, for some dissidents, psychiatric hospitals were a harsher punishment than forced labour camps. Patients were medicalised into a vegetative-like state accompanied by headaches and nightmares. Neuroleptic drugs caused severe side-effects such as stomach ulcers, insomnia and depression. Most importantly, they halted dissidents' intellectual labour. Arguably, even Stalin's Gulag camps allowed some prisoners to be creative intellectually: some prisoners wrote poetry, studied literary texts and managed to draw in the most squalid conditions (Etkind 2013). In contrast, intellectual prisoners in psychiatric hospitals lived in a drug-induced stupor. They were frequently prevented from writing and reading, to the point that reading science fiction, for example, could be interpreted as a symptom of madness.

For some, psychiatric hospitals were seen as an acceptable alternative to prison. Many Soviet hippies performed and celebrated madness to dodge army conscription and mock social norms, but they also feared an onset of real madness triggered by prescribed drugs (Fürst 2018). For the poet Joseph Brodsky, psychiatric detention was a balancing act between intellectual freedom and a total loss of creative consciousness, including incapacity to work (Reich 2013). Nevertheless many dissidents feared psychiatric hospitals more than labour camps because they stripped them of their individuality – a process described as loss of 'distinctiveness' of the self¹³ and of one's political identity. For instance individuality, as a sense of one's juridical and political 'I', was an important theoretical question that preoccupied defenders of human rights (Komaromi 2015, 76) and Orthodox religious dissidents (Ganson 2013). The former situated an individual within a legal framework of democratic rights distribution that could strengthen a position of an individual as a citizen in possession of individual rights. The latter pondered the problem of atomisation as a breakdown of community links that could be healed through renewal of religious solidarity (Ganson 97). For dissident priests, godless society resulted in an experience of isolation within a crowd (98) – a simultaneous loss of individuality and loneliness of isolation that haunted political dissidents in psychiatric prisons. Thus an alternative to the 'totalitarian' unity of thought was, in the dissident Petro Grigorenko's words, 'a community of persons – rational, proud, independent in everything

and tolerant of each other, voluntarily cooperating in the course of interaction' (Reich 2014, 582) and/or a community of believers within the Russian Orthodox Church (Ganson 2013).

Similarly, in a letter to samizdat (dated 1971), one political prisoner agonised that the loss of all his rights entailed a concomitant loss of political subjecthood. Textbooks on criminal psychiatry distinguished between *pravosposobnost* and *deesposobnost* – a capacity to have rights and a capacity to acquire and exercise rights, and so to assume responsibilities and duties as a citizen, respectively (Morozova 1977). *Pravosposobnost* was ascribed at birth while *deesposobnost* was predicated on purposeful intelligent activity (*planomernaya rassuditelnaya deyatelnost*) (72). A diagnosis of madness thus not only made ordinary Soviet people squeamish (*brezgliv*) about dissidents. It also deprived a dissident of his or her rights and, crucially, of a legitimate voice in domestic political affairs by depoliticising their protest as psychotic behaviour (Field 1995, 278).

Sluggish schizophrenia

Sluggish schizophrenia was a medical term coined by Soviet psychiatrists in 1920–39 to describe mild borderline cases and the tempo of schizophrenia (Zajicek 2018). Because it was seen as an early stage of a progressive mental disorder, sluggish schizophrenia lacked a precise list of symptoms. This indeterminacy was a handy politicised tool of criminal psychiatry and the Soviet prosecution, as almost any behaviour, especially the strength of dissidents' conviction and their self-righteousness,¹⁴ could be assessed as sluggish schizophrenia – a potentiality of a mental illness rather than its full-blown version. In other words, forensic psychiatry in the Soviet Union claimed to spot psychological 'anomalies' without any manifest symptoms, even if a patient contradicted medical experts and claimed that he or she was psychologically robust (Morozova 1977, 5). In many ways Soviet psychiatric manuals contained a self-authorisation.

Nevertheless, Soviet psychiatric manuals did publish various definitions of schizophrenia and sluggish schizophrenia. Schizophrenia was described as an (anti-)social illness because the Marxist framework highlighted the role of social conditions in determining mental health. Consequently, it was said that schizophrenia entailed a withdrawal from social contract (Zajicek 2018, 3). For example, Dr Sukhareva, who was among the first to engage with sluggish schizophrenia, described it as a propensity for solitude and emotional flatness in the late 1930s. In the

Brezhnev era Dr Snezhnevski expanded the list (Field 1995, 287) of fuzzy symptoms to include perseverance, struggle for truth, manifestation of reformism and litigiousness (Reich 2014, 566). Occasionally sluggish schizophrenia was identified with ‘philosophical intoxication’, unconventional and experimental thought, interest in abstract ideas and a tendency to offer ‘bizarre’ interpretations and theories.

A case study of a murder suspect profiled the defendant as somebody who, despite his emotional aloofness, entertained paranoid ideas about making an invention or discovery in biology and physics and claimed to have written ‘award-worthy’ manuscripts titled ‘Gnoseology’ and ‘Theoretical Mechanics’ (Morozova 1977, 65). The defendant, accused of beheading his manager, gave an impression of looking down on the investigators. For the Soviet experts, it was a textbook case of schizophrenia. Soviet forensic psychiatry pledged to carry out prophylactic measures against such socially harmful tendencies (7–8). Vehemently opposed to trendy philosophical teachings (*modniye filosofskiyе ucheniya*), Morozova appeared scornful of Western psychiatry for treating psychological maladies (*rasstroystva*) as acts of personal rebellion against existing public order (8). For Morozova, any ‘odd’ behaviour, including ‘incorrect and inappropriate’ (*nepravilnoye i neodikovatnoye*) (11) conduct during an investigation, could be a justification for psychiatric evaluation.

According to a KGB report on Zhores Medvedev,¹⁵ a prominent Leninist Marxist, his ‘mental illness’ comprised the following symptoms:

- A persistent mania for truth-seeking
- Having a beard
- Meticulous habits of thought
- A belief that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was an act of transgression of sovereign borders
- A conviction that he should devote his life to the ideals of communism
- Attempts to prove his point
- Inclinations to philosophising
- Scriptomania, or writing excessively
- Shouting out about his fight for democracy and truth

In his letter in defence of Zhores Medvedev,¹⁶ Solzhenitsyn noted that Medvedev was told that he was ‘abnormal’ because ‘normal people’ thought alike.

Another dissident, Petro Grigorenko – admired as a Soviet general who joined dissidents to defend ethnic minorities in Crimea and speak

against the abuse of psychiatry – was given a similar diagnosis during one of his internments in the Serbsky Institute. He was described as a well-adjusted individual with excellent memory and concentration skills. However, his ‘pathology’ consisted of a conviction that he was within his right to seek reforms. In fact, it was said his ideas had an obstinate character and were so intense that they determined his conduct. His first psychiatric assessment mentioned Grigorenko’s tendency to argue, construct repetitive arguments, dominate in a conversation, interrupt and insist on the correctness of his views, but concluded that he was a mentally healthy, principled and politically active person (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971, 99–103).

Another subject, Ivan Yakhimovich, was a Latvian dissident and a member of the Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights. He demonstrated no signs of hallucinations, but was diagnosed with a paranoid psychopathic personality for his conviction that he fulfilled an important mission on behalf of the Soviet people. In fact, psychiatrists and lawyers speculated whether conviction in the rightness of their position and in speaking the only available truth was a common or anomalous trait among politically active people – with a crucial difference that prosecution saw the dissidents’ critical statements about the Soviet Union as being slanderous of Soviet reality.

Taking into consideration the fact that sincere speech, stubbornness, irony, strategies to derail interrogation and many cultivated eccentricities (van Voren 2009) were assiduously cultivated among dissidents, Semyon Gluzman published a manual for dissidents or ‘agents of other-thinking’ in 1975. A Soviet psychiatrist, Gluzman disagreed with a description of ‘other-thinking’ as a psychiatric anomaly, a belief for which he was later convicted. Gluzman argued that Soviet psychiatry operated with two sets of concepts and definitions of mental illnesses. One was ‘truly’ scientific, backed by research. The other set was pseudo-concrete, rooted in fuzzy and abstract assumptions, frequently with a philosophical or political cast, about what counted as a ‘normal’ person. The norm, he explained, presumed a person of average intelligence, unwilling to take risk and mainly guided by an instinct of self-preservation and a desire for stable employment (Gluzman 2012, 33). During psychiatric evaluations, Gluzman recommended dissidents to project the image of an average, normal person, somebody with a normal childhood, well-integrated, keen on sports and comfortable in mass social settings such as festivals (44). It was important to demonstrate lack of interest in modern art, theoretical mathematics and philosophy (unless it was a professional occupation); failure to do so risked a diagnosis of ‘metaphysical

intoxication' (44). A single person had to cite objective circumstances (unemployment, illness, etc.) rather than lack of interest in marital relations.

Gluzman suggested that 'sluggish schizophrenia' was applied to dissidents because it was consistent with psychiatric theory and political imperatives of the totalitarian state that defined 'other-thinking' as an outcome of mental pathology. His engagement with psychiatric theory was an attempt to redefine the very idea of 'pathology' that other dissidents sought to invert and apply to the Soviet system of 'behavioural bilingualism' (Reich 2014, 567) – a system that, for dissidents, engendered a schizophrenic break between truth and lies, reality and political illusion.

'Other-thinking' and totality as the primacy of the whole

Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway explain that psychiatry and political ideology of Soviet Marxism were intertwined (1977, 43). In fact, the Soviet Marxist concept of the collective guided Soviet psychiatry: a group, a collective always had priority over an individual (42). As a result, the task of a psychiatrist was to reintegrate a person into the collective through a mediating power of labour and to eradicate nonconformist values. The above examples show how dissidents were cast as 'madmen', incapable of understanding the principles of unity of thought. This brings me back to my initial question about the possibility of dissent as 'other-thinking' (*inakomysliye*) under the conditions of totalitarianism.¹⁷ I have indicated that this contradiction tends to be framed within a realist paradigm. If the unity of thought had had empirical basis, then a dissident activity was not what it seemed.

Alternatively, to acknowledge the radical possibility of other-thinking undermines a claim to the existence of a monolithic totalitarian society, but somewhat tarnishes the dissidents' claim to exception. In this chapter I have adopted a different tack by showing that the notion of 'totalitarianism' is valuable not as a label of an actually-existing reality, but as an ideation that reveals certain philosophical foundations of the Soviet world. I have picked examples from case studies of political abuse of Soviet psychiatry because they crystallise the tension between the official Soviet premise of the primacy of the whole and the dissidents' efforts to delineate a critical space outside 'the whole'. At the same time loyal (for want of a better word) Soviet citizens and dissidents shared a cosmological perspective of the world divided into 'inside' and 'outside'.

The idea of the primacy of the whole has a long genealogy in European philosophy and has found traction in anthropology as a mereological problem of relating (and separating) parts and wholes. In philosophy the argument goes like this: are parts derived from their whole or is the whole an abstraction from its parts (Schaffer 2010, 31)? The question applies to ‘gunky’ worlds where things (including social worlds) are composite objects that can be subdivided or reassembled into infinitely complex worlds (Brzozowski 2016, 58–9). The tricky bit is not simply to ascertain that parts and wholes are relational, but to establish what is fundamental: parts or their entanglements. A pluralist solution is numerical; it quantifies and adds parts to create an essentially atomistic assembly marked by boundaries and ontological categories (Schaffer 2010, 44). A monistic perspective sees the world as an integrated system where components supervene (or build) on the whole, rather than the other way around (56–7). This produces a world where heterogeneity does not presume a summation of isolated entities.

If philosophical arguments seem too abstract, anthropological research tends to flesh out this basic philosophical problem by looking at many concrete ways to carve the world. For example, Marilyn Strathern’s seminal essay on the reconfiguration of social relations by constructing and dissolving wholes into parts resists a conventional understanding of personhood through a membership of an individual in a group (1994). I suggest that, in the realm of political agglomerations, the relation between parts and wholes is predicated on a kind of intimacy that does not correspond to kinship ties.

To press the point, the value of the primacy of the whole specifies both intimacy and dissent – political, intellectual, artistic and so on – as an imperative to remain or an attempt to explore a potentiality of ‘outsideness’. It instantiates a tension between intimacy and estrangement and harbours a conceptual contradiction: there could be no ‘outside’ under the conditions of totalitarianism. Nevertheless, the state agents and dissidents (and many other people, overlooked by grand historical narratives) engaged in an infinite movement between inside and outside of the perimeters of the Soviet cosmos. Dissidents, refuseniks, intellectuals, artists, religious people, hippies, creative Marxists and others looked for routes outside – literally abroad or retreating into the obscurity of basements, private flats, low-profile jobs, where autonomy could be affirmed. It was not a choice but a prerequisite for a compromised freedom of exile and loss (Boym 1996). Nevertheless, a plausible ‘outside’ location engendered a possibility of the political otherwise. State agents also explored the potentialities of ‘outside’ by deporting and exiling

people abroad or locking them in isolated, sometimes remote spaces outside the official domains of legitimate personhood.

Contrary to the scholarship that gives the notion of 'totalitarianism' little empirical basis or conceptual traction, my objective has been to show that Soviet totalitarianism remains a productive category of analysis in Soviet studies because it embodies a distinct vision of a social order where primacy is given to the whole rather than its parts. My intention has been to rework this philosophical problem as an anthropological inquiry into a mode of value creation (Munn 1986, 3). For reasons of genealogical continuity and parallelism with the Soviet thought that I cannot elaborate here, 'totalitarianism' as a value of the primacy of the whole postulates an extreme intimacy of a thing to itself (Sider 2007, 54), of *one to its parts*, a crucial problem for Soviet experiment and its deeper conceptual lineaments.

To rephrase, even if 'totalitarianism' was empirically hyperbolic, the priority of the whole carried a high conceptual, ethical and political premium in the Soviet Marxist thought and praxis. To go beyond 'mere facticity' (Munn 1986, 4) of totalitarianism, I have described a topology of totalitarianism that confers equivalence to the whole and its parts, the way clay subsumes its fluid pieces (Martino 2010, 147). The topology of totalitarianism, with a propensity to subtend everything into one, conveys an idea that a systemic world of totalitarianism can be found not in fact, but in the effects of its fantasy (Meltzer 2013, 86).

Estrangement and intimacy

In interviews and memoirs, many dissidents recollect a sense of isolation from friends and family during their incarceration and a dependence on dissident networks upon their release. The intimate relations with other dissidents proved to be a lifeline for many. It was not unconditional, as one could be expelled for suspected cooperation with the Soviet security agents, but it was vital for many, especially as many dissidents managed to create unofficial systems of financial and psychological support. On the other hand dissidents were persecuted for their infidelity to the Soviet people; yet upon return from prisons and psychiatric hospitals, many dissidents encountered ostracism and unemployment. The letters they addressed to the Soviet functionaries suggest that, even if they wanted to, former dissidents could not fully reintegrate into the Soviet whole. Hence physical expulsion and immigration became the way out of this internal isolation.

To conclude, I have argued that Soviet totalitarianism was predicated on the value of one, as the primacy of the unity of the many. In this historical scheme of things dissent enacted *estrangement* and thereby subtracted from the whole, while the repressive mechanism reinstated the *intimacy* with the many as the primacy of the abstract whole. As a political coordinate, dissent demarcated an exclusive circle of friendships, kinship and political activists. At the same time the intimate connections among dissidents severed the links with the presumed Soviet peoplehood and concrete people who embraced the value of unity. As dissent engendered estrangement from the ideology and institutions of the Soviet government, it was punished with another kind of estrangement, including a diagnosis of madness, imprisonment and exile.

In the Soviet context, dissent engendered estrangement and intimacy, while political membership also necessitated estrangement and intimacy to a different abstract collectivity, to a different degree. The concurrence of estrangement and intimacy is not specific to Soviet history either; it represents just one way – a lamentably repressive and self-negating one – of reworking the problem of encompassing the diverse many within a totality of one. Thus the above historical narratives point not so much to a tension between estrangement and intimacy, but rather to their forms, scale and intercalations. We are left with a perpetually awkward question of how ‘radical estrangement is compatible with a shared duty’ (Levy 2017, 113) in its intimate political forms.

Notes

- 1 In writing this essay, I have used the archival materials kept in the Archive of Other-Thinking (*inakomyслиye*) of the International Memorial in Moscow (f.163, op.1, d.3,6,9,10,22). It consists of letters of political prisoners and their family members that were passed into different collections of samizdat archives. All personal names have been omitted with the exception of well-known dissident figures such as Gorbanevskaya, Faynberg, Medvedev and Gluzman, among others. I would like to thank Boris Belenkin and Alexei Makarov in the International Memorial in Moscow for their support.
- 2 Originally published and circulated through samizdat in 1970.
- 3 This argument reflects dissidents’ own perceptions of their work as accumulation and dissemination of objective facts and historical information. Some recoiled at any suggestions of theorising their materials. However, many dissidents, especially those of a far-right and nationalist ilk, have transitioned well into contemporary politics and occupy prominent positions in the Russian Duma (c.f. Laruelle 2015). Some dissident strategies and ‘repertoires of contention’ have been recently adopted in street protests and critical analysis of current socio-political events in Russia (Horvath 2015, 582).
- 4 Yurchak appropriately links his concept of *vnye* to M.M. Bakhtin’s formulation of outsidersness, or *vnyenakhodimost*, in the latter’s *Toward the Philosophy of the Act*, written between 1919 and 1921 and first published in the USSR in 1986, after the author’s death. The concept seems to have gained currency among Moscow intellectuals in their discussions of dissidents and today’s protest politics.

- 5 Elsewhere I have discussed a complex genealogy of official and creative Soviet Marxism that was explicitly built on Baruch Spinoza's ideas of the physicality of thought and evolved in parallel with Gilles Deleuze.
- 6 To give the past an anthropological reading, I engage with archival materials, collections of Soviet diaries, texts such as memoirs and compilations of archival documents, Russian and English-language secondary sources and conversations with ageing dissidents, as well as intellectuals and civic activists in Moscow who find dissident history interesting.
- 7 For example, housing, clothing and other practices of centralisation and standardisation that had practical and ideational value.
- 8 Similarly understood as a transcendental humanist principle above and outside the concreteness of a political action.
- 9 People who were denied (*otkaz*) exit visas to migrate from the Soviet Union.
- 10 The impression is that multiple human rights organisations in Soviet Russia and then among Soviet expats protested against the use of psychiatry for political purposes rather than against its systematic abuse of all patients.
- 11 It turned out that this is a sensitive question to raise with surviving dissidents. When I asked a wife of one of the members of a committee against psychiatric abuse in Moscow if she knew how and why KGB differentiated between political dissidents and psychiatric patients, she responded with a scornful 'just because'. By contrast, at a public lecture on dissidents in Moscow in 2018 I joined a group of young professionals (translators, historians and administrative staff at an international organisation) who speculated that Gorbanevskaya was not imprisoned because she was a single mother and Faynberg was tucked away into a psychiatric hospital because he lost his front teeth during the scuffle with the KGB in Red Square.
- 12 The complete study was disseminated through samizdat and sent to Amnesty International in 1977.
- 13 Some dissidents were petrified to meet violently insane inmates. Rooms were shared with other patients. There was no attempt to protect them from each other.
- 14 Most dissidents claimed that their perspective was the only correct way of interpreting the world.
- 15 GARF (State Archive, Moscow), f.10055, op.3, d.421.
- 16 For a personal account of Zhores Medvedev's incarcerations and the efforts to release him, see Medvedev and Medvedev (1974).
- 17 The Soviet example is not unique and it would be unwise to indigenise 'totalitarianism' as a culture-specific perspective and to racialise it as a 'Russian' propensity. In fact the primacy of whole, and its political entailments, had precedents in Russian intellectual and folk theories and history has been an enduring philosophical theme in European, including Soviet, thought, discussed with reference to monism or to non-dualistic, one-world theories of complexity. My intention is to give the well-known empirical events of August 1968 and their broader political and ideational context an anthropological reading.

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