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What is the history of samizdat?*

INTRODUCTION

When the processes that transformed the Soviet Union and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s come to be better understood, a place in that explanation is likely to include a history of samizdat. At this stage it would be premature to ascribe any clear or unambiguous role to the production and distribution of samizdat material. Nevertheless a prima facie case can be made for the role that samizdat played in the circulation of ideas and the constitution and articulation of new political and friendship networks. The extent to which these ideas and the networks which sustained them contributed to the generalized crisis of legitimacy that enveloped the region is at this stage a much more open question. What is clear is that from the mid-1970s the volume of samizdat activity increased in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and that the production, circulation and consumption of samizdat material, in conditions of illegality or semi-legality, involved significant numbers of people in a complex culture of dissent and risk. In the Soviet Union the phenomenon had a much longer history. Following initiatives by the post-Kruschev leadership to circumscribe more tightly the boundaries of personal expression, marked most obviously by the Siniavski–Daniel trial in 1966, the volume of samizdat material in circulation increased.[1]

The reproduction and redistribution of 'western texts', the importation of basic printing and reprographic technologies and the circulation of samizdat material across national borders (including republication and distribution in western Europe and North America) also highlights the extent to which the history of samizdat has an important international and regional dimension.[2] In addition to mapping this geography of samizdat, it will also be important to explain the

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[1] For an early discussion of Siniavski and Daniel see Leopold Labedz and Max Hayward, 'The arrests', *Problems of Communism*, XV, 2 (1966), 65–70 and Abraham Brumberg, 'Traitors in the dock', *Problems of Communism*, XV, 2 (1966), 70–8. Marc Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems 1917–1977* (Oxford, 1977), 376–82, provides a general discussion of Russian samizdat activities from 1955.

[2] The research section of Radio Free Europe played an important role in the collecting and dissemination of samizdat material. Samizdat from the USSR was collected in the Arkhiv Samizdata by the Research Department of the Munich-based Radio Liberty from 1968. The London-based Palach Press Agency, set up and run by Jan Kavan, was an important conduit for samizdat from Czechoslovakia, while from 1978 the Paris-based Magyar Füzetek (Hungarian Notebooks) edited by Péter Kende published Hungarian samizdat.

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differential incidence of samizdat activity by country and over time, the range of responses from political, juridical and policing authorities and the ways in which samizdat was read and used.

Traditionally, samizdat material has attracted three types of interest. First, a concern with the ideas and arguments that appeared in samizdat literature. Second, an interest in the way in which the state responded to the material and those individuals and organizations responsible for its production and distribution. Finally, some work has been undertaken on the linkages between samizdat material and organized forms of opposition and dissent.[3] While these avenues of investigation would figure prominently in any history of samizdat, they remain fragments of a much broader and altogether more complex story. In order to shed some light on how this story might be put together, the first part of this article considers the work of Robert Darnton, focusing in particular on his elaboration of a communications model for investigating the life-cycle of printed books. The second part of the article discusses what samizdat is, how it can best be categorized, who read it and how they read it.

ROBERT DARNTON: THE COMMUNICATION CIRCUIT

For the last twenty-five years Robert Darnton has been involved in a painstaking and exhaustive study of the production, distribution and influence of illegal literature in pre-revolutionary France.[4] His work, stimulated by a broader set of questions regarding the origins of the French Revolution and a particular debate about the reading habits of the French public in the eighteenth century, is part of a growing body of research on the history of books. In the course of his work, Darnton has reflected more generally on the development of what he characterizes as the 'important new discipline' of the history of books. Darnton describes the typical concerns of the discipline as:

> The social and cultural history of communication by print . . . its purpose is to understand how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behaviour of mankind during the last five hundred years.[5]

Such an ambitious project has inevitably generated a host of specialist areas of investigation, ranging from work on the contents of private libraries to the study of neglected genres. For Darnton, the history of books has become so crowded with 'ancillary disciplines' and discrete avenues of investigation that 'one can no longer see its general contours'.[6] In order to remedy this situation, Darnton has developed a general model for analysing the way books come into being and spread through society. The model is premised on the assumption that printed books 'generally pass through roughly the same life-cycle', and importantly Darnton suggests that 'with minor adjustments, it should apply to all periods in the history of the printed book'.[7]

The model, shown in Figure 1, consists of a communication network or circuit which links

[3] F. J. M. Feldbrugge, *Samizdat and Political Dissent in the Soviet Union* (Leyden, 1975). Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shagrin (eds), *The Political, Social and Religious Thought of Russian Samizdat: An Anthology* (Belmont, Mass., 1977). Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (London, 1989). Stanley F. Cohen, *An End To Silence* (New York, 1982).

[4] Robert Darnton, *The Business of the Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France, 1769–1789* (New York, 1995); *The Kiss of Lamourette* (London, 1990); *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London, 1996); *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

[5] Darnton, *The Kiss*, *op.cit.*, 107.

[6] *ibid.*, 110.

[7] *ibid.*, 111–13. Darnton, *The Forbidden*, *op.cit.*, 181–97.

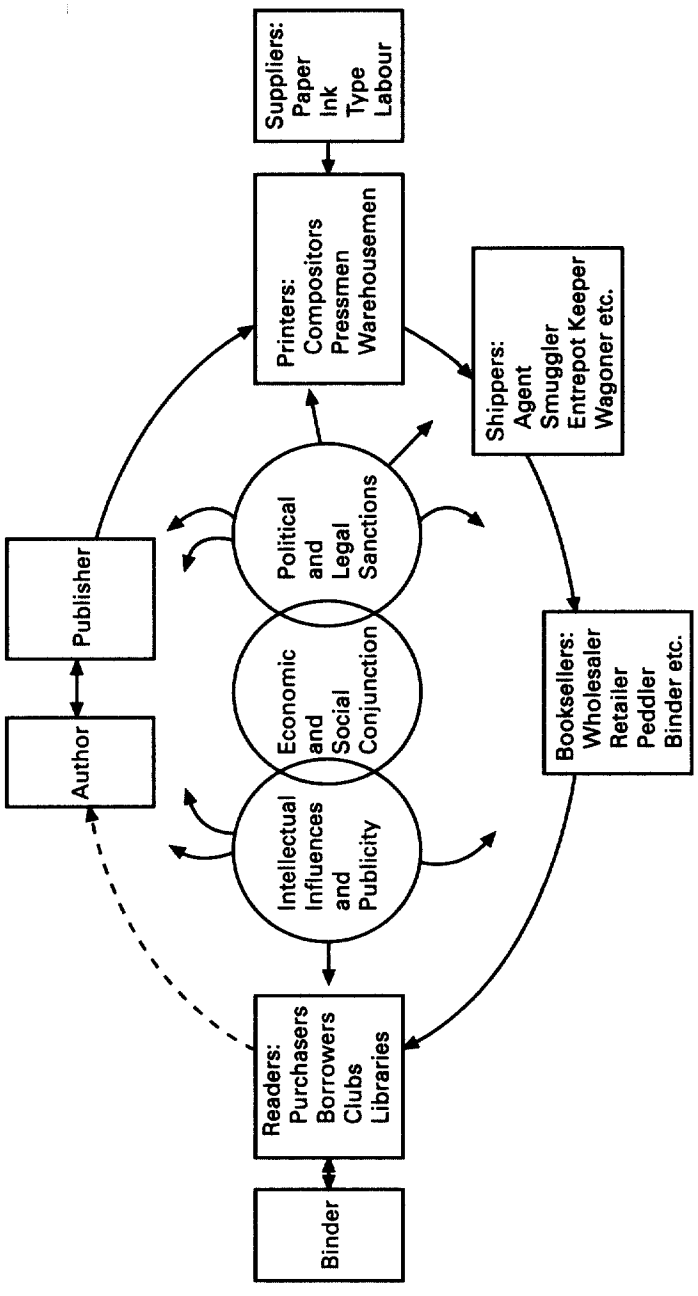

Figure 1. The communication network
Source: R. Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette. Reflections in Cultural History* (New York, 1990), 112.

authors to readers (the outer circuit) and a cluster of broader variables (political/legal sanctions, economic and social conjuncture, intellectual influences and publicity) which impinge upon and shape the operations and culture of the more formal elements in the network.[8]

In so far as Darnton has elaborated on this model, it has tended to be with specific reference to his work on eighteenth-century France; however he has also made two general claims with regard to the investigative procedures that the model suggests. First, the model posits 'the penetration of society by a communication network composed of arteries, veins and capillaries, and that takes account of every stage in the process of production and distribution'.[9] This involves a rejection of any simplistic unilinear diffusionist perspective. Second:

> Instead of assuming a self-sufficient, machine like mode of functioning, the model allows for outside influences at every stage. Authors, publishers, printers, booksellers, librarians and readers constantly modified their behaviour in response to pressure from the state, the Church, the economy, and various social groups.[10]

Finally, and importantly, Darnton offers an extended caution with regard to readers and reading, insisting that 'reading remains the most difficult stage in the cycle to understand'. The problem of the meanings and interpretations that readers construe from texts is compounded for Darnton by a broader set of concerns about the character and making of public opinion. The latter for Darnton involves some attempt to account for the role and influence of rumour, gossip, oral and printed news. Broadly, the strategy that Darnton proposes is one which suggests that the meanings readers take from texts and indeed their choice of texts are shaped and circumscribed by a 'pre-existing cultural frame'.

In firmly rejecting an undetermined concept of reading, Darnton concludes that the real challenge with regard to readers and readings is less a problem of conceptual clarification than the absence of adequate evidence to sustain the empirical research. Acknowledging the plurality of meanings that any given text might sustain is no substitute for providing an account of how texts are read and used, and an understanding of the reference points and frameworks that readers employ to construe meaning and significance from their active relationship with printed material.

With the caveat of the need for flexibility and subtlety that must accompany the application of all models, there is little doubt that Darnton is extremely suggestive. Indeed, an appreciation of the utility of the model grows when read in conjunction with his substantive work on the cultural life of France in the eighteenth century. However, there are aspects of the model which need to be explored in more detail, particularly in the light of Darnton's claim that it can in principle be employed to investigate all periods in the history of printed books.

The first area that requires probing is the relationship between the formal outer circuit of Darnton's model which links author to reader and the cluster of intellectual, social, economic and political variables that constitute the macro-environment within which the communication network operates. There is, it needs to be said, a level of indeterminacy in the way in which Darnton conceptualizes this relationship, and a lack of specificity with respect to the relationships between the constituent parts of the macro-environment. One response to this is to insist that these are largely empirical concerns which cannot a priori be established, let alone resolved

[8] For a discussion of Darnton's model see Thomas Adams and Nicholas Barker, 'A new model for the study of the book' in Nicholas Barker (ed.), *A Potencie Of Life: Books in Society: The Clark Lectures 1986–1987* (London, 1993).

[9] Darnton, *The Forbidden*, *op.cit.*, 182.

[10] *ibid.*, 183–4.

at the conceptual level. But even allowing for this, any investigation will at some point have to suggest a more theorized sense of the macro-environment, the relationships between its constituent parts and the way in which they articulate with the institutions and processes that sustain the production, distribution and consumption of printed material. The general point can be illustrated with reference to Darnton's category of 'political and legal sanctions', an area that is particularly important when dealing with illegal or semi-legal texts. Throughout his work Darnton operates with a non-unitary concept of the state. This is important because any unitary concept of the state would presume that the range of state institutions engaged in the proscription and regulation of illicit material would operate as one, or at least with a degree of consistency. Yet it is clear that at the political, judicial and policing levels, the scope for exercising discretion is considerable. The fact that a particular text has been proscribed does not automatically mean that policing or customs activity increases, or that courts and judges make decisions which reflect, in some simple way, an agreed political agenda. Why and how discretion is exercised is important. It can stem from a political directive, bureaucratic inertia, limited resources or a degree of scepticism regarding the justice or rationality of the matter at hand on the part of those charged with enforcing political and legal directives. It may even stem from a degree of uncertainty as to whether or not texts or activities associated with their production and distribution are illegal.[11] A further consideration is the nature of the legislation that is used to 'censor' and restrict the circulation of printed material and the balance between the use of legal and extra-legal methods.

From the perspective of those engaged in what they understand to be illicit activity, the discretion of the state is experienced in a rather different way. As the extent to which discretion will be exercised remains in most cases unknown, one would reasonably expect activities to be organized on the assumption that sanctions and punishment remain a permanent possibility. Indeed, it is precisely this 'threat' and the uncertainty it creates rather than a consistent application of known political and legal directives that constitutes some of the complexity of the way in which the state rules.[12]

Highlighting some of the issues embedded in Darnton's category of 'political and legal sanctions' helps to illuminate the question of the ways in which these relate to the activities of the 'communications network'. As can be seen from the model, the emphasis is on the ways in which 'political and legal sanctions' circumscribe the environment within which publishers, printers, shippers and booksellers conduct their affairs. What is missing from this is any clear sense that the activities of the 'communications network' influence in any way the broader political and legal environment in which they operate. The relationship is essentially top-down with the 'communications network' conducting its business in an imposed environment. Yet one does not have to endorse some fanciful pluralism to appreciate that, in principle, the activities of the 'communications network' can have effects on the environment within which it operates.

[11] Darnton remarks with reference to France in the eighteenth century that 'The very notion of legality in literature remained fuzzy, because the authorities in charge of the book trade constantly fudged the line that separated the licit from the illicit.' *The Forbidden*, *op.cit.*, 3–4.

[12] This 'threat' can be reinforced by a range of activities that falls short of arrest, prosecution, trial and imprisonment. Such activities would include: 'watching', knowledge or fear of surveillance, knowledge or fear of informers, knowledge and rumours about the treatment of others engaged in similar activities, searches, confiscation of printing equipment and texts, harassment and the harassment of friends and relatives, loss of job, restrictions on travel and so forth.

Recognizing this is particularly important if the purpose of the enquiry is to explore some aspect of the relationship between the circulation and reading of texts and social change. While the challenge will always be to identify and delineate the causal dimensions of this relationship, which may be insignificant or non-existent, its possibility must always be entertained. Having raised some general issues about Darnton's macro-variables and their relationship with the 'communications network', we can now focus in more detail on the network itself.

The first point to note is that the 'network' comprises a series of functions which takes a text from author to reader and a corresponding division of labour. At two points in the circuit denoted by 'printers' and 'readers', a further division of labour is suggested. In principle, of course, this model could be further extrapolated, but given the overall objective of Darnton's model no useful purpose would be served by this exercise. The second point to note is that the linkage between 'readers' and 'authors', which completes the circuit, is indicated by a broken rather than a solid line. There are perhaps two reasons for this. First, it could indicate a general uncertainty about what readers do with books and how, if at all, they communicate with authors. Darnton is not altogether helpful on this, though he does suggest that 'authors respond to readers, reviewers, and other sources of information and inspiration in the surrounding society'.[13] Second, the broken line could indicate that the exchange relationship between 'reader' and 'author' is qualitatively different from those that mediate the exchange relationships in the rest of the circuit. The 'author' is not the direct beneficiary of the purchasing decisions of individual readers, libraries and book clubs. While particularly successful or popular authors might reasonably expect to benefit in some way or other, the benefits, particularly the financial benefits, are mediated by the author/publisher relationship. All of the other exchange relationships in the circuit will involve negotiation – though the scope for this is likely to vary – but all of them are likely to be more direct and less mediated than the reader/author nexus.

The third interesting aspect of the model is the extent to which it can be regarded, albeit with modifications, as universally applicable, or at least capable of illuminating the last five hundred years of the history of books. This is by no means a straightforward question. In suggesting a model that combines a functional division of labour with the specific institutional form that this division of labour took in eighteenth-century France, Darnton is free of the charge that his model is historically specific. If we can broadly agree about the functions, it is a comparatively easy task to identify who or what performs these functions in different places at different times.

There are, however, a range of more interesting questions that can be raised about the general applicability of the model. At a superficial level, it may appear surprising that Darnton, who has spent so many years working on illegal and clandestine literature, should produce a model that is readily adaptable to illuminate the life-cycle of the 'normal' book. However, once it is appreciated that any sustained illegal or semi-legal activity normally requires both an organizational structure and a persuasive economic rationale, the congruence and interconnectedness between the licit and illicit becomes clear. It is apparent from Darnton's work that 'illegality' creates three basic problems for those operating in the mainstream and on the margins of the clandestine. First, it increases the overall level of commercial and physical risk that to some extent is anticipated through costing and pricing decisions. Second, 'illegality' causes some disruption to the flow of information that publishers and booksellers require in order to make informed decisions about what to publish and what to stock. And, finally, 'illegality' constitutes a problem for readers or

[13] Darnton, *The Forbidden*, *op.cit.*, 182.

potential readers in that they have to find a source of illicit material at minimal risk to themselves. Risk, access to information, products, raw materials and any related cost and pricing implications are integral to most commercialized exchange relationships. The strategies adopted by the publishers, booksellers, street-traders and shippers which Darnton documents so thoroughly vary, but in the main they are all intent on minimizing commercial and personal risk. In the majority of cases this is done by operating simultaneously in the legal and illegal sectors of the book trade. This spreading of risk was certainly easier for publishers who in the main were located outside France, beyond the jurisdiction of the French authorities.[14]

The argument so far with regard to the general applicability of Darnton's model is twofold. First, a functional treatment of the division of labour makes it possible to consider its applicability over time and establish the institutional form that the trade takes. Second, legal and illegal manifestations of the book trade share a set of commercial considerations and require equivalent channels of communication and organizational structures.

What happens, though, if the overarching rationale for any moment or period in the history of books is not driven or even strongly informed by commercial considerations? The question is obviously important for the study of samizdat. The first point to make is that the absence of a commercial rationale does not obviate the need to explore the economics of the network of exchanges in the life-cycle of the book. One can speculate that in the absence of a clear commercial rationale there is likely to be a greater diversity of exchange relationships between the constituent parts of the 'communications network'. This could involve gifts, barters, loans, the legal and/or illegal use of resources owned by others, large amounts of 'free' labour as well as monetary transactions in grey and black markets. With regard to monetary transactions, it also seems likely that payments for scarce resources, such as paper, will be in excess of the prevailing 'market' rate. The same argument is likely to hold for paid labour. When samizdat production was heavily dependent on typescript as opposed to more sophisticated reproduction technologies, the going rate for 'samizdat typists' was above normal levels of remuneration. However, we also know that 'payment' could take the form of a copy of the text which in turn had its own exchange value and could be used as a method of payment for services that had no direct relationship with samizdat activities.[15]

The absence of a commercial rationale is also likely to alter the basis on which decisions are made as to what to publish. Clearly there will be a presumption that there is, will be or ought to be a demand for what is published, but the information mechanism that a commercialized market at least in part provides will be absent. One implication of this is that information flows are likely to be more informal, perhaps fed back through the distribution network or constituted and expressed outside the formal 'communications network' altogether. An important corollary of this is that the 'author' is highly unlikely to be motivated by commercial considerations, which in turn opens up the question as to what is it that motivates authors to participate in non-commercialized exchanges and the extent to which they have any choice in the matter. An author could voluntarily donate his or her work because no other publication was available. Alternatively an author might be unaware that his or her work has been

[14] Darnton makes extensive use of the archive of the Sociétié typographique de Neuchâtel, a major supplier to the French market based in Switzerland.

[15] Soviet sailors paid Soviet prostitutes with Russian tamizdat. See D. Pospielovsky, 'From gosizdat to samizdat and tamizdat', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, XX, 1 (1978), 25.

published and a further possibility is where an author makes a conscious decision to publish, rejecting more lucrative opportunities. All of these factors need to be taken into account when considering samizdat authors alongside decisions to write but not to publish ('writing for the drawer'), or only to publish abroad.

The third broad aspect of a non-commercialized trade in printed material concerns the scope and organization of the 'communications network'. It seems reasonable to speculate that it could well be characterized generally by a less fixed or rigid division of labour than is suggested in Darnton's model, particularly with regard to publishing and printing operations. It could also be the case that this looser, more flexible arrangement was combined with a greater complexity of organization and co-ordination with respect to particular functions. There is evidence from the way in which Solidarnosc organized its samizdat activity that, in order to minimize risk, printing took place in numerous locations. This in turn added to the complexity of co-ordinating the printing, collation, collection and distribution of material. One way, perhaps, of characterizing non-commercialized 'communications networks' is to suggest that they display low levels of institutionalization and variable amounts of co-ordination and organization.

Finally, we need to consider what could well be a rather large objection to the applicability of Darnton's model and its associated methodology to the study of samizdat. Darnton is primarily concerned with books as specific material products and the role they play in the genesis and development of political ideas and attitudes. Samizdat, while text based, comes in a variety of forms which includes books but also encompasses newspapers, newsheets, pamphlets, journals, letters, manifestos and so forth. As we shall see, what defines samizdat is its unofficial status rather than questions of genre or the particular form the text takes. This variety and range of forms is important. Books, newspapers and pamphlets are not only read differently, they are linked in distinct ways to particular histories and traditions of expression and communication. In principle these differences and the links between them can be addressed within Darnton's schema, though there is likely to be variation, particularly with respect to the detail of authorship, production and distribution. Finally, we are likely to find that specialist samizdat publishers, such as those dealing with religious material, will distribute material through networks that are constituted prior to, and for reasons other than the distribution of illicit texts.

WHAT IS SAMIZDAT?

According to Telesin, the term samizdat was coined in the late 1950s by a Moscow poet. Samizdat is the acronym for *samesbyaizdat* which translates literally as 'publishing house for oneself'.[16] The poet apparently wrote *samesbyaizdat* on the front of a collection of poems where the publisher's name would normally appear. Apart from capturing a clear sense of what the poet was doing, *samesbyaizdat* and its acronym are a parody of *Gosizdat*, the acronym for the official state publishing house. Initially, then, samizdat referred to the practice of an author publishing him or herself, but subsequent usage has extended this definition to cover all aspects of the production and distribution of 'unofficial' material. The term has also been used retrospectively to characterize earlier forms of the practice evident in both Czarist and post-revolutionary periods. In Russia during the 1920s the practice was referred to as 'Underwood', after the make of typewriter that was used for typing manuscripts. Officially, samizdat activity has

[16] Julius Telesin, 'Inside "*Samizdat*" ', *Encounter*, XL (February 1973), 25.

been defined in a range of forums ranging from trial proceedings and journal articles to private memorandums. In 1969, Major-General Malygin argued that:

> There are also instances when certain politically immature young people commit acts which would not seem to be illegal, but which, in their aggregate, may do great damage to our society. For instance all kinds of manuscript works with ideologically harmful contents have recently begun to circulate. Advice on this activity is received from abroad. And so-called Samizdat comes into being at the direct instigation of Western intelligence and is actively supported by it.[17]

In a similar vein, Andropov when president of the KGB characterized samizdat as 'literature outside censorship' usually 'typed or hand-written manuscript, passed from hand to hand and reproduced on photocopiers and duplicating machines'.[18] Trotsky provides some sense of the similarity between samizdat methods and those of the Left opposition in the 1920s in his description of the fate of his 1927 'Letter to the Bureau of Party History':

> It circulated from hand to hand in the USSR. In hundreds of copies, either retyped or copied by hand. Single copies often inexact, filtered abroad. Translations of them appeared in several languages.[19]

The uncertainty with which Malygin touches on the legal status of samizdat is important. In the Soviet Union, samizdat was prosecuted under Articles 70 and 190–1 of the Criminal Code, with the latter introduced shortly after the Siniavski–Daniel trial. Article 70 requires evidence of anti-Soviet purpose or intent while Article 190–1 requires evidence of 'defamation', 'discreditation', and 'false fabrication'. It is significant, too, that Article 190–1 covers dissemination in oral, written or printed form and makes a distinction between the production and dissemination of material.[20] Following the Soviet lead, most prosecutions of samizdat activities have been conducted under general catch-all legal Articles rather than Articles which specifically prohibit or indeed name samizdat. In addition to these general laws and laws pertaining to the search and confiscation of documents, the Soviet authorities also made use of international copyright rules following their accession to the Geneva Convention in 1973.

Samizdat refers exclusively to the unofficial production and distribution of text-based material in typed, mimeographed, xeroxed or printed form. There were, however, a number of other formats which were used for the reproduction and dissemination of 'unofficial information'. *Radizdat* refers to a range of broadcast materials, including books, talks and news bulletins that were copied, usually from foreign radio stations, onto tape and circulated. *Magnizdat*, derived from the Russian for 'magnetic tape recorder', covered music, verse, speeches and talks that were either copies from the radio or based on live recordings. In addition to these taped formats, the terms *tamizdat* and *kolizdat* denote two subcategories of samizdat. *Kolizdat* refers to publication in quantity. Its usage covers both collections of samizdat material bound together into a single volume and various attempts to enlarge the scale of samizdat publishing by developing subscription-based periodicals. Finally, *tamizdat*, literally 'over-there' publishing,

[17] *ibid.*, 26.

[18] 'The birth of samizdat', *Index on Censorship*, XXIV, 3 (May/June 1995), 62–3.

[19] Quoted in G. Saunders (ed.), *Samizdat: Voices of Soviet Opposition* (New York, 1974), 8.

[20] See Feldbrugge, *Samizdat*, *op.cit.*, 19–25 for a fuller discussion.

refers to material of Soviet origin published abroad and then smuggled back into the Soviet Union.

There are three initial conceptual difficulties with the term samizdat. The first is the fact that it is used to characterize the complete cycle of the production, distribution and reading of illicit material. The second is the idea of the 'illicit' and 'unofficial', which only make sense against a shifting and highly politicized sense of the 'licit' and 'official'. Finally, given that the term samizdat is recent, can it legitimately be employed retrospectively to characterize earlier manifestations of the production and distribution of 'unofficial' material in the Soviet Union and the countries of central and eastern Europe?

In principle, the generic use of the term samizdat to characterize all those activities and practices associated with the production, distribution and reading of 'unofficial' material is not a problem if, following Darnton, it proves possible to identify and characterize the discrete activities associated with each stage of the samizdat cycle. For the purposes of this discussion, four stages can be identified: authorship, production, distribution and reading.

The problematic relationship between the 'official' and the 'unofficial' is exemplified in the Hungarian literature on samizdat which includes references to texts in circulation as state samizdat, official samizdat and semi-legal samizdat. Superficially, state samizdat and official samizdat appear to be contradictions in terms, while the idea of semi-legal samizdat captures reasonably accurately some of the ambiguity and uncertainty that surrounded the status of particular texts. However, the real significance of the qualifying usage of the terms 'state' and 'official' is that they designated important features of the flow and circulation of officially controlled information in Hungary. Usefully, this circulation of official information can be viewed on a continuum from the openly public to the highly restricted and confidential. Within this schema, state and official samizdat referred to officially sanctioned material with a restricted and prescribed circulation. Typically this material which included books, foreign translations, press reports and articles carried the legend 'to be used as manuscript' and was made available to selected members of the intelligentsia and senior party officials. As with any controlled system of information, access to restricted and confidential material both confirmed and denied status and operated as an instrument for co-option and corruption. A less restricted variant of these arrangements, which has also been characterized as state samizdat, covered articles published in officially sanctioned specialist journals or books that reached a limited public.[21]

Significant as these mechanisms were for controlling access to information, providing opportunities for sensitive and controversial issues to be discussed and co-opting critical and semi-dissident voices, they differed in one very important respect from samizdat. All of them were part of an officially controlled system or network of information. Samizdat, on the other hand, is material that is produced and circulated outside this official system of information. Two preliminary comments can be made about this 'line' between the 'official' and the 'unofficial'. First, it is misleading to view this 'line' as somehow fixed or static. While some topics were more or less permanently proscribed, others occupied a much greyer, more ambiguous status. This

[21] György Aczél, a key figure in the development of ideological and cultural policy in Hungary after 1956, provides an interesting example of the 'limited public'. 'We do not regard Kafka as a realist artist . . . yet we publish his works. It is not our intention however to popularize them in vast paperback editions. Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* was also printed in our periodicals and in book form and it was produced in one of our small theatres – but we have not considered presenting it over television.' György Aczél, *Culture and Socialist Democracy* (London, 1975), 171–81.

uncertainty regarding the boundaries was registered most obviously in demands from samizdat activists in some countries for clear legal definitions of acceptable and unacceptable material. Second, there were times when the line between the 'official' and the 'unofficial' appeared to disappear. Examples of the latter would include the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the Prague Spring and Poland for the duration of the legal phase of Solidarnosc. More generally, it seems highly likely that the category of the 'official' expanded considerably, though to differing degrees in different countries, in the years preceding the events of 1989/90.[22]

Finally, the issue of whether it makes sense to deploy the term samizdat retrospectively is dependent to some extent on the nature of the enquiry and also on the country under consideration. Most accounts of the history of uncensored material in the Soviet Union before the 1960s either do not use the term or employ the term 'proto-samizdat'.[23] With regard to Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, samizdat activity in terms of the volume of material produced only becomes significant in the 1970s and 1980s.[24] Within any overall history of samizdat there are clearly good grounds for employing the term to capture and explore similar practices over time, irrespective of when the organizing concept was established. However, the need will always remain to ensure that the practices are indeed 'similar' and to explore with some care the changing contexts within which samizdat was produced.

CATEGORIES OF SAMIZDAT

Most analyses and classifications of samizdat material are based on subject matter, genre and the titles of periodicals, newspapers and serial publications. With the exception of work by prominent authors, little attention has been given to authorship or editorship and no systematic research has taken place on production and distribution networks, readers or the reading of samizdat material. Given its extraordinary diversity, the classification of samizdat material is by no means straightforward. Yet little progress can be made towards an investigation of readers and reading until we can delineate the range of material that was potentially available to readers. If, as seems reasonable, the reading of samizdat material involved judgements of taste and preference as well as the constraints imposed by the difficulties and dangers associated with obtaining material, we need to know what readers were making decisions about. In the early stages of samizdat activity, when the volume of material was negligible, it is possible to speculate that readers read anything they could obtain, but the volume of material increased at such a rate in the 1970s and 1980s that judgements about what to read were increasingly being made. This in turn raises the question of how readers knew what was available. While much of this knowledge was derived from informal networks, social gatherings and organized meetings, publicity was also provided by state institutions, including official and party publications charged with

[22] See György Schöpflin, 'Opposition and paraopposition: critical currents in Hungary, 1968–1978', in Rudolf Tőkés (ed.), *Opposition in Eastern Europe* (London, 1979) for a fuller discussion of 'circuits of information' in Hungary. For discussion of the detailed mechanisms for censoring in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, see György Schöpflin (ed.), *Censorship and Political Communication* (London, 1983).

[23] See Pospielovsky, 'From gosizdat', *op.cit.*, for an example of the latter.

[24] Jan Vladislav provides an interesting insight into the foreign literature circulating unofficially in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, 'people like Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky, Rilke, Babel, not to mention Kafka and Orwell. All of these became part of the samizdat network of unofficial literature in the 1950s.' George Theiner (ed.), *They Shoot Writers Don't They?* (London, 1984), 45.

limiting the influence and appeal of samizdat. What was rare – although a 'samizdat shop' was established in Hungary in 1981 – were generally known places where prospective readers could shop for samizdat.[25]

On the basis of archive and secondary sources, it is possible to compile a preliminary table or list of types of samizdat material.[26] This list aims to be relevant for the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, though some categories figure more prominently in some countries than in others. Literary works, for example, were much more prominent in Soviet samizdat than in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with the possible exception of Czechoslovakia.

1 *Literary works*
(a) Novels
(b) Short stories
(c) Poetry
(d) Plays
(e) Memoirs
(f) Biography and autobiography

2 *Literary works* (translations, including western literature and émigré material)
(a) Novels
(b) Plays
(c) Poetry
(d) Memoirs
(e) Biography and autobiography

3 *News, reports and information bulletins*
(a) Reports and accounts of political events, activities, conferences and meetings
(b) Reports of arrests, persecutions, harassment, interrogations and searches
(c) Reports of trials, sentences and appeal hearings
(d) Reports from places of confinement (prisons, hospitals, camps)
(e) Reports of émigré initiatives and foreign reaction
(f) Violations of human rights
(g) Gossip, rumour and speculation
(h) Relevant foreign material

4 *Open letters, appeals and declarations*
(a) To national governments/Communist Party
(b) To international bodies and organizations
(c) To named individuals
(d) Relevant official communiqués and correspondence

5 *Analytic texts and research findings*
(a) Single/multi-authored books on most subjects

[25] Bill Lomax, 'Samizdat under siege', *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, VI, 1–2 (1983).

[26] Feldbrugge, *Samizdat*, *op.cit.*, 7–15. Telesin, 'Inside', *op.cit.*, 26–7. Wieslawa Kostrzewa-Zorbas and Ronald Bachman, 'The independent press in Poland 1976–1990', Holdings in the European Division Library of Congress. Demszky papers and RFE/ RL Archive, Open Society Archives, Budapest.

(b) Translated books and journal articles
(c) Journals, most subject areas
(d) Commemorative and anniversary collections (events, historical periods and individuals)
(e) Republication of relevant texts (including foreign texts)

6 *Official documents*
(a) International treaties
(b) Declarations, pacts and conventions
(c) Trial transcripts
(d) Court verdicts
(e) Official declarations and pronouncements
(f) Texts of secret orders

7 *Press*
(a) Reviews of official press (particular topics)
(b) Reprints of old newspaper articles
(c) Reprints of articles published abroad
(d) Newspapers

8 *Censored material*
(a) Lists and text of cuts made in official publications
(b) Reprints of relevant official material

9 *Surveys, questionnaires and social conditions*
(a) Attitudinal
(b) Living conditions
(c) Ethnic and national minorities

10 *Individual complaints*
(a) By individuals
(b) By theme
(c) Relevant official correspondence

11 *Religious material*
(a) General treatment of religion
(b) Treatment of specific religious groups and beliefs
(c) Statement of religious belief (Baptists, Lutherans, Russian Orthodox, Catholic, etc.)

12 *Programmes, manifestos and statements from organizations and campaigns*
(including pre-1989 independent political parties and organizations)

13 *Pornography*

14 *Polemics, lampoons and satire*

15 *Reviews and summaries*
(a) Samizdat material
(b) Samizdat material from other countries
(c) Reviews and commentary on samizdat material from official publications

16 *Interviews*

17 *Miscellaneous*
(a) Posters
(b) Cartoons
(c) Stamps

A number of initial points need to be made about this list. First, it does not cover the circulation of samizdat material outside the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, nor does it cover material produced by and circulated within émigré communities. Second, while the list is reasonably comprehensive, the categories should not be viewed as exclusive. Quite a lot of material can be classified under more than one category. Third, the list includes tamizdat, but excludes all 'unofficial material' communicated in non-text formats. In terms of assessing the influence of 'unofficial material' this could prove to be an important limitation because it is highly likely that a much greater number of people listened to rather than read samizdat material. Audiences of between one and two million Hungarian listeners have been estimated for samizdat material broadcast on Radio Free Europe.[27] Finally, no attempt has been made here to quantify the overall volume of material or to indicate the volume of material by category. Once this has been done, there will be a need to estimate the overall number of readers. This is notoriously difficult because, as with any text, but particularly with samizdat, we know that once obtained texts were passed from reader to reader.

READERS

Who were the readers of samizdat? In the absence of systematic research it is generally assumed that the readers of samizdat were largely urban-based intellectuals. More broadly, it has been argued that the growing body of samizdat literature 'became a genuinely alternative public sphere'.[28] Under this interpretation samizdat is viewed as part of a broader culture of dissent, opposition, critique and independent initiatives that developed in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia during the 1970s and 1980s. While the evidence for this and the role played by intellectuals particularly in Hungary and Czechoslovakia is considerable, we need to explore much more fully the likely readership of samizdat and to consider why, when and how this material was read.

In the post-war period, the central European intelligentsia retained a status and a political significance that contrasted sharply with the increasingly marginal position of its continental and Anglo-Saxon counterparts.[29] While the origins of this lie in the leading role that the central European intelligentsia played in the modernizing and nation-building projects of the nineteenth century, it was confirmed and indeed reinforced by the exigencies of Communist Party rule in the post-war period. But as the prominence of intellectuals in the 1956 Hungarian

[27] Rudolf Tőkés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996), 187.

[28] Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (Oxford, 1990), 95, and Skilling, *Samizdat*, *op.cit.*, 157–238.

[29] György Konrad and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (Brighton, 1979). Ivan Szelényi, 'The prospects and limits of the eastern European new class project: an auto-critical reflection on *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*', *Politics and Society*, XV, 2 (1986/87). Janina Frentzel-Zagórska and Krzysztof Zagórski, 'East European intellectuals on the road of dissent: the old prophecy of a new class re-examined', *Politics and Society*, XVII, 1 (1989). Zygmunt Bauman, 'Intellectuals in east-central Europe: continuity and change' in György Schöpflin and Nancy Wood (eds), *In Search of Central Europe* (Cambridge, 1989), 70–90.

Revolution, the Prague Spring and the Polish unrest of the 1960s indicates, the relationship between the intelligentsia and the party-state apparatus contained the potential for a fundamental antagonism over the character and trajectory of the social order. As Bauman has observed, the tensions, conflicts and concordats that inscribed this relationship were essentially 'a domestic affair of the dominant elite, without much affecting the structure of domination as such'.[30] What this misses or understates is the extent to which these temporary disruptions of party rule had sources and a dynamic within the party-state apparatus itself. While it is certainly true in broad terms that the 'structure of domination was reimposed', the terms of these 'reimpositions' involved particular and country-specific 'settlements' between a reconstructed party-state and the local intelligentsia. But in all cases, these 'settlements' maintained the interplay of opposition and mutual dependency that characterized the relationship between intellectuals and communist rule.[31]

Two additional features of the central European intelligentsia are relevant to our concerns. First, as the legitimizing vocabulary of 'socialist societies' shifted from the ideological mode of its initial phases to the instrumental and more pragmatic idioms of its latter phases, state and to a lesser extent party institutions were peopled with a significant layer of highly educated and skilled professionals. Initially this 'technocratic intelligentsia', as it has been characterized, equated position and status maintenance with system maintenance. But given its comparative lack of 'ideological baggage', this strata was in a position to consider pragmatically how its interests could best be maintained in a post-communist order. Second, with the possible exception of Poland, the central European intelligentsia has a remarkably poor record of developing and sustaining links with working-class and popular movements. As Lomax has observed, 'The gut reaction of Central and East European intellectuals to the rise of popular movements has almost always, however, been one of mistrust and fear.'[32] Historically, the overwhelming idiom of the central European intelligentsia, in its critical mode, has either involved an appeal to the universality of intellectual discourse or attempts to modify, reform and humanize communist rule. Latterly, sections of this intelligentsia came to embrace a post-communist agenda couched in liberal-democratic terms. While these developments are important for understanding the range of options explored by intellectuals, they are not our immediate concern.

How, then, does this digression assist us with the task of identifying the potential readers of samizdat? It seems highly likely that samizdat was read and exerted an influence on sections of the party-state apparatus. The technocratic intelligentsia has already been alluded to, but in addition to this stratum, reform-oriented party members are also likely to have taken an interest in samizdat literature. Anecdotal evidence from Hungary confirms the closeness of the relationship between 'dissident intellectuals' and the 'technocratic fraction of the elite':

> As liberalization unfolded, the new elite began to court dissidents. They read the samizdat publications, feeling almost humiliated by their own lack of courage to speak their own minds. A sort of discursive revolution was under way although to begin with the new elite was creating room for the dissenting intelligentsia to grow . . . as they gained respect for the new discourse, a sort of culture of critical discourse began to penetrate the new

[30] Bauman, 'Intellectuals in east-central', *op.cit.*, 86.

[31] In the formulation suggested by Bauman, 'the party had neither eliminated nor devoured the intelligentsia', *ibid.*, 83.

[32] Bill Lomax, 'From death to resurrection: the metamorphosis of power in eastern Europe', *Critique*, XXV (1993), 78.

elite, began to radicalize them, equipped them intellectually in their struggle with the old elite, and increased their frustration with the old ways of ruling society.[33]

There are always dangers in generalizing, particularly from the Hungarian experience where the boundaries between the 'technocracy' and 'dissenting intelligentsia' were highly nuanced. We need to know the scope and significance of these linkages in different countries, the time-period over which they developed and the particular role that samizdat played in sustaining them.

A further strata of the party-state apparatus which we can reasonably anticipate scrutinized samizdat literature was the internal security services in their various guises. While the punishment and harassment of samizdat activists by the security services is well documented in samizdat and official sources, we know very little about the impact that exposure to this material had on those charged with reading it in an official capacity. Official public statements and press coverage that touched on samizdat were apparently rare and overwhelmingly hostile, but this leaves open the question of how material was considered in closed sessions of various committees and forums.[34]

It might seem paradoxical to draw attention to the potential appeal of samizdat to members of the party-state apparatus. But given the number of people who were dependent on its institutions for employment, patronage and preferment and the substantive crisis of legitimacy that characterized its final years, we have to address the mechanisms and processes whereby, at its most simple, people changed their minds. There is, however, a much more obvious category of readers, namely those intellectuals variously described as 'dissenting' and 'oppositional'. It is this strata who were central to the production of samizdat and almost certainly comprised its core readership. Typically, they were 'independent intellectuals' employed in comparatively menial occupations or attached to research institutes and, to a lesser extent, universities. There are, however, important questions to be asked about the extent to which this circle extended to include other professionals in a more broadly defined intelligentsia. While it is reasonable to presume that the majority of samizdat was produced and read in urban settings, we need to understand the role of capital cities and the extent to which other towns and cities generated and sustained their own local samizdat networks. Given a reluctance to use the postal service to distribute samizdat and the differential mobility of intellectuals, we also need to understand the organization and scope of distribution networks between towns and cities. However, as the case of Rural Solidarity demonstrates, there is a danger in presuming that samizdat was solely an urban phenomenon. There is also an assumption that readers of samizdat were adults, although given the evidence that we have about the growing exposure of students and young people to various manifestations of North American and West European culture throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there are also questions to be asked about the generational readership of samizdat.[35]

Two further categories require consideration. The first of these is the industrial working class, the second encompasses various categories of agricultural worker. In both cases, it seems to be the case that preparedness to read samizdat was heavily dependent on the broader political

[33] Ivan and Balazs Szelényi, 'Why socialism failed: towards a theory of system breakdown – causes of disintegration of East European state socialism', *Theory and Society*, XXIII (1994), 227–8.

[34] For Janos Kadár's intemperate reaction to the Haraszti trial in Hungary see Tőkés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution*, *op.cit.*, 172–3.

[35] The Movement for the Defence of Human Rights and Civil Rights (ROPCiO) in Poland published the journal *Bratniak* for young people.

environment. The argument can be illustrated by considering *Robotnik* (*The Worker*), a KSS–'KOR' newspaper first published in September 1977 and designed to 'inform and educate workers and to serve as a tool for organizing workers' cells'.[36] The first issue of four pages had a print run of four hundred. In 1980, seventy thousand issues of *Robotnik* No. 60 were published. Distributed outside factories and churches and with an estimated readership of three per copy, *Robotnik* had the highest circulation of any samizdat publication in Poland prior to the formation of Solidarity. Some sense of the composition of the readership can be established from the distribution points and signatories to the 'Charter of Workers' Rights' published in *Robotnik* No. 35 in August/December 1979. The charter that anticipated many of the twenty-one demands which formed the basis for the Gdansk negotiations the following year secured around one hundred signatures. Of these, the majority were skilled workers and technicians.[37] The figure is significant, particularly in view of the fact that signatories included their names and home address and that many of them signed on behalf of workplaces and groups of workers. Poland in the late 1970s also provides examples of samizdat newspapers and journals produced for peasants and rural workers.[38]

Poland was unique in central and eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s in the extent to which urban and rural workers were actively engaged in challenging the authority of the state. It is without doubt this level of activity that helps to explain the composition of samizdat readership in Poland prior to the Gdansk negotiations and the formation of Solidarity. It is significant, too, that there is little evidence from either Hungary or Czechoslovakia of comparable levels of samizdat readership among industrial and agricultural workers in the 1970s.

In addition to establishing the composition of readers by country, we need to explore the implications of the regional and international circuits of samizdat. What we are likely to find is that regional and international samizdat networks were based on both new and longer established links between individuals, groups and organizations. The regional linkages within central and eastern Europe were characteristically based on the common purpose and mutual support of samizdat activists based in different countries. With regard to western Europe and North America, émigré, exile, political and journalistic networks seem to have operated as conduits for samizdat material. In addition, there remains the exceedingly murky presence of the intelligence services to take into consideration and, more generally, the role of western organizations and agencies in providing financial and other forms of support for samizdat activity. The routes that samizdat followed suggest distinct though almost certainly overlapping readerships. Typically, samizdat was published in the West either by academic presses, political and campaigning organizations, specialist journals or publishing houses set up by émigré groups. The only general exception to this were samizdat literary texts, particularly novels and to a lesser extent plays and poetry, which found their way onto the lists of mainstream and specialist literary publishers.

What the above confirms is that the readership of samizdat was not homogeneous. One important implication of this is that different communities of samizdat readers are likely to have

[36] Michael Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland* (New York, 1993), 160.

[37] The full text of the charter, signatories and addresses can be found in Jan Jósef Lipski, *KOR Workers' Defence Committee in Poland 1976–1981* (Berkeley, 1985), 492–500.

[38] *Gospodarz* (*The Farmer*) first appeared in 1977, *Niezalezny Ruch Chlopski* (*Independent Peasant Movement*) was first published in 1978 and *Placówka* (*The Outpost*) was launched by KSS–'KOR' in 1979.

read different types of samizdat material.[39] Of equal importance is the extent to which the same material was read and interpreted differently by different readerships.

READING

How, then, was samizdat read? Given the scope of this question only a few general lines of enquiry will be suggested. Samizdat was read alongside official texts and it seems highly likely that readers were well aware of the differences between the two. While I have indicated earlier that there were areas of 'greyness', the boundaries between the 'official' and the 'unofficial' were discernible. Although somewhat dependent on category and genre, there has to be a presumption that readers regarded samizdat as more reliable and more accurate than official material. This is particularly important with regard to those categories of samizdat that constituted in effect an alternative news and information service. Samizdat readers were also more likely to read official material critically. Official material, most obviously newspapers and public pronouncements, were read in the knowledge that they were 'official' and with an awareness of their overall purpose and rationale. Darnton, in a recent discussion of how East Germans read 'official' material, has argued that:

> The East Germans not only read between the lines; they also controlled the meanings of the blank spaces. They read critically, aggressively, with a combination of sophistication and alienation unimaginable in the West, even among our hardiest deconstructors . . . everyone learned to look at official messages sceptically, even those who did nothing more than switch back and forth between East and West German broadcasts on their television sets.[40]

What this suggests is the need to think through the relationships that readers had with 'official' and 'unofficial' material and to consider how these relationships informed the overall sense that readers made of what they read. As has been argued above, the categories of 'official' and 'unofficial' only make sense in relation to each other. Neither of them existed in isolation and readers were likely to be crucially aware of this. This general point is important for another reason. The 'official' in central and eastern Europe remained a somewhat unstable category in the sense that its content could shift and change over time. These shifts were often highly nuanced, but they were reflected in changes of tone, emphasis and the language of official publications. We need to know the extent to which the decoding of these 'official' shifts was related in any way to an exposure to samizdat texts. There exists here the possibility of a kind of hidden dialogue that took place behind the back of the overt hostility of the state towards samizdat publishers and their readers.

In conclusion, there are two further aspects of reading that require consideration. The first concerns the role of the social in reading and the second relates to the broader political context within which samizdat was read. We know particularly from the Russian and Polish evidence that samizdat material was produced to assist with the task of mobilizing and organizing political opposition and to give a voice to particular groups and interests. However, it also seems likely that a large number of samizdat readers were passive in the sense that they did not

[39] The term 'communities of readers' comes from Robert Chartier, *The Order of Books* (Cambridge, 1994), 1–23.

[40] Robert Darnton, 'Censorship, a comparative view: France 1789–East Germany, 1989', *Representations*, XLIX (Winter 1995), 57–8.

combine their readership of samizdat with any overt involvement in 'dissenting' or 'oppositional' activities. Given the enormous diversity of samizdat, the reading of particular types of material could stem from interests and enthusiasms that had little or no direct relationship with challenges to the authority and legitimacy of the state. Certainly, this type of reading was 'politicized' if for no other reason than that of the difficulty and risk attached to obtaining and possessing texts. But what is being registered here is a relationship between reader and text which is markedly different from those where 'reading' was linked to more public and visible forms of disapproval and dissent. Nevertheless, there was an important social dimension to the essentially 'private' reading of samizdat material. For what it provided were opportunities for conversations and dialogues to take place on topics and themes that could not easily be discussed openly in workplaces or homes. In an important sense, these conversations were 'free' in the sense that they did not have to employ the codes and euphemisms of everyday life. A further dimension to this social reading is the extent to which different ways of reading, most obviously reading aloud, which has largely disappeared from the contemporary world, were reinstated when people came together to consider samizdat texts.[41]

Turning to the broader political context within which samizdat was read, there is a real danger in presuming that the very existence of samizdat was indicative of an official though unspoken policy of liberalization, a licence for the public expression of a much greater diversity of opinions and views. The danger is even greater when some easy causal linkages are drawn between the dramatic events of the late 1980s and the myriad dissenting and oppositional initiatives that developed from the 1970s onwards. While samizdat was certainly part of this broad culture of resistance which sought in its affirmative and strategic mode to establish a 'public sphere' and a new basis for constituting legitimate political authority, it is fanciful to presume that samizdat was tolerated in any simple sense. There was toleration and even dialogue, but there was also harassment, surveillance and punishment. What faced samizdat publishers and readers, particularly in the 1980s, throughout central and eastern Europe, were political leaderships who, in an important sense, had lost both the ability and in some cases the willingness to rule. It was this climate of uncertainty, danger and risk that constituted the environment within which the business of samizdat was conducted. The challenge for any comprehensive history of samizdat is to establish the role that samizdat played in this decisive historical moment.

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[41] For a general discussion of 'reading aloud' see Chartier, *The Order of Books*, *op.cit.*, 1–23. Variants of 'reading aloud' would include recitation, a practice located in oral rather than written traditions of resistance and dissent.