

EDITH W. CLOWES

Russian Experimental Fiction

Resisting Ideology After Utopia



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RESISTING IDEOLOGY

AFTER UTOPIA

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EDITH W. CLOWES

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

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TO CRAIG, SAM, AND NED

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* Preface and Acknowledgments *

THIS BOOK explores the challenge that literary play poses to ideological fixation. Since the death of Stalin experimental fiction has been more openly contested and its authors more severely punished than so-called realist fiction and its authors. Beginning with the experiments of Abram Terts (Andrei Siniavsky) and Nikolai Arzhak (Iuly Daniel) in the late 1950s, Soviet courts, censors, and editorial boards put ludic art on trial and then consistently kept it off the printed page. Clearly this kind of art offers more than the vacuous aestheticism that its critics have seen in it.

The focal point of this study is a considerable body of fiction that responds to the heritage of utopian thought and conceives of contemporary Soviet reality ironically, in terms of a realized utopia. It spans the post-Stalinist period, starting with Terts's "What Is Socialist Realism?" in 1959 and concluding with stories by Liudmila Petrushevskaja and Aleksandr Kabakov of the late 1980s. Included in this discussion are, among others, Terts's *Liubimov*, Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow-Petushki*, Aleksandr Zinoviev's *Yawning Heights*, Vladimir Voinovich's *Moscow 2042*, *The Ugly Swans* by the Strugatsky brothers, and Vasily Aksënov's *The Island of Crimea*. All of these works deal centrally with the question of social imagination: how alternative worlds are framed and what impact they have on our perception of social "reality" and our behavior in society. I have used the term *meta-utopian* to describe this fiction. My definition includes that of Saul Morson in *The Boundaries of Genre*, that is, a form of literary play involving parody of parody, but it probes beyond this purely formal aspect to questions of social mentality. The term *meta-utopian* is meant to signal an ideological and imaginative scope quite different from that of traditional utopian, dystopian, anti-utopian, and counterutopian fiction. If metaphysics traditionally takes as its problem the prime causes of the physical, material world, so the meta-utopian imagination searches out the linguistic, psychological, and political structures that inform the process of generating and realizing social dreams. Skeptical toward all distinct valences of utopian writing, it entertains a variety of utopian scenarios and seeks to expose their common, underlying motivations and assumptions.

Among the key elements of dogmatic thinking that meta-utopian writing probes is a simple binary system of values, an “either/or,” “we/they” mentality that informs much Russian utopian thinking and certainly Marxism-Leninism. Revealing the essentially similar mindset behind the two aesthetic opponents, Socialist Realism and post-Stalinist critical realism—with their competing ideologies of Marxism-Leninism and conservative, Russian nationalism—meta-utopias show the even stronger hostility of both to aesthetic play and social critique. By pointing out the poverty of existing social scripts available in contemporary Russian culture, these works at least implicitly open a middle ground for greater ideological complexity.

My study is divided into three parts. The first part provides a theoretical and historical framework for understanding meta-utopian experiments and their importance for Russian culture. The second is a structural analysis of meta-utopian fictions, how they interrogate narrative forms, language use, and concepts of space and time to uncover the valuative structures inherent in them. The third part provides an examination of the “implied reader,” the reader projected in the text, and how experimental writers carry out an implicit claim to refine their readers’ aesthetic, social, and political sensibilities.

The subject of this book bears an important, if not immediately obvious, relationship to the rethinking of utopia in Western culture that has accompanied the quincentenary of Columbus’s discovery/invention of the New World. It is obvious to everyone that the communist world has collapsed, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the Western world also faces a crisis of social and political imagination. If the celebration of Columbus makes us wonder about the reality of the imagined and constructed *geography* of the New World, this same year of 1992 highlights a key juncture in Russian Orthodox *eschatology*. The year 1992, strange as it may sound, is the quincentenary of the apocalypse, the end of the world according to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Around the year 1492 social-political images took hold, in both East and West, that were to resonate throughout the modern era. Just as the idea of the New World gave a rationale for westward voyages and legitimacy to the often brutal conquest, colonization, and enslavement of native populations to the south and west, so the ancient “Legend of the White Cowl” and the image of Moscow as the Third Rome fed a Russian, messianic idea of nationhood that, in turn, justified imperial expansion to the south and east. Russia was to be the salvation of the world.

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Perhaps it is not surprising that both Russian and Western utopian ideas have been severely challenged, if not discredited, five hundred years, almost to the year, after their symbolic inception. The most recent expression of Russian messianism, the Soviet state, caved in at much the same time that the "New World," and particularly the United States, is wondering exactly *who* Columbus was and *what* "world" he "discovered." Eastern and Western utopian visions have sparred against one another for as long as they have existed, each serving more or less intensely as the binary opposite against which the other defined itself. Now, in the ashes of the cold war, both "Russia" and the "New World" are confronted with ideological emptiness, the question of what they really are and to what purpose they exist.

Meta-utopian fiction, along with the Russian apartment art movement, conceptualist art, and much experimental poetry and theater of the 1970s and 1980s, is part of a broad cultural groundswell that focuses on ideological petrification and challenges Soviet orthodoxy at every point. Obviously there are many examples of cultural texts that combine aesthetic experiment and ideological critique that do not receive attention here. For example, some readers may miss discussion of other experimental narratives, such as Sokolov's *Palisandriia* or Bitov's *Pushkin House*, that parody dogma. These and many other fictions are not included because they do not engage in utopian discourse. But while this book does not offer a comprehensive historical treatment of the Soviet underground, it is hoped that its interpretive framework deals fully enough with the relationship between aesthetic experiment and ideological critique to offer an approach to other kinds of texts.

I wish to thank the people who encouraged this project along the way. Ellen Chances spent hours discussing utopian ideas and recent Soviet literature with me and provided valuable information about the contemporary scene. Jay West and Bernice Rosenthal commented on various versions of the manuscript. Deming Brown, Natalia Ivanova, Thomas Lahusen, Nadia Peterson, Laura Beraha, David Bethea, Svetlana Boym, and Boris Gasparov variously lent materials and critical sense. Colleagues at Purdue University, Jay Rosellini, Zina Breschinsky, Djelal Kadir, Floyd Merrill, Cal Schrag, Larry May, Marilyn Friedman, and Leonard Harris were generous with discussion, comments, and questions. I particularly want to thank my students from the seminar "Utopia and Modernity" who gave me an education

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

in non-Russian utopian discourse, from Che Guevara to Ronald Reagan.

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I am grateful to the editors and publisher of *The Russian Review* for permission to use material that first appeared in that publication.

* *Note on Transliteration and Translation* *

THE SYSTEM of transliteration used throughout this book is Thomas Shaw's System II. To make the text easier to read, however, I have made a few modifications. Although Russian titles of written works are transliterated according to System II, names of people are altered. All diacritical marks are omitted. Names ending in *-ii* have been shortened to end in *-y*, as in Gorky or Siniavsky. For the sake of correct pronunciation I have chosen to write the last name Zinov'ev as Zinoviev. To convey the sound *yo*, I have used *ë*, as in Lënia Tikhomirov.

Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own.

* *List of Abbreviations* *

P RIMARY WORKS analyzed will be cited in the text by the relevant abbreviation and page number. In the text, the first date given in parentheses after the title of a work is the date of writing or of first publication. If a second date is given, it is the date of first publication in the Soviet Union.

- CC Arkadii Strugatskii and Boris Strugatskii, "Grad obrechennyi," *Neva*, no. 9 (1988): 64–117; no. 10 (1988): 86–128. No translation is available.
- D Aleksandr Kabakov, "Nevozvrashchenets," *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 6 (1989): 150–75. Translated as *No Return*, ed. D. Stumpf, trans. T. Whitney (New York: Morrow, 1990). Citations are from the original. In the text, I have translated the title as "The Deserter."
- IC Vasilii Aksënov, *Ostrov Krym* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981). Citations are from *The Island of Crimea*, trans. M. H. Heim (New York: Vintage, 1984).
- L Abram Terts (Andrei Siniavskii), *Liubimov*, in *Tsena metafory ili prestuplenie i nakazanie Siniavskogo i Danielia*, ed. L. S. Eremina (Moscow: Kniga, 1989), 336–424. Translated as *The Makepeace Experiment*, trans. M. Harari (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1989). Citations are from the original. In the text, I have used the title *Liubimov*.
- M Vladimir Voinovich, *Moskva 2042* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1987). Translated as *Moscow 2042*, trans. R. Lourie (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1990). Citations are from the original.
- MP Venedikt Erofeev, *Moskva-Petushki* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1977). Translated as *Moscow to the End of the Line*, trans. H. W. Tjalsma (New York: Taplinger, 1980). Citations are from the original. In the text, I have translated the title as *Moscow-Petushki*.
- MS Nikolai Arzhak (Iulii Daniel'), *Govorit Moskva* (New York: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1966). Translated as "This Is Moscow Speaking," in *This Is Moscow Speaking, and Other Stories*, trans. S. Hood, H. Shukman, and J. Richardson

ABBREVIATIONS

- (London: Collins, 1968). Citations are from the original. In the text, I have translated the title as *Moscow Speaking*.
- NR Liudmila Petrushevskiaia, "Novye Robinzony," *Novyi mir*, no. 8 (1989): 166–72. No translation is available.
- PM Vladimir Tendriakov, "Pokushenie na mirazhi," *Novyi mir*, no. 4 (1987): 59–116; no. 5 (1987): 89–164. No translation is available.
- RB Fazil' Iskander, *Kroliki i udavy* (Moscow: Knizhnaia palata, 1988). Translated as *Rabbits and Boa Constrictors*, trans. R. E. Peterson (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1989). Citations are from the original.
- RF Aleksandr Zinov'ev, *Svetloe budushchee* (Lausanne: L'age d'homme, 1978). Citations, except where noted, are taken from *The Radiant Future*, trans. G. Clough (London: The Bodley Head, 1981).
- SR Abram Terts (Andrei Siniavskii), "Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm?" in *Tsena metafor ili prestuplenie i nakazanie Siniavskogo i Danielia*, ed. L. S. Eremina (Moscow: Kniga, 1989), 425–59. Citations are from "On Socialist Realism," in *"The Trial Begins" and "On Socialist Realism"*, trans. G. Dennis (New York: Vintage, 1960), 147–219.
- US Arkadii Strugatskii and Boris Strugatskii, *Gadkie lebedi* (Frankfurt: Posev, 1972). Citations are from *The Ugly Swans*, trans. A. Nakhimovsky and A. S. Nakhimovsky (New York: Macmillan, 1979).
- YH Aleksandr Zinov'ev, *Ziiaiushchie vysoty* (Lausanne: L'age d'homme, 1976). Translated as *The Yawning Heights*, trans. G. Clough (New York: Random House, 1979). Citations are from the original.

PART ONE

EXPERIMENTAL FICTION AGAINST
IDEOLOGICAL FIXATION

*

Meta-utopian Writing

THE PROBLEM OF UTOPIA

AS IDEOLOGY

IN THE SHORT period since 1987 when Gorbachev made his speech about filling in the “blank passages” of Soviet Russian history, Russian intellectuals have confronted a serious crisis of social imagination. While it is clear that the old monopolistic, authoritarian communist ideology is in retreat, many people, and not just the old hardliners, fear that the absence of an authoritarian hierarchy portends an apocalypse, the onslaught of complete political and economic disorder. On the other hand, particularly since the failed coup of August 1991, a significant number of citizens have proved that they are probing some wholly different notion of social-cultural discourse, rejecting the mental sphere that limited them to the two extremes of authority and anarchy. Instead, they are proceeding from the assumption that some negotiated middle ground of compromise and common interest is preferable to either extreme, that one can achieve a better society through communication between radically differing interests—in short, through a notion of consensus.

Literary life, as manifested in both the literary press and fiction currently being published and discussed, has played a crucial role in articulating a new mentality. Early on, experimental fiction and ideological critique burst onto the center stage of literary-intellectual discussion to tear down what credibility party centralism still enjoyed. We have only to consider the publication and broad discussions of Tolstaia's, Narbikova's, and Popov's “anti-ideologizing” fiction, the first Soviet publication of ideologically heretical, modernist “classics,” such as Zamiatin's *We*, Nabokov's oeuvre, Kafka's *The Castle*, the current interest in Western antiauthoritarian modes of thinking, such as that illustrated by the concept of “deconstructionism.”¹

¹ Galina Belaia, *Zatonuvshaiia Atlantida*, Biblioteka “Ogonek,” vol. 14 (Moscow: Ogonek, 1991), 42. Belaia maintains that what has been called the “other prose” rejects “any violent ideologization of content.” On deconstructionist theories, see, for

During the first two or three years of glasnost these literary events bolstered the debate about the merits of Marxism-Leninism and the historical exposés of the Civil War era implicating Lenin in the later formation of Stalinist totalitarianism.

One of the central issues in the literary debate has been the question of utopia and the relationship between the different uses of utopia: as fictional experiment, as ideological construct, and as social practice. The appearance of the modernist "dystopian" novels of Zamiatin, Platonov, and Orwell has aroused heated discussion about the importance of "alternative," experimental fiction as a needed challenge to established ideology, a kind of "warning" about dogmatism.² The present study is about a more recent body of fiction, written in the underground since Stalin's death, that is of possibly even greater importance to the process of imagining and articulating kinds of social consciousness other than the authoritarian ones traditional in Russian life. This fiction can be called "meta-utopian" since it is positioned on the borders of the utopian tradition and yet mediates between a variety of utopian modes.³ Spawned as it was in the underground of the post-Stalinist years, meta-utopian fiction represents a much greater immediate challenge to current leaders, whether of communist or any other political stripe, than dystopian novels do. It is clearly not by chance that some of its most radical exemplars, for example, Zinoviev's *The Yawning Heights*, Siniavsky-Terts's *Liubimov*, and Voinovich's *Moscow 2042*, are only just becoming available now in the early 1990s. They are important, if hidden and unacknowledged, pathbreakers to the seeming transformation of mentality that we now witness.⁴ Unlike their dystopian predecessors, they fit as part of this postcommunist time and its ideologically fragmented cul-

example, A. A. Griakalov and Iu. Iu. Dorokhov, "Ot strukturalizma k dekonstruktsii (zapadnye esteticheskie teorii 70-80-kh godov XX veka)," *Russkaia literatura*, no. 1 (1990), 236-49.

² See, for example, V. Lakshin's introduction to the first Soviet Russian printing of We: "Antiotopiia' Evgeniia Zamiatina," *Znamia*, no. 4 (1988): 128.

³ I take the term *meta-utopia* from Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (1981; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, n.d.), 146. While Morson uses the term as a generic category, I have used it here to refer to a social consciousness involving social and cultural pluralism.

⁴ For some recent discussions of their importance see N. Azhgikhina, "Vozvrashchenie Siniavskogo i Danielia," *Oktiabr'*, no. 8 (1990): 203-5; Karl Kantor, "Siiiaiuschaia vysota slovesnosti," *Oktiabr'*, no. 1 (1991): 30-35.

ture: through them the cultural soil that produced a phenomenon like glasnost becomes more palpable.

This writing "about utopia," with its penetrating insight into utopian modes of thinking, is a powerful stimulus to those seeking social and political alternatives to a long-standing authoritarian culture. Mikhail Suslov, the Soviet Union's chief ideologue of the post-Stalinist era, thought Zinoviev an enemy of Soviet power more terrible even than that longtime moral counterweight to the Soviet regime Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. According to an old friend of Zinoviev, Karl Kantor, Suslov reasoned thus: "While Solzhenitsyn revealed the secret of the horrors of the GULAG [the concentration camps], Zinoviev pictured normal, everyday life outside the GULAG as the kind of life in which the GULAG would fit naturally, at least at the stage of the birth and development of 'real communism.'"⁵ By contrast, those meta-utopian works that have become available enjoy tremendous popularity. The most recent meta-utopian narratives, Petrushevskai's "The New Robinsons" and Kabakov's "The Deserter," have been hailed as best-sellers and are counted among the most important fiction of the glasnost period. Here, too, some critics have compared these works to those of Solzhenitsyn as a measure of their overwhelming significance for their time.⁶

In the following discussion my chief concern is to examine how experiment with literary style and narrative form relates to the deeper cultural-ideological problem of the reinvigoration and reframing of social imagination. The major question here concerns the function of such fiction vis-à-vis existing ideological frameworks. Does it, like traditional utopian narratives, offer a single, "progressive" alternative to the existing social and political system? Like counterutopian visions, does it provide a nostalgic revision of some past age? Or instead, like anti-utopian or dystopian writing, does meta-utopian fiction deconstruct utopian schemes, only then to abandon the notion of a beneficial social imagination? Or, and I believe this to be the closest to the truth, does meta-utopian fiction take note of the proliferation of these different social attitudes, standing on the interface of dominant utopian ideologies, juxtaposing them, revealing the hidden similarities behind their more obvious, mutually adversarial

⁵ Kantor, "Siiaushchaia vysota," 34.

⁶ Andrei Vasil'evskii, "Opyty zanimatel'noi futuro(eskhato)logii, II," *Novyi mir*, no. 5 (1990): 258–62. Belaia sees Solzhenitsyn's epic novels as the inheritors of a tradition of "authoritarian art" that the new avant-garde rejects. See *Zatonuvshaia Atlantida*, 42.

programs, thus opening a neutral space that permits the emergence of other possible patterns of social practice? The term *meta-utopian* best emphasizes this challenge not just to one kind of utopia but to a whole array of social constructs available in the Russian heritage.

My conceptualization of meta-utopian art builds on a project undertaken in the 1970s by the French literary scholar Paul Ricoeur to make more of “utopia” than merely a bastard literary-rhetorical genre, an artistically uninteresting form of social fantasy.⁷ To achieve his goal Ricoeur recalled the efforts of Karl Mannheim in his book *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) to put the two notions of ideology and utopia into some conceptual relationship and thereby to salvage each from the flatness of a single, unchallenged social consciousness. Ideology and utopia, according to Mannheim, are the two major vehicles by which we model reality (which we can never know or evaluate in and of itself). As kinds of divergence from social reality, ideology and utopia offer competing formulations and evaluations of a perception broadly accepted as “reality.” Each becomes more than opaque false consciousness in its resistance to the other. Ricoeur adds to this scenario his own concerns with the two terms as kinds of imagination that can interact with each other and with social reality in productive (or what he calls “constitutive”) as well as reactive, nonproductive (or “pathological”) ways. Each taken by itself, Ricoeur argues, can only provide a destructive model of reality: ideology tends to “fix” reality in a symbolic prison, some immutable form, while utopia tends to “escape” from reality into imaginative anarchy. In Ricoeur’s view, the two function best if they partake in dialogue, in which ideology productively legitimizes a certain view of reality and utopia modifies and reanimates that view by challenging and subverting it. Utopia, as a form of irony or satire, points out the credibility gap normally filled by ideology between the rulers’ claim to power and the willingness of the citizenry to accept that claim.⁸

While Ricoeur’s project is plausible and useful in its effort to give greater conceptual weight to utopia and to put it into a functional context, I see several problems with it. One is his opinion that ideology and utopia are qualitatively different. Both are sociopolitical constructs that legitimize some collective configuration, allocate power, define notions of justice, freedom, happiness, and so forth. The dif-

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. G. H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁸ Ibid. See especially pp. 298–303.

ference, it seems to me, has more to do with the relationship of the theoretical construct to an existing power base.

Another problem has to do with Ricoeur's positive valuation of what he calls "constitutive" thinking and almost wholly negative valuation of "pathologies." The one cannot exist without the other. As should be clear from the Soviet case study offered here, the constitutive element cannot become active until a pathology has been "diagnosed." New social options do not become thinkable until the familiar stagnation of Stalinist society and the knee-jerk reaction, the urge to escape, have both been acknowledged, contemplated, and evaluated.

Ricoeur has an overly optimistic view of utopia as a qualitatively new form of consciousness. He ignores an important element of the pathological side of utopia, that is, its hidden and sometimes destructive rehearsal of existing structures and archetypes of oppression. For example, in many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century utopias, from Saint-Simon to the Russian Godbuilders, church dogma, hierarchy, and ritual are reanimated under the avowedly antireligious guise of rational, political faith or revolutionary passion.

A final problem is related to the supposed innovativeness of utopian thinking. It concerns the problem of language and consciousness in utopian schemes and the status of utopian writing as literature. Almost without exception, from Fourier to Chernyshevsky to Gorky (to Hitler and Stalin), utopians seem linguistically creative, coining new words and concepts, but their style in general tends to be, at best, sterile and derivative and, at worst, hackneyed and full of kitsch. Gorky's coinage of "Godbuilding" (*bogostroitel'stvo*), for example, is rooted in Dostoevsky's "Godman" (*bogochelovek*), Solovyov's idea of "Godmanhood" (*bogochelovechestvo*), and, later, the symbolists' concept of "Godseeking" (*bogoiskatel'stvo*).⁹ Moreover, Gorky's most fervent utopian statements are couched in a cloying, kitschy style and form that certainly sabotage whatever ideas and plans for social renewal that he may have had.¹⁰ Utopians' ability to call forth a plausible, truly new social order is circumscribed in part by their typically inadequate use of language.

⁹ Jutta Scherrer, *Die Petersburger Religiös-Philosophischen Vereinigungen* (Berlin-Wiesbaden: O. Harrasowitz, 1973), 310–12; Raimund Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo bei Gor'kij und Lunačarskij bis 1909* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1982), 21–23.

¹⁰ See, for example, Gor'kii's "Chelovek" from 1904.

Despite the reservations we have mentioned, Ricoeur's idea of relating ideology and utopia as imaginative, ideational adversaries suggests a context for understanding the role of meta-utopian writing as a challenge to the Soviet social imagination. In the nineteenth century the two kinds of construct, ideology and utopia, were clearly divided: "ideology" represented the values of that social group presently in a position of power and privilege, and "utopia" provided an imaginative design for a better future society. When utopia was put into practice at all, for example, in France or in New England, it was only on the level of a very small, voluntary community of like-minded people in the role of alternative or adversary to legitimized power on the broader social scale.¹¹

In twentieth-century totalitarianism, and particularly in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, ideology and utopia lost their fruitful, adversarial relationship and became one and the same in a fusion of the traditional characteristics of each. Like traditional "ideology," this new construct legitimized an existing power structure. And like ideology, this ruling vision disclaimed labels such as *ideology* or *utopia* that implied false consciousness and, preferring the epithet *scientific*, insisted on its ability to represent reality accurately. Like *utopia*, on the other hand, it put before the citizenry a bright picture of an ideal society, promising to make that society come true in the near future. Like utopia, this new "utopian ideology" assumed an adversarial position vis-à-vis an actually existing ideology, for example, bourgeois capitalism, and promised to realize its program through waging war on this enemy. This conjoining of ideology and utopia closed the circle off from critical challenge, from open discreditation, by curtailing the forms available to memory and imagination in historiography and art. Really what was achieved in both systems was a new catholic faith, only now not in a deity but in a substitute, the state.

The question arises: Has any form of imaginative play arisen to answer this dilemma, this disastrous flattening of the horizon of social imagination? If dystopian fiction pointed out the failure of social imagination, are there other forms of utopian thinking that somehow go beyond this impasse? Does the current cultural debate in general divulge only "pathology," that is, a dead-end-apocalyptic mentality, or is there "health," in the sense of promising social scenarios to be

¹¹ Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 581–89.

realized in appropriately fresh language and form? In other words, has the post-Stalinist underground offered merely a dark mirror for the Stalinist "utopia" or has it offered to the imagination new alternatives?

If there is any fresh valuative framework, it is offered by the skeptical, "meta-utopian" thinking, of which Ricoeur's essay is an example, that has emerged in both West and East in the late twentieth century. If anti-utopian thinking and dystopian fiction have a significant pathological side, denying not only actual "realized" utopian schemes but also the very notion of a beneficial social imagination, meta-utopian thinking takes a critical stance on the borders *among* existing systems of social values. Its object is not to discard "old" valuative systems, but to juxtapose them, to expose, through debate, the pathologies inherent in them, and thus to make possible the emergence of other, more adequate forms of social imagination. Meta-utopian thinking certainly has its own pathologies: it is capable of degeneration into an anarchistic kind of relativism, reducing all valuative constructs to expressions of underlying power relationships. Another pathological scenario, and one familiar currently in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, is the crumbling of a single totalitarian ideology into a large number of mini-totalitarianisms, each insisting on its own legitimacy. The result inevitably is war. Nonetheless, the strong penchant of meta-utopian thinking for pluralist discourse, its inherent effort to bring about a confrontation of opposing ideologies, promises a broadening of the social horizon.

It is true, as Galina Belaia has pointed out recently in *The Sunken Atlantis*, that much "alternative" art implicitly or explicitly challenges official ideological positions.¹² Like most underground literature, meta-utopian fiction belongs to what Donald Fanger has called the "other" tradition in Russian literary history, the tradition, starting with Pushkin and Gogol, that uses aesthetic play to call into question the "social imperative," the truth-seeking to which Russian writers have classically dedicated themselves.¹³ Because of its rich allusions to Western and pre-twentieth-century Russian traditions of utopia, which themselves have been vital to articulating the domains of and relationships between social-moral and aesthetic impulses, meta-

¹² Belaia, *Zatonuvshaia Atlantida*, 40–43.

¹³ Donald Fanger, "Conflicting Imperatives in the Model of the Russian Writer," in *Literature and History: Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies*, ed. G. S. Morson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 117.