

Project

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FREE VOICES IN THE USSR

Independent Soviet Literature, Arts and Thought and their Western Echoes (1953-1991)

ABSTRACT

Free Voices in the USSR and Echoes in the West (1953-1991) is a joint research project involving the University of Florence and the University of Pisa, directed by Professor Claudia Pieralli and Professor Marco Sabbatini.

The **project** is conceived both as a *research tool* for students, doctoral students, researchers, scholars and professors, and as a *platform that hosts* and implements the results of new research, which is placed within the *epistemological and conceptual framework* proposed in this portal.

The **project aims** to explore expressions of independent thought and culture in the Soviet Union between the end of Stalinism in 1953 and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. The concept of dissent within the Soviet Union has often been distorted to suit narratives attractive to Western commentators, who have focused on voices opposing Communist Party ideology. This is a simplification as many alternative voices from this period express a non-conformity which is aesthetic or social rather than political. The artists and writers behind nonconformist actions and words frequently saw their alternative forms of expression as a protest of some sort, but they did not speak with

one voice. Indeed, not only are there significant generational differences, but also different literary, artistic and philosophical points of view and premises.

As the process of destalinisation initiated by Khrushchev began to stall and promises of greater freedom evaporated, independent voices were increasingly viewed as hostile and censored by Soviet institutions. Expressions of dissent became louder from the mid 1970s and in the following decade an alternative cultural scene emerged. Thanks to the *samizdat* network, this 'Second Culture' represented an organised, systematic opposition to official Soviet culture. The third wave of cultural emigration helped keep channels of communication with the West open and gave impetus to the publication of Russian works beyond the Iron Curtain (*tamizdat*). The clandestine circulation of almanacs, literary reviews, single works and collections began to spread from Moscow and Leningrad to smaller towns and cities. Seminars, exhibitions, conferences and lectures were organised in places and ways that were autonomous and parallel to those endorsed by official Soviet institutions. With the advent of *glasnost* under Gorbachev in the 1980s, alternative voices began to come into the open and many exponents of independent thought were involved in the new processes of democratisation.

The project *Free Voices in the USSR* is a work in progress and as such is in constant evolution. Such a project cannot hope to be exhaustive given the vast and heterogeneous galaxy that was cultural dissent in the USSR and its complex reception beyond the Iron Curtain in the West. We do, however, consider it fundamental to offer a schematic description and in this portal we hope to present and make accessible an *epistemic-ontological* definition of dissent, based on the premise that to scientifically describe the nature of a cultural phenomenon, is to define what the phenomenon is.

The website is designed to enable the user (be they an expert in the field or approaching the subject for the first time) to consider Soviet dissent both as a unique phenomenon and as a phenomenal typology within the overall syntax of Soviet and European culture in the second half of the twentieth century.

Let us try to provide a brief description of these itineraries.

PORTAL STRUCTURE AND THEMES

The project focuses on two principal themes, **“Free Voices in the Soviet Union”** and **“The Reception of Soviet Dissent in the West”**. The first presents the diverse manifestations of independent culture and dissent in the USSR between 1953 and 1991, while the second traces the history of the reception of Soviet dissent and underground culture in intellectual circles in the West.

Each theme is subdivided into three sections.

FREE VOICES IN THE SOVIET UNION is divided into the sections: “Samizdat and non-official artistic expression”, “Underground places and groups”, “Facts and Phenomena”:

1. **“Samizdat and non-official artistic expression”**: this section is dedicated to analysing the language of artistic dissent as well as the strategies of survival employed by participants in the ‘Second Culture’. Attention is given to all mediums of alternative artistic expression including verbal and literary (especially literature produced by the *samizdat* network), music and songs circulating thanks to *magnitizdat*, painting and sculpture, independent cinema, photography, theatre and the performing arts. For this reason, the section is further divided into three **categories** – each of them referring to a specific artistic language: *literature/samizdat*, *audio texts/magnitizdat*, and figurative and visual arts.
2. **“Underground places and groups”**: this section presents a map of the principal centres of non-official culture and describes the most important protagonists of the Soviet underground. It is organised geographically, focusing on Moscow and Leningrad, but covering the whole of the Soviet Union.
3. **“Facts and phenomena”**: this section concentrates on the social dimension of clandestine culture, examining the ways in which non-authorised, alternative

forms of expression reached the public. It looks at the rare manifestations present in authorized publications, and mainly at underground seminars, circles, exhibitions, celebrations, festivals and concerts. Special attention is given to the civil rights movement, open protest letters and protest marches in favour of individuals tried for dissent.

THE RECEPTION OF SOVIET DISSENT IN THE WEST is divided into the sections: “Tamizdat”, “Case studies”, “Italian Publications and Catalogues”.

1. **“Tamizdat”**: this section describes the principal literary works circulating in Russian and in translation via the *tamizdat* network, which unlike the parallel *samizdat* system, operated through publishing houses and journals in the West. The network represented a bridge between independent voices in the Soviet Union and intellectuals in the West.
2. **“Case studies”**: this section focuses in more detail on works such as *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak and *The Gulag Archipelago* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn that are emblematic of the cultural and mediatic impact of Russian literature and art beyond the Iron Curtain.
3. **“Italian publications and catalogues”**: this section presents the principal Italian publishers involved in disseminating Soviet cultural discourse which were important for the reception and distribution of alternative Soviet voices in Italy and beyond. Attention is given to the activity and archives of the most important publishing houses and cultural reviews. We hope to offer a framework for reconstructing the debate on Soviet dissent in Italy.

OPEN ACCESS MENU

Our portal has three research tools aimed at giving students reference points in space and time as well as information on the men and women who helped establish channels for cultural exchange and dialogue between the USSR and the West:

Where: a list of the major centres and geographical areas relating to the section “Free voices in the Soviet Union”.

Chronology: an overview of the period 1953-1991 in the West and the USSR with descriptions of the most relevant historical events for independent Soviet culture, connecting the evolution of dissent inside the Soviet Union with its reception in the West.

People: a list of the most influential figures of the Soviet Union's 'Second Culture' and the Western intellectuals who helped disseminate their voices beyond the USSR.

OBJECTIVES

The project aims to collect contributions from historians, philologists, literary critics and other academics working with students and researchers to develop a space which stimulates debate and comparison on themes relating to dissent in the Soviet Union. The project is pioneering in that it aims to connect distinct but connected lines of study on independent voices from the USSR. The reception of Soviet dissent in the West has often been framed by rhetoric reflective of anti-Soviet propaganda surrounding the Cold War. Reflections on freedom of expression, political responsibility and the struggle for historical truth are prone to present opposition to Soviet ideology from a Western perspective. This project aims to comprehend the origins and cultural impact of such a position and to unpick the mediatic and political instruments in operation both in the Soviet Union and in the West.

The objective is not merely to contrast and compare writers, artists and thinkers in the USSR with their counterparts in the West, but to examine the processes of dialogue, assimilation and re-elaboration that occurred during the second half of the twentieth century and allowed dissenting voices within the Soviet Union to contribute to Europe's and the wider world's cultural and intellectual development.

The project aspires to reach researchers and academics from all over the world, in the hope that the sharing of resources online will act as an impetus for further research, the organisation of seminars, roundtables, study days and joint publications involving the Universities of Florence and Pisa.

SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA

FREE VOICES IN THE SOVIET CONTEXT, is divided into three sections: “Samizdat & Non-Official Artistic Expression”, “Underground Places & Groups” and “Facts & Phenomena”.

The first section “**Samizdat & Non-Official Artistic Expression**” is further divided into three categories, as follows: “Literature of the Samizdat”, “Music & Audio Texts”, “Visual & Performing Arts”.

Literature from the Samizdat – has two categories: *Periodicals* and *Works*.

The **Samizdat > Periodicals** category is dedicated to mapping and indexing periodicals and magazines of major importance in the literary and artistic fields, which circulated underground in the Soviet Union. In some of the reported cases, it was possible to obtain complete catalogues for the magazines, thanks to the database <https://samizdatcollections.library.utoronto.ca/>. In others, it was possible to consult the typescripts in archival collections as indicated in the bibliography at the end of the articles.

In addition, the **Samizdat > Periodicals** category also includes collections and news reports, which document a series of initiatives promoted by groups and the underground press. For each periodical, the following information is provided: *Title*, *Date of first publication and final publication*, *Place of Publication*, *Editorial Board or Editors*, *Main Contributors*, *Total Number of Issues*, *Description*, *Notes* (if any) and *Bibliography*. In addition, the years (and, where appropriate months) of the first and final publication are reported as they appear on the issues. If these differ from the actual years of publication, they have been inserted in square brackets. In the field *Place of Publication*, the city or cities where the journal was published are reported. If the name of the place has changed, the Italian translation of the toponym is given as it appears in the periodical (e.g., Leningrad instead of Saint Petersburg). The *Editorial Board* field summarizes data on the composition of the editorial committee and, where possible, information on changes in management or

section editors. The field appears only in the records of those magazines that defined their editorial board or *redkollegiia*. For the magazines which indicate *redaktory* (editors) the respective field *Editors* has been inserted. In the field *Main contributors* the names of the most frequent authors are reported, and sometimes also those responsible for specific sections. If it was not possible to reconstruct the identity of the authors, we left the name and/or the patronymic initials and/or the pseudonym under which they appear in the pages of the magazine. In the *Description* field we present: the history of the periodical, editorial trends, organization of contents, genres (essay, poetry, prose, translation, interviews), main editors, possible information on copyright, authors who collaborated and the most significant contributions from a historical-cultural point of view. In the field *Notes*, where present, reference is made to the primary source on which the website entry is based and any technical remarks on specific issues (typescripts, manuscripts, information on the availability of some issues). For magazines which published only a few issues, the total number of pages of the issues has been indicated in the additional field *Total pages*. In the *Bibliography* field there are the main bibliographic sources consulted for the preparation of the article, which are provided also for purposes of further investigation. For Samizdat collections and news reports published from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s, a limited number of collections on historical, literary, and artistic topics are represented. They have been chosen for their relevance to this project. Specifically, they are *Kronika tekushchikh sobytii* (Chronicle of Current Events) and *Pamiat'* (Memory) for which we carried out comprehensive research using the paper and online archives of Memorial International (<http://old.memo.ru/history/diss/chr/>) for *Kronika tekushchikh sobytii* and (<https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/events/calendar/160#list>) for *Pamiat'*. The following fields are shown for the collections and news reports: *Title*, *Dates of publication*, *Place of publication*, *Description*, *Promoters*, *Authors*, *Total numbers*, *Notes* (if any), *Bibliography*. The *Description* field presents, the history of the collections and reports (when and how they circulated), the events and topics that were given most attention, the authors who collaborated and the most important contributions from a historical-cultural point of view. In the field *Promoters* we indicate the names of the figures who were responsible for creating and sustaining

the collections and reports. In the *Authors* field, we give the names of contributors to the collections (in the case of news reports, there is no reference to the authors). For the *Notes* and *Bibliography* fields, the same criteria apply as for the magazines. At the moment we have excluded literary works by authors of Russian modernism, whose texts in some cases were published in *tamizdat* and, therefore, included in the **“Tamizdat”** section. The fields here are reported as follows: *Title, Author, Years of Editing, Place of First Publication, Description, Russian Language Editions, Translations, Bibliography, and Filmography*, when available.

The second section **“Music & Audio Texts”** is dedicated to the vast and heterogeneous field of audio texts, also commonly called *Magnitizdat*, a term adopted ex-post to indicate the clandestine dissemination of audio materials on magnetic media. The section is divided into several headings and related articles, which offer a general description of the phenomenon by documenting the methods used for recording, the performers and the content of their work. This section also provides information on reference materials, such as interviews with protagonists and those who participated in the magnitizdat.

The third and last section of the *Samizdat* section, **“Visual & Performing Arts”**, contains a series of contributions focused on the visual arts and dissent, from photography to figurative arts, audio-visuals, and theatre.

The second section **“Underground Places & Groups”** offers a map of the meeting points of unofficial culture and describes the main protagonists of the many collective manifestations of the underground. It was decided to order the articles according to a geographical criterion, which takes into consideration first Moscow and Leningrad and extends to cover the whole territory of the Soviet Union. In this section we map out the most significant places of the Moscow and Leningrad underground (private flats, and public places such as squares and streets) and also various schools and groups which operated clandestinely in the two cities. The following fields have been included for private apartments: *Place, Key words used in place names* (indicating the Russian lexemes used in the names of specific places), *Description* (providing a brief history of the events that took place in the flats and the individuals

involved), *Bibliography* (providing bibliographical and in-depth information). The entries on squares and streets contain the following fields: *Dates* (indicating the dates on which events and initiatives were organised), *Place*, *Participants*, *Publishing initiatives* (linked to the foundation and distribution of magazines and almanacs, if any), *Description* (with a reconstruction of the history of the place, the events that took place and the participants) and *Bibliography*.

The entries concerning clandestine groups and schools that existed in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus and belonged to the so-called 'Second Culture' (*Vtoraia kul'tura*) of the period from the beginning of destalinization (1956) to the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), are divided according to place (at the moment: Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev, Minsk). These entries contain information both about groups that were self-defined through the writing of manifestos, and more fluid and difficult to trace groups. For these entries the following fields are listed: *Dates*, *Location*, *Founders or promoters*, *Members*, *Editorial initiatives*, *Description*, *Bibliography*. The field *Dates* indicates the time frame within which the activity of the group can be circumscribed. The field *Place* indicates the city in which the group formed and operated. If the name of the place has changed, the Italian translation of the place name is given. In the *Founders or Promoters* field the leading figures within the group are indicated, if any. In the field *Members* the names of the actual members of the group are given. If the a number of members makes a complete list impossible, the main names are given. In the *Publishing initiatives* field, the publishing activities of the group or of some of its members are indicated, whether they are occasional (the publication of anthologies and almanacs) or periodical (the publication of a magazine). In the *Description* section, the group's activities are reconstructed, from its genesis to its consolidation as a circle of individuals with a common Weltanschauung, in some cases with a shared literary agenda. Reference is also made to the influences of each group, as well as its performative gestures, if relevant. In the *Bibliography* field the main bibliographic sources consulted for the drafting of the articles are listed, which also provides information for further investigation.

The third section **“Facts & Phenomena”** illustrates the public dimension of clandestine culture in its various typological representations and is divided into the categories: Circles, Seminars, Conferences, Authorized Publications, Human Rights Movement, Open Letters, Trials, Meetings and Demonstrations, Exhibitions, Celebrations, Concerts and festivals. A specific section is devoted to the Civil Rights Movement and its activists. Other categories such as “Open Letters”, “Meetings and Demonstrations”, “Trials” explore the different forms of protest which took place following the trials of individuals who were linked in various ways to the world of dissent as *inakomyslie*, and not necessarily as dissidents. The criteria adopted within each category reflect the criteria commonly used for entries on individual people (as in **“People”**), while for “Protest Letters” we use the criteria used for journals, with due specificity. We will use the following fields for the category “Open Letters”: *Title of letter, Date, Authors, Recipient, Place of publication, Date of publication, Description, Consequences* if any.

The category – Authorized Publishing – documents works which were published and circulated officially, but whose content allows them to be classified as dissenting. The fields of these entries are *Date* (referring to the date of publication), *Place of publication* (which contains the same information as in the related field in the other sections), *Editors, Preface, Number of pages, Print run, Description, Bibliography*.

THE RECEPTION OF SOVIET DISSENT IN THE WEST is the thematic area divided in the three sections: “Tamizdat”, “Case Studies”, “Italian Publications and Catalogues”.

In the **“Tamizdat”** section, there is a further subdivision into the following categories: *tamizdat* Publishing houses, Periodicals, and works published beyond the borders of the USSR. The works and the *tamizdat* journals were selected for their relevance, and also in consideration of the different cultural-political phases in the Soviet Union. The most representative works and journals have been selected.

Tamizdat > Periodicals: the fields are the same as in the *samizdat* journals.

Tamizdat > Works: at the moment, this section contains non-periodic *tamizdat* journals, that is, one off publications of anthologies, miscellaneous works and collections (currently limited to the case of “Metropol”, classified here as an anthology) and literary works that circulated first clandestinely in the USSR, before

being smuggled abroad, and subsequently printed outside the Soviet borders. The following fields are shown in the entries of the literary works: *Title*, *Year(s) of writing*, *Year of first publication*, *Publisher or Journal*, *Place of publication*, *Description*, *Editions in Russian language*, *Translations*, *Bibliography* and *Notes*. The *Year(s) of writing* field indicates the year (or years) in which the work was written. The year in which the work was first published is indicated in the *Year of first publication* field. This field also refers to any cuts which were made (if a work was not published in full), as well as to the language in which it was published for the first time. The *Publisher or Journal* field reports the publishing house or magazine which published the work and, where possible, the series in which it was included (if present). The *Place of publication* field shows the city or cities where the work was published. If the name of the place has changed, the Italian translation of the toponym is reported as it appears on the title page (i.e. Leningrad will be written as Leningrad, rather than Saint Petersburg). In the *Description* field the editorial history of the work is reconstructed, referring to the various editions and personalities who contributed to its publication, indicating its circulation in *samizdat*. The events that led to the first publication, as well as the first publications in Russian, are also briefly described. In the *Editions in Russian* field, the editions in which the work appeared in Russian are reported. The field also indicates whether the work was published in its entirety or not. The *Translations* field shows all the translations of the work into the major western languages, indicating the place of publication, the publishing house and the translator in round brackets. The *Bibliography* field shows the main bibliographic sources consulted in researching the entry, which is intended to provide references for further information. In the *Notes* field, we report observations relating to particular editions of the work and/or archival sources.

The category **Tamizdat> Publishing Houses** includes the main *tamizdat* publishing houses, i.e. those that emerged outside the Soviet borders and beyond the Iron Curtain with the explicit vocation of publishing books banned in the Soviet Union, both in Russian and in translation. For each entry we provide information in the following fields: *Dates*, *Place*, *Editors*, *Description*, *Notes* (if any) and *Bibliography*.

The second section **“Case Studies”** is dedicated to the reception of selected literary works from the USSR, which in various ways are attributable to the culture of ‘dissent’. It includes *Doktor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak and *The Gulag Archipelago* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, which constitute emblematic literary cases, with a remarkable media and cultural impact in contexts beyond the Iron Curtain. These entries have the following fields: *Author, Place, Date, Description* and *Bibliography* (with references to primary and critical literature).

The third section, **“Italian Publications & Catalogues”**, presents the main Italian publishers involved in disseminating Soviet cultural discourse, which were important for the reception and distribution of alternative Soviet voices. Attention is given to the activity and archives of the most important publishing houses and cultural reviews. We hope to offer a framework for reconstructing the debate on Soviet dissent in Italy. The section is divided into four categories: Publishing Houses and Italian Cultural Magazines, which document translations of works published in Italy from 1956 to 1991, Catalogues of Journals and Editorial Archives.

The category Publishing Houses presents the Italian publishing houses that were involved in spreading the culture of ‘dissent’ from the USSR. The articles are organized with the following fields: *Dates, Place, Series, Description* and *Bibliography*. Some entries contain a full list of the works (translations, monographs etc.) regarding Soviet dissent published by the particular house. Our research on the publishing houses was largely based on bibliographic sources and, where possible, on the archival collections of the houses themselves. The *Dates* field indicates the dates within which the publishing house was active, or continues to be active. The field *Place of Publication* records the city (or cities) in which the publishing house was/is located. In the field *Series* we report the collections in which translations and publications concerning the culture of dissent were included. The *Description* field contains information about the history of the publishing house, editorial trends, published genres and the most frequently represented authors. The *Bibliography* shows the main bibliographic sources consulted for writing each entry, which it is hoped will serve as a point of reference for further in-depth analysis.

In the category Italian Cultural Magazines, four important literary and artistic journals

are described. These journals are relevant for the analysis of the reception of Soviet dissent between 1956 and 1991. The journal entries contain the following fields: *Title*, *Date of beginning and Date of End*, *Place of Publication*, *Editorial Board*, *Total Number of Issues*, *Main Contributors*, *Description*, *Notes* (if any) and *Bibliography*. The *Dates* field indicates the chronological references within which the journal was published. The years (and possibly months) are indicated as they appear on the issues. If these differ from the actual years of publication, they have been inserted in square brackets. The field *Place of Publication* records the city (or cities) in which the journal is/was published. The field *Editorial board* summarizes data relating to the composition of the editorial committee and, where possible, information about changes in editorship and the editors of particular sections. The field *Main Contributors* includes the names of the most frequent authors, sometimes also working as editors of specific sections of the magazines. The *Description* section presents the magazine's history, editorial trends, content organization, genres (essay, poetry, prose, translation, interviews), the main editors, copyright information, collaborating authors and the most significant contributions from a historical-cultural point of view. In the *Notes* field reference is made to the primary sources used to write the entry and technical observations on specific issues (typescripts, manuscripts, information on the availability of some issues). The *Bibliography* field shows the main bibliographic sources consulted for writing the entry, which also aims to provide information for further in-depth analysis. In the category **Catalogues of journals**, complete editions or significant parts of editions are presented (for the Sunday section of "Il Sole 24 ore"). The catalogues are organised by: *Editorial location*, *Dates of Publication*, *Title*, *Author*, *Page reference*, *Bibliographic data* if any.

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