



## Reviews

**Samizdat, Tamizdat & Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism**, by Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov. Berghahn Books, 2013, pp 378, £75; ISBN 0857455857. Language: English.

*Samizdat, Tamizdat & Beyond* is an edited volume of fourteen chapters divided chronologically, co-edited by Friederike Kind-Kovács (Regensburg University) and Jessie Labov (Ohio State University). The book fills an existing need for greater understanding of *samizdat* (self-publishing) and *tamizdat* (publishing elsewhere), as well as other forms of covert publishing (e.g., *magnitizdat*) and dissemination in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, both pertaining to Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. The book offers three sections with chapters that discuss different legacies and contexts for *samizdat* and *tamizdat* pre-1989. The fourth section is devoted to more contemporary matters, considering digital publishing, the internet and radio. It steps out of the post-Soviet space to offer discussions of similar practices in China and the Middle East. The volume features chapters by prominent scholars across disciplines, countries and areas of research. This diversity offers a range of perspectives useful to a wide audience with interests in *samizdat* and *tamizdat* in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and spaces.



At the volume's outset, in Chapter One, Ann Komaromi asserts an alternative approach to *samizdat* and *tamizdat* that emphasizes interpretations 'other than those of outmoded political binaries or fixed Cold War narratives' (p. 27). The focus of Komaromi's chapter, Carl and Ellendea Proffer and Ardis Publishing, also provides unique insight into the Proffers' interactions with Vladimir Nabokov, which reveal his own acknowledgement of underground publishing of his own works in Soviet Russia. It was Ardis who published Nabokov's works in Russian in the U.S. Komaromi observes that 'Nabokov's writing bridged the modernist and contemporary eras in time, and Russia and America in space. As Nabokov's Russian-language publisher in the United States, Ardis made the leap from being a small publishing house resurrecting modernist literature to a vital enterprise working with contemporary Rus-

sian readers and writers' (p. 37). The subsequent history of Ardis is a fascinating web of authors, texts and even CIA operations that starts this collection on an intriguing path.

A nice contribution of this volume is the emphasis on several Slavic nations other than Russia. Eight of the chapters present discussions on *samizdat* and *tamizdat* that focus on nations in the Soviet sphere of influence other than Russia. Czechoslovakia and Poland are especially prominent. In the second chapter, 'The Baltic Connection: Transnational Samizdat Networks between Émigrés in Sweden and the Democratic Opposition in Poland', Lars Fredrik Stöker discusses Polish *samizdat* (in Polish, *drugi obiegi*, 'second circulation') and its success as the result of interaction beyond the Iron Curtain in Sweden. Chapter Three by Kind-Kovács discusses the role of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty as co-conspirators in the dissemination of unauthorized literature in Soviet Russia, and also in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Poland. Chapter Twelve similarly considers radio broadcasting, but in late 1990s Yugoslavia, owing to a live broadcasting project between Belgrade and Vienna. This chapter by Daniel Gilfillan also points out the importance of the internet as a tool of communication during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. The fourth chapter, by Karolina Ziolo-Puzuk, discusses the central role of the Polish émigré journal *Kultura* in contributing to Polish political thought from the post-World War II era through the year 2000. For example, Ziolo-Puzuk attributes Polish support for Ukraine's Orange Revolution to the role played by *Kultura*. The seventh chapter by Agnes Arndt is also concerned with Poland in its discussion of the transfer of the principle of *civil society* between East and West that impacted Polish dissident thought. Christina Petruscu's chapter 'Free Conversations in an Occupied Country: Cultural Transfer, Social Networking, and Political Dissent in Romanian Tamizdat' discusses Romanian communism and the dissemination of nonconformity through the publication of journals such as *Dialog*, the assembling of dissident groups among Romanian intellectuals and the Romanian diaspora in the West. Muriel Blaive discusses Czechoslovakia's evolving historical narrative under Stalinism and behind the Iron Curtain between 1948 and 1968 in the volume's sixth chapter, and the tenth chapter by Alice Lovejoy, 'Video Knows No Borders', undertakes the unique topic of television and film produced via *samizdat* in Czechoslovakia.

Chapters Eight, Nine, and Eleven deal exclusively with Russia. Brian Horne's chapter, 'The Bards of Magnitizdat: An Aesthetic Political History of Russian Underground Recordings' discusses the role of *magnitizdat* (the illegal recording and distribution of recordings that criticize the Soviet Union) and particularly the legacy of songs produced through *magnitizdat* in the 1970s and 1980s, with special attention to the *bardovskaja pesnja* 'bard song', made popular by artists such as Vladimir Vysotsky. Chapter Nine, by Valentina Parisi, also discusses the 'Russian unofficial arts' in the 1970s and 1980s as indicated by the chapter title 'Writing About Apparently Nonexistent Art' (p. 190). Parisi's chapter discusses the role of a journal dedicated to visual arts, *A-Ja*, published in Paris in *tamizdat*. This journal, she writes, 'helped to spread Soviet unofficial art abroad so as to overcome the complete isolation in which nonconformist artists found themselves at the end of the 1970s' (p. 192). The journal *A-Ja*, according to Parisi, was distinctive in comparison to other journals published in *tamizdat* because of its 'unprecedented interest in conceptualizing socialist realism as the oppressive but inevitable background against which Soviet unofficial art arose and developed' (p.

199). Chapter Eleven, 'Postprintium? Digital Literary Samizdat on the Russian Internet' by Henrike Schmidt, offers a timely discussion of contemporary digital publishing among current Russian writers as a form of *samizdat*, despite their different contexts. State-imposed restrictions on internet use, blogging and significant limitations on the press in Putin's Russia are not altogether dissimilar from the contexts in which underground forms of publishing evolved. As Schmidt explains, 'Digital samizdat differs at first glance from its Soviet predecessor. Though as well excluded, for various political and aesthetical reasons, from the traditional publishing institutions, it nevertheless suffers neither comparable material constraints, nor the lack of a national or even worldwide audience. The media contexts of Soviet and digital samizdat are thus completely different' (p. 221). Citing contemporary poet and author Dmitrij Bykov, Schmidt claims also that digital self-publishing has the potential to publish work of lesser quality than that which emerged during the Soviet era (p. 226), and therefore, even *samizdat*, perplexing as it may seem, 'needs censorship, or at least a strong institutional force suppressing the freedom of expression' (p. 228). Schmidt's article is particularly compelling in light of recent events in Russia, such as the Pussy Riot arrests and proposed limitations on the internet that would require users to enter identifying information in order to gain access.

Two chapters at the end of the volume address regions outside of Eastern and Central Europe. Martin Hala's 'From Wallpapers to Blogs: Samizdat and Internet in China' provides a generally good overview of internet censorship in China, although the statistics at the beginning of the article are problematic since Hala uses numbers of internet users, rather than percentages to compare China and the U.S. Because China is the most populous nation on the planet, it will certainly have greater numbers of internet users. However, in percentages, half a billion users in China only represents 50 percent of the total population. In the U.S., it is estimated that 84 percent of the population uses the internet. Additionally, Hala seems to disregard the role of proxy servers outside of China as important access means, claiming 'Anybody who has ever used a proxy server knows that it can be a frustrating experience, since it slows the connection significantly' (p. 272). To this reviewer, this observation is out of place. In the context of *samizdat* or *tamizdat*, particularly in the Soviet context, publishing in these ways and/or getting access to these publications was certainly inconvenient. Inconvenience, however, did not impede access for those who truly wanted it. This chapter is also problematic in that it does not link clearly and consistently to Soviet or post-Soviet practices of *samizdat* or *tamizdat*. The overarching conclusion is that the internet and *samizdat* are the same thing because they 'create an alternative public space beyond direct reach of the state' (p. 278). While parallels may exist, the discussion leading to this conclusion is a bit too broad and possibly not entirely up-to-date. The final chapter in the volume, Barbara Falk's 'Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe' examines the contribution of *samizdat* and *tamizdat* to social change, in comparison to the role played by social media during the Arab Spring. Falk's chapter offers some interesting parallels between two regions of the world that otherwise are rarely compared to one another. They are part of what is, ultimately, a fairly politicized discussion on the topic.

Overall the chapters in this volume are probably most useful to Slavists, particularly those in humanistic areas of inquiry placed temporally in the latter half of the twentieth cen-

ture. Some articles, such as Ann Komaromi's piece on Ardis, Horne's chapter on bard songs and *magnitizdat*, or perhaps Schmidt's piece on self-publishing on the Russian internet might be appropriate for use in Russian literature courses focusing on the twentieth century to the present. Similarly, chapters from this volume could be very useful in courses in history, media studies and world literature. Researchers working on underground publishing during the Soviet era will find all of the chapters that focus on Russia, Eastern and Central Europe of great interest.

DR. RACHEL STAUFFER works as Assistant Professor of Russian and Associate Director of International Programs at Ferrum College in rural southwestern Virginia, where she oversees the Russian major and minor and the minor in Contemporary Russian Studies. Her research interests include Russian phonology, pragmatics, markedness and distinctive feature theory, Russian cultural history, non-European Russian literature, culture, film and post-Soviet literature. [rachelstauffer@gmail.com]