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EDITED BY TOMÁŠ GLANC

# Samizdat Past & Present

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## Samizdat Past & Present

Tomáš Glanc (ed.)

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# Long Live Samizdat

## Editorial note

Tomáš Glanc

Over the last few years, research into samizdat has undergone some significant development, the roots of which, as is commonly the case in such circumstances, can be found retrospectively in the fairly remote past. In simplified terms, this ‘turn’ can be described as the depoliticization of samizdat and in some cases the declining interest in its role in the history of literature, with a shift towards a more typological, medial and performative approach (samizdat as an act/activity in a particular place and community).<sup>1</sup> Also of importance is the attention being paid not only to samizdat as an object, but also to the consequences of samizdat culture, e.g. in the formation of subjectivity and the constitution of symbolic power as conceived by Pierre Bourdieu. His theory inspired Ann Komaromi, who is also actively engaged in preserving and providing access to samizdat.<sup>2</sup> This research field has also been created in the recent past, and is not just based on traditional archiving aspirations and (re-)editions of hard-to-find texts, but is much more to do with the issue of how to structure access to fragile, hand-made copies, how to digitize them and organize the ‘architecture’ of their publication, so that they serve not only as books available online, but also as a network of items that belong to a single unit, as well as to the set of all other published texts, periodicals and the like, while differing from them typologically. Ann Komaromi deals with this task in her Database project:

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1 See e.g. CSEH-VARGA, Katalin. ‘Innovative Forms of the Hungarian Samizdat. An Analysis of Oral Practices’, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, No. 1, 2016, Vol. LXV, pp. 90-107.

2 KOMAROMI, Ann. *Uncensored: Samizdat Novels and the Quest for Autonomy in Soviet Dissidence*. Evanston (IL): Northwestern University Press, 2015.

'*Soviet Samizdat Periodicals*', which has been operating since 2011 at <http://samizdat.library.utoronto.ca>. The provision of access to samizdat as a 'museumization' issue and not just as a challenge for philological and cultural history research, but also as a curating challenge focusing on narration through objects and their arrangement, as well as through exhibitions, is highlighted by Daniela Šneppová in her contribution to knowledge of a broad range of samizdat activities.<sup>3</sup>

These more distanced approaches, which are less utilitarian in comparison with the political perspective of 'prohibited literature', bring about new ways of integrating samizdat into cultural history, not only from the standpoint of opposition to the state-controlled book market, but also as a particular publication strategy, generating increased sensitivity towards the media dimension of publication and special distribution. This is associated with particular acts (transcription, transport and circulation) in communities of users of samizdat as a communication framework, in which physical presence and the connection between individual participants plays a rather more obvious role than in the case of book culture in general. Moreover, in the most recent research, samizdat does not just mean printed matter, but also other media for information and works of art, both musical and audiovisual,<sup>4</sup> as well as performative (drama<sup>5</sup>). As for the spontaneous

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3 ŠNEPPOVÁ, Daniela. 'Staging Samizdat: The Czech Art of Resistance, 1968-1989', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, No. 1, 2016, Vol. LXV, pp. 64-89.

4 For details of samizdat music see this dissertation: HAGEN, Trever. *Musicking in the Merry Ghetto. The Czech Underground from the 1960s to the 2000s*. Exeter: University of Exeter, 2012.

5 See LAZORČÁKOVÁ, Tatjana. 'Divadelní disent. K historii neoficiálních divadelních aktivit v sedmdesátých letech 20. století' [On the History of Unofficial Theatre Activities in the 1970s], in *Kontexty III. Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis*, M. SÝKORA (ed.). Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2002, pp. 47-64. JUNGMANNOVÁ, Lenka. 'Neoficiální, nezávislá, paralelní, alternativní, nelegální, druhá, jiná, nelicencovaná, samizdatová, ineditní, undergroundová, podzemní..., ale naše. Pokus o vymezení problematiky neoficiální dramatiky v letech 1948 až 1989' [Unofficial, Independent, Parallel, Alternative, Illegal, Secondary, Other, Unauthorized, Samizdat, Unpublished, Underground, Subterranean..., But Ours.



distribution of various recordings, the term *magnetizdat* had long been established (at least in Russian).

One of the first programmatic manifestations of the post-political approach to samizdat can be considered to be the catalogue for the Präprintium exhibition in 1998,<sup>6</sup> published by the small Bremen publishers Temmen with a ‘multimedia CD’, which was something of a technical peculiarity in the late 1990s, matching the subject of the exhibition. The very name indicates that attention is focused on alternative duplication to (book) printing, thus developing an idea that had already been formulated: samizdat of a literary nature, and the ‘production’ of texts and books harked back to before the invention of typography.<sup>7</sup> The relatively narrow focus on the Moscow circle of primarily conceptual artists who in various ways developed samizdat practices in their work, raises the question of the extent to which this analogy can be pursued in other artistic communities at other times and in other countries.

Here samizdat is not a politically controversial topic, but an intimate cultural process, which forms and manages not only the works of art themselves, but also their distribution, documentation and even their reception and archiving/museumization.

Valentina Parisi, who includes poetic readings,<sup>8</sup> for example, in the category of samizdat, was also heading in the direction indicated by the Präprintium exhibition and the catalogue of the same name in her monograph on Soviet samizdat.

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An Attempt to Define the Issues Surrounding Unofficial Drama between 1948 and 1989], *Divadelní revue* No. 3, 2003, Vol. XIV, pp. 3-11.

6 G. HIRT – S. WONDERS (eds.). *Präprintium. Moskauer Bücher aus dem Samizdat (Ausstellungskatalog)* [Moscow Books in Samizdat (Exhibition Catalogue)]. *Dokumentationen zur Kultur und Gesellschaft im östlichen Europa, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen*. Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1998.

7 See SKILLING, H. Gordon. ‘Samizdat: A Return to the Pre-Gutenberg Era?’, in *Cross Currents. A Yearbook of Central European Culture*, L. MATĚJKA – B. STOLZ (eds.). Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1982, pp. 64-80.

8 PARISI, Valentina. *Il lettore eccedente. Edizioni periodiche del «Samizdat» sovietico (1956-1990)* [Outreaching Reader. Soviet Periodical Samizdat]. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013, p. 247 et seq.

Samizdat has naturally attracted attention in its most obvious form, i.e. as a publication strategy reacting to the unfree conditions in a closed society of an authoritarian or totalitarian nature. It would be a mistake to ignore the connection between samizdat and Communist censorship, the persecution of writers on political grounds and its connection with political dissent and rights to freedom of speech that had been trampled underfoot. However, nowadays, thanks to systematic study<sup>9</sup>, we know that censorship is a phenomenon that appears in all periods of cultural development, and it would be limiting to see it exclusively as an instrument for the ideological persecution of writers.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the attention of researchers is increasingly being drawn by phenomena which might indeed be associated genealogically with the conditions in which samizdat in Eastern Europe came about, but at the same time they go beyond the political framework or simply abandon it altogether and raise different types of questions that come under the current scope of the humanities in a way that casts new light on old subjects.

In Czech literary studies the subject of samizdat has continually been raised ever since the significant increase in the importance of this publishing activity in the 1970s during the period known as normalization after the Soviet-led military intervention in 1968, which

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9 See e.g. PREČAN, Vilém. 'Unabhängige Literatur und Samizdat in der Tschechoslowakei der 70er und 80er Jahre', in *Der Zensur zum Trotz: Das gefesselte Wort und die Freiheit in Europa*, P. RAABE (ed.). Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft, 1991, pp. 241–253. Ibid: 'Independent Literature and Samizdat in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s', in *Literature and Politics in Central Europe: Studies in Honour of Markéta Goetz-Stankiewicz*. Columbia: Camden House, 1993, pp. 91–107.

10 The Institute of Czech Literature at the Czech Academy of Sciences first published a translation anthology on this subject: T. PAVLIČEK – P. PÍŠA – M. WÖGERBAUER (eds.). *Nebezpečná literatura? Antologie z myšlení o literární cenzuře* [Dangerous Literature? An Anthology of Thought on Literary Censorship]. Brno: Host, 2013 – followed by an extensive two-volume collective monograph: WÖGERBAUER, Michael – PÍŠA, Petr – ŠÁMAL, Petr – JANÁČEK, Pavel et al. *V obecném zájmu. Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře, 1749–2014*. [In the General Interest: Censorship and Social Regulation of Literature in Modern Czech Culture, 1749–2014]. Praha: Academia – Ústav pro českou literaturu, 2015.

radically changed the cultural policy of the ruling Czechoslovak Communist Party. Previous research into samizdat activities in the Czech lands, going back to the war period and the 1950s, but with their heyday in the 1970s, will culminate in the 'Encyclopedia of Czech Literary Samizdat 1948–1989' and the 'Article Bibliography of Czech Literary Samizdat' projects, which are under way from 2015 to 2019 at the CAS Institute of Czech Literature, Lexicography Department and the Centre for Information on Literary Studies at the same research institute with the assistance of the Czech Science Foundation and the Czech Ministry of Education research infrastructure.

Attempts to achieve an overview of samizdat that not only summarizes its sources, archives, libraries and even individual publications, but also offers an inspiring approach to the study of the phenomenon itself are made in parallel with many other countries, but unfortunately often with insufficient regard for the comparative aspect, which is increasingly attractive with the passage of time.<sup>11</sup> Studies are undertaken both in countries where samizdat has played an important cultural and historical role (e.g. Russia, Poland<sup>12</sup>, East

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11 The following publications, for example, have at least to some extent followed this route: W. EICHWEDE (ed.). *Samizdat. Alternative Kultur in Zentral- und Osteuropa. Die 60er bis 80er Jahre. Dokumentationen zur Kultur und Gessellschaft im östlichen Europa* [Samizdat. Alternative Culture in Central and Eastern Europe from the 1960s to the 1980s]. Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2000. A. CATALANO – S. GUAGNELLI (eds.). 'La luce dell'est: il samizdat come costruzione di una comunità parallela', *Il samizdat tra memoria e utopia. eSamizdat 2010–2011*, Vol. VIII, pp. 5–17. V. TODOROV (ed.). 'Publish & Perish: Samizdat & Underground Cultural Practices in the Soviet Bloc (I) and (II)', *Poetics Today: International Journal for Theory and Analysis of Literature and Communication*, 2008–2009, Vol. XXIX and XXX. V. PARISI, (ed.). *Samizdat. Between Practices and Representations. Lecture Series at Open Society Archives. Budapest, February – June 2013*. Budapest: Central European University, Institute for Advanced Study, 2015. FEINDT, Gregor. 'Opposition und Samizdat in Ostmitteleuropa. Strukturen und Mechanismen unabhängiger Periodika in vergleichender Perspektive' [Opposition and Samizdat in Eastern Europe. The Structures and Mechanisms of Independent Magazines in Comparison], *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, No. 1, 2016, Vol. LXV, pp. 17–42.

12 BŁAŻEJOWSKA, Justyna. *Papierowa rewolucja. Z dziejów drugiego obiegu wydawczego w Polsce 1976–1989/1990* [A Paper Revolution: From the History of the 'Second Circulation' in Poland]. Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej,

Germany<sup>13</sup> and Hungary<sup>14</sup>) and at universities where attention is traditionally focused on Eastern Europe (in the USA, Italy, Germany<sup>15</sup> and elsewhere).

In this connection we have decided to publish English translations of several studies of samizdat that have been written in the Czech milieu or that involve Czech culture. We wanted to find out which relevant, inspirational studies are available that might also attract foreign researchers, as they contain many ideas that go far beyond the factographic and political framework, or that present the traditional aspects in a way that is inspiring to this day.

One of the characteristic features of independent culture in Communist countries during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was its small-scale interconnections with counterpart communication circles in other Soviet bloc countries. Hence our publication is by no means just aimed at users whose native language is English, but also in equal measure at all those who might be interested in these subjects and who cannot read these texts in the original language.<sup>16</sup>

The selection of just a few articles out of dozens, if not hundreds of previously published studies of Czech samizdat was not an easy

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2010. KANDZIORA, Jerzy - SZYMAŃSKA, Zyta. *Bez cenzury 1976-1989: literatura, ruch wydawniczy, teatr: bibliografia* [Censorship Free 1976-1989: Literature, Publishers, Theatre: Bibliography]. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1999.

13 KOWALCZUK, Ilko-Sascha. *Freiheit in Öffentlichkeit. Politischer Samizdat in der DDR 1985-1989* [Freedom in Public. Political Samizdat in Eastern Germany 1985-1989]. Berlin: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 2002.

14 HODOSÁN, Róza. *Szamizdat történetek* [Stories of Samizdat]. Budapest: Noran, 2004. DEMSZKY, Gábor - RAJK, László - SASVÁRI, Edit. *Földalatti vonalak* [Underground Lines]. Pécs: Jelenkor, 2000.

15 Particularly noteworthy is the connection between samizdat and the way the internet operates nowadays. This subject is dealt with competently by Henrike SCHMIDT in her monograph: *Russische Literatur im Internet. Zwischen digitaler Folklore und politischer Propaganda* [Russian Literature on the Internet. Between the Digital Folklore and the Political Propaganda]. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011.

16 In the field of artistic practices and theories, this mediating role was played at the beginning of this century by Primary Documents: L. HOPTMAN - T. POSPISZYL (eds.). *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*. Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 2002. A fairly comprehensive publication of this kind is still missing in the field of samizdat.

task, and was not governed by any strict objective criteria. We have attempted to present views of samizdat that might be comprehensible and inspirational in the present-day situation, where, as already mentioned, the typological and theoretical standpoints go hand in hand with the historical viewpoint, or even take precedence over it. Chronologically, we have also taken into account both the era in which authors depicted samizdat, as it were, while it was still in operation, i.e. till the end of the 1980s, and research into the following period, when attempts were first made to systematize samizdat output and its reflections from the standpoint of the age in which samizdat had lost its previous urgency and had acquired new characteristics and fresh qualities in retrospect.

For the first group of texts (written during the samizdat era and distributed primarily through samizdat channels) an exceptionally significant role was played, from our point of view, by the texts of Miroslav Červenka (1932–2005), one of the most prominent Czech literary theorists of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a critical pupil and original successor to Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukařovský, who was not only an internationally famous versologist, but also a samizdat poet and samizdat theorist. He only wrote two studies on it, which actually overlapped to some extent, but both of them present a conceptual analysis relating samizdat to general textological and literary history and scholarship of the kind that displays sensitivity to the manuscript and its changeable semiotic nature during communication between the author, the publisher and the reader.

A study by prose writer and essayist Josef Jedlička (1927–1990), who emigrated from the working town of Litvínov to West Germany after 1968, describes the growing and increasingly genre-diverse samizdat output of the 1970s, which he compares to the cultural experience of the 1950s, documenting samizdat as a network not only of texts, but also of alternative institutions.

The controversial nature of the texts by literary critic, historian and writer František Kautman (1927–2016) and essayist, linguist and philologist Karel Palek (\*1948) publishing under the pseudonym of

Petr Fidelius make them of special importance to our collection. Should it ever appear that samizdat culture before 1989 was exclusively in solidarity as it overcame its differences of opinion in its polemical relations with the official prosecuting and state authorities (as was the case to a large extent in political dissent between participants in the Charter 77 civic initiative), then Kautman and Fidelius's short articles indicate the opposite. There were harsh polemics even within samizdat over what samizdat actually meant and what terminology could be used to describe its ambitions and activities. Fidelius takes exception to the term *ineditní* (unpublished), which he believes contradicts the very essence of samizdat output, in which the term *edice* (publication, series) plays a key role. Moreover, in the Czech context these polemics refer to a specific terminological and ideological element that could not exist in the Soviet Union, the homeland and empire of samizdat. Some authors (including not only Fidelius, but also prose writer Ludvík Vaculík, one of the key samizdat participants) refer to a paradox which they seek a way out of (in vain), i.e. in an environment under pressure from linguistic Sovietization, how can we avoid the term samizdat, which might well express its subversive nature in the face of Soviet-style political power, but at the lexicological level it highlights the adoption of such irritating neologisms as *kolkhoz* and *khozrazchot*?

Texts by the brilliant stylist Jiří Gruša (1938–2011), poet, prose writer and later Czech Ambassador to Austria and Germany, never relinquish their personal tone in favour of scholarly propriety. His viewpoint is objective but in particular it is that of an author who was one of the prominent protagonists of his generation during the 1960s, the man behind the journals that were among the most important press platforms of their day (*Tvář* and *Sešity pro mladou literaturu*) and who was subsequently one of the first to personally experience the persecution and criminalization of literary activity. He was prosecuted for distributing pornography in his literary works, and during the 1970s he was involved in the establishment of Petlice, the largest Czech samizdat 'publishing house'.

Gruša's view of samizdat output includes historical intersections and comparisons relating not only to the Stalinist period in post-1948 Czechoslovak history, but also references to the Soviet regime and even Tsarist Russia. At the same time, however, his description includes the detailed testimony of a prominent participant in the events taking place in Czechoslovakia.

The articles by librarian and editor Jiří Gruntorád (\*1952), translator, journalist and literary critic Tomáš Vrba (\*1947) and Martin Machovec (\*1956), literary historian, critic and editor of Czech underground literature, present an important stage that combines personal experience of samizdat with the opportunity to treat it historically with the hindsight of the ensuing period, in which samizdat ceased to fulfil its original function of publishing texts that could not be published, for various reasons, in the usual way.

The characteristic approach of the period starting in the early 1990s involved attempts to summarize, categorize and describe the material in an elementary way: the establishment of the *Libri prohibiti samizdat* library under the management of one of those most prominently involved in samizdat production, Jiří Gruntorád, the first collected bibliographical works, an anthology of texts examining the phenomenon of alternative, unofficial culture in the Czech lands,<sup>17</sup> the fifteen-part television serial *Samizdat* (2003), directed by Andrej Krob, one of those involved in samizdat activities, and Petr Slavík's television serial *Alternativní kultura* (1997–2005) inter alia. This flurry of typological arrangement and material registration activity also involved Tomáš Vrba, samizdat publication house and magazine editor, and in the 1990s the editor-in-chief of the *Lettre internationale* and *Přítomnost* magazines. An irreplaceable role combining that of eye-witness and protagonist with the competence of editor and textologist is played by the author Martin Machovec. We have not included his seminal

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17 HANÁKOVÁ, Jitka. *Edice českého samizdatu 1972-1991* [Czech Samizdat Series 1972-1991]. Praha: Národní knihovna ČR, 1997 and J. ALAN (ed.). *Alternativní kultura. Příběh české společnosti 1945-1989* [Alternative Culture: The Story of Czech Society 1945-1989]. Praha: NLN, 2001.

study 'The Types and Functions of Samizdat Publications in Czechoslovakia', 1948–1989 in this anthology, because it is easily available to all those interested in an English translation in *Poetics Today*.<sup>18</sup> Two of his contributions deal with some fundamental aspects of samizdat and research into it. The first one ('How Underground Authors and Publishers Financed Their Samizdats') looks at the economic dimension of independent publishing, which is often overlooked due to samizdat activists' voluntary participation in the preparation and distribution work, which might appear somehow exempt from economic mechanisms. For all that, however, samizdat is an attractive subject for research into its 'shadow economy' operations, even though it is only sporadically documented, as is the case with any black market. However, this lack does not mean that samizdat was not inter alia a material and inevitably an economic pursuit involving such categories as work and its value, material costs, time (working time), buying, selling, profit and the like. Machovec's study on the group of writers around the Půlnoc series (1949–1955) bore testimony to his erudition, with his detailed knowledge not only of individual texts, but also of their variants, transcriptions and the relations between biography and bibliography, as he reconstructed the emergence and activities of one of the first postwar samizdat communities, which came to be of decisive importance inter alia for the creation of the 'cultural underground', the most famous representatives of which were the poet and philosopher Egon Bondy, the theorist and poet Ivan Martin Jirous and the band Plastic People of the Universe.

The texts by literary historian and translator Alena Přibáňová (\*1970), editor, writer and literary historian Michal Přibáň (\*1966), Polish lecturer in Czech studies and cultural journalist Weronika Parfianowicz-Vertun (\*1984), literary historian Petr Šámal (\*1972), who is also editor of the classified journal *Česká literatura* published by the CAS Institute of Czech Literature, and Tomáš Glanc (\*1969), doctor

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18 *Poetics Today, Publish & Perish: Samizdat & Underground. Cultural Practices in the Soviet Bloc II*, No. 1, Spring 2009, Vol. XXX. Duke University Press.



in Russian studies and East European literature specialist, are remarkable for each individual author's unique perspective, since in contrast to the contributors referred to above they have at most only marginal personal experience of samizdat. Their relationship towards samizdat is primarily that of researchers, aided by the preserved material media and the methodological tools which they use in their efforts to find relevant approaches to the phenomena under investigation.

In the case of Alena Přibáňová, Michal Přibáň and their article on Sixty-Eight Publishers in contact with samizdat at home and the competition in exile, this is a specific example of the largest *tamizdat* (publishing in exile) producer and procedures involving movement of texts between the 'domestic' and 'foreign' environments.<sup>19</sup> Put in this way, the following question also problematizes and expands the category of samizdat: does it also include books published in the usual way at state-registered publishers that operated in other countries, whose output was distributed abroad (primarily within the 'émigré' environment, from which it was then smuggled into samizdat circulation in the 'domestic' environment?)

This topic is developed by Petr Šámal in his text on parallel circulation as a consequence of censorship, which was published as part of an extended study entitled 'In the Interest of the Working People' on literary censorship between 1949 and 1989.<sup>20</sup> It follows the effects of censorship on literary activity, resulting in the need to smuggle prohibited printed matter across totalitarian state borders and to publish it at publishers in an environment that placed demands on authors that were different to those they were used to in the domestic environment, and which many had difficulties accepting. This question also raises the possible status of 'secondary circulation', i.e. the case of books that were officially published, but subsequently withdrawn from sale, from libraries and from public circulation, so

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19 A monograph by KIND-KOVÁCS, Friederik - LABOV, Jessie. *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism*. New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013 deals with an analogous issue in Soviet material.

20 In WÖGERBAUER et al., *V obecném zájmu* see footnote No. 10, pp. 1099-1223.

they played the same role as tamizdat, although this was not typographically evident. This issue is referred to in the article by Tomáš Glanc, whose contribution shares the interest expressed by Weronika Parfianowicz-Vertun's article in the media dimension of samizdat and samizdat that was not only distributed on paper, but also on other media including X-ray negatives that still showed traces of human bodies. This brings us back to the beginning – and to the present-day interest in samizdat, which is remarkable for its sensitivity to its fragile material nature, as well as to its movements, not only in the literal sense (i.e. the distribution of samizdat in the past between its physical mediators and its readers), but also in a metaphorical sense involving the interpretation of samizdat, i.e. shifts in its possible meanings.



