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Fellow Seminar

Valentina Parisi

SAMIZDAT IN THE CONTEXT OF READING PRACTICES IN SOVIET RUSSIA

It is generally assumed that *samizdat* as a self-publishing strategy was a key form of dissident activity which aimed to spread forbidden works within and beyond the borders of the Soviet Union and insofar to discredit or undermine the authority of the Soviet State. But from a different viewpoint *samizdat* can also be analysed as a self-significant medium which challenges to a great extent our presuppositions about how a published text should look like. In particular, while it established a parallel level of textual production and dissemination, *samizdat* recalled to life aspects of scribal culture that have been marginalized by the invention of the printing press.

In the first of the two talks that I will give during my research stay in Budapest, I will contextualize *samizdat* publishing and reading practices within the interpretive framework provided by book history studies (a relatively recent discipline which analyses books and print media as cultural artefacts). Taking as a starting point my forthcoming book *The Exceeding Reader. Soviet Samizdat Literary Journals, 1956-1990*, I will address issues relating to the Pre-Gutenberg character of self-published texts. On the other hand, stressing the role played by the reader in the physical making of *samizdat* texts, I will describe some of the features of the new readership to whom self-publishing appealed, drawing on the notion of "interpretive community" coined by Donald F. McKenzie.

Valentina Parisi received her PhD in Slavic Studies in 2005 at the State University in Milan. In 2009-2011 she has been a postdoctoral fellow at the Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane (SUM) in Florence. Her research interests encompass a range of issues relating to unofficial literature and arts in the USSR, with a major focus on samizdat. Among her publications we find a short monograph about Lev Rubinstein's artist books (*„Das Buch verlassen“: Lew Rubinsteins Künstlerbücher, 1972-1974*, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, 2007) and a chapter about the Russian art journal "A-Ja",

forthcoming in the volume edited by Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov, *From Samizdat to Tamizdat: independent media before and after 1989*, which will be published by Berghahn. She is also the editor of a volume devoted to the influence of Siberian Shamanism on Russian avant-garde art (*La Venere e lo sciamano. L'influsso dello sciamanesimo siberiano sulle arti e la cultura russa del Novecento*. Napoli, Graphic Art, 2010).