

Production, Circulation and Reception of Soviet Nonconformist
Culture in Italy (1957-1991): A Transnational Perspective

MAPPING SOVIET UNDERGROUND CULTURE IN ITALY: ROUTES, NETWORKS, PARATEXTS. AN INTRODUCTION*

MAPPARE LA CULTURA UNDERGROUND SOVIETICA IN ITALIA: PERCORSI, RETI, PARATESTI.
UN'INTRODUZIONE

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ABSTRACT

The production, circulation and reception of Soviet underground culture in Italy during the cultural Cold War represents an extremely interesting case study to demonstrate that the 'Nylon Curtain' – namely, an extremely permeable geopolitical and ideological border – allowed the passage in both directions of a great variety of cultural objects, such as manuscripts (*samizdat*), books (*tamizdat*), audio recordings (*roentgenizdat*, *magnitizdat*), videotapes, paintings, drawings, graphics, photographs, etc. Starting from an event of crucial importance for the diffusion of unofficial Soviet culture in Italy and abroad – the *Biennale of Dissent* – which took place in an equally crucial year for the international spread of Soviet dissent – 1977 – this essay aims to introduce the main topics of this thematic section, through the analysis of the actions of various socio-cultural actors who participated in the creation of the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti, fotografie, videotapes, samizdat* [Books, magazines, posters, photographs, videotapes, samizdat] and the relational network that linked them.

Keywords: Cultural Cold War; Transnational Networks; *Biennale of Dissent*; 1977; *Tamizdat*.

La produzione, circolazione e ricezione della cultura sovietica underground in Italia durante la Guerra Fredda culturale rappresenta un caso di studi estremamente interessante per dimostrare che la 'cortina di Nylon' – ovvero, un confine geopolitico ed ideologico estremamente permeabile – permetteva il passaggio in entrambe le direzioni di una grande varietà di oggetti culturali quali manoscritti (*samizdat*), libri (*tamizdat*), registrazioni audio (*roentgenizdat*, *magnitizdat*), video, quadri, disegni, grafiche, fotografie ecc. Prendendo le mosse da un evento di cruciale importanza per la diffusione in Italia e all'estero della cultura sovietica non ufficiale – la Biennale del dissenso – che ebbe luogo in un anno altrettanto determinante per la diffusione a livello internazionale del dissenso sovietico – il 1977 – attraverso l'analisi dell'azione di diversi attori socio-culturali che parteciparono alla realizzazione della mostra *Libri, riviste, manifesti, fotografie, videotapes, samizdat* e della rete relazionale che li univa, questo saggio si propone di introdurre le tematiche principali di questa sezione tematica.

Parole chiave: Guerra Fredda culturale; Reti transnazionali; *Biennale del dissenso*; 1977; *Tamizdat*.

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This thematic section about the production, circulation, and reception of Soviet underground culture in Italy from a transnational perspective (1957-1991) aims to analyse the complexity of the field of cultural production (Bourdieu) during the cultural Cold War (Scott-Smith and Segal). The production, reception, and circulation in Italy of Soviet underground/unofficial/non-conformist culture (literature, visual art, and music) will be addressed through the scope of the agency of small actors (Autio-Sarasmo and Miklóssy 7-9) – state and non-state institutions (publishing houses, social movements, human rights organizations, associations, etc.) and individuals (writers, translators, publishers, literary agents, critics, human rights activists, dissidents, officials, diplomats, politicians, etc.) – as well as of paratexts (Genette), thus contributing to the broader field of comparative socio-cultural history of the Cold War (Mitter and Major).

1. THE ROLE OF SMALL STATES IN THE CULTURAL COLD WAR. THE CASE OF ITALY

The idea to analyse the production, circulation, and reception of Soviet underground culture in a specific national context arises from a relatively recent turn in Cold War studies, that focuses on the role of “smaller states as actors in their own right, pursuing their own interests and forming their own relationships with greater powers or with each other” (Autio-Sarasmo and Miklóssy 7). The analysis of the agency of small states, thus, allows us to consider the sphere of cultural interactions among the two blocs as a multilateral space that “was uncontrolled by superpowers and was not subject to the bipolar laws of the Cold War” (8). Bent Boel recently noted that, in attempting to reconstruct the transnational networks between Soviet dissidents and Westerners, it is important to take into account not only the international political factors but, most relevantly, the domestic level, as the analysis of a specific national context can convey very important information about the development and consolidation of transnational dissident networks during the Cold War (“Who helped the Soviet Bloc Dissidents?”). Of course, “[m]ost key dissident initiatives in the mid-1970s, like the creation of the Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR) in Poland or the launching of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, primarily had domestic roots and motivations” (“Who helped the Soviet Bloc Dissidents?”). But if we take into account the Italian political situation in the Seventies – when “the absence of relations between the [Italian Communist Party (PCI)] and the dissidents became a major issue in domestic politics, and one used by the [Italian] Socialist Party (PSI) in its conflict with the Communists” (“Who helped the Soviet Bloc Dissidents?”) – the contacts established by Italian actors with Polish and Czechoslovak émigré communities appear in a different light. And this lends additional significance to the fact that the most important Czech émigré magazine – *Listy*¹ – was founded in Rome in 1970 by the Czech dissident Jiří Pelikán² with the support of the PSI (Caccamo,

¹ *Listy* was the press organ of the Czechoslovak Socialist Opposition. For further information, see Caccamo, *Listy*; and COURAGE.

² Jiří Pelikán, one of the leaders of the Prague Spring, after being stripped of his Czechoslovak citizenship (1970), he sought political asylum in Italy and acquired Italian citizenship (1977). He stood as a candidate for the European

Jiři Pelikan 43-44; Lomellini, “Il Sessantotto” 19), as well as on the assistance that the Polish émigré community near to Jacek Kuroń and the KOR received in Italy,³ and on the support offered from 1976 onwards by the PSI to Leach Wałęsa and the *Solidarność* [Solidarity] movement (Landoni).

Italy has been chosen as a case study also for its central role during the Cold War, being host to one of the two most important communist parties in the Western bloc. Like the French Communist Party (PCF), the PCI attracted the attention of the United States. Determined to maintain its hegemony in Western Europe, throughout the post-war decades Washington persistently viewed the PCI as a threat to the integrity of the Western bloc and the Atlantic alliance and kept the prevention of a communist victory in Italy as a basis objective (Scott-Smith 72; Brogi; Basosi and Bernardini). Thus, Italy – as well as France – became the *primary target* of the psychological warfare activities waged by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) to cement an Atlantic civilization of the West through covert and overt cultural operations (Scott-Smith 58-83; Scionti 91). In general, Italy was one of Western European countries whose political life was most affected by the clash between the two blocs (Dondi). In the 1970s domestic and bipolar factors interacted in new ways, bringing to a decade of high social and political conflicts, mass mobilizations, political and generational changes.⁴

Italy is a particularly interesting case study also in terms of its undoubtedly central role in the transnational dissemination of unofficial Soviet culture. It was here, in fact, that the first *tamizdat*⁵ was published in 1957 (Burgoyne et al. 416), when the Milanese publishing house Feltrinelli released Boris Pasternak's *Il dottor Živago* [Doctor Zhivago] as a world premiere (Mancosu, *Inside the Zhivago Storm* and *Zhivago's Secret Journey*). Since then, numerous Italian publishing houses – such as Mondadori, Einaudi, Rizzoli, De Donato, Jaca Book, and La Casa di Matriona, to name but a few – have included various *tamizdat* titles in their catalogues, some of which were also published

Parliament with the PSI, winning election (1979) and being reconfirmed in the role (1984).

³ In the late 1960s, the new wave of Polish emigration following the 1968 crisis received great support and assistance in Italy, thanks to the agency of a prominent Polish intellectual who had settled in Naples: Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. During World War II, Herling-Grudziński joined General Anders's 2nd Polish Corps and, after the war, he settled in Italy. Here, together with Jerzy Giedroyc, in 1947 he founded the Polish *tamizdat* magazine *Kultura* in Rome, and in 1955 he moved to Naples with his wife Lidia Croce, daughter of the philosopher Benedetto Croce. Thanks to Herling-Grudziński's network of contacts, which linked the Polish *intelligentsia* abroad with the Italian cultural and political milieu, some of the Polish students who led the protests in 1968 emigrated to Italy, particularly those belonging to the *Komandosi* [The Commandos] group, such as Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Aleksander Smolar. The latter was to become the international spokesperson for the KOR and served as the representative of the Committee for Social Self-Defense KOR abroad. They both played an important role in the foundation of the Polish *tamizdat* journal *Aneks*, which also benefited from the support of the *Kultura* group (Herling-Grudziński, Józef Czapski, and Jerzy Giedroyc), as well as of other Polish émigrés (such as Leopold Łabedz). Among the Polish émigrés from Kuroń's political milieu who fled in Italy, there was also Marta Petrusiewicz.

⁴ On the topic, see Santarelli, Crainz, Ginsborg and De Luna.

⁵ The term *tamizdat* is a Russian acronym which literally means ‘published over there’, namely on the other side of the Iron Curtain, and refers to four different cultural objects: 1) texts that were censored and/or unpublished in the Eastern Bloc, smuggled out of the USSR and its Socialist satellite countries, and printed in the West not only in translation, but also in the original language; 2) translations into Russian, Central and Eastern European languages of Western texts banned in the Eastern Bloc; 3) re-editions of texts originally published in Russia/USSR, Central and Eastern Europe, which for some reason (often of ideological nature), were no longer available to readers in the Eastern Bloc; and 4) texts written and published in the West by Russian, Central and Eastern European émigré authors, which were primarily targeted at readers in the Soviet Bloc.

in Italy as a world premiere, as in the case of *Viaggio nella vertigine* [Journey into the whirlwind] by Evgeniia Ginzburg and *Il primo cerchio* [The first circle] by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, published by Mondadori in 1967 and 1968 respectively, both in Italian translation and in the original Russian.⁶

The essays in this section cover a period stretching from the 1960s to the late 1980s. In order to provide a historical context for the reception of non-conformist Soviet culture in Italy, it is therefore necessary to focus on a year that marked a turning point in the transnational reception of Soviet and Eastern European dissent in Italy and abroad: 1977. That was the year in which Italy hosted the second session of the Sakharov Hearings and the *Biennale del dissenso culturale nei paesi dell'Est* [Biennale of cultural dissent in the Eastern countries], better known as the *Biennale of Dissent*. It is therefore no coincidence that several essays collected in this section mention the *Biennale of Dissent* both directly (Bertelé, De Florio, Dalla Bontà) and indirectly (Larocca) as a pivotal event for reconstructing the reception of underground and non-conformist Soviet culture in Italy. The organisation of the most famous and impressive Western event entirely devoted to the underground culture of the Soviet bloc countries was made possible by a vast and efficient network of transnational contacts who worked to bring to Venice not only the works of numerous non-conformist and underground artists, but also a variety of clandestine cultural objects. Indeed, the programme of the *Biennale of Dissent* also featured the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti, fotografie, videotapes, samizdat* [Books, magazines, posters, photographs, videotapes, *samizdat*], dedicated to a wide range of cultural artefacts and original documents that had arrived clandestinely from behind the Iron Curtain – *samizdat* (magazines, literary journals, essays, open letters and appeals) and *magnitizdat* (documentary audiotapes and videotapes on various aspects of life in the socialist countries of the Soviet bloc), photographs, posters and *tamizdat* – thereby allowing us to place Italy at the centre of a complex web of transnational network that played a determinant role in the production, circulation and reception of Soviet underground culture during the Cold War.

2. ITALY, 1977: THE RECEPTION OF SOVIET AND EASTERN EUROPEAN DISSENT

1977 is generally considered the year when the high tide of the Great Détente began its decline: during the fall of the year the US government undertook a dubious campaign to accuse the Soviet Union of ‘destabilizing Africa’ (Donaghy). The celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution (7 November 1977) were preceded a few weeks earlier by the opening of the follow-up meetings to the Helsinki Accords, held in Belgrade (4 October 1977–9 March 1978) to review the effectiveness of Helsinki’s Basket IV, which established monitoring mechanisms to

⁶ On Mondadori’s editorial policy for the publication of Russian *tamizdat*, see Sicari “Ital’ianskii Tamizdat”; on the Italian editorial history of E. Ginzburg’s work, see Parisi, “Da Magadan”. On the Italian editorial history of A. Solzhenitsyn’s *The First Circle*, see Sicari, “The Literary Agent”; Garetto and Mazzucchelli; and Mazzucchelli in this volume.

oversee the effective application and implementation of the agreements by the signatory states.⁷ On that occasion, great attention was paid to the compliance with Principle VII of the Agreements, which enshrined respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This had the side-effect of polarising and exacerbating the tensions between the two blocs, effectively shifting the ideological struggle to the front line of the defence of human rights in the year that began with the publication of *Charta77* (7 January 1977). Moreover, after the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975, respect for human rights was at the forefront of the demands of Soviet and Eastern European dissidents, who began to set up various non-governmental organisations and informal groups – foremost among them the *Moskovskaia Khel'sinskakaia gruppa* [Moscow Helsinki Group] – whose aim was to denounce any violations of the Agreements by the USSR and other satellite states.⁸ Therefore, just as the year 1968 marks the beginning not only of a global cycle of social protests but also of the emergence of new international networks (Lomellini, “Il Sessantotto” 15; Flores and Gozzini), 1977 is the year in which some of these transnational networks took action to raise international public awareness of the fate of opposition movements in the USSR and its satellite states.

Against the backdrop of that eventful year, Italy – which on the domestic level was facing an extraordinary period of intense social and cultural activism, political participation, mass protests and social tensions⁹ – found itself at the centre of the world's attention, hosting two high-profile events that contributed significantly to the Western reception of dissent and non-conformist culture in the Eastern Bloc: the second session of the Sakharov Hearings (25-28 November, Rome)¹⁰ and the *Biennale of Dissent* (15 November-15 December, Venice), both of which aimed at promoting the democratisation of Soviet society through international public pressure on the Kremlin (Boel, “International Sakharov Hearings” 81). In particular, the Venetian event was dedicated that year to Soviet, Central and Eastern European cultural dissent. Thus, on the international stage, it became a strategic instrument employed to shine a spotlight on dissent within the Eastern Bloc and, consequently, on human rights violations in the USSR and its satellite states, with the aim of pressing Moscow ahead of the Belgrade meeting by leveraging the commitments made under the

⁷ The substantive human rights provisions – including freedoms of conscience, information, and movement – reside within Basket III of the Helsinki Accords, while Basket IV provided the institutional framework required to monitor compliance, enforce those rights, and schedule future follow-up meetings.

⁸ The Moscow Helsinki Group was founded on 12 May 1976 with the aim of monitoring the Soviet government's compliance with the Helsinki Accords and denouncing human rights violations in the USSR. For a detailed account, see Alexeeva, “The Moscow Helsinki Group” and Alekseeva, *Istoriia* 65-76.

⁹ In 1977, a new student movement stood up against the established order, the so-called ‘Movimento del 77’ [Movement of ‘77], an underground counter-cultural social movement which promoted the cultural revolution using irony, creativity and play, an ideal embodied, among others, by the Indiani Metropolitani [Metropolitan Indians]. Despite the playful and non-violent attitude of the movement, the protests were violently struck down when, in Bologna, the left-wing student Francesco Lorusso was killed (11 March 1977) by police forces during clashes, resulting in an urban guerrilla. The Bologna riots ushered in a year of deep tensions that caused a long series of deaths among the protesters and the police. On the topic, see Edwards, Hajek and Mariscalco.

¹⁰ The International Sakharov Hearings examined human rights violations in the Soviet bloc. The first session took place in Copenhagen (1975), the second was held in Rome (1977), the third in Washington DC (1979), the fourth in Lisbon (1983), and the fifth in London (1985). A sixth session should have taken place in Bonn (1986) but was never organised. For a detailed discussion of the topic, see Boel 2021.

Helsinki Accords. On the domestic level, however, it also served the Italian socialists' purpose of putting the PCI in a difficult position both with the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) and with public opinion at home. It was no coincidence that Italy – the Western NATO allied country boasting the largest communist party – was chosen as the venue for these two major events (102).

The *Biennale of Dissent* was divided into nine sections (visual arts; music; cinema; theatre; mass media, communications, books and *samizdat*; literature and poetry; history; religion; and scientific research) and hosted three different exhibitions: one dedicated to the visual arts of the USSR, *La nuova arte sovietica: una prospettiva non ufficiale* [The new Soviet art: a non-official perspective];¹¹ one entirely dedicated to Czechoslovak graphic art, *Grafica cecoslovacca: Undici anni di ricerca, 1965-1975* [Czechoslovak graphic art: eleven years of research, 1965-1975];¹² and, finally, the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti, fotografie, videotapes, samizdat* [Book, magazines, posters, photographs, videotapes, *samizdat*],¹³ dedicated to a vast collection of photographic, audio, video and literary materials documenting the various forms of cultural dissent produced clandestinely in the Eastern Bloc (*samizdat*, *magnitizdat*) and in the Western Bloc (*tamizdat*).

The programme was enriched by the film festival *Cinema e paesi dell'Est* [Cinema and the Eastern Countries],¹⁴ the theatre festival *Il teatro dell'Est* [Theatre of the East]¹⁵ and two music festivals dedicated respectively to dissident singer-songwriters and 'bards' – *Cantautori del dissenso: récitals di canzoni e poesie di artisti esponenti del dissenso* [Singer-songwriters of dissent: recitals of songs and poems by dissident artists]¹⁶ – and to censored Soviet composers, who had emigrated from the Eastern Bloc or were active in the Soviet underground scene – *Sovetskaja Muzyka* [sic] [Soviet Music].¹⁷ This rich cultural programme was further complemented by a series of sev-

¹¹ Curated by Enrico Crispolti and Gabriella Moncada, the exhibition took place at the Palazzetto dello Sport in the Arsenale in Venice (15 November-17 December 1977). Among the artists on display were: Aleksander Melamid, Lev Nussberg, Ernst Neizvestnyi, Jan Kotik, Ilia Kabakov and many others. On the *Biennale of Dissent*, see: Biennale, *Il dissenso culturale*; Parisi, "Zwischen Unstimmigkeit"; Molok, "Biennale dissidentov"; May, Bertelé, "Venice 1977" and Enrico Crispolti, 62-119. On Soviet participation in the Venice event over the years and on the activities of the Russian pavilion at the Biennale, see Molok *Russkie khudozhniki*. On Soviet participation to the Biennale from 1924 until 1962, see Bertelé, *Arte sovietica*.

¹² At the exhibition, which was held at the Querini Stampalia Foundation in Venice, works by 13 artists were exhibited, including Alena Kučerová, Adriana Šimotová, Oldřich Kulháněk, and Jan Krejčí (Biennale, "Il dissenso culturale" 546-548).

¹³ The exhibition was held in the Ala Napoleonica of the Museo Correr, in Venice's St Mark's Square. The exhibition featured 2,500 items, including books and magazines (*tamizdat*); manuscripts and typescripts of pamphlets, open letters, appeals, and magazines (*samizdat*); *magnitizdat*; photographs by Victor Abdalov and I. Kynkl; posters; and videotapes (Biennale, "Il dissenso culturale" 578-80).

¹⁴ The screenings took place at the Cinema Olimpia (St. Mark), Sala Pasinetti (Ca' Giustinian) and Malibran Theater in Venice. The programme of the film festival – realized with the active contribution of Antonín Liehm and curated by Mira Liehm – featured also a series of initiatives (round-table discussions and seminars) dedicated to the work of Sergey Paradzhanov, who was at the time a prisoner of conscience in the USSR. (Biennale, "Il dissenso culturale" 553-64).

¹⁵ The theater festival (December 5-6) featured screenings of films, videotapes, and audiotapes of excerpts from plays directed by Andrei Serban and Otomar Krejča, a tribute to Václav Havel by director Sergio Genni, and a film by director Erwin Piscator based on a short story by Anna Seghers. The screenings were followed by a conference titled *Teatro-provocazione: il non allineamento nel lavoro teatrale nei paesi dell'Europa dell'est* [The theater of provocation: non-alignment in Eastern European countries' theater] (December 7-8) (Biennale, "Il dissenso culturale" 580-86).

¹⁶ The festival in Venice saw the performance of singer-songwriters Wolf Biermann (19 November 1977, Teatro Malibran), Karel Kryl (28 November 1977, Ateneo Veneto), Aleksandr Galich (3 December 1977, Ateneo Veneto), and Aleksei Khvostenko (5 December, Cinema Olimpia) (Biennale, "Il dissenso culturale" 593-596).

¹⁷ The programme, curated by Valerii Voskoboinikov, featured several concerts which took place on 6- 7 and 11-

en international conferences dedicated to numerous aspects of Soviet life: art in its multi-faceted expressions (visual arts, film, literature, theatre), religion, scientific research, and history.¹⁸ These conferences saw the participation not only of dissidents and so-called *inakomysliashchie* ('those who thought differently') who had already emigrated to the West (such as Vladimir Bukovskii, Andrei Amal'rik, František Janouch, Antonín Liehm, André Glucksmann, Natal'ia Gorbanevskiaia, Aleksander Smolar, Leonid Pliushch, Zhores Medvedev, Liudmila Alekseeva, Josef Skvoretsky, and many others), but also of international scholars and intellectuals of the calibre of Norberto Bobbio, Alain Besançon, Georges Nivat, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Susan Sontag, Alberto Moravia, and Gordon Skilling. Amidst the cultural ferment of that Venetian winter, the tensions arrived at rather critical levels. The political temperature, however, had already started to rise as early as in January 1977, when the first rumours regarding the *Biennale* had begun to circulate.

3. VENICE, 1977: THE BIENNALE OF CULTURAL DISSENT IN EASTERN COUNTRIES

In the early years of the Biennale's presidency of Carlo Ripa di Meana,¹⁹ relations between the Venetian institution and the Soviet Union were fruitful, as demonstrated by a rich documentation held at the archive of contemporary arts (Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, ASAC) in Venice. From 18 to 22 May 1975, a delegation comprising the president, the director of visual arts and architecture – Vittorio Gregotti – and an interpreter and expert on Soviet culture – Maria Roncalli Doria²⁰ – travelled to Moscow, at the suggestion of the Venetian institution itself and at

13 December at the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory in Venice. On those occasions, works by D. Shostakovich, A. Rabinovich-Barakovsky, P. Herschkowitz, I. Dorfmann, Yu. Markowitsch, E. Denisov, M. Barolsky, S. Gubaidulina, M. Kopytman, T. Mansurian, A. Schmittke and V. Silvestrov were performed (Biennale, "Il dissenso culturale" 596-99).

¹⁸ The conferences were all held in the Napoleonic Wing of the Correr Museum, in Venice's St Mark's Square. The programme of the various conferences was organised as follows: *Libertà e socialismo: momenti storici del dissenso* [Freedom and socialism: historical moments of dissent] (15-18 November); *Avanguardie e neo-avanguardie nell'est europeo* [Avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes in Eastern Europe] (19 November 1977); *Cinema e paesi dell'est* [Cinema and the Eastern European countries] (25-27 November); *Il dissenso religioso* [Religious dissent] (29-30 November); *L'altra letteratura: crisi dell'egemonia e contraddizioni nelle culture dell'est europeo* [The other literature: crisis of hegemony and contradictions in Eastern European cultures] (1-4 December); *Teatro provocazione: il non allineamento nel lavoro teatrale nei paesi dell'Europa dell'est* [Provocation theatre: non-alignment in theatrical work in Eastern European countries] (7 December); *La libertà della ricerca scientifica: problemi della scienza e degli uomini di scienza nei paesi dell'Europa dell'est* [Freedom of scientific research: problems of science and scientists in Eastern European countries] (9 December); *Musica e potere* [Music and power] (12-13 December). On 4 December, as part of the literary conference, the Ateneo Veneto hosted a reading by the Russian poet Iosif Brodskii.

¹⁹ Carlo Ripa di Meana (1929-2018) was born into an aristocratic family and, in the 1950s, became involved with the PCI, serving as an editor at *l'Unità* (1950-1953) and later, on behalf of the PCI, directing in Prague the International Union of Students' magazine, *World Student News* (1953-1956). In 1957, following the invasion of Hungary, he left the PCI and aligned himself with the PSI, joining the party's Central Committee. From 1958 to 1960, Ripa di Meana edited the magazine *Passato e presente*. From 1974 to 1978, he served as President of the Venice Biennale. From 1979 to 1984, Ripa di Meana served as a Member of the European Parliament. In 1993, after leaving the PSI, he became the national spokesperson for the Federation of the Greens, within whose ranks he was appointed Minister of the Environment (1992-1993), and later served as a Member of the European Parliament (1994-1999).

²⁰ Maria Roncalli Doria, also known as Mariolina Doria de Zuliani Marzotto, is a Venetian of noble descent, and a Slavist graduating in Russian language and literature from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She began visiting the USSR in the 1960s, thanks to a ministerial scholarship (Bertelè, *Enrico Crispolti* 63). During her visits behind the Iron Curtain, she became friends with Iosif Brodskii, who, after emigrating to America, was a regular guest in the lagoon city. In the opening paragraphs of his essay dedicated to the lagoon city, *Fondamenta degli Incurabili* [Watermark] (1989), Brodskii refers to his friend Doria de Zuliani without ever naming her directly, describing her as "the nu-

the invitation of the USSR Ministry of Culture, to discuss Soviet participation in the Biennale's activities for the 1976-1978 triennium (ASAC Fs AV 1975a). The report drawn up by Carlo Ripa di Meana upon his return to Italy stated that during the meetings with the Soviet delegation²¹ various requests had been put forward for the different sectors of the Biennale: a collaboration with the Taganka Theatre, directed by Iurii Liubimov, for the staging of *Ten Days That Shook the World* and *Hamlet*; a musical performance by composer Edison Denisov; the screening of Andrei Tarkovskii's latest film *Zerkalo* [The Mirror] and of the complete works of director Vasily Shukshin; an exhibition by Aleksander Rodchenko; one on Soviet architecture from 1917 to 1930; another dedicated to the Tretyakov Gallery's unexhibited collections; and, finally, one dedicated to the Soviet Union's historical participation in the Biennale (ASAC Fs AV 1975a). On that occasion, the two delegations had also discussed collaboration between ASAC and various Soviet institutions, including the Lenin Library, the State Institute for Art Studies of Moscow, and the Moscow Art Theatre Studio Nemirovich-Danchenko (ASAC Fs AV 1975a). However, despite the variety of projects proposed by the Venetian institution, in his report Ripa di Meana stated that the main objective of the Biennale mission was to safeguard relations with the USSR, in the belief that "it would be very useful for resolving many delicate situations at the new Biennale, including with many other [socialist] countries" (ASAC Fs AV 1975a).²² Later in his report, Ripa di Meana mentions a private conversation with the commissioner of the Soviet pavilion – Vladimir Goriainov – regarding the national pavilions of other socialist countries, during which Goriainov had informed him that he "had made contact with his colleagues in Hungary and Poland to ascertain their views on the organisation of the new Biennale" (ASAC Fs AV 1975a).²³ And even though not all the requests put forward by Ripa di Meana had been accepted by the Soviet Deputy Minister of Culture Vladimir Popov – such as, for example, the participation of the composer Edison Denisov – nevertheless he expressed a positive view on the possibility of future collaborations, proposing the staging of an exhibition on the theme of 'art and revolution' dedicated to the Soviet avant-garde from 1917 to 1925. At the conclusion of the meetings, the USSR's participation in the 1976 Biennale was confirmed, as was its support for the organisation of the exhibitions proposed by the Biennale delegation for the years to follow (ASAC Fs AV 1975a). To seal the agreements reached and the commitment to continue the collaboration between the USSR and the Biennale, Ripa di Meana

tria-clad sight", "the only person I knew in the city" or, simply, "the Veneziana". In 1975, Doria De Zuliani was appointed by the Biennale as consultant for relations with the USSR. She served as director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Moscow (2000-2002) and she is a retired professor of Russian language and literature.

²¹ The Soviet delegation was formed by the Minister of Culture Pëtr Demichev, the Deputy Minister of Culture Vladimir Popov, the head of the Department of Fine Arts Aleksander Khalturin, the commissioner of the Biennale Soviet Pavilion Vladimir Goriainov, the official of the Ministry of European Affairs Popova, and the First Secretary of the Union of Artists Tair Salakhov (ASAC Fs AV 1975a).

²² "[S]arebbe stato molto utile per sbloccare molte delicate situazioni della nuova Biennale anche con molti altri paesi [socialisti]". Where not otherwise indicated, all translations are of the author. *IS*

²³ "[A]ver preso contatto con i suoi colleghi di Ungheria e Polonia per conoscere il loro parere a proposito dell'impostazione della nuova Biennale".

presented a letter of thanks to the Soviet Deputy Minister of Culture Vladimir Popov during their final meeting on 21 May 1975 (ASAC Fs AV 1975b).

The collaboration with the Soviets continued successfully into the following year. On 27 May 1976, Ripa di Meana issued a statement published in the newspaper *Izvestiia* on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow (Ripa di Meana, “Nepovtorimyi balet”), as if to confirm the ‘bright future’ of this cultural cooperation. On 19 June, in the pages of the *Corriere della Sera*, Ripa di Meana hinted to the Italian public at “the most interesting agreement for 1977” concluded by Gregotti with Moscow for the staging of “an exhibition that will be remembered for years and years all over the world” (Ripa di Meana, “Una sfida”).²⁴ Gregotti himself echoed this statement the following week in the pages of the same Italian newspaper, confirming that the programme for the 1977 event was already ready and awaited only the approval of the executive committee and confirmation of funding from the Italian government (Gregotti, “La polemica”), on which the Venice Biennale was still dependent at the time.

Beyond these press announcements, however, as late as 31 August 1976, Ripa di Meana sent a letter to the head of the Soviet Department of Fine Art, Khalturin, seeking confirmation of the agreements reached between Vittorio Gregotti and commissioner Goriainov regarding the organisation of the exhibition *USSR 1917-1930*²⁵ scheduled for the 1977 Biennale at the Italian Pavilion of the Giardini in Venice. On 6 October 1976, Khalturin replied in the affirmative in a letter sent to Ripa di Meana²⁶ and in another addressed to Gregotti: after congratulating the latter on the success of the 1976 Biennale, he informed him of the establishment of a special Soviet commission of which he himself had been appointed chairman, postponing the finalisation of the remaining details to a meeting in Venice (ASAC Fs AV 1977a). Ripa di Meana’s reply was not long in coming: on 25 October, he invited the Soviet commission to attend a meeting to be held in Venice on 16 December 1976 (ASAC Fs AV 1976), which, however, did not take place due to Moscow’s failure to reply. On 3 January 1977, Ripa di Meana sent a reminder to Deputy Minister Khalturin, renewing the invitation for the Soviet delegation to attend the Venice meeting on a date to be agreed (ASAC Fs AV 1977b). Among the papers held at the ASAC, this letter is the last trace of any direct contact between Soviet cultural institutions and the Biennale presidency. Relations deteriorated rapidly when, following the publication on 7 January 1977 of *Charta77* by Czechoslovak dissidents, Ripa di Meana abruptly announced in the press that the next Biennale edition would be dedicated to cultural dissent in the Eastern Bloc countries:

²⁴ “[U]na mostra che verrà ricordata per anni e anni in tutto il mondo”.

²⁵ In a letter sent on 3 January 1977 by Vittorio Gregotti to Professor Manfredo Tafuri, a member of the committee appointed by the Biennale to organise the exhibition, the proposed title is *Il contributo degli artisti visivi alla costruzione del nuovo ambiente in Unione Sovietica tra il 1917 e il 1930* [The contribution of visual artists to the construction of the new environment in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1930] (ASAC Fs AV 1977c).

²⁶ The letter sent by Khalturin to Ripa di Meana is not preserved in the archival funds of the Biennale; however, the archives hold Ripa di Meana’s reply to the Soviet Deputy Minister of Culture, dated 25 October 1976, which refers to the letter written by the latter on 6 October 1976 (ASAC Fs AV 1976).

[...] [N]ever before as in recent weeks – in the face of the extremely serious acts of cultural, moral and political repression taking place in the heart of Europe, in Prague, and finding grim echoes in Poland, the Soviet Union and Hungary – the free voice of the Venice Biennale, its work of independent documentation, its critical international influence, and its strong links with intellectuals and artists from all countries are recognised invaluable and indispensable. I am certain that the Executive Board, convened for 29 January, will commit the Biennale to speeding up the process so that in 1977 it may present a programme of high quality and depth in which, amongst other things, a documentation and debate initiative on the reality of dissent in Eastern Europe will be given ample scope and significance; an initiative free from any form of exploitation and realised through the solidarity of the international cultural community.²⁷ (Corriere della Sera, “Sul dissenso”)

Ripa di Meana’s solidarity with dissidents and with the cause of human rights in Eastern Europe did not merely stem from human empathy, but also from his long-lasting familiarity with the nation and people of Czechoslovakia. In the early 1950s, he was a member of the PCI and, in this capacity, had spent several years in Prague as Italian representative at the International Union of Students (UIE). In the Czech capital, he befriended Jiří Pelikán (Caccamo, “Quando Pelikan”) – who at the time was a leading figure in the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the secretary of the UIE – and many others Czech communists and intellectuals. In Prague, Ripa di Meana’s circle of acquaintances also included some Italian fellows, such as Bettino Craxi, who at the time was a representative of the Italian Student Union. It was precisely Ripa di Meana’s personal connection to Czechoslovakia that determined his departure from the PCI in the aftermath of the invasion of Prague, bringing him closer to the PSI, the party of which he was also a member at the time of his Biennale presidency.

In that eventful year of 1977, Ripa di Meana’s unexpected and seemingly impulsive change of direction had immediate repercussions, and the relations between the Soviet Ministry of Culture and the Biennale came to a standstill. Before long, the initial friction turned into open conflict and even led to diplomatic tensions between Italy and the USSR. The official signal came from Moscow via the pages of *Izvestiia*: on 4 February 1977, the Russian newspaper published an article by its Roman correspondent Vadim Ardatovskii, eloquently titled “Venetsianskaia metamorfoza” [The Venetian metamorphosis] (4). The article condemned Ripa di Meana who, contrary to his initial good intentions to broaden the Biennale’s international scope through the participation of the USSR and other socialist countries, had decided to dedicate the 1977 exhibition to dissidents from Eastern European countries, even announcing the display of a vast collection of clandestine texts. The Italian director was accused of “ideological sabotage”²⁸ through a thinly

²⁷ “[...] mai come in queste settimane dinnanzi ai gravissimi episodi di repressione culturale, morale e politica che hanno luogo nel cuore dell’Europa, a Praga, e trovano cupi riscontri in Polonia, Unione Sovietica ed Ungheria, si riconosce preziosa e indispensabile la voce libera della Biennale di Venezia, la sua opera di autonoma documentazione, la sua influenza critica internazionale, i suoi robusti contatti con gli intellettuali e gli artisti di tutti i paesi. Sono sicuro che il consiglio direttivo, convocato per il 29 gennaio, impegnerà la Biennale a forzare i tempi perché nel 1977 essa sia presente con un suo programma di qualità e di approfondimento in cui, tra l’altro, abbia ampiezza e significato una iniziativa di documentazione-dibattito sulla realtà del dissenso nell’Europa orientale, iniziativa libera da ogni strumentalizzazione e realizzata con la solidarietà della cultura internazionale”.

²⁸ “[И]деологическая диверсия”.

veiled anti-Soviet propaganda by transforming a popular international arts festival into a campaign against the socialist countries (4). From then on, the Soviet press spared no criticism, and the Venetian event was relegated to the semantic field of the “circus”²⁹ (Ardatovskii, “Provokatsionnaia voznia” 3), “provocation”³⁰ (Sovetskaia kul’tura 7) and “farce”³¹ (Kedrin 3). The press went so far as to ask rhetorically whether the ambiguous stance of Ripa di Meana – who, on the one hand advocated for collaboration with socialist countries and, on the other, strove to give voice to dissent in Eastern European countries – was due to “feigned naivety”³² or to a contemptuous “corrupt cynicism”³³ (Ardatovskii, “Provokatsionnaia voznia” 3).

On the domestic front, the reactions from the press were also intense, and the issue of human rights violations in Eastern European countries reignited controversy and polemics within the Italian left and, in particular, with the PCI. The latter, under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer, in those years was distancing from Moscow by spearheading the Eurocommunism movement. Also the radical left-wing group around the newspaper *il Manifesto* played a leading role in the public debate that arose following the decision to dedicate the Biennale to dissent in Eastern Bloc countries.³⁴ Yet the issue of ‘dissidence’ in the Soviet bloc remained a delicate one on the left. In the pages of left-leaning daily *Paese Sera*, art historian Nello Ponente criticised Ripa Di Meana’s decision from both a factual and a practical standpoint, branding as opportunistic the intention to include in the 1977 programme both an exhibition of official Soviet art dedicated to the avant-garde – already agreed with Soviet institutions in 1975 – and one dedicated to unofficial art from the Eastern socialist countries (ASAC Fs AV 1977d). Ripa Di Meana was therefore accused of seeking to win support “from both the right and the left”,³⁵ whilst running the risk of failing to do justice to the Venetian cultural institution he presided over. Giulio Carlo Argan – one of the leading art critics on the international scene, who at the time was also the mayor of Rome and was close to the PCI – also criticised Ripa di Meana’s proposal, deeming it insubstantial from a strictly artistic point of view and emphasising that it seemed a rather “unilateral display of anti-Sovietism”³⁶ which would turn into a parade of dissidents organised with a deplorable “Red

²⁹ “[Ц]ирк”.

³⁰ “[П]ровокация”.

³¹ “[Ф]арс”.

³² “[Н]аигранная наивность”.

³³ “[О]плаченный цинизм”.

³⁴ In open opposition to the PCI and, equally, to the Biennale organization, shortly before the opening of the Venice event, *il Manifesto* organized a conference in the lagoon city dedicated to cultural and political opposition in the countries of the *socialismo reale* [really existing socialism]. The conference *Potere e opposizione nelle società post-rivoluzionarie. Una discussione a sinistra* [Power and opposition in post-revolutionary societies. A discussion on the left] (November 11-13, 1977) saw the participation of several Western leftist intellectuals, such as the journalist Rossana Rossanda – who promoted the initiative –, Fernando Claudin, Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault; as well as several Soviet and Eastern European dissidents, such as Zdenek Mlinar, István Mészáros, Leonid Pliushch, Krzysztof Pomian, Jacek Kuroń, and Adam Michnik. The debate was then continued in 1979, with the organization of a second conference entitled *Le società post-rivoluzionarie: l’altro volto della crisi mondiale* [Post-revolutionary societies: the other face of the world crisis] (4-7 January, Milan). Both conferences represented a turning point in the Italian left.

³⁵ “[S]ia a destra che a sinistra”.

³⁶ “[U]n’unilaterale manifestazione di antisovietismo”.

Cross nurse zeal”³⁷ (Argan, “È una Biennale” 65-67). Reiterating his critical position also in the PCI’s press organ – *l’Unità* – Argan clarified that he disagreed with Ripa di Meana’s proposal not as a left-wing mayor, but as an art critic, expressing his perplexity in these terms: “Modern arts is all in disagreement with the systems and regimes in which it exists: why limit ourselves only to that which dissents from the regimes of socialist countries?”³⁸ (Argan, “Una intervista” 2).

Meanwhile, in the pages of the *Corriere*, leading PSI figure Claudio Martelli supported Ripa di Meana’s decision, declaring that the Venetian event would spark a debate among the left (Martelli): but, in doing this, he basically confirmed that the choice of this theme was driven by political rather than artistic reasons. The PSI’s support and assistance in organising the *Biennale of Dissent* was undeniable, and Ripa di Meana himself stated years later that “[d]uring that difficult period of the *Biennale [of Dissent]*’s gestation, it was truly Bettino Craxi and Claudio Martelli, along with the De Michelis brothers³⁹ and a few others, who lent me their support”⁴⁰ (Biennale, “La Biennale del Dissenso”). Almost all the people he mentioned were prominent figures of the PSI: Craxi was the party secretary, Martelli was one of its leaders, and Gianni De Michelis was an MP in the Chamber of Deputies from the Venice electoral district.⁴¹ On the domestic political front, the socialists accused the communists of failing to openly condemn human rights violations in the USSR and Eastern Europe so as not to upset Moscow, using this argument to discredit the PCI in the eyes of the left-wing electorate. On the international front, however, the decision to dedicate the 1977 *Biennale* to the theme of dissent in Eastern European countries complied with the new direction of American foreign policy, which, from the outset of the Carter administration, had shown to be particularly sensitive to human rights issues in the countries of the Soviet bloc. Jimmy Carter famously expressed his unconditional support to Soviet dissidents shortly after taking

³⁷ “[Z]elo da crocerossina”.

³⁸ “L’arte moderna è tutta in dissenso con i sistemi e i regimi in cui vive: perché limitarsi solo a quella che dissente dai regimi dei paesi socialisti?”. While critical of Ripa di Meana decision, the PCI was also careful to distance itself from the CPSU: in June 1977 an editorial in *l’Unità* responded tit-for-tat to the attacks launched by Soviet newspapers on the Venice event, claiming that, “although our skeptical and critical position regarding the ways and forms in which the initiative, decided by the majority of the Biennale Board of Directors, is intended to be implemented is well-known, an attack like that of *Literaturnaia Gazeta* is unacceptable, as it does not discuss, it attacks; it does not contest, it insults” [“[è] nota la nostra posizione, di riserva e di critica, verso i modi e le forme con cui si intende realizzare l’iniziativa decisa, a maggioranza, dal Consiglio di amministrazione della Biennale. Tuttavia, è inaccettabile un attacco come quello della *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, che non discute, ma aggredisce, non contesta, ma insulta”] (*Unità*, *Attacco della ‘Literaturnaia’*). The PCI’s newspaper also distanced itself from Moscow’s stance in the case of the attempt of the Soviet ambassador in Italy to interfere with the autonomy of the Italian cultural institution: on this topic, see further information below in this essay.

³⁹ The ‘brothers De Michelis’ were Gianni De Michelis (1940-2019) – deputy in the ranks of PSI and former Minister of State Holdings (1980-1983), Minister of Labour and Social Security (1983-1987), Deputy Prime Minister (1988-1989) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (1989-1992) – and Cesare De Michelis (1943-2018) – literary critics, professor of Italian literature at the University of Messina and Padua, and editor of the publishing house Marsilio (1969-2018).

⁴⁰ “Durante quella difficile gestazione della Biennale a darmi man forte furono davvero Bettino Craxi e Claudio Martelli, con i fratelli De Michelis e pochi altri”.

⁴¹ It is also worth to notice here that, at the local level, in those years Venice was governed by a council composed of members of the PSI and the PCI, a detail that adds a further layer of complexity to the relationships that governed the Italian left in the Seventies. Despite a context of general fragmentation and opposition, the PCI and PSI also had spaces for mutual collaboration.

office, replying to the letter that Andrei Sakharov⁴² had sent him to plead the cause of human rights in the USSR (5 February 1977)⁴³ and meeting informally with Vladimir Bukovskii⁴⁴ at the White House (1 March 1977) (Snyder 91-92).

The proposal for an exhibition dedicated to the unofficial culture and dissent of the Eastern Bloc countries was strongly opposed by Soviet authorities, who did not hold back in their diplomatic reactions, threatening to withdraw, with all the other socialist countries, from the Venice event through the Soviet ambassador in Rome, Nikita Ryzhov. The scandal erupted the day after Ripa di Meana was convoked by the Secretary General of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Raimondo Manzini and the Director General for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries Vittorio Montezemolo, who was also Ripa di Meana's uncle. During the meeting, Ripa di Meana was informed of the Soviet ambassador's protests. The following day, claiming that on that occasion he had been subjected to unacceptable pressure from officials of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to dissuade him from the idea of dedicating the Biennale to dissent in Eastern countries (Ripa di Meana and Mecucci) – pressures which, however, the Italian Minister denied in an official ministerial statement (ASSR MR 1977a) – he tendered his resignation as president of the Biennale (ASSR MR 1977b; Corriere, “Pesante intervento russo”). The resignation, however, merely reignited the controversy, raising an outcry in support of Ripa di Meana and the inde-

⁴² Andrei Sakharov (1921-1989) was a Soviet physicist, dissident and human rights activist. In 1975, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He worked for years on the Soviet program for the development of thermonuclear weapons, but, growing concerned about nuclear proliferation and after warning the government that the development of antiballistic missile defense posed a serious threat of global nuclear war, in 1968 he wrote the essay *Razmyshleniia o progresse, mirnom sosushchestvovanii i intellektual'noi svobode* [Reflections on progress, peaceful coexistence, and intellectual freedom], which circulated in *samizdat* and *tamizdat*. Together with his wife Elena Bonner (1923-2011), he was very active in the Soviet human rights movement: Sakharov was among the founders of the *Komitēt prav cheloveka v SSSR* [Committee on human rights in the USSR]. For his activity in defence of human right, he was persecuted by Soviet authorities and was exiled with Bonner near Moscow, in the city of Gor'kii (today Nizhnyi Novgorod), a city then closed to foreigners. In 1986 Sakharov was rehabilitated by Mikhail Gorbachev and went back to Moscow, where he died in 1989.

⁴³ Jimmy Carter's letter to the Nobel Peace Prize-winning physicist Andrei Sakharov is held at Harvard's Houghton Library, in the Sakharov collection (HOU MS Russ).

⁴⁴ Vladimir Bukovskii (1942-2019) was a Soviet human rights activist. Because of his activities, he spent twelve years in psychiatric hospitals, labor camps, and prison. He denounced the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes and, together with his fellow inmate – the psychiatrist Semën Gluzman – wrote a manual for dissidents explaining how to avoid being committed to a psychiatric hospital – *Posobie po psikhiiatrii dlia inakomysliashchikh* [Manual on psychiatry for dissidents] – which circulated widely in *samizdat* and *tamizdat*. Thanks to various Western campaigns in support of his release, in 1976 he was freed through a prisoner exchange with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Chile, Luis Corvalán, and expelled from the USSR. In 1978, he wrote his biography, which was first published in *tamizdat* in English – *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissident* (1978) – and later in the original Russian – *I vozvrashchaetsia veter* [The wind returns, 1979] – before being translated into numerous languages, including Italian: *Il vento va e poi ritorna* (1978). In Italy, the PCI's Secretary General Enrico Berlinguer participated to the campaign in defence of Bukovskii: he sent a letter to PCUS's Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev (6 August 1976) to plead Bukovskii's cause by asking for his pardon, to which the Central Committee (CC) of the CPSU answered on August 26, rejecting the request and complaining about the Italian communists' “lack of information about Bukovskii's anti-Soviet activities” (TsK KPSS). The support offered to the dissidents by Berlinguer and Georges Marchais – the then Secretary General of the PCF – had already attracted the attention of the chairman of the KGB, Iurii Andropov, who as early as 1975 denounced the statements by both leaders on the issue of human rights in the USSR as a threat to the stability of the Soviet state (Andropov, “Zapiska N. 3213-A”). A warning reiterated again in 1976, when he reported to the CC about the danger that Soviet dissidents exploited the statements of Western Communist leaders (in particular, these of Berlinguer and Marchais) to reinforce and promote their own anti-Soviet stances at home, as well as abroad (Andropov, “Zapiska N. 394-A”).

pendence of the Biennale as a cultural institution.⁴⁵ A few weeks later, following a parliamentary inquiry into the matter, the president's resignation was withdrawn. The real crux of the matter, however, remained the Italian government's funding of the Venetian event, which arrived late and risked jeopardising the entire organisation, as pointed out by Vittorio Gregotti, the outgoing director of the Biennale's Visual Arts Sector, in the pages of the *Corriere* ("Pesante intervento russo"). For this reason, work on the 1977 *Biennale's* edition began with significant delay and preparations were carried out in a frantic rush over the course of only a few months. Nevertheless, thanks to the first transnational contacts between the *Biennale* organisers and numerous personalities of the Eastern European diaspora in the West – already established by early 1977 – the programme was drawn up and the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti, fotografie, videotapes, samizdat* opened in November of that year.

4. THE 'BIENNALE NETWORK'

In the programme of the *Biennale of Dissent*, the paragraph devoted to the presentation of the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti* mentioned the collaborators of the project as follows:

This project was developed by Massimo Pini with the contribution of Leo Łabedz, Iurii Mal'tsev, Dario Staffa, Gino Bianco, Lia Wainstein, Gianlorenzo Pacini, Jiri Pelikan, Nicola Matteucci, Ennio Caretto, Carlo Sartori, and Alberto Luna. The operational implementation of the exhibition Books and Samizdat was entrusted to Professor Gianfranco Dogliani of the University of Venice, who will be associated with Dr. Piergiorgio Branzi.⁴⁶ (ASAC Fs AV 1977e)

However, the transnational network of socio-cultural actors – who contributed materially or otherwise to the organisation of this exhibition – included many other people, as for example Leopold Łabedz⁴⁷. For reconstructing and mapping the relational connections which linked together several actors (nodes) involved in the transnational socialization of texts (*samizdat* and *tamizdat*), the correspondence of Leopold is very useful. In a letter he sent to the American jour-

⁴⁵ On this subject, see Bevilacqua; Bianchi; Tornabuoni; Unità, "La Biennale" and "I comunisti".

⁴⁶ "Questo progetto è stato elaborato da Massimo Pini con l'apporto di Leo Łabedz [sic], Juri Malceev [sic], Dario Staffa, Gino Bianco, Lia Wainstein, Gianlorenzo Pacini, Jiri Pelikan, Nicola Matteucci, Ennio Caretto, Carlo Sartori e Alberto Luna. La realizzazione operativa della mostra *Libri e Samizdat* è stata affidata al professor Gianfranco Dogliani dell'Università di Venezia, al quale verrà associato il dottor Piergiorgio Branzi".

⁴⁷ Leopold Łabedz (1920-1993) was a prominent figure of the Polish diaspora and one of the leaders of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Shils and Coleman 437). Born in the USSR in a Polish family, he grew up in Warsaw and studied medicine in Paris. After the Nazi occupation of Poland, in 1939 he fled to the Soviet zone of occupation and was imprisoned and sent to the Gulag. In 1942, following the Sikorski-Mayski agreement – signed by the Polish government-in-exile and Soviet Russia – he was released from the Gulag and joined the 2nd Polish Corps led by General Władysław Anders, with which he went to Italy, where he took part, among others, in the Battle of Monte Cassino (1944) and the Battle of Bologna (1945). After the SWW Łabedz stayed in Italy, where he studied at the University of Bologna, and after he moved to United Kingdom, where headed the London office of Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR). In 1955 he founded the journal *Soviet Survey* – a publication subsidized by the CIA through the CCF, which he co-edited with Walter Laqueur since 1961 – after renamed *Survey: A Journal of Soviet and East European Studies*, of which Łabedz became its editor-in-chief in 1964 until 1989. Łabedz was a leading figure of the CCF, a role that he maintained also after the renaming of the organization as International Association for Cultural Freedom (IACF).

nalist Patricia Blake⁴⁸ on 17 August 1977, Łabedz stated that, following Ripa di Meana's request, he was "collecting material for the exhibition of *samizdat*, as well as some other things which may be useful" (HILA 1977a). The following day, Łabedz wrote to the president of the Biennale – whom he had previously met in Lucca in July (HILA 1977b) – to discuss the matter in person, reporting that:

[I]mmediately after my return from Lucca, I began to make arrangements to collect the material for the Biennale exhibition, and I hope to be able to get it by the middle of September [sic]. The bulk of the material will consist of *samizdat* manuscripts, books from them published in the West [*tamizdat*], and photographs which I hope to collect in London. Friends in Amsterdam, Paris, and Munich have promised to do the same; I then plan to take a car (with Mr. A Stypulkowski), collect the material from these places and bring it to you. I can see no other practical way of doing it in the short time that is left. (HILA 1977c)

As we have seen, the PSI played a key role in the organisation of the *Biennale of Dissent*. The contacts that made the exhibition possible must therefore be traced within the transnational 'socialist network' or, to be more precise, within the network of collaborations between several socialist and anti-communist socio-cultural actors (institutions and individuals) which arose and consolidated in 1977. A closer analysis of Łabedz's correspondence allows us to establish that the first contacts with the leadership of the PSI, and in particular with Craxi, were already established in the spring of that year. In a letter sent on 24 April 1977 to Carl Gershman,⁴⁹ executive director of the American Social Democrats, Łabedz shared his impressions of a trip to West Berlin: regarding the coordinated actions to be undertaken in view of the Belgrade *follow-up* meetings of the Helsinki Accords – the "business of Belgrade" – he mentioned that the situation was "very depressed", because "the Europeans reacted very negatively, with Germans [Social Democrats] being the worst" (HILA 1977d). However, Łabedz also added that "[o]n the other hand, my experience in Rome with Kraxi [sic] and the Socialist trade unionist was very good" (HILA 1977d), suggesting that this meeting offered a broad scope for collaboration with the Italian socialists ahead

⁴⁸ Patricia Page Blake (1952-2010) was an American Slavist, literary critics and journalist specialized in Russian literature and Soviet affairs. For her stunning beauty, she was also a model. Blake was a correspondent in the Soviet Union and an associate editor for *Time-Life*, and the consultant on Soviet affairs for *The New York Times*, where she also published several articles about Soviet and Russian literature. She has edited five collections in English translation of Soviet Russian literature, including *Dissonant Voices in Soviet Literature*, *Halfway to the Moon: New Writing from Russia*, and *Writers in Russia*, all co-edited with Max Hayward. She was an Associate of Harvard's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and collaborated actively with the CCF, being also married with the White Russian expatriate composer Nikolas Nabokov (1903-1978) – the cousin of the writer Vladimir Nabokov – a leading figure of the CCF, and later the president of the IACF (Horowitz). In 1982 Blake married the journalist Ronnie Dugger (1930-2025), the founder of the American Alliance for Democracy (1996). Under the fictional name of Portia Brown, she was also mentioned in Vsevolod Kochetov's controversial novel – *Chego zhe ty khochesh'?* [What do you want?] (1969) – where Blake is depicted as a beautiful spy.

⁴⁹ Carl Gershman (1943) was the executive director of the American Social Democrats (1974-1980, SDUSA), a social democratic organization in the United States. SDUSA formed in 1972 as the successor to the Socialist Party of America (SPA), which splintered into three groups: SDUSA, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and the Socialist Party USA. Strongly anti-communist, in 1980 he was a resident scholar at Freedom House. From 1984 until 2021, he was also the president of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an American private, congressionally funded, grant-making institution that supports non-governmental groups working for democracy around the world.

of the Belgrade meetings. The cooperation referred to on this occasion consisted in supporting the defence of human rights in the USSR and its satellite states, with the aim of putting the Soviet Union – and, with it, the Western communist parties – on the back foot. A significant trace of this political strategy and of Łabedz's active contribution to its implementation can be found in his correspondence with Zbigniew Brzeziński,⁵⁰ then Secretary of State in the Carter administration. In a letter dated 16 February 1977, Łabedz wrote that he had “been following the first steps of the new administration with intense interest”, adding that he also hoped that they [Brzeziński and Carter] “will not be swayed from this line by the inevitable signs of Soviet displeasure” (HILA 1977e):

[T]he human rights issue put the Russian very much on the defensive, as one can feel from the Soviet and Communist press. [...] The human rights issue not only puts the Russians on the defensive but plays havoc with the Western Communist parties. I very much hope that Carter's administration will not be swayed by the siren voices of those who argue that the raising of this issue is counter-productive and would do more harm than good. (HILA 1977e)

This strategy formed the basis for the decision to focus on the issue of human rights in order to put the USSR and the Western communist parties on the spot ahead of the Belgrade meeting, as reiterated in a second letter that Łabedz sent to Brzeziński on 22 April 1977. Reporting on his meetings with European socialists, he noted once again – as in the letter sent to Gershman – that the German Social Democrats were the least cooperative:

Dear Zbig,

The first hundred days of the Carter administration are coming to an end, and I thought I would write you a note. I have just been to Rome and Berlin. In Rome I saw (with Kolakowski and Michnik) socialist and trade union leaders and in Berlin I attended a meeting with the diplomats and foreign office officials from Britain, France, Germany and the USA, where we discussed the forthcoming Belgrade conference. The Italian communists face increasing difficulties in reconciling their radical promise and their reformist practice. This not only leads to the fall of its popularity, but to increasing tensions and strains inside the party. As far as Belgrade is concern[ed] the Europeans are very weak and the Americans confused. [...] The weakest link in the Western-Alliance chain is without doubt W.[estern] Germany. The hysteria about the ‘Carter line’ among the German social democrats and progressives is really striking. [...] I think it is quite fundamental that there should be a systematic effort to provide the Carter policy with the proper ideological underpinning and particularly to influence the public (European) opinion. (HILA 1977g)

⁵⁰ Zbigniew Brzeziński (1928-2016) was an American diplomat and a political scientist of Polish origin. He was born in Warsaw and grown up in Canada, where his father was a diplomat. He studied in Montreal and in 1953 he defended his doctorate in political science at Harvard University, where he worked until 1960. He was granted American citizenship in 1958. He was associated with Columbia University in New York (1960-1989), where he headed the Research Institute on Communist Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. Policy Planning Staff from 1966 to 1968. Brzeziński served as U.S. President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor from 1977 to 1981. He collaborated with two of the main Polish cultural institutions abroad – Instytut Literacki and the *tamizdat* journal *Kultura* – and with the journal *Survey* directed by Leopold Łabedz, publishing articles on the political situation in the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc and the foreign American policy, primarily towards communist countries. He also actively worked to support the anti-communist opposition, especially the Polish trade union *Solidarność*, as well as the group of young Polish émigré intellectuals that published the *tamizdat* journal *Aneks* (HILA 1977f).

The understanding with Craxi and Italian socialists, combined with the need to influence European public opinion regarding Carter's policy of supporting dissidents behind the Iron Curtain, thus transformed the *Biennale of Dissent* into a good opportunity to implement this strategy ahead of the Belgrade meetings. This shared purpose had already emerged in the statements made by the Italian socialist Claudio Martelli in the wake of Carlo Ripa di Meana's announcement that the 1977 Biennale would be dedicated to dissent in the Eastern Bloc countries. In an article published in the *Corriere*, Martelli endorsed that decision, emphasising that Carlo Ripa di Meana's proposal was not the result of a personal whim, but rather was 'in the air' at that particular historical moment and corresponded to the duty of democratic forces to support the victims of political persecution throughout the world. In expressing his endorsement, Martelli was aligning with the international and national context:

Organisations such as Amnesty International and the various editions of *Listy* have been moving in this direction for years with increasing vigour and authority; the Socialist International itself has taken up the cause; the President of the [Socialist] International and of the SPD [German Socialist Party], Willy Brandt, made it the subject of his introduction to his party's recent Central Committee meeting; as did the Secretary of our party, Bettino Craxi, at the Central Committee of the PSI, as well as in many occasions did Francois Mitterrand.⁵¹ (6)

Łabedz played a decisive role in the organisation of the *Biennale's* exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti*, particularly as an intermediary with another institution that significantly contributed to the display of *samizdat* and *magnitizdat* items: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Although the ASAC archives provide no traces of it, the collaboration between the Venetian institution and RFE/RL is well documented in archival sources held at the Hoover Institute – and in particular in Łabedz's personal collection – and at the Open Society Archives in Budapest, where part of the documentation relating to activities funded by the Free Europe Committee and coordinated by RFE/RL is located. The first trace of the contacts that Łabedz established with RFE in relation with the exhibition's organization is a memorandum for internal use written by Jim Brown⁵² on 11 August 1977 and addressed to his collaborators Methodi Zaharieff,⁵³ Samuel Bellus,⁵⁴ József Szabados,⁵⁵ Zygmunt Michałowski⁵⁶ and Bernard Yarrow.⁵⁷

⁵¹ "In questa direzione si muovono da anni con crescente vigore ed autorità organismi come Amnesty International e le varie edizioni di *Listy*; la stessa Internazionale Socialista ha assunto come proprio il tema; il presidente della Internazionale e della SPD, Willy Brandt, ne ha fatto l'argomento della introduzione al recente Comitato Centrale del suo partito; così il segretario del nostro partito Bettino Craxi- al Comitato Centrale del PSI, così in più occasioni Francois Mitterrand".

⁵² Jim Brown (1928-2009) joined RFE in 1957 as an editor and then became a research analyst for Bulgaria and Romania. In 1976 he was named deputy director, and two years later he took over as network director, a role he held until 1984, when he resigned because of disagreements with the Reagan administration.

⁵³ Methodi Zaharieff was a broadcast executive and administrator who served as the Director of the Romanian Broadcasting Department at RFE.

⁵⁴ Samuel Bellus (1916-1998) was the director of the Czechoslovak Broadcasting Department at RFE.

⁵⁵ József Szabados (1927-2004) was the director of the Hungarian Section of RFE (1973-1984).

⁵⁶ Zygmunt Michałowski (1918-2010) was the director of the Polish Section of RFE (1976-1982).

⁵⁷ Bernard Yarrow (1899-1973) in 1954 was elected vice president of the FEC and from 1957 until 1973 he served as senior vice president.

Leo Labeledz [sic] called me from London today to say he was helping to organize the exhibition on the repression of human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at the Venice Biennale. He would like some help from us and from RL. The kind of thing Leo would like are pieces of samizdat (originals or copies), written reports from those who have suffered persecution in Eastern Europe, even films or gramophone recordings illustrating repression or persecution. (OSA 1977a)

In a letter sent on 26 August 1977 to Peter Dornan⁵⁸ Labeledz listed in detail the materials that he wished to collect from the RL headquarters in Munich:

I am sending you the list of the *samizdat* and dissident material which I am particularly anxious to get hold of, both in the original *samizdat* form and Western printed form [*tamizdat*]. As I said, I would be extremely grateful if you could allow me to borrow at least some of this material from your own files, to be returned after the Biennale exhibition. I would also appreciate it if you can think of anything else that would be worthwhile displaying, aside from the material listed, I would be particularly interested in the following: 1) your own records of *samizdats* (Archiv Samizdata); 2) any authentic voices of dissent (*magnitizdat*); 3) photographs of dissidents, etc.: 4) quotes from Soviet historiography on particular historical events, which are striking in their discrepancies, from these last sixty years. I am planning either to come myself and collect the material or to send somebody from the Biennale. In any case I shall phone you before mid September to find out whether you can collect this material for me (i.e. for the Biennale). (HILA 1977h)

The collaboration was subsequently confirmed in a memorandum drafted by William Buell⁵⁹ and dated 25 October 1977, in which he reported on a telephone conversation with Ripa di Meana, who “seemed to be delighted with the attention from a representative of RFE/RL and readily agreed that our efforts were complementary” (OSA 1977b). The affinity between the Biennale and RFE/RL stemmed from the fact that, as Buell himself explained, “his [Ripa di Meana’s] purpose was to make Eastern European and Soviet artistic and literary dissent known in the West; ours [RFE/RL] was to make it known in the East”. Great emphasis was placed on the key alignment of objectives between the two organisations, namely media coverage of the Biennale and raising international public awareness of issues related to dissent and human rights in the Soviet bloc in the run-up to the Belgrade meetings:

Meana would prefer for the time being not to be interviewed on the record by Robertiello [RFE/RL’s correspondent in Rome] but he wanted Robertiello to be put in touch with him so that he could provide him with the Biennale information. An interview would be something he may consider at a later date, and it might very well suit his purposes. He made a good deal of the close relationship between the Biennale and Basket III of the Helsinki Final Act. [...] We will be discussing further the pooling of our resources and those of RL to cover this event, which should provide us with unusual broadcast opportunities. (OSA 1977b)

⁵⁸ Peter Dornan (1923-1999) joined RL in 1956 as a research analyst, and in 1968 he created the RL’s Samizdat Section, a special unit to collect and broadcast *samizdat* text coming out of the Soviet Union – known as the *Arkhir Samizdata* [Samizdat Archive] – of which he was the director until 1988. Dornan was also the editor of *Materialy Samizdata*, a weekly publication of RL and its Research Institute that became the biggest collection of annotated documents on human rights violations in the Soviet Union. For further information, see Korti.

⁵⁹ William Buell (1925-2011) was an American State Department Foreign Service Officer. He entered the State Department in 1951. His postings included Warsaw, Taipei, Brussels, Paris and Washington DC. In 1965, Buell was made director of the Voice of America’s Polish language service. From 1975 to 1977, Buell served as a legislation assistant to Senator Adlai Stevenson. In 1977 he became director of RFE in Munich, becoming two years later senior vice president of RFE/RL until 1987, when he retired.

Łabedz's correspondence confirms his prominent role as an intermediary between the Biennale and RFE/RL. In a letter sent to Martin Dewhirst⁶⁰ on 10 October 1977, Łabedz secured Dewhirst's cooperation – who was then a contributor to Radio Liberty – regarding the collection of material to be delivered to professor Gianfranco Dogliani,⁶¹ in his capacity as representative of Ripa di Meana:

I have been in touch with the Biennale about you, they seem to be in a great hurry but perhaps they have invited you directly? They are preparing an exhibition of *samizdat* and I asked Peter Dornan to prepare collection which Professor Doliani [sic] will eventually collect. He is going to get in touch with them sometime in the second half of October. I hope you will help, I made a similar request to J. Brown about some historiographical material. I'd be grateful if you could give them a hand (Stypulkowski will also be helping) because I am leaving for a long trip and shall not be able to do anything myself. (HILA 1977i)

On 3 November 1977, Peter Dornan from RFE/RL handed over the *samizdat* materials to the Biennale representative Dogliani, who had travelled to Munich, as evidenced by a jointly signed agreement preserved in the RFE/RL archives:

I, Gianfranco Dogliani, hereby declare on behalf of the President of the Venice Biennale for 1977, Carlo Ripa di Meana, that the *samizdat* materials (66 sheets and 1 bound volume – see descriptive list attached) entrusted to me on 3 November in Munich will be safeguarded and given maximum-security care in handling.

Items on display will be exhibited behind locked glass display-cases and they will not be handled (fingered) by the visiting public. No mention will be made of RFE/RL as the lender of any of the attached items.

The documents are being lent with the understanding that responsibility for their safeguarding is being assumed by Carlo Ripa di Meana and that they will all be returned to Peter Dornan at RFE/RL or his designated representative in Munich by 20 December 1977. (OSA 1977c)

Łabedz's role was crucial not only in sourcing the *samizdat* materials provided by RFE/RL, but also in collecting *magnitizdat* (as demonstrated by his correspondence with Dewhirst and Dornan), and, finally, *tamizdat* published by Western publishing houses, as evidenced by a letter sent to Massimo Pini⁶² on 6 October 1977:

I made all the necessary arrangements with Professor Doliani [sic] in Venice about the collection of the *samizdat* material and he has already phoned us from Paris saying that he had collected the publications and films which were waiting for him there. I have also spoken with the director of Collins (who did not receive the letter which was supposed to have been sent to him from Venice), he promised to collect all the books which would be relevant from the Glasgow store. These books will be valuable because Collins publish important dissident authors: Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn, Siniavsky,

⁶⁰ Martin Dewhirst (1937) is a British Slavist expert on Russian *samizdat* and on Russian and Soviet systems of censorship: on the latter topic he published the volume *The Soviet Censorship* (1973). From 1964 until 2000 he lectured on Russian literature and history at the University of Glasgow. Periodically, from 1970 to 1990, he worked in the Samizdat Section of Radio Liberty in Munich. He participated in the Sakharov Hearings in Rome and helped to organise the subsequent Hearings in Lisbon and London.

⁶¹ Gianfranco Dogliani (1949) was a professor of English literature at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

⁶² Massimo Pini (1937-2012) was a business executive and journalist. In 1957 he was the founder (with Piero Sugar) and director of the publishing house SugarCo. One of the closest associates of PSI Secretary Bettino Craxi, he served twice on the Board of Directors of the Italian public broadcasting company (RAI). In 1977, he was chairman of the Lombardy Region's Radio and Television Committee. After the collapse of the First Republic, he aligned himself with the right conservative party Alleanza Nazionale [National Alliance]. See, Bocconi.

Sakharov and others. The parcel should be ready by the time Professor Doliani [sic] comes to London on the 11th. (HILA 1977l)

In the same letter, Łabedz also referred to the sending of his “introduction to the Biennale ‘guide’”, and the same he did in a letter sent to Dario Staffa, the director of the Centro Studi e Ricerche su Problemi Economico-Sociali [Center for Studies and Research on Economic and Social Problems, CESES] (HILA 1977m): his essay *Dissenso e censura* [Dissent and censorship] has been published in the volume *Tecniche del dissenso e forme del consenso all'est* [Techniques of dissent and forms of consensus in the East] edited by Gianfranco Dogliani for the Biennale book series (12-24), however, in the same publication he is not credited among the collaborators who helped in the realization of exhibition *Libri, Mass Media e Samizdat* [Books, Mass Media and Samizdat] (79). However, in the draft of the Biennale’s programme, he is mentioned as the keynote speaker at the history seminar (17 November) titled *History and Socialism: Historic moments of dissent* with the report *The New Dissent* (ASSR MR 1977c).

Łabedz’s correspondence thus reveals a complex web of transnational relational networks among various actors, mainly revolving around two CIA front organizations: the CC, of which Łabedz was a leading figure; and the Free Europe Committee (FEC), of which Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were among the major operating divisions. As we have seen, these actors contributed in various ways to the realization of the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti*. On this extent, for example, is very interesting the fact that, in several letters – one addressed to Ripa di Meana (HILA 1977c), and one to Martin Dewhirst (HILA 1977i) – Łabedz mentioned Andrzej Stypułkowski as helper in the collection and transport of *tamizdat* books for the exhibition. And in fact, Stypułkowski – a Polish émigré based in London – in 1964 was the founder of the Russian *tamizdat* publishing house Overseas Publication Interchanges (OPI) under the auspices of Polonia book Fund (Klots 152), which was a joint Polish-American enterprise sponsored by FEC and, as such, also took part to the secret books distribution programmes coordinated by the Press and Special Projects Division (PSPD) directed by George Minden⁶³ (Reisch 39-54; Sowiński, “Cold War Books” 52; “Overseas Mechanism” 384-89). Stypułkowski is credited among the collaborators of the *Libri, riviste, manifesti* exhibition (Dogliani 79).

Among the socio-cultural figures who offered their collaboration to the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti*, we should also mention Antonín Liehm, who was invited to take part in the organization of the *Biennale of Dissent* in February 1977 by Carlo Ripa di Meana, and Jiří Pelikán (Liehm 313). In addition to playing a leading role in the general organization of the Venetian cultural event (313-15) and, alongside his wife Mira Liehm, he curated the programme devoted to Eastern European cinema (ASSR MR 1977c),⁶⁴ and he also arranged personally for 80 Czechoslovak

⁶³ For more information about George Minden and the secret book programmes coordinated by PSPD see Reisch 39-54.

⁶⁴ Mira Liehm curated the volume *Il cinema dell'Europa dell'Est: 1960-1977* [Eastern European cinema: 1960-1977],

graphic works to be sent to Venice from the USA: these formed the core of the exhibition *Grafica cecoslovacca* (ASAC Fs AV 1977f; ASAC Fs AV 1977g; Liehm 314). Liehm's greatest contribution to the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti* was to act as an intermediary in gathering Victor Abdalov's⁶⁵ collection of 54 photographs from the Soviet Union (ASAC Fs AV 1977h; ASAC AV 1977i; ASAC Fs AV 1977l) and the *magnitizdat* documentation exhibited on that occasion, consisting of 24 VHS tapes (ASAC Fs AV 1977g). For the *Biennale of Dissent* book series, he also curated the volume *Letteratura e dissenso nell'Europa dell'Est* [Literature and dissent in Eastern Europe], which included the essays of Andrei Siniavskii, Václav Havel, Ludvík Vaculík, Paul Ricoeur and Julia Kristeva, to mention only a few. The introduction to the conference proceedings about the literary dissent, published by the Biennale in 1980 – *L'Altra letteratura nell'Europa dell'Est* [The other literature in Eastern Europe] – was also written by Antonín Liehm.

Amnesty International should also be mentioned among the organizations that offered their assistance in gathering the material. From the documents preserved at ASAC, we know that Ripa di Meana and Dogliani were in contact with Anita Bennett, member of Amnesty's secretariat and in charge for the collection of posters, books and videotapes. However, the only trace of this contact is recorded in a message addressed to Dogliani and Ripa di Meana, stating that Bennett had called by telephone to confirm that "she [was] willing to send" the materials (ASAC Fs AV 1977m). On the contrary, there is ample evidence of the contribution provided by several members of the Centro Studi Russia Cristiana⁶⁶ [Christian Russia Study Centre] and of its publishing house La Casa di Matriona⁶⁷ to the organization of the exhibition of *samizdat* and *tamizdat*, as well as of other events of the *Biennale of Dissent*. The direct contacts that Russia Cristiana maintained

published by Marsilio in collaboration with the Biennale in 1977.

⁶⁵ Victor Abdalov (1950-2023) was a photographer born in Turkmenistan who immigrated to the United States in early 1976. In 1973, he was arrested in the Soviet Union whilst filming a documentary about Russian Christians. In the US, Abdalov served as director of photography on Tim Burton's first two films, *Vincent* (1982) and *Hansel and Gretel* (1983). For further information, see Umland 2.

⁶⁶ The Centro Studi Russia Cristiana [Christian Russia Study Center] was founded in 1957 by Father Romano Scalfi with Father Pietro Modesto and Father Nilo Cadonna in Sinate, near Milan. Since the late 1960s Russia Cristiana established close ties with Comunione e Liberazione [Communion and Liberation, CL], the Catholic movement founded by Father Luigi Giussani (Colognesi 100-102; Boel, "International Sakharov Hearings" 104, 128). This also led to a collaboration between Russia Cristiana and the publishing house Jaca Book, founded by members of Gioventù Studentesca [Student Youth, GS], the movement from which CL later originated. For more info about Russia Cristiana and its collaboration with Jaca Book in the publication of *tamizdat*, see also Larocca in this thematic section.

⁶⁷ The publishing house La Casa di Matriona [The house of Matriona], a name inspired by A. Solzhenitsyn's tale *Matrënin dvor*, was founded in 1975 by some members of Russia Cristiana – including Mario Corti, Sergio Rapetti, Giovanni Bensi, Giovanni Codevilla and Iurii Malt'sev – with the aim of giving voice in Italy to the various expressions of dissent in the Eastern bloc countries, with particular attention to the political repression perpetrated against religious communities in the USSR and its satellite countries. Among the works published by La Casa di Matriona, numerous volumes are dedicated to religious dissent, such as: *Cronaca della chiesa cattolica in Lituania. La lotta dei lituani per la propria identità di popolo* (1976); Nikolaj Zernov, *La rinascita religiosa russa del XX secolo* (1978); Dmitrij Dudko, *La nostra speranza. Diario di un prete russo* (1979); Lev Regel'son, *La tragedia della Chiesa Russa 1917-1945* (1979); Gleb Jakunin, *Presente e futuro della Chiesa nell'URSS* (1980); Francesco Škoda, *L'ateismo comunista sovietico* (1983); J. Rabas, *Una Chiesa in catene, Materiali sulla situazione della Chiesa cattolica in Cecoslovacchia* (1986); Evgenij Pazuchin, *Specchio della gloria. Testimonianza dall'URSS: La Chiesa a mille anni dal Battesimo* (1988). The authors of the essays published by the publishing house also include Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Vladimir Solov'ev, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov. Several books published by La Casa di Matriona were showcased at the *Libri, riviste, manifesti* exhibition.

with Orthodox Russia (Boel, “International Sakharov Hearings” 104) and with numerous Soviet and Eastern European dissidents both living abroad and in the Soviet bloc – thanks also to the clandestine activities it carried out in support of religious communities persecuted in the USSR and its satellite countries, including the smuggling of bibles and religious literature, as well as *tamizdat* (Colognesi 50-51, 104-05, 108; Boel, “Bible Smuggling” 266, “International Sakharov Hearings” 104) in collaboration with the Agenzia Letteraria Internazionale [International Literary Association, ALI] (Colognesi 108; Boel, “International” 103), which was a CIA front organization that took part in the FEC secret book distribution programs (Boel, “International” 103; Reisch 508-09) – made its members, some of whom were also part of the executive committee of Sakharov Hearings’ Italian session (Boel, “International” 104-05),⁶⁸ valuable collaborators for the organization of the *Biennale of Dissent*.

In 1977, Carlo Ripa di Meana invited Father Romano Scalfi⁶⁹ and Giovanni Codevilla⁷⁰ to take part to the committee that dealt with the religious sector of the event⁷¹ (ASSR MR 1977c; Colognesi 141). With their collaboration, a series of seminars devoted to religious dissent in the Eastern bloc countries has been organized (29-30 November), hosting reports by Anatolii Levitin Krasnov, Evgenii Vagin, Leonid Pliushch, Dominik Morawski, Aleksander Piatigorskii and many others. These seminars were both chaired by Germano Pattaro, who also edited a volume for the *Biennale del Dissenso* book series – *Il dissenso religioso* [Religious dissent] – which contain several

⁶⁸ Mario Corti was the president of the executive committee in charge of organizing the Second International Sakharov Hearings in Rome, while Giovanni Codevilla was the secretary. However, the membership also included other people coming from Russia Cristiana’s milieu, such as Sergio Rapetti and Lucio del Santo. La Casa di Matriona published two volumes on the Sakharov Hearings: one devoted to the Copenhagen session, *Le testimonianze del tribunale Sakharov sulla violazione dei diritti dell’uomo nell’Unione Sovietica* [Sakharov tribunal’s testimonies on human rights violations in the Soviet Union] (1975), curated by Mario Corti; and another to the Rome session, *Tribunale Sakharov. Atto secondo* [Sakharov tribunal. Second act] (1979), curated by the Italian Committee of the International Sakharov Hearings.

⁶⁹ Romano Scalfi (1923-2016) was ordained a priest in 1948, and in 1951 entered the Collegium Russicum in Rome, the first Catholic institution dedicated to the study of Russian culture and spirituality. In 1957, he attended the Catholic University of Milan and founded Russia Cristiana, together with another former Russicum student, Father Pietro Modesto. Later, Father Nilo Cadonna, who would also become a key figure in Russia Cristiana, joined the group. Beginning in 1958, Russia Cristiana became an educational center, hosting summer Russian language courses and cultural seminars: Father Scalfi was the main driving force behind these projects. Between 1960 and 1970, Scalfi periodically traveled to the USSR to clandestinely disseminate religious literature behind the Iron Curtain, also committing himself to disseminating Soviet *samizdat* in the pages of Russia Cristiana’s magazine: *Russia Cristiana ieri e oggi*, which later became *L’Altra Europa* and, subsequently, *La Nuova Europa*. In 1970 he became a member of CL, and in the same year, for his clandestine activities, he was declared *persona non grata* by the Soviet authorities, unable to return to the USSR until its dissolution in 1989. On his initiative, the Library of the Spirit was founded in Moscow in 1993.

⁷⁰ Giovanni Codevilla (1941) is a professor of Comparative Ecclesiastical Law and a lecturer in Eastern European Law. He was editor of the magazine *Russia Cristiana ieri e oggi* and *La nuova Europa*, with which he continues his collaboration. In 1975 he was among the founding members of the publishing house La Casa di Matriona, of which he was the president for many years. He was a member of the Organizing Committee of the Sakharov Hearings in Rome (1977) and in Washington (1979).

⁷¹ The appointment of Scalfi and Codevilla prompted the resignation of two members of the committee appointed by Ripa di Meana for the religious section of the Biennale – Giorgio Girardet and Renato Maiocchi – who thus intended to protest against the collaboration of two sworn anti-communists like the members of Russia Cristiana, an association also accused of political collusion with the far right and of being subsidized by the CIA (Boel, “International Sakharov Hearings” 107-108).

religious *samizdat* documents.⁷² However, the cooperation of Scalfi and Codevilla is not credited in the official Biennale programme in relation with the religious seminars (Biennale, *Il dissenso culturale*), while Codevilla – together with Iurii Mal'tsev⁷³ – is mentioned as collaborator to the organization of the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti* (Dogliani 79). Mal'tsev participate as speaker also to the Biennale literature seminar devoted to the literature of dissent, a topic on which he was a specialist, and it was not a coincidence if the title of the seminar – *The Other Literature* (3 December) (Biennale, *Il dissenso culturale*) – reminded his book *L'altra letteratura (1957-1976)*. *La letteratura del samizdat da Pasternak a Solženicyn* [Other literature (1957-1976). Samizdat literature from Pasternak to Solzhenitsyn], the first history of literary dissent ever published, released by La Casa di Matriona in 1976.⁷⁴ In the Biennale book series, Mal'tsev also participated with two contributions: a bibliography of the Italian books devoted to literary dissent, published in the volume *Tecniche del consenso e forme del dissenso all'est* (Dogliani); and the essay *Le origini e i motivi del dissenso in letteratura* [The origins and reasons for dissent in literature] published in the Biennale's conference proceedings *L'Altra letteratura*.

At the opening of the *Biennale del Dissenso*, an inaugural message by physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov was played (14 November)⁷⁵ and, also in this case, the contribution of a member of Russia Cristiana was crucial. It had been recorded in Moscow by Sergio Rapetti,⁷⁶ who, having travelled to the Soviet capital on a trip organized by a PCI-associated travel agency, managed to slip away from the travelling group to visit Sakharov's home precisely with that purpose (Boel,

⁷² The volume, published in 1977 by Marsilio in collaboration with the Biennale, is a rich anthology of religious *samizdat* documents, many of which has been also included in the volume *Rinascita cristiana nell'URSS. Testi del samizdat religioso* [Christian revival in the USSR. Religious *samizdat* texts], edited by Romano Scalfi and published the same year by La Casa di Matriona.

⁷³ Iurii Mal'tsev (1932-2017) was a Russian-born dissident emigrated in Italy in 1974. Since the Sixties he was an active member of the Soviet human right movement and was the promoter and signer of many appeals and open letters. In 1969 Mal'tsev was among the founders of one of the first Soviet organization for the defense of human rights in the USSR, *Initsiavnaia gruppā po zashchite prav cheloveka v SSSR* [Initiative group for the defense of human rights in the USSR]. For his activism he was arrested and imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital: about this experience he wrote the book *Reportazh iz sumasshedshego doma* [Reportage from a madhouse], published in 1974 by the American *tamizdat* publishing house Novyi zhurnal. Once in Italy, he started to cooperate with Russia Cristiana and in 1975 was among the founders of the publishing house La Casa di Matriona, for which he authored and curated several volumes, thus contributing actively to the reception of Soviet *samizdat* in Italy, as well as abroad. He also collaborated with several others Russian émigré literary journals and magazines (such as *Grani*, *Kontinent* and *Russkaia Mysl'*). On Mal'tsev, see also Talalay "Vol'nyi filolog", "Literaturoved" and "Un filologo militante".

⁷⁴ The same year, the volume has been also released in Russian by the publishing house Posev with the title *Vol'naia russkaia literatura* [Free Russian literature].

⁷⁵ The Italian translation of A. Sakharov's message is available in the Biennale archival collection stored at ASAC Fs AV 1977n.

⁷⁶ Sergio Rapetti (1941) is a Slavist and translator of numerous Russian works. Since the 1960s, he has dedicated himself to the translation and dissemination of *samizdat* works – some of which were published in Italy under the pseudonym Nicola Sorin – collaborating with various Italian publishing houses (Mondadori, Vallecchi, Garzanti, Einaudi, and Jaca Book) and Russian émigré publishers (Posev), as well as with numerous Russian *tamizdat* literary magazines (*Grani*, *Posev* and *Kontinent*) and associations such as Russia Cristiana, the Moscow and Rome Helsinki Groups, Memorial Italia and Memorial International. In 1975 he was among the founders of La Casa di Matriona and, as a member of the Organizing Committee of the Rome session of the Sakharov Hearings, in 1977 he went to Moscow to record the physicist Sakharov's messages for the Rome session and for the *Biennale of Dissent*, which he smuggled to Italy (Boel, "International Sakharov Hearings" 107). Following this operation, he was declared *persona non grata* by the Soviet authorities and was unable to return to Russia until 1991, after the dissolution of the USSR. For further information, see Colognesi 39-41 and Larocca.

“International Sakharov Hearings” 107). On that occasion, Sakharov also recorded a message for the Rome session of the Hearings that bearing his name (Colognesi 141). Thus, even if both audio tapes were recorded and smuggled to Italy by Rapetti, the undercover operation to carry a message from Sakharov to the Rome Hearings – which was the propulsory event of the initiative of recording the messages – come from an agreement between another member of Russia Cristiana, Mario Corti⁷⁷ – who at the time was also in charge of the presidency of the executive committee of the Sakharov Hearings’ Rome session – with Elena Bonner, the Soviet human rights activist and dissident who was also Sakharov’s wife (Boel, “International Sakharov Hearings” 107). For the *Biennale of Dissent*, Corti worked as interpreter from Russian to Italian at Galich’s concert and, for the Biennale book series, he edited the volume devoted to Soviet clandestine music – *Canzoni/Poesie del dissenso* [Songs/Poetries of dissent] – in collaboration with Sabina Magnani and Gianlorenzo Pacini. Nevertheless, his contribution to the *Biennale of Dissent* was not limited to these activities, as he worked closely with Ripa di Meana and Jiří Pelikán not only in that occasion, but also in the case of other exhibitions devoted to the Eastern European dissident culture which were promoted by the Biennale between 1977 and 1978.

In the history of the Venice Biennale, the *Biennale of Dissent* is a unique case also because, after its official closing in November 1977, it became a sort of traveling exhibition. In 1978, the collections exhibited at the *Biennale of Dissent* were divided: part of the artworks, *samizdat*, and *tamizdat* were showcased in Lodi in the exhibition *Aspetti e documentazione degli artisti non conformisti dell’Unione Sovietica* [Aspects and documentation of non-conformist artists of the Soviet Union] (5-26 February 1978); while another part was transferred to Bellinzona, in the Italian-speaking Switzerland, and showcased at the exhibition *Rassegna del dissenso culturale nei paesi dell’Est europeo* [Exposition of cultural dissent in Eastern European countries] (17 February-14 March 1978).⁷⁸ In April, the materials exhibited in Lodi and Bellinzona were transferred

⁷⁷ Mario Corti (1945) was born in Italy but grew up in Argentina. Returning to Italy, in the 1960s he became a member of Russia Cristiana and, working behind the Iron Curtain as an interpreter for FIAT and Pirelli, began distributing books and materials in the USSR. From 1972 to 1975, he worked as an interpreter and translator at the Italian Embassy in Moscow, establishing close relationships with Soviet dissidents during those years. Because of these contacts and his activities distributing *tamizdat* behind the Iron Curtain and sending *samizdat* to the West via diplomatic pouch, Corti was expelled from the USSR. In 1974 Corti transported out the USSR part of the library of A. Solzhenitsyn and, with the help of Ludmilla Thorne, he delivered it in Switzerland to the same author, who has been already expelled from the Soviet Union. In 1977, Corti chaired the organizing committee of the Sakharov Hearings in Rome. In 1979 he was hired at Radio Liberty where, until 1988, he served as an analyst and editor – under the direction of Peter Dornan – in the Samizdat Unit in Munich, later becoming head of the Unit (1988-1990). Corti went on to serve as Deputy Director and then Director of the Information Resources Department at the RFE/RL Research Institute (1990-1995), and from 1998 to 2003 he was Director of Radio Liberty’s Russian Service. For La Casa di Matriona he edited several volumes, among which the two abovementioned volumes dedicated to the Sakharov Hearings in Copenhagen, the volume *Prigionieri politici dell’URSS* [Political prisoners of the USSR] (1977), and the translation – made in collaboration with his wife Elena Gori – of Aleksandr Nekrich’s *Popoli deportati* [The Punished Peoples] (1978). For Jaca Book, under the pseudonym of Massimo Gori, Corti also edited *La lunga strada di un’alternativa nell’URSS, 1968-1972: Sei documenti del samizdat politico* [The long road to an alternative in the USSR, 1968–1972: six documents of political samizdat] (1972). For further information, see Boel, “International Sakharov Hearings”; Galli; Lorenzetto; Belenkina.

⁷⁸ The exhibition in Bellinzona was organized by the Venice Biennale in collaboration with the municipality of Bellinzona, and with the participation of the *Musee de l’art russe contemporain en exil* [Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in Exile], directed by Aleksandr Glezer, who founded it in 1976 in Montgeron (K.). On this occasion as well, the

again and sent to Turin for the event *Il dissenso culturale nei paesi dell'est* [Cultural dissent in Eastern European countries] (26 April-10 May), which hosted two different exhibitions and a conference, and has gone down in history as the 'Turin Biennale' (ASAC Fs AV 1978).⁷⁹ Also in Turin, one of the exhibitions has been dedicated to a collection of *samizdat*, *tamizdat*, *magnitizdat* and photographs – *Il dissenso culturale nell'URSS. Documenti letterari e del samizdat* [Cultural dissent in the USSR. Literary documents and samizdat] – for organizing which Mario Corti played an important role. On that occasion, to the *samizdat* already exhibited in Venice, another bulk of documents has been added, and it was precisely thanks to his agency that these new materials arrived in Italy. As a representative appointed by Ripa di Meana (in charge of the presidency of the Turin Biennale), Corti travelled to Munich to the RL/RFE headquarters, where he received 108 sheets and two volumes on April 7, 1978. The material was delivered by Peter Dornan, who received it back on July 28 (OSA 1978). In the exhibition catalogue – *Il dissenso culturale nell'URSS. Documenti letterari e del samizdat* [Cultural dissent in the USSR. Literary documents and samizdat] – Corti is credited as consultant together with Mal'tsev, while Rapetti is credited for the general coordination of the exhibition (Gazzetta del Popolo, *Dissenso culturale*).

5. MAPPING THE ITALIAN NETWORKS OF SOVIET NON-CONFORMIST CULTURE

The analysis of the transnational relations between some of the several state and non-state socio-cultural actors involved in different capacities in the realization of the *Biennale of Dissent* and, in particular, of the exhibition *Libri, riviste, manifesti*, highlights the structure and topology of the 'Biennale network', which allow us to map a portion of the field of cultural production during the Cold War. This case study contributes to demonstrate that the permeability of the Iron Curtain – defined by Péteri, due its porosity to cultural objects, as a 'Nylon Curtain (113) – was made possible by the cross-border cooperation of a great variety of state and non-state socio-cultural actors, all of whom had just as many goals, motivations, habitus, beliefs and social relations that placed them in specific positions within the field of cultural production, as well as within the field of power (Bourdieu). And in fact, the *Biennale of Dissent* represents one of those cases where, by exploring *how* and *why* “determined individuals and diverse movements linked up, overlapped and stubbornly pursued their own paths, with or without state support” (van Dongen et al. 3), we can highlight that, even in the presence of overlapping positions in the

program of the exhibition of artworks, *samizdat*, and *tamizdat* was enriched by a series of debates that brought numerous Soviet dissidents to the canton of Ticino, such as Viktor Nekrasov, Iurii Mal'tsev, Jiří Pelikán, and Leonid Pliush, to name just a few.

⁷⁹ The Turin exhibition was organized by *La Gazzetta del Popolo* in collaboration with the Venice Biennale, and featured a conference attended by Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovskii, as well as two separate exhibitions: one dedicated to non-conformist Soviet visual arts, held at Palazzo Reale; and another dedicated to documentation of cultural dissent, held at Palazzo Madama, where a collection of *samizdat*, *tamizdat*, *magnitizdat*, and photographs was displayed. For more information, see Caleidoscopio CIAC.

name of anti-communism, the motivations and aims of each single actor were divergent: Łabedz was moved to action by his condition as an emigrant from a state forcibly subjected to the yoke of communism; Carlo Ripa di Meana was moved – on a human level – by his personal closeness to the cause of the Czech dissidents, sharing their motivations for opposition to the communist regime, while – on the political domestic level – he was driven to action by his distancing from the PCI and his subsequent rapprochement with the PSI; the members of Russia Cristiana, motivated by the reasons of faith, pursued the goal of supporting persecuted religious minorities in the countries of the Soviet bloc with the aim to fight an anti-religious state, and so on. And even in those cases when they cooperated – at different levels, with different roles and positions – and/or their anti-communist activities were sponsored – with a higher or lesser degree of awareness – by CIA front organizations, nevertheless they were active participants whose agency preserved a certain degree of autonomy, which was eventually informed by national contexts, political motivations and individual backgrounds (8). Thus, the micro-historical approach (Ginzburg) adopted in examining the agency of several socio-cultural actor cooperating in the organization of the *Biennale of Dissent* – by giving more emphasis to the action of small actors (individuals, as well as states and institutions) “that at times supported, at other times cut across or transcended, the state-run scenario” (3) – contributes to the reconsideration and downsizing of the superpowers narrative, in favour of a more complex and nuanced representation of the cultural Cold War.

In this light, the ultimate contribution of the essays collected in this thematic section aim to analyse the agency of small state and non-state actors and, in doing so, to map a limited and detailed portion of a broader network of relationships among individuals and institutions involved in the transnational production, circulation and reception of underground Soviet culture. Each essay presented here should be intended as large-scale map that help us make sense of the structure and topology of the field of cultural production during the Cold War. Furthermore, taking into account that “the network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement in their struggles to defend or improve their positions [...], strategies which depend for their force and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations” (Bourdieu 30), the central idea of this thematic section is based on the ambitious attempt to orient the further development of Slavic cultural studies towards the comparative and transnational perspective open by the ‘network turn’ that computer science and data analysis conveyed through the so-called digital humanities (Ahnert et al.).

Bourdieu argues that, in order to understand the symbolic and material meaning of cultural objects, they must be situated within the system of social relations which sustains them (1993). In this perspective, it is important to examine the dynamics of the field of cultural production by taking into account the agency of the socio-cultural actors who contributed to the production, circulation and reception of cultural objects, as well as to their legitimation as such. In the case of un-official Soviet and Eastern European manuscripts and self-published texts (*samizdat*) that

were smuggled from the Soviet bloc to be printed in the West (*tamizdat*) – and, from there, often smuggled back to the other side of the Iron Curtain – the analysis should also be extended to the transnational relational networks among a series of state and non-state institutions and individuals that enabled the cross-border cultural exchanges. The list of the cultural object which clandestinely crossed the Iron Curtain also includes the paintings of non-conformist Soviet, Central and Eastern European artists which were showcased in Western exhibitions, as well as clandestine recordings of underground music, poetry, and book readings (*rentgenizdat/roentgenizdat, magnitizdat*) released and/or broadcasted in the West. The cross-border circulation of knowledge and ideas, as well as the material smuggling on both sides of the Iron Curtain of manuscripts, books, disks, and audio/video tapes, has been only made possible thanks the cooperation of a large number of individuals and institutions that Kind-Kovács define as a ‘transnational community’ (81-208).

Many of the essays in this thematic section explore the transnational networks that linked various socio-cultural actors who contributed to the production, circulation and reception of Soviet underground culture in Italy. In her overview of the Italian publishing landscape from the 1960s to the 1990s, Giuseppina Larocca highlights the contribution of the publishing house Jaca Book, detailing its links with various Christian associations (Russia Cristiana, Gioventù Studentesca, Centro culturale Charles Péguy, and Comunione e Liberazione) that collaborated to its publishing projects, through the analysis of the agency of certain translators (Sergio Rapetti and Giovanni Bensi) who cultivated direct transnational contacts with various Soviet dissidents living abroad, as well as in the USSR. Outlining the dynamics of Mondadori’s publishing work, Valentina Parisi focuses on the agency of editorial readers (Anton Maria Raffo, Oreste Del Buono, and Giovanni Buttafava) and translators (Mariia Olsuf’eva), as well as on their relationship with cultural figures involved in various capacities in the transnational circulation of Andrei Platonov’s works (such as Nikita Struve, Michael Scammel, and Ludmila Dušková). Giulia De Florio also devotes considerable attention to examining the transnational networks that led to the publication of a number of clandestine audio recordings (*magnitizdat*) of Bulat Okudzhava’s songs, examining, for example, the agency of the Slavists Clara Strada and Gian Piero Piretto, who actively contributed to the smuggling and the reception of such unofficial records in Italy. Giada Dalla Bontà also investigates the transnational cultural exchanges and networks, focusing mainly on the agency of Italian and Soviet institutions (such as the Italy-USSR Association, the Department of Cultural Activities in Rome and the Soviet Embassy), as well as of local cultural associations (such as Moscow’s cultural association Sputnik and Arcinova) that, during the Perestroika, enabled the organization in Italy of a number of rock festivals dedicated to Soviet music, whilst also allowing various bands from the Italian underground rock scene – including, for example, CCCP-Fedeli alla linea and Litfiba – to perform in the USSR.

In assessing the role of socio-cultural actors in the reception of Soviet un-official and non-con-

formist culture in Italy, a special place should to be devoted also to the analysis of paratext, defined by Gerard Genette, as “what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (1). The paratext is a ‘threshold’, “an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside” and, as such, it is “a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that [...] is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (1-2). Thus, paratext – subdivided into the two different ‘spatial categories’ of peritext (preface, foreword, footnote, chapter titles etc.) and epitext (interviews, reviews, reading opinions, etc.) – is the place where texts are mediated.

In the case of translated works – including in the translation of *samizdat* and *tamizdat* – paratext plays an even more decisive role in shaping the target reader’s response. In this regard, in this thematic section Sara Mazzucchelli illustrates how the reception of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn’s *Il primo cerchio* [The first circle], Nadezhda Mandel’shtam *L’epoca e i lupi* [The era and the wolves. Eng. *Hope against hope*], and Vasily Grossman’s *Tutto scorre* [Everything flows] was negotiated by the paratexts of Mondadori’s editions, analysing the agency of several cultural actors who – at different levels and with different roles – contributed to the Italian reception of these works (such as Donato Barbone, Pietro Zveteremich, Giovanni Buttafava, Erich Linder and Lia Wainstein). While Valentina Parisi, in examining the reception of Andrei Platonov’s *Kotlovan* and *Chevengur*, focuses on the reviews of Mondadori’s editorial readers: she also highlights how the paratext of the volume published by Einaudi in 1968 – with the title *Ricerca di una terra felice* – influenced (in a rather negative way) the fortune of this author in Italy for the years to come. On a similar note, Giuseppina Larocca examines the paratexts of different book series and subseries published by Jaca Book and their contribution to the reception of Soviet nonfiction underground literature, as well as of non-conformist and dissent literature in Italy.

Paratexts are also relevant when mediating other arts to the public. In this thematic section, Matteo Bertelé illustrates the reception of Soviet nonconformist visual art through the reviews published in Italian art magazines and journals about several exhibitions by Ernst Neizvestnii, Oscar Rabin, and the kinetic collective *Dvizhenie*, to mention only a few: to this aim, he focuses on the role played by Italian art critics and curators (such as Enrico Crispolti, Duilio Morosini and Carlo Belloli). This thematic section reserve also special attention to the circulation and diffusion of Soviet underground music. In her analysis of the Italian reception of Soviet ‘sung poetry’ – and in particular of the ‘bards’ Bulat Okudzhava and Aleksandr Galich – Giulia De Florio takes into account a wide variety of paratexts, such as disk booklets, reviews and news published in journals and magazines, focusing on the agency of several cultural actors (such as Michele Straniero, Michele Serra, Giuseppe Conte and Emanuele Novazio). While Giada Dalla Bontà explores the Italian reception of Soviet underground rock music by reconstructing its history through the analysis of radio broadcasts, specialized musical publications (books, fanzines, magazines etc.),

and rock festivals organized in Italy in the late Eighties – that invited Soviet groups such as Igry, Televizor and Kino – through the analysis of the agency of specific cultural actors (such as Alba Solaro, M. Bughdadi, and Antonio Avantaggiato) and the integration of Sound Studies methodology. The formation of reader's response through paratexts is at the core of Alessandra Reccia's essay on the agency of the intellectual Franco Fortini in the reception of Soviet dissent in Italy: through the analysis of his critical writings – such as reviews about A. Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *The Gulag Archipelago*, as well as essays and articles – Reccia analyses Fortini's interpretation of the personal and historical 'catastrophe' of the collapse of the Soviet Union, highlighting its impact (the 'sign') on the Italian author as well as on his past and present readers.

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