

Music Samizdat as Zines? The Case of “Ot Vinta” from Soviet Latvia

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Abstract

DAUGAVIETIS, Jānis: Music Samizdat as Zines? The Case of “Ot Vinta” from Soviet Latvia.

The conceptual problem this article aims to research is how zines (of the Western or “the first world”) and music samizdat (of socialist countries or “the second world”) should be analysed. Thus far, they have been regarded as separate phenomena; however, do these two forms of underground literature differ so greatly that they should be analysed using different theoretical approaches? The subject of the paper, *От Винта* (*Ot Vinta*), is a Russian-language music samizdat from the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic which was published in the late Soviet period. It came out in Riga between 1987 and 1991 and was closely connected to the local underground and semi-official rock scene. As Soviet music samizdat is an under-researched topic, and the Latvian one is practically unexplored, an important part of the paper is devoted to a description of this field and the context in which it appeared. The paper also explores the history of *Ot Vinta*, which is based primarily on original interviews, and an analysis of the content of the publication itself. *Ot Vinta* was the central magazine of the Riga Russian language underground music scene of its time and is closely linked to the unofficial rock music subculture of the whole Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, making it a very important historical source for this time and for this music. The final conclusion is that there are no significant differences between Soviet music samizdat and Western zines. There are differences in design, determined by the different means of production and reproduction, as well as by the poor circulation of information about Western underground zines until the late 1980s. There are also differences in the attitude of the state towards zines and samizdat. The political resistance of music samizdat, which until recently was the dominant thesis in samizdat research, is now being questioned. Such discussion is also taking place in zine research (and in the sociology of culture and taste in general), which is a further reason why research of these forms of alternative press in the two worlds of Christian civilization (the “first” and the “second”) should not be separated.

Keywords: USSR; Latvia; music samizdat; zines; socialism; post-socialism

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“It is difficult now to find people who have preserved this value system – it is still marginal. Neither readers of the Soviet music samizdat, nor, moreover, its researchers, can now be found. The former died out; the latter were not born. Collectors remained.”¹

During the first wave of research and reflection on samizdat in the Soviet Union, which began after the democratization of the political system in the second half of the 1980s, statements such as the following were often made: *“The Westerner will hardly understand the meaning of rock samizdat,”² [because] “in a civilized democratic society, samizdat does not exist, because almost everything can be printed in a normal press; in totalitarian, dictatorial regimes it is also absent due to the complete absence of freedoms.”³*

1 НЕМЦОВ, Максим. Октябрьские тезисы. In ВОЛКОВ, Александр С. – ГУРЬЕВ, Сергей (eds.) *Контркультура. Опыт креативного саморазрушения 1989 – 2002*. Москва : Сияние, 2017, p. 7.

2 ЛАВРЕНТЬЕВА, Анна. Самиздат: иллюзии и реальность. In *За Зеленым Забором*, 1989, Vol. 3, p. 22.

3 СУЕТНОВ, Александр. *Самиздат: библиографический указатель. Каталог нетрадиционных*

Would we still argue today that Soviet music samizdat is something so original and unique to the Soviet Union (as well as some other socialist countries)? Is there something fundamentally different between the alternative and underground media born in Western democracies (which when referring to the underground music press we will hereby refer to as zines)? If we look at the research to date on such publications, it seems that yes, music-oriented zines and samizdat are phenomena that originate from different areas. Published works tend to look at one or the other, practically never together.

The fact that the Russian term “samizdat” has become internationally used to refer to illegal literature published in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and other socialist countries supports the thesis that samizdat is something unique. However, is this a sufficient argument? Amateur zines created by music fans in both socialist and capitalist countries appeared simultaneously in the second half of the 1960s,⁴ the only difference being that in non-democratic countries such an initiative of the citizenry, which was outside the official press and censorship system, was drastically kept in check, while zine-makers in the West were free to continue producing. Their fate was largely dependent on market demand and/or the enthusiasm of the publishers.

This raises the question: are there any significant differences between unofficial, underground music samizdat published in the Soviet Union and Western zines? If the difference is only in the reactions of state regimes – in one case prohibition, in the other, ignorance – maybe these two phenomena should be analysed within the framework of a single theory? I will attempt to provide provisional answers to this conceptual question by examining one example of Soviet, music-oriented samizdat: *Ot Vinta* (1987 – 1991), which was published in Riga during the last years of Soviet Latvia.

As there is still very little academic research on Soviet samizdat, and none at all on *Ot Vinta* and the Latvian zine scene, I will begin with a review of the literature in this field. This will be followed by the story of how the publication was created and produced. Two sources are used: firstly, original interviews with the publishers and authors, and, secondly, the content of the publications themselves. Since the publication was produced completely independent of the official Soviet publishing system and was invisible in the official Soviet mass media, one has to rely on secondary data and oral history.

Zine Theory?

The concept of zines has long seemed so self-evident that it is often not even defined in academic texts. However, in this case it is necessary if we want to compare zines with music samizdat. The following is a definition given by Stephen

изданий (1985 – 1991), Архив нетрадиционной печати, дополненное издание 2-е. Москва : Центр образовательных программ института Новых технологий образования, 1992, р. 6.

4 GINSBURG, David D. Rock Is a Way of Life: The World of Rock 'n' Roll Fanzines and Fandom. In *Serials Review*, 1979, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 29-46; КУШНИР, Александр (ed.) *Золотое подполье: полная иллюстрированная энциклопедия рок-самиздата 1967 – 1994: история, антология, библиография*. Нижний Новгород : ДЕКОМ, 1994.

Duncombe in one of the most authoritative books on the subject, *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*: "Zines are non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves."⁵ English dictionaries also have similar definitions of zines, for example "a small magazine that is produced cheaply by one person or a small group of people and is about a subject they are interested in;"⁶ or "a non-commercial often homemade or online publication usually devoted to specialized and often unconventional subject matter."⁷

The most common technical characteristics of zines are the following:

- made by amateurs, non-professionals, music fans;
- issued by one, a couple, or a few people;
- produced and published with the creator's own resources;
- dedicated to a specific genre/theme; and
- having a small circulation.

Not all of these conditions have to be met for a publication to be called a zine. There can always be various exceptions; for example, a zine can be published by professional journalists; it can have a print run of thousands or even tens of thousands, and it can be dedicated to different topics and so on. However, these attributes are considered to be suitably representative of the technical structure of zines and are regularly found in their explicit or implicit definitions.⁸

Zines are a specific form of text circulation largely determined by the limited resources of their publishers, especially pre-Internet. Since most music zines specialize in a particular genre or style of music, their distribution only made sense within specific subcultures or scenes. Consequently, zine distribution was most often very local, often using only informal channels and institutions, based on social ties and reproducing a specific subcultural identity.

More problematic are those features of zines that are value-laden. These include: being created in the do-it-yourself (DIY) tradition, being deliberately non-commercial, supporting the community, being a form of political protest, being created to please, etc. Firstly, zines are diverse in their content and aesthetic and political orientation, and such statements cannot be generalized, even in the context

5 DUNCOMBE, Stephen. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. London; New York : Verso, 1997, p. 10.

6 Subject word: Zine. In *The Cambridge English Dictionary 2020*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/zine>.

7 Subject word: Zine. In *Merriam-Webster 2020*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/zine>.

8 See: FLEMING, Linda. The American SF Subculture. In *Science Fiction Studies*, 1977, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 265; GINSBURG 1979, p. 30; JAMES, David E. Poetry / Punk / Production: Some Recent Writing in LA. In *Minnesota Review*, 1984, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 141; BURT, Stephen. Reviewed Work(s): *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* by Stephen Duncombe: *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* by Simon Frith: *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* by Angela McRobbie: *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* by Sarah Thornton. In *Transition*, 1998, No. 77, p. 148, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2903206>; ATTON, Chris. *Alternative Media*. London : Sage, 2002, p. 55, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446220153>; FREEDMAN, Jenna. Pinko vs. Punk: A Generational Comparison of Alternative Press Publications and Zines. In WALLACE, K. Martin et al. (eds.) *The Generation X Librarian: Essays on Leadership, Technology, Pop Culture, Social Responsibility and Professional Identity*. North Carolina : McFarland, 2011, p. 150; GUERRA, Paula. Fast, Furious and Xerox: Punk, Fanzines and DIY Cultures. In GUERRA, Paula – QUINTELA, Pedro (eds.) *Punk, Fanzines and DIY Cultures in a Global World: Fast, Furious and Xerox*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28876-1> etc.

of the zines of one music genre. Secondly, zines can be analysed through various conceptual and theoretical prisms, which often lead to contradictory conclusions. Can zines be considered tools of political resistance or just expressions of aesthetic pleasure? It is, in fact, a discussion well known in the modern research of subcultures and in cultural sociology in general. On the one hand, the Marxist-structural approach (Dick Hebdige, Pierre Bourdieu) views cultural production and consumption, including taste, as arising from economic relations, emphasizing the political importance of artistic and cultural practices whose function is either to preserve the status quo or to change it. On the other hand, the postmodern approach (Antoine Hennion, Andy Bennett) questions the thesis of economic determinism in the modern context, attributing to individuals much greater freedom and influence over their own behaviour, tastes, and ways of enjoyment.

Although this discussion also occurs in the research field of zines,⁹ these two approaches should not be considered mutually exclusive. Firstly, the political may be combined with entertainment: *“A revolution without dancing is a revolution not worth having”*.¹⁰ Secondly, it is a question of how we interpret politics: how explicit and intentional should the contents of the publication be in order to be able to say with certainty that this or that zine is political? This clash of theoretical approaches is, however, essentially about one question: how can the emergence of subcultures (including zines) be interpreted? One tradition sees the phenomenon as the symbolic response (protest) of the subordinated; the other tradition sees it is an expression of aesthetic needs.

Music-oriented Samizdat as Zines?

To investigate the degree to which samizdat resembles or differs from zines, I will use both the technical parameters of zines (being the self-published work of one or a few amateur autodidactic music fans geared to a specific theme or genre) and the contradictory “ideological” theses of either political protest or aesthetic pleasure. In addition, I will pay particular attention to aspects of Soviet music samizdat production and distribution that differ from Western zines. These details may not play a significant role in the comparative conceptualization of music samizdat, but they are often fascinating and worthy of note.

It is generally assumed that the content of classic samizdat consisted of both artistic and political work that was forbidden for publication, as well as content that would most likely be banned or censored, thus emphasizing the political aspect of this type of publishing. Within this interpretation, samizdat implicitly implies political opposition to a totalitarian (or at least undemocratic) regime. It should be noted that in Stalin’s Soviet Union, samizdat did not exist due to total state control and immediate persecution. Likewise, no punk zines were issued in

9 See: ATTON 2002; ŠIMA, Karel – MICHELA, Miroslav. Why Fanzines? Perspectives, Topics and Limits in Research on Central Eastern Europe. In *Forum Historiae*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2020.14.1.1>; ATTON, Chris. Popular Music Fanzines: Genre, Aesthetics, and the ‘Democratic Conversation’. In *Popular Music and Society*, 2010, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 517-531 etc.

10 A statement commonly but wrongly attributed to Emma Goldman, an anarchist political activist and writer.

the German Democratic Republic from 1979 to 1983.¹¹ It was only with the softening of the Soviet regime that a gradual change in attitudes towards unofficial publishing practices took place, from a policy of total eradication to controlled surveillance from the early 1970s.¹²

In any case, the transfer of a Western Neo-Marxist theory of subcultures to the USSR is problematic. It would be difficult to argue that Soviet subcultural expressions (poetry, literature, underground music) were a response to the exploitation of the working class of the late Socialist period. It was not the workers or the peasants whom the Soviet state regarded as producers and consumers of samizdat. Instead, they identified the technical and creative intelligentsia, students, and representatives of various religious and nationalist groups to be the problematic groups.

Samizdat was also fed by Soviet artistic or aesthetic censorship, which may not always be seen as political interference in art. When the “artistically inferior” essays rejected by publishing editors were published by the authors themselves, both professionals and amateurs, these also became samizdat. In fact, we can also consider translated and published foreign pulp fiction, esoteric literature, pornographic material, horoscopes, games, etc. as samizdat.¹³

We can also consider music samizdat as a political act, because it was in deliberate opposition to Soviet cultural and aesthetic canons and the official (and sole) Soviet cultural policy. The small number of such publications in the pre-Perestroika era and the evidence of systematic repression enacted by the USSR’s oppressive institutions support this thesis. At the same time, it can be assumed that overt or covert criticism of the political regime was not the dominant driving force behind the music samizdat. The impetus was basically the desire of adherents of the new rock aesthetics to talk about music that was dear to them: “*Throughout its short history, the underground rock press has consistently opposed the two »upper inhabitants« – Soviet society (until 1987) and »wild capitalism« (since 1990).*”¹⁴ This opposition, even if it was purely aesthetic, was also political, as any direct or indirect criticism of socialist artistic canons and cultural policy positions implied disloyalty or even resistance to the regime. This created some tension between zinesters and public authorities, which could manifest itself in the universities where zinesters studied or in the places where they worked, and it could lead to the involvement of the KGB (Committee for State Security).

11 SCHMIDT, Christian. Meanings of fanzines in the beginning of Punk in the GDR and FRG. An approach towards a medium between staging, communication and the construction of collective identities. In *Volume! La revue des musiques populaires*, 2006, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 61, <https://doi.org/10.4000/volume.636>.

12 GRIBANOV, Alexander – KOWELL, Masha. Samizdat According to Andropov. In *Poetics Today*, 2009, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 89-106.

13 KHANIUTIN, Alexei. Teenage Samizdat: Song-Album Scrapbooks as Mass Communication. In *Journal of Communication*, 1991, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 55-65; DREIMANE, Jana. Officially Non-Existent: Storage and Use of Banned Literature in the Soviet Latvia in the 1970s – 1980s. In *Knygotyra*, 2017, Vol. 68, pp. 143-160, <https://doi.org/10.15388/Knygotyra.68.10719>.

14 ГУРЬЕВ, Сергей. Пограничные столбы рок-самиздата (опыт описания описания). In КУШНИР, Александр (ed.) *Золотое подполье: полная иллюстрированная энциклопедия рок-самиздата 1967 – 1994: история, антология, библиография*. Нижний Новгород : ДЕКОМ, 1994, p. 7.

Creators of samizdat used many methods to avoid confrontation with the KGB, ranging from self-censorship and collaboration with the regime (for example, establishing so-called “Rock Clubs”) to various conspiratorial methods, such as small circulation, pseudonyms, writing text in other languages, reverse translations, confused edition numbering and title changes, and the use of different typewriters. Despite this, however, there were recorded cases of confrontations with the KGB and censorship in the period up until 1989. One reason for this is that the samizdat publisher could be prosecuted under several articles of the Criminal Code.¹⁵ Communication with Soviet state power during the Perestroika period was gentler than before, but a “call from a KGB employee” or an “invitation to visit the KGB” were still relatively common in 1987/1988.¹⁶

Research of Music-Oriented Samizdat

The first wave of research – or more precisely, bibliographic organisation – into music samizdat in the territory of the USSR began in the very last years of the Soviet Union’s existence. This was a time when samizdat was no longer considered a politico-ideological taboo from a forbidden culture. There was instead an interest both in the USSR and beyond in what had recently been forbidden fruit.

Music samizdat was sometimes included in the cataloguing of samizdat in general, but as it was not a thematic priority, it occupied a marginal and undeveloped place. The main focus was on political publications and those that focused on literature and poetry. It could be argued that in the context of music samizdat, a bibliographic-historical interest prevailed at the time. Essentially, there were two motivations for this. One was the attempt by insiders of the underground and music samizdat scene to perform a comprehensive audit and to document the field; the other was the efforts of professional bibliographers to formally catalogue all previously unofficial publishing. Both groups actually carried out their work at the same time, i.e. 1989 – 1991.

The most important contribution of librarians and bibliographers of that time came from Alexander Suetnov, whose main interests were dissidents, human-rights defenders, and informal literature in general. His most significant collection, *Самиздат: библиографический указатель. Каталог нетрадиционных изданий (1985 – 1991)* (*Samizdat: bibliograficheskij ukazatel'. Katalog netradicionnyh izdanij (1985 – 1991)*), has a separate chapter devoted to music publishing, *Музыкальные издания (Muzykal'nye izdanija)*.¹⁷ It lists 158 issues (numbers 1171 – 1328). Although the book has a fairly detailed introduction and commentary on the history, functioning, and chronology of Soviet samizdat, music samizdat is not specifically analysed. For the publications included in the catalogue, only

15 СУЕТНОВ 1992, p. 11.

16 See also: ГУРЬЕВ 1994, p. 7; СЕРЖАНТ, Александр – SUMAROKOV, Dmitry. Он ранен был в живот. In *Даугава*, 2004, Vol. 245, No. 3, pp. 139-157; ТУПИКИН, Влад. Записка о русскоязычном самиздате 1990-х и двухтысячных. In *Неприкосновенный Запас*, 2009, Vol. 65, No. 5 pp. 182-190; Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov [in Russian], interviewer Jānis Daugavietis, from 26 September 2019, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3484696>; ТУПИКИН, Влад. Самиздат после перестройки. In *Индекс / Досье На Цензуру*, 2001, Vol. 13, <http://index.org.ru/journal/13/tupikin1301.html> etc.

17 СУЕТНОВ 1992, pp. 188-204.

concise bibliographic information is given: title, type, edition, start year, issues, edition. The introduction notes that the chapter on music samizdat *Muzykal'nye izdanija* was created with Aleksandr Kushnir.¹⁸

Aleksandr Kushnir (born 1964) was an underground music journalist and producer during the Soviet period who has compiled the most authoritative catalogue of USSR music samizdat to date, *Дискретная энциклопедия рок-самиздата* (*Diskretnaja enciklopedija rok-samizdata*), which was published in the leading independent music fanzine/journal of those times, *КонтрКультУр'а* (*KontrKul'tUr'a*) number three,¹⁹ in which he acted as both author and editor.²⁰ This research was written between 1988 and 1990, and Kushnir's sources of information and informants came from the very scene he had been personally involved in since the early 1980s. The 45 pages of the magazine briefly describe 165 Soviet music samizdat fanzines (mainly rock music), beginning with the first editions of the late 1960s. For each fanzine, data is provided on the number of issues, dates of the first and last issues, edition, format, type of publication, the composition of the editorial board, and city. The individual fanzines are described concisely, with their front page and an editorial photo. It should be noted that: “*Editions with a circulation of one copy were also included in the encyclopaedia on an equal footing, because the moment of success with the reproduction of products has no sociocultural significance for samizdat: the fact of the presence of an internal impulse, rather than an external perception, is important.*”²¹ This is and will be one of the practical problems in studying Soviet music samizdat: how to decide which handwritten single-copy “magazines” that look like a notebook, a draft book or a diary are considered to be a zine, and which are not?

A few years later, this encyclopaedia was expanded into a book *Золотое подполье: полная иллюстрированная энциклопедия рок-самиздата 1967 – 1994: история, антология, библиография* (*Zolotoe podpol'e: polnaja illjustrirovannaja jenciklopedija rok-samizdata 1967 – 1994: istorija, antologija, bibliografija*).²² It deals, in the same way, with some 250 editions from about 90 USSR and former-USSR cities, but the core, i.e. the major and better-known publications remain virtually unchanged, as most of them were no longer being published by 1991 or were in hibernation. The book also publishes two analytical introductory articles (by Sergej Gurjev and Aleksandr Kushnir) and more than 50 reprints of classic samizdat articles from various editions of different periods.

To this day, Kushnir's work is considered to be the most authoritative source of rock-oriented samizdat in the USSR, there being no other study or publication to rival its comprehensive detailing of the genre.²³ It covers Russian-language

18 СУЕТНОВ 1992, p. 4.

19 КУШНИР, Александр. Дискретная энциклопедия рок-самиздата. In *Контр Культ Ур'а*, 1991, Vol. 3, pp. 49-94.

20 ВОЛКОВ, Александр С. – ГУРЬЕВ Сергей (eds.) *Контркультура. Опыт креативного саморазрушения 1989-2002*. Москва : Сияние, 2017, 480 p.

21 КУШНИР 1991, p. 50.

22 КУШНИР 1994.

23 STRUKOVA Elena letter to Jānis Daugavietis. *Sovetskij muzikalnij samizdat*, [Personal e-mail communication], 18 February 2019.

samizdat well; however, it does not include or cover issues in other languages apart from a few written in Ukrainian and Belarusian. It is possible that this was not only due to the language barrier presented by the other, non-Slavic languages of the USSR, but also because these other Soviet states had their own distinct national scenes. Within one Soviet republic, or even one city, there could be two or more quite distinct scenes, which not only differed along the lines of their aesthetic preferences, but also along the lines of nationality and ethnicity, language, and political ideology. Granted, this second thesis remains only an unexplored assumption; however, we can see a similar Slavic-centric vision in all samizdat bibliographies, including Suetnov's.²⁴

The next wave of exploration and systematisation of music-oriented samizdat began in the late 1990s, and this time it was more extensive and diverse. It was no longer just underground activists and professional Russian librarians who were interested in dissident literature, but also literary scientists, linguists, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists. They were no longer just from the capital cities of the former USSR. They included among their number amateur scientists and researchers from the outermost regions of the former Soviet Union and beyond.

More and more memoir-type publications are beginning to emerge that focus on specific instances of music samizdat, either on single publications and/or specific urban and regional samizdat scenes.²⁵ As a rule, these are not academic articles. The authors are witnesses to or even creators of the events described. In addition to giving valuable first-hand evidence on the production and distribution of publications, the relations with official authorities, the local and USSR-wide rock scene, and the content of editions, they often contain the conceptual generalizations of insiders on this subject.

A somewhat idealistic and romanticized interpretation of the emergence of Soviet music samizdat is often present, namely the perception of it being a means of seeking and practicing *freedom*.²⁶ If this freedom is not put forward as being the only or dominant motivating factor, then this assumption does not stand in contradiction to other concepts or theories. There are indications that during Perestroika one of the driving forces of music samizdat was economic considerations. This period (1986 – 1987 and onwards) saw not only greater democratic rights for the citizenry, but also greater freedom for individual businesses. Concerts by previously unrecognized or even banned rock bands were now legal. These bands, many of which had been underground and present solely in the col-

24 СУЕТНОВ 1992.

25 See: ДОЛГИХ, Ольга – КУЗНЕЦОВ, Аркадий. История тюменского журнального рок-самиздата 1980-х–1990-х годов. In *Журналист. Социальные Коммуникации*, 2014, Vol. 4, No. 16, pp. 118-26; МЕДВЕДЕВ, Владимир. Артефакт. Тюменский самиздат. In *Топос: лит.-филос. журн*, 2002, [e-resource] <http://www.topos.ru/article/700>; САВЕНКО, Елена. *На пути к свободе слова: очерки истории самиздата Сибири*. Новосибирск : ГПНТБ СО РАН, 2008, 200 p.; САВИЦКИЙ, Станислав. *Андеграунд. История и Мифы Ленинградской Неофициальной Литературы* (PhD Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2002), <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/19242>; СЕРЖАНТ and SUMAROKOV, 2004; LIUBINIENĖ, Neringa. Metalo muzikos gerbėjų fanzinai: subkultūrinės grupės tapatybės kodai. In *Grupės ir aplinkos*, 2009, No. 1, pp. 199-220; MCMICHAEL, Polly. "After all, you're a rock and roll star (at least, that's what they say)": Roksi and the Creation of the Soviet Rock Musician. In *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 2005, Vol. 83, No. 4, pp. 664-684.

26 ГУРЬБЕВ 1994.

umns of music samizdat, were now able to play in stadiums. The same people who had issued samizdat publications and had organised illegal “apartment concerts-*kvartirniki*” (small concerts held in apartments), now started to organise big concerts and festivals. Although profit may not have been the main motivation for some, it was an undeniably strong factor for others.

The creators of the music samizdat Урлайт (*Urlait*, 1985 – 1992) (which later transformed into *KontrKul'tUr'a*) remember the conflict with the Moscow's *Rock-Laboratory*, modelled on the Leningrad and Riga Rock Clubs,²⁷ and thus under the supervision of the KGB:²⁸ “*At the same time, there was a war with the Rock-Laboratory, which, as we now understand, tried to put the underground under the control of the KGB and open concert activities under this hood. We were closely connected with a group of managers who wanted to do all this completely independently of the KGB.*”²⁹

In the early 00s, a new wave of late Soviet socialist research emerged in the humanities and social sciences, sometimes involving a reinterpretation of the function and meaning of samizdat (including music samizdat). The informal press and some other allegedly non-state activities of this period of the Soviet regime were no longer viewed as being an expression of binary opposition to a repressive power. Instead, researchers viewed them in a more nuanced way,³⁰ even beginning to question the resistance of the music samizdat to the regime.³¹

One of the least studied areas to date is the content of music-oriented samizdat. The only examples of this genre that have been commented on, republished, or analysed are the classic big publications of Рокси (*Roksi*) and *KontrKul'tUr'a* and a pair of regional samizdat. If we focus on Soviet-era music samizdat from Latvia, it can be said that there has been virtually no research. The collections of libraries and archives in Latvia and other countries have not been studied, and private collections have not been identified. Although there are some crumbs of information in memoirs and retrospective interviews, most knowledge is to be found in previously untold oral histories.

To sum up the exploration of music samizdat of the Soviet period so far, it can, first of all, be concluded that there is still very little academic research. Bibliographic work and memoir-type publications dominate. Secondly, more than ten years after the collapse of the USSR, samizdat was viewed as a unique phenomenon of the totalitarian Soviet state, which may have been one of the reasons why Western

27 See footnote on these clubs later in subsection “Production of *Ot Vinta*”.

28 See also: ГУРЬЕВ, Сергей. Лучший враг. In ВОЛКОВ, Александр – ГУРЬЕВ, Сергей (eds.) *Контркультура. Опыт креативного саморазрушения 1989 – 2002*. Москва : Сияние, 2017, pp. 31-38.

29 ГУРЬЕВ, Сергей. «Контркультура» — главный журнал рок-самиздата, 4 October 2013, [e-resource] <https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/volna/context/kontrkultura-glavnyy-zhurnal-roksamizdata>.

30 ЮРЧАК, Алексей. *Это было навсегда, пока не кончилось. Последнее советское поколение*. Москва : Новое Литературное Обозрение, 2014, 664 p.; САВИЦКИЙ 2002; YURCHAK, Alexei. Suspending the Political: Late Soviet Artistic Experiments on the Margins of the State. In *Poetics Today*, 2008, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 713-733; OUSHAKINE, Serguei Alex. The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat. In *Public Culture*, 2001, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 191-214.

31 ГАНСКАЯ, Екатерина. Критический дискурс о русской рок-культуре в текстах советского музыкального самиздата. In *Litera*, 2019, No. 2, pp. 22-30, <https://doi.org/10.25136/2409-8698.2019.2.29557>.

theories were not used in its analysis. This tradition, viewed in the light of political dissidentism and based primarily on a descriptive rather than conceptual analysis, is still strong, although the discourse on the interpretation of samizdat is beginning to change, especially since Alexei Yurchak's publications on the everyday life and activities of those in the artistic field in late socialist societies.

Production of *Ot Vinta*

Ot Vinta (1987 – 1991) was one of the first Latvian music zines, as this term is understood in the West – an “unofficial” rock magazine made by amateurs and music fans/musicians, with a small circulation (a few dozen) and mainly devoted to the local underground scene. At the same time, it represented the Soviet tradition of samizdat, which in fact was, originally, its sole influence.³² Apart from the Latvian (language)-issued new wave/punk fanzine *Stieple* (1984 – 1990), there had only been a few editions of music or art-oriented amateur publications in the Latvian SSR. We can say that they qualify as samizdat, if we accept Kushnir's definition that a single copy edition is enough.³³ These include *Zirgābols*, *WCZLS*, and *Seque*, published by Hardijs Lediņš and Juris Boiko in 1971 – 1974,³⁴ and *Без Жмогас* (*Bez Zhmogas*) in 1974.³⁵ These were one-issue editions of Riga school pupils, and they were very much like notebooks, diaries, or manuscripts, where young people expressed their music and artistic aspirations and tastes in a collage or in non-illustrated handwriting.³⁶ Although there was only one copy of such samizdat, they were often circulated widely. Most often this just meant a circle of friends, acquaintances, and classmates; however, sometimes it also came to the attention and investigation of the repressive state authorities, causing real trouble for their authors.³⁷

According to the most generalized periodization of Soviet samizdat, *Ot Vinta* is a publication belonging to the second phase of the perestroika period. It began in 1987, when various changes brought about by the reforms had already become real. Although the situation varied in different regions and cities of the country, the state's attitude towards informal media became more and more liberal, especially regarding explicitly non-political samizdat. Although there is more evidence of the KGB's interest in and repression of music samizdat in 1987 and 1988, including in Latvia,³⁸ this was not the case with *Ot Vinta*. The years 1987 – 1988

32 Interview with Sergei Volchenko [in Russian], interviewer Jānis Daugavietis, from 29 October 2019, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3522363>; Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.

33 КУШНИР 1991, p. 50.

34 ASTAHOVSKA, Ieva – ŽEIKARE, Māra (eds.) *Nebijušu sajūtu restaurēšanas darbnīca. Juris Boiko un Hardijs Lediņš: Workshop for restoration of unfelt feelings. Juris Boiko and Hardijs Lediņš*. Rīga : Latvijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centrs, 2016, p. 23.

35 ИОФФЕ, Марк. Зин: стёб и кэмп. In *Интернет-журнал ГЕФТЕР*, 17 March 2017, [e-resource], <http://gefeter.ru/archive/21542>, acc. 14 February 2020; YOFFE, Mark. Soviet Rock Collection and International Counterculture Archive at the Global Resources Center of the George Washington University Libraries. In *Slavic & East European Information Resources*, Vo. 21, No. 1-2, pp. 112-132.

36 See: KGB non-confiscated issues of Lediņš & Boiko: *Seque. 1972 – 1974 Samizdats*, [e-resource], <http://pietura.lv/seque/?grupa=seque&tkst=samizdats>, acc. 14 February 2020. Surviving originals are held in the private archives of the Boiko and Lediņš families.

37 ASTAHOVSKA – ŽEIKARE 2016, p. 23.

38 СЕРЖАНТ, Александр – СУМАРОКОВ, Дмитрий 2004; NEIBARTE, Sarmīte. *Zum, Zum Dzejniek! Aivars Neibarts*. Rīga : Pētergailis, 2019, p. 232.

were the busiest period for the magazine (five issues were published), with no retaliation from the KGB or other state institutions, only mild interest.³⁹

Jānis Daugavietis (JD): *“There are only authors’ nicknames practically. Why? Scared or just because?”*

Sergei Volchenko (SV): *“Generally no one really wanted to sign with their real names, I can tell you more when 1 – 2, maybe Nr. 3 came out, one of the authors came up to me and said, »If you get dragged in to KBG, you know, I have nothing to do with this«! Because of course you could get something for that [...]. Even though we had peace. There were no objections at all [from the state].”⁴⁰*

Ot Vinta content was markedly musical, and if anything political or socio-critical appeared, it was not an overly radical view. Most likely, the KGB’s priorities in Latvia were purely political publications that had already begun to call for the restoration of Latvia’s sovereignty or even independence or cultivated other ideas that were hateful to the Soviet authorities.⁴¹ It would have been difficult to rebuke *Ot Vinta* for “bourgeois nationalism” (one of the regime’s main ideological enemies in the so-called national republics) if only for the reason that it came out in Russian, there were no ethnic Latvians in the editorial team, and most of the content was devoted to Riga’s Russian-language rock music scene.

At the same time, pseudonyms were used by virtually all the writers contributing to the magazine; there was no information about the editorial team, no addresses, and no instructions on how to acquire the publication. Some issues bear the words На правах рукописи (*Na pravah rukopisi*, that is *As a manuscript*), as if to suggest that there was no intention to circulate the publication and that it should not, therefore, be subject to censorship. Alternatively, there was the ironic use of Винт – движитель рекламы (*Vint – dvizhitel’ reklamy* or *Vint – advertising engine*), Пролетариям всех стран (*Proletarijam vseh stran* or *To the proletarians of all countries*), and the use of the title font of the main Communist Party newspaper Правда (*Pravda* or *Truth*) for the title of *Ot Vinta* (see fig. 3, 6, 8). It was both a tradition of pre-Perestroika samizdat conspiracy and precautionary practices and a technique of “steb” (mockery or derision).

SV: *“In fact, if you read the title in a row without pauses, then the expression »To the proletarians of all countries Ot Vinta« can be interpreted as »The proletarians of all countries have pofig (do not care)«.*

»Propeller – an advertising vehicle« was borrowed from an article by Ilya Smirnov (Moscow) about the Bravo group, which became popular after being screwed up [»svintili«, that is, arrested] right at the concert. There is even a photo where a ment [militiaman] comes up on the stage to Zhanna Aguzarova [the front women].”⁴²

39 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019; Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.

40 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

41 For this topic see: BRODSKY-ZISSERMAN, Dina (ed.). *Constructing Ethnopolitics in the Soviet Union: Samizdat, Deprivation and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 294 p., <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403973627>.

42 Volchenko, Sergei, letter to Jānis Daugavietis. Re: *Ot Vinta* Nr. 5., [Personal e-mail communication], 20 March 2020.

Ot Vinta's chief editor, Sergei Volchenko (born 1962), was a volunteer worker at the Riga Rock Club⁴³ from 1985. His duties included collecting membership fees and taking care of the club's sound equipment.⁴⁴ There is no mention anywhere in the issues of the publication that it is an organ or voice of the Rock Club, and it positions itself in interviews as independent. However, despite this, *Ot Vinta's* affiliation with this institution is obvious (several members of the "editorial board" were involved in the management of the club, played in groups, and the contents of the journal covered the activities of the rock club). The Rock Club was an official institution of the Soviet state. Its "parent organization" was the Latvian Communist Youth (Komsomol) division of the City of Riga and it was supervised by the KGB.⁴⁵ It therefore had to comply with the laws and cultural policy of that time. For example, club groups had to submit their lyrics for approval (censorship) to the respective Komsomol employee, the rock club curator.⁴⁶ *Ot Vinta* also probably managed to maintain a level of self-censorship that satisfied both parties. In interviews, the creators of *Ot Vinta* say that the KGB was aware of its contents but did not give them any direct comment or recommendation.⁴⁷

SV: "When nr. 3 – 4 came out [...] I knew a man who was related to a »cantor« [KGB]. I asked him, »Can you find out there with your [...] acquaintances [laughs] how and what is happening [...] « A week later he says, »They have seen it, read it, and said that there will be no sanctions. You can sleep peacefully«...[laughs]."

JD: "Probably there was no bourgeois nationalism there [*Ot Vinta*]?"

43 The Riga Rock Club was formed in the autumn of 1983, bringing together unofficial rock bands to form a state-approved formal organization under the direct authority and supervision of the state. The model was the Leningrad rock club, founded in 1981. See: TROITSKY, Artemy. *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia*. Boston; London : Faber and Faber, 1988, 160 p.; EASTON, Paul. *The Rock Music Community*. In RIORDAN, Jim (ed.) *Soviet Youth Culture*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, pp. 45-82; STEINHOLT, Yngvar Bordewich. *Rock in the Reservation: Songs from Leningrad Rock Club 1981 – 1986*. New York; Bergen : Mass Media Music Scholars' Press, 2005, 230 p. The Riga Rock Club was the second such formation in the USSR, although the first unsuccessful attempts were made in Moscow and Leningrad in the late 1960s and early 1970s. See: МИХАЙЛОВ, Николай Дмитриевич. Что Такое 'Ленинградский Рок-Клуб'? [e-resource, blog Берег Питера, accessible now only through [archive.org](http://web.archive.org/web/20140517001234/http://beregpitera.ru/), 2013], <https://web.archive.org/web/20140517001234/http://beregpitera.ru/>; КАН, Александр. Ленинградский рок-клуб: заметки очевидца. In *BBC News Русская служба*, 20 March 2011, [e-resource], https://www.bbc.com/russian/society/2011/03/110320_5floor_rock_club.shtml; STARR, S. Frederick. The Rock Inundation. In *The Wilson Quarterly*, 1983, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 58-67. The rock club gave the underground groups who became members a chance to play in rare semi-closed club concerts (which were not advertised) and later, during the perestroika years, to perform outside Riga in cities of other republics. It became the most important rock music institution of its time in Riga and all of Latvia. It featured different genre groups ranging from hard rock to avant-garde and noise.

44 ГОРСКАЯ, Анна. За рок-н-ролл! In *Бизнес&Балтия*, 19 November 2008, Vol. 3592, No. 221. p. 10, [e-resource], <http://arhiv.bb.lv/?p=1&i=4160&s=8&a=152426>; Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

45 There is no research on the relationship between the first USSR rock clubs (Leningrad, Riga and Moscow) and the KGB. Memoirs and interviews usually mention special rock club KGB curators and seats at rock club concerts that were actually reserved for observers from the Komsomol and this security institution. See: Interview with Raimonds Legimovs, interviewer Kristaps Lejiņš: Dambis par alternatīvās skatuves pirmsākumiem un attīstību. In *Alternative.lv*, from 10 December 2012, [e-resource], <http://www.alternative.lv/intervijas/dambis-par-alternativas-skatuves-pirmsakumiem-un-attistibu-212/>; МИХАЙЛОВ 2013.

46 Interview with Andrej "Kastot" Kostanenko [unrecorded], interviewer Jānis Daugavietis, from 23 January 2019; Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.

47 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019; Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.

SV: “Nationalism was not there, of course. Probably at that time they had something else to deal with...”⁴⁸

Ot Vinta was created by young amateurs with no previous experience of producing such publications. Previously, they had read samizdat, and Volchenko had even reproduced some editions of samizdat, including some articles of music-oriented samizdat.⁴⁹ The person with the greatest experience was Andrei “Kastot” Kostanenko (born 1964), who had produced handwritten editions of Орган БЭКО (*Organ BEKO*) with friends and other musicians from the emerging Bolderāja scene since 1984 (or earlier).⁵⁰ Neither Kastot nor Sergei Volchenko and Dmitry Sumarokov (born as Sustretov in 1967), who made up the first “editorial board”, nor any of the other original authors of *Ot Vinta* had any specialized education in media production or publishing.

Volchenko and Sumarokov had extramural engineering studies at the Riga Polytechnic Institute (now Riga Technical University) and worked at ЭЛЛАР (*EL-LAR*, Factory of the USSR Ministry of Electronic Industry), where hardware for the manufacture of microchips was produced. They both sat at the same table in an experimental mechanical engineering design bureau, and it is here that the production of *Ot Vinta* took place,⁵¹ illegally, of course, using the resources of a public authority during working hours without permission and without payment.

Technically, *Ot Vinta* was created using the classic samizdat technique of that time: typewriter, paper, carbon paper, photo, scissors, and glue. Five or six copies of the magazine were printed at the same time by using carbon paper. Photographs were then glued on to each of these originals, plus a cover or other illustrations, whether in the form of a drawing, collage, or the like.⁵² Sergei Volchenko says that his duties ended after he had edited and typed up the articles, and then put the publication together. He left one or two copies for himself (the archive), and distributed the rest to the Rock Club, the authors, and acquaintances. However, *Ot Vinta* gained a greater circulation thanks to copies made by others. For example, Dmitry Sumarokov remembers having reproduced the magazine on the spot, in the factory, secretly using the “soviet xerox” there. He also manually stitched the printed pages with a wire used in the electrical industry and placed it in a transparent cover.⁵³

48 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

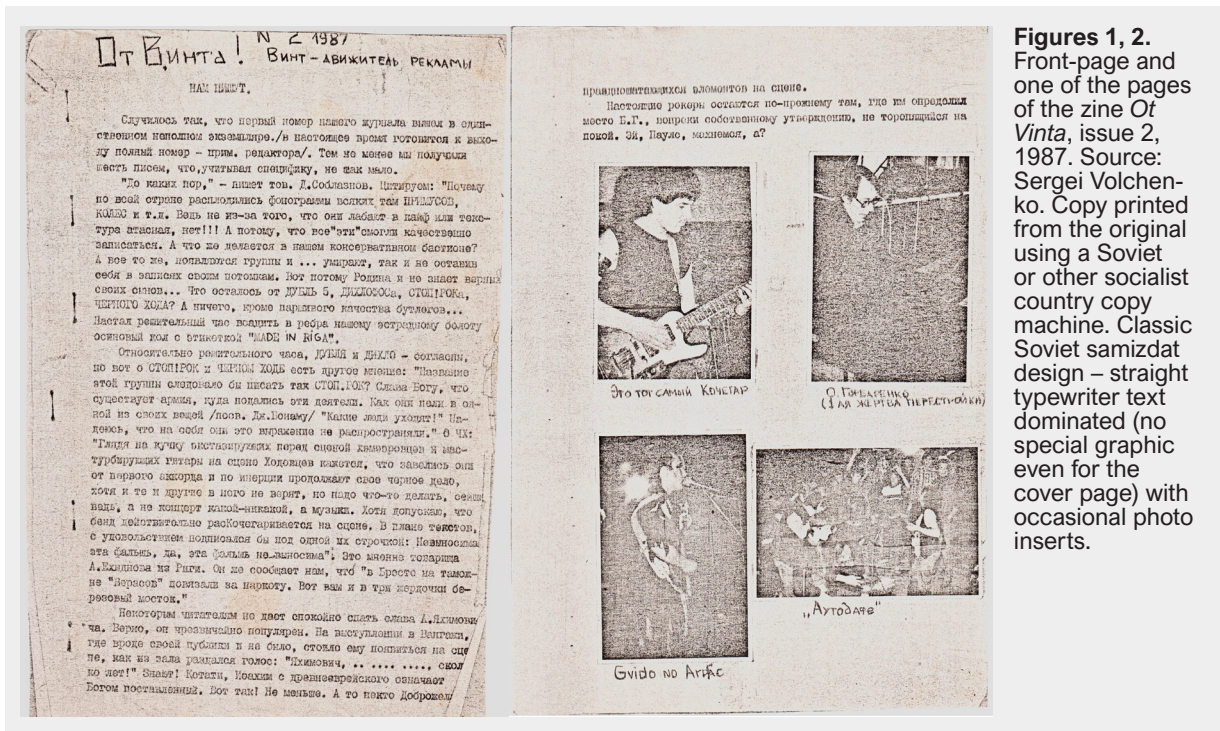
49 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

50 КОСТАНЕНКО, Андрей. Шванцен-Штоппер – Золотой дозьяк. Der Kunstmeisters aus Bolderaa, 1984 – 1999. In *Малая Земля*, 1999, [e-resource], <http://malajazemlja.narod.ru/mztrio/mztrio1.html>; КУШНИР 1991, p. 82. Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019. Bolderāja is one of the most remote neighbourhoods of Riga, and in everyday language it is often understood to include another neighbouring district, Daugavgrīva. It developed rapidly during the Soviet era thanks to industrialization and military bases, in which mainly immigrants from other USSR republics worked and served, making it the most “Russian” area of Riga.

51 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019; Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.

52 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

53 Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.



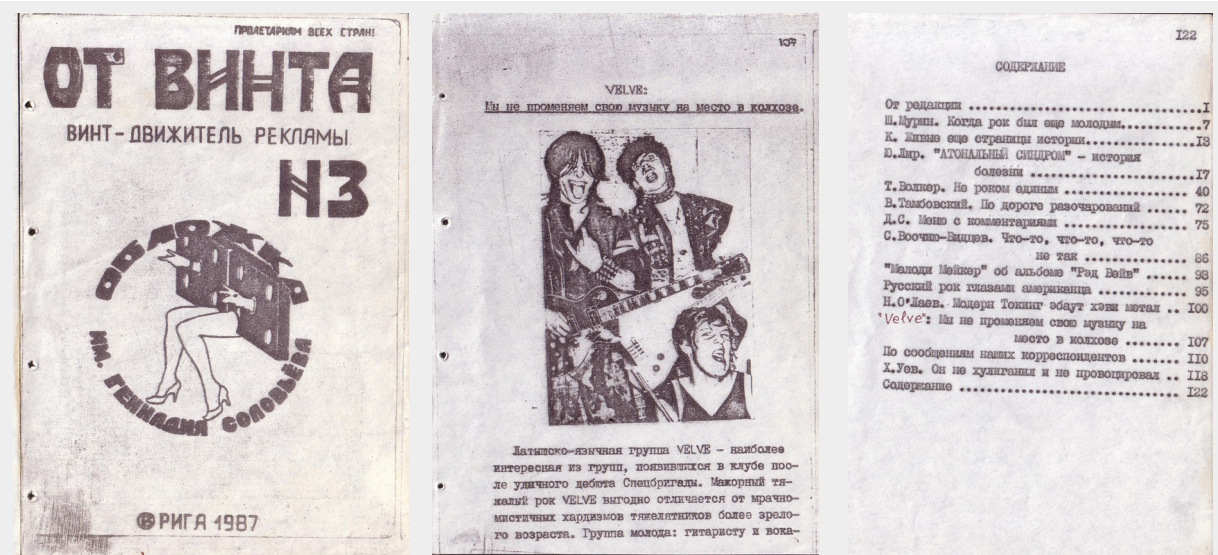
Figures 1, 2. Front-page and one of the pages of the zine *Ot Vinta*, issue 2, 1987. Source: Sergei Volchenko. Copy printed from the original using a Soviet or other socialist country copy machine. Classic Soviet samizdat design – straight typewriter text dominated (no special graphic even for the cover page) with occasional photo inserts.

Further reproduction of the finished edition of the samizdat was spontaneous and uncontrolled. If someone who had a samizdat edition in their hands was exposed to its contents and had the appropriate means of production at his or her disposal (e.g., a typewriter, although this was not compulsory as handwritten samizdat were circulating in the early 1990s),⁵⁴ and he/she was not afraid, then they made as many copies as possible. The same thing happened with music samizdat. This was a widespread practice that had the approval of the samizdat community. Therefore, it is difficult to judge the number of *Ot Vinta* magazines that were reproduced, but it can be assumed with certainty that there were five – six original copies produced in Riga (typewriter, carbon paper copying, with real photos) and a few dozen “xeroxed” copies. How and by what means *Ot Vinta* was reproduced in other cities of the USSR is unknown and unstudied.

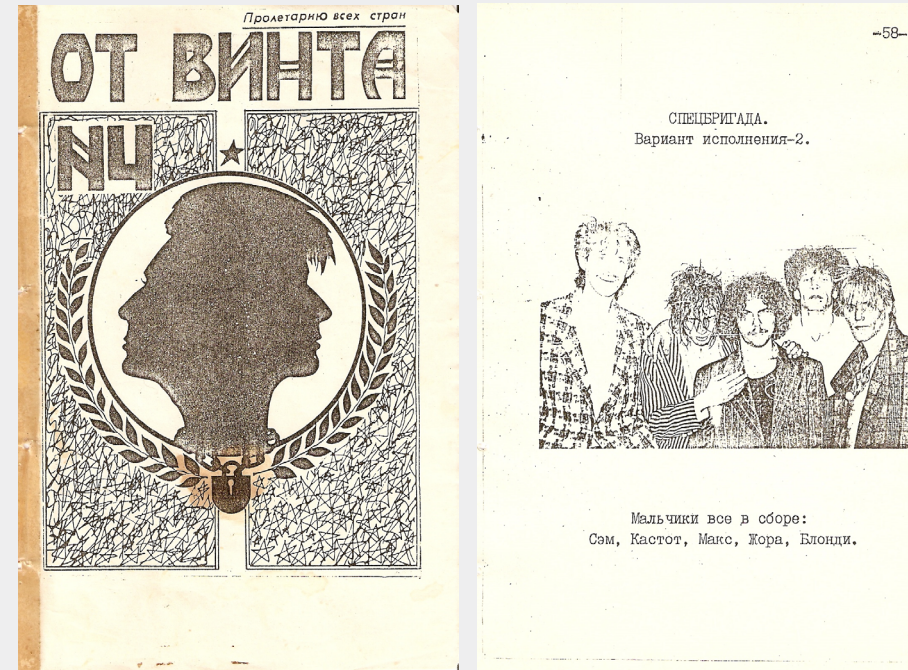
Due to the traditions of samizdat and the technical means available, including the education of the creators of the *Ot Vinta* makers (they did not go to art schools), its design is laconic-technocratic: straight, uninterrupted, typewritten A4 or A5 pages on one side, with maybe a photograph, drawing or collage in the middle (or on the whole page) (see Figures 1 – 7). When they began publishing *Ot Vinta*, its makers had only seen Soviet samizdat, including some examples of music samizdat,⁵⁵ so the visual and design aesthetics of classical western punk/DIY cannot be seen in the first issues of their magazine. This came later, due to, firstly, the flow of information coming from the West; and, secondly, the greater availability of xerox machines in the USSR at the end of the 1980s.

54 ГУРЬБЕВ 2013.

55 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019; Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.



Figures 3, 4, 5. Front page and two of the pages of the zine *Ot Vinta*, issue 3, 1987. Source: Raimonds "Dambis" Lagimovs. Typewriters usually had only one alphabet, in this case Cyrillic.



Figures 6, 7. Front page and one of the pages of the zine *Ot Vinta*, issue 4, 1987. Source: Sergei Volchenko. In Fig.7, the group *Specbrigada*, with its leader and one of the founders of *Ot Vinta*, Kastot (second from the left).



Figure 8, 9. Front page and one of the pages of the zine *Ot Vinta*, issue 7, 1991. Source: Raimonds "Dambis" Lagimovs. A new approach to design and a typewriter replaced by a computer.

SV: *“Ot Vinta started in the beginning of 1987. Kastot and I were walking down the street and he started telling me a practically finished article, pretty well. I said to him, »Go on, write it«!*

*He replies, »Everything is written«.*⁵⁶

Ot Vinta number one came about after Kastot showed Volchenko a handwritten notebook in late 1986 or early 1987, which was actually a ready-made edition. Volchenko offered to rewrite it on a typewriter.⁵⁷ This resulted in the second version of the first issue of *Ot Vinta* – printed and with one or two articles added by other authors. Handwritten and single copy style, Kastot and his fellow musicians from the Bolderāja underground scene had previously published a very local edition, *Organ BEKO*. The year 1986 was a notable one for Kastot and his rock band Specbrigada, as they had started playing their first concerts outside Bolderāja and using electric instruments (electric guitar and amplifying equipment). They had, moreover, become a member of the Riga Rock Club and increasingly involved in the USSR underground scene, getting more contacts and information about activities in other cities.⁵⁸

*“According to legend, the origin of the magazine is connected with a certain Buddhist from Ulan-Ude, to whom the aforementioned Andrei Kostanenko somehow promised to send a publication that not-boringly reflects some aspects of the Riga rock movement. Fulfilling the promise, Kastot single-handedly prepared the debut issue, which was a 24-page notebook with hand-written materials and pasted photos.”*⁵⁹

In the second issue of *Ot Vinta* (Spring 1987), half is written by Kastot, his main pen name being X. Уев (Kh. Uev), and the rest by three other authors. The third issue (Summer 1987) of 122 pages in an A5 format contains articles by at least seven authors. It should be noted that all the authors used pseudonyms or nicknames that were known to people in the scene. The *Ot Vinta* editorial board was not a formal institution, so it is difficult to pinpoint its boundaries, but besides the three authors mentioned above, we can, after the second issue, add the authors Igor Detkovsky and Sergey Rozhko.⁶⁰ Both were also directly affiliated with the Riga Rock Club.

The last issue of the year (number four) contains 76 pages, with contributions from five authors. During this time, an editorial split was underway which saw two important authors leaving: Kastot, who started *Малая Земля (Malaja Zemlja)* in 1988, and Rozhko, who began publishing *СПИДЪ (SPID)* in the same year.⁶¹ *Ot Vinta* number five came out in the summer of 1988, with 87 pages featuring articles from 12 authors (or pseudonyms). The sixth issue (1989) is the so-called “Garbarenko issue”, as it was based on the letters of legendary Riga avant-garde musician Oleg Garbarenko (born 1950 – 1992), frontman of the band Атональный Синдром (Atonal’nyj Sindrom). Only one copy of the issue was published.

56 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

57 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

58 Interview with Andrej “Kastot” Kostanenko, from 23 January 2019.

59 КУШНИР 1994, p. 162.

60 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

61 КУШНИР 1994, p. 163.

The year 1989 can be considered as the year when censorship effectively ended in the Latvian SSR.⁶² This meant that samizdat could be published officially and viewed as a commercial opportunity. In terms of its population, Latvia is a relatively small country, comprising at that time approximately 2.7 million people. Although half of the population belonged to the Russian-speaking community, it was difficult for the Russian-speaking press to compete with Russia’s (All-Soviet) magazines. While some new “normal” (not samizdat) music-oriented Latvian-language magazines appeared at that time, in 1990 – 1991 (e.g., *Parks, Una, Patsnieku Iela*), none appeared in Russian. The *Ot Vinta* editorial board had considered publishing a “normal” music magazine but concluded that it would not be cost-effective.⁶³ The Russian-language music samizdat in Latvia continued to function in the style of a fanzine until the early 1990s (e.g., *Малая Земля, ИБО, Авось, Ересъ – Malaja Zemlja, IBO, Avos’, Eres’*), finally ending around 1991 – 1992.

The last two issues of *Ot Vinta* were released after a pause of two years. The first of these was an unnamed four-page “blues number” dedicated to the birthday of Riga guitarist Jānis Vanadziņš (born 1951) and was published at the beginning of 1991. The last edition, the seventh, was released at the end of the year. It consists of 25 eclectic pages, and the reader can feel that the material has been stretched over a few years. Volchenko and Sumarokov continued their work with samizdat sporadically through the 1990s and beyond; however, it was no longer a systematic activity. They re-issued the Garbarenko edition twice (in 1994 and 1995).⁶⁴ A final attempt to create a new issue of *Ot Vinta* took place in 1996; however, it didn’t progress beyond the draft stage and an unfinished layout design.⁶⁵

The drop off in intensity after 1987, when only four issues were published in the next four years, can be explained not only by changes in the editorial composition, but also by rapid and cardinal changes in the socio-political-economic context in Latvia. These changes began at the end of 1987, with the democratization of the public sphere, the strengthening of the national independence movement, and the legalization of some forms of private business. On May 4, 1990, the Parliament of the Latvian SSR proclaimed independence from the USSR. Although this was a significant historical moment, the very rapid economic crisis taking place at that time had a much greater impact on the daily lives of the population. It was marked by a decline in industrial production and trade, a shortage of commodities and foodstuffs, high unemployment, and a growing state of social anomie.⁶⁶

This economic recession followed a period in which rock music and other popular musical genres were completely legalised by the state administration and freed from state control. The incredible mass attendance at concerts that had taken place in

62 STRODS, Heinrihs. *PSRS politiskā cenzūra Latvijā, 1940 – 1990*. Rīga : Jumava, 2010, 472 p.; BRIEDIS, Raimonds. *Teksta cenzūras isais kurss: prozas teksts un cenzūra padomju gados Latvijā*. Rīga : LU Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, 2010, 183 p.

63 Interview with Dmitry Sumarokov, from 26 September 2019.

64 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 20 March 2020; ЛЕВКИН, Андрей. Гарбаренко и др. In *Бизнес & Балтия*, 3 July 1995, Vol. 278, No. 75, p. 16, [e-resource], <http://arhiv.bb.lv/?p=1&i=51&s=8&a=1918>.

65 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 29 October 2019.

66 DREIFELDS, Juris. *Latvia in Transition*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997, 224 p.; PABRIKS, Artis – PURS, Aldis. *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2001, 184 p.

1988 – 1989 disappeared as a result of this economic strife.⁶⁷ The lifting of censorship and the transformation of the economy saw a change in the role of the Riga Rock Club. This shift from the Soviet totalitarian cultural policy to one characterised by market-based music production and mechanisms of circulation resulted in a lessening of its influence. After all, the most important function it had played for rock musicians during the Soviet period, namely securing a legal gig, was no longer relevant. Moreover, the idea of a central “rock organisation” did not correspond to the new spirit of the time. Competing organisations emerged; many of Riga’s Russian-speaking musicians emigrated, and a new generation of musicians entered the scene.

The last big Riga Rock Club festival took place in the fall of 1991, and Sergei Volchenko, one of its organizers, remembers it with a hint of bitterness: “...at the last gig of the Rock Rudens Festival in 1991, a man without a ticket appeared, pulls out a gun and starts yelling: »Now I’ll shoot everyone if you don’t let me into the hall«! They twisted him up, of course, threw him away, and the pistol was taken away, but I did not want to continue doing anything. It is not interesting to strive for such thrash.”⁶⁸ In a similar vein, Volchenko comments on the ending of *Ot Vinta*: “Rather, interest simply disappeared and it all became irrelevant.”⁶⁹

In parallel with the work on *Ot Vinta*, some of its authors had already started cooperating with the official Russian-language media of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1987, for example, writing in the weekly *Рок диалог* (*Rok dialog*) section in the newspaper *Советская Молодежь* (*Sovetskaya Molodezh*), published by the Latvian Komsomol. They continue to practice journalism, including music, even after restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia in 1990, joining the new professional Russian-language mass media system⁷⁰ as well as trying out other types of business.

Conclusions

It is likely that differences in the nature of zine and music samizdat research is not a result of any theoretical disagreement but rather due to the competence and subjective or aesthetic interests of the researchers. In most cases, research is dominated by a more or less pronounced insider approach,⁷¹ and every researcher is likely to have come from a zine or samizdat scene of a certain time and geographic location. This paper is no exception, and so it is narrowly specialized. We have, therefore, the American Stephen Duncombe with a book on, basically, American zines;⁷² the Brit Matthew Worley with publications on British punk zines;⁷³ the Soviet-Ukrain-

67 ALKSNE, Andra. *Credo: Veltījums leģendārajai Latvijas rokgrupai ‘Credo’, liktenim un laikam*. Rīga : Poligrāfijas infocentrs, 2008, 335 p.; PĀPĒDIS, Māris. *Remix...Pie laika*. Rīga : Upett, 2015, 383 p.

68 ГОРСКАЯ 2008, p. 10.

69 Interview with Sergei Volchenko, from 20 March 2020.

70 They worked in the editorial office of *Балтийское Время* (*Baltijskoe Vremja*), which from 1988 to 1992 was published as a Popular Front of Latvia weekly newspaper in Russian, but then operated as an independent enterprise, becoming the leading Russian-language newspaper in Latvia.

71 ŠIMA – MICHELA 2020, p. 2.

72 DUNCOMBE 1997.

73 WORLEY, Matthew. Punk, Politics and British (Fan)Zines, 1976 – 84: ‘While the World Was Dying, Did You Wonder Why?’ In *History Workshop Journal*, 2015, Vol. 79, No. 1, pp. 76-106, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbu043>; WORLEY, Matthew. *Whose Culture? Fanzines, Politics and Agency*. In GILDART, Keith et al. (eds.) *Ripped, Torn and Cut: Pop, Politics and Punk Fanzines from 1976*. Manchester :

ian-Russian author Aleksandr Kushnir on Soviet (basically Slavic) rock samizdat,⁷⁴ and the Portuguese researchers Paul Guerra and Pedro Quintela with studies on Portuguese punk zines.⁷⁵ These are cases of classical ethnocentrism that take the form of Slav-centrism, British-centrism, or UK punk-centrism in zines and samizdat research.

*"While other media are produced for money or prestige or public approval, zines are done [...] for love: love of expression, love of sharing, love of communication."*⁷⁶ These words can be fully attributed to the creation and production of *Ot Vinta*, the Soviet Latvian music samizdat discussed in this article. It had a small circulation and was made by non-professional "journalists" and "publishers" in the DIY spirit. They were rock music fans and music lovers, some of whom had already become musicians. The creators of *Ot Vinta*, as musicians and support staff, were closely linked to the underground rock scene in Riga, and most *Ot Vinta* content was devoted to it.

The production of *Ot Vinta* was certainly also a protest, however. By defending their aesthetic tastes, the authors of this samizdat opposed, directly or indirectly, the values of the Soviet ideology and its accepted cultural policy. It was the period of late socialism, which had already passed through Перестройка (Perestroika) and Гласность (Glasnost), and had a reformed, more democratic society and administration. It was a political act to question socialist realism (however unpredictable and contradictory it may have been) and other canons of official culture, and to opt for the mass music of "rotting Western capitalism". However, in the case of *Ot Vinta*, it cannot be said that the driving force behind its publication was political protest.

At the same time, it is difficult to draw a line of demarcation between aesthetic and political values. Is it possible to discern any "pure" aesthetic values from Western rock music, as well as from Soviet pop music, without considering social or political values? Can the rebellion of the former – sexual and substance (ab)use, inactivity, isolation, pessimism – or the positivism of the latter – collectivism and conformism – somewhere die away or transform? It is possible, but not at that time and not in that context.

Did Soviet *Ot Vinta* differ from the zines of the Western world? No. There are no significant differences in terms of production, distribution, values, or ideology. There are differences in the details of production (in design, in the means used, in distribution channels, and in the degree of conspiracy required) as well as in the attitude of the ruling political regime (ignorance or control). However, these are features that lie outside the definition of what is a zine, so the main conclusion of this article is that Western music zines and Soviet music samizdat are one and the same phenomenon.

Returning to and ending with the case of *Ot Vinta*, a few things need to be repeated. First, the content of this zine (or music samizdat) is a unique source of historical

Manchester University Press, 2018, pp. 55-71, <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/81421/>; WORLEY, Matthew. "If I Had More Time It Could Be Better, but the New Wave's about Spontaneity, Right?": Finding Meaning in Britain's Early Punk Fanzines (1976 – 77). In *Punk and Post-Punk*, 2020, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 223-245.

74 КУШНИР 1994.

75 GUERRA – QUINTELA 2020; QUINTELA, Pedro – GUERRA, Paula. Punk Fanzines in Portugal (1978 – 2013): A Mapping Exercise. In *Keep It Simple, Make It Fast! An Approach to Underground Music Scenes*, 2016, Vol. 2, pp. 59-67; GUERRA, Paula – QUINTELA, Pedro. Spreading the Message! Fanzines and the Punk Scene in Portugal. In *Punk & Post Punk*, 2014, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 203-224.

76 DUNCOMBE 1997, p. 18.

information about the underground music (mainly Russian-language) scene of Riga during its time. It came from and belonged to this informal culture, which remained largely undocumented in official media or other documents. Secondly, this is the first study of the most important Riga zine of its time, during which two hitherto digitally unavailable numbers were digitized and made public. Thirdly, the preliminary study of the Soviet music-oriented samizdat collections reveals that the largest collections are in private hands, while the largest collections of publications in state libraries and archives are to be found outside of the countries where they were produced, which is the case for both Latvia and Russia.⁷⁷ This, in turn, implies researching archives, library collections and private collections in the name of the national interest of these countries, with the aim of cataloguing, digitizing or even purchasing such publications.

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⁷⁷ DAUGAVIETIS, Jānis. *USSR Music Samizdat Collections and Latvian Items in Them*. Rīga ; Latvia : Zenodo, 20 August 2020, [The original publication of this is deposited in Zenodo repository], <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3992721>.

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