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St. Petersburg as *Res Publica*: Common Things and Commonweal.

St.Petersburg Freedoms

Writing in the late 1840s, a foreign visitor to St. Petersburg Eduard Jerrmann gave an account of life in the city that prompted his English translators to supply the book with a special introduction (1852).[1] Given usual unfavourable foreigners' descriptions of life under the tzars, with Marquis de Custine being most famous among numerous works of this genre, it was rather surprising to find positive evaluations in a book by a German – and it led the English translators to posit a question of whether direct largesse of the tzar had influenced the exposition of Mr. Jermann.

For example, one of the most surprising features of life in St. Petersburg in the 1840s, wrote Jermann, was a condition of private and social freedom he discovered: a liberty of action in one's private life and a widely shared liberty to discuss politics during social occasions like friendly dinners or salon visits. "Our notion is that politics is a prohibited topic in the Russian capital. Nor is the notion altogether erroneous, for in public one does not hear them discussed… [But] of freedom, the Petersburger enjoys an ample measure; not only in the complete liberty of his social life, not only in his complete abandonment to his individual inclinations, but also in respect of political controversies, which in his domestic circle are often carried on with such keenness and unreserve, that the hearer fancies himself transported into some German republican club. Freedom is far greater in St. Petersburg in this respect than is generally supposed."[2] Reading these lines today, one is bound to follow the scepticism of the British editors of the German author, because Jermann's narrative contradicts our usual perception of life under Nicholas I, the "gendarme of Europe". A free-flowing debate in private is not the same as a guaranteed right of the freedom of speech in public, and a lauded social liberty to freely meet who one wishes and do what one wants is very close to what Tocqueville described as a threat of "democratic despotism" stemming from modern individualism: engaging in *petites et vulgaires plaisirs* while ceding the right to participate in political discussion and deliberation that decides matters of common destiny.

[1] Edward Jermann, *St. Petersburg: Its People; Their Character and Institutions*. Trans. from German by Frederick Hardman. New York: Barnes and Co, 1852.
[2] Ibid., p. 14-15

However, in his assertions, Jermann was never alone. If we forget about all the usual apologetics for monarchic freedom inherent in "Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality", produced by the pocket pens that were well paid to support this official triad, we still find many intelligent people who pointed out the existence of certain very important liberties in St. Petersburg of that time. Thus, Belinsky wrote in a famous essay opposing Moscow to St.Petersburg, that Moscow is a city of "patriarchal family life" that stifles everyday freedom: "Family ties still play a great role in Moscow. Nobody lives there without an extended family. If you were born an orphan and then came to live in Moscow, they would immediately make you marry, and you would acquire a network of relatives of seventy-seven generations. Not to love and respect relatives is considered in Moscow worse than free-thinking."[3] In contrast, in St. Petersburg old household mores and partriarchalism are decisively shaken: the poorest lady of common rank tries to speak French, socialize in coffee-shops round and follow *bon ton* so as to resemble the "good society" of aristocrats.

This European-style aristocratic community sets the standards for Petersburg behaviour even if it is inaccessible for many Petersburgers, being "a true terra incognita for all those, who do not have a right of its citizenship: it is a city in the city, a state within a state." But inaccessible as it is in its court or salon life, it serves as a model for developing common manners, when they are played out in the common space of the city. Thus, even though one hardly finds in St.Petersburg people eager to discuss *politics* in public places, one sees a certain commonality of *politesse* and equality in the use of these public places. Aspiring for appropriating the polite manners of higher estates, the lower ranks mix and intermingle with them in public. Belinsky concluded: "If Petersburg does not have publicness (*publichnosti*) in the true sense of the word, then there is definitely none of household or family seclusion: Petersburg loves streets, promenades, theatres, coffee-shops, a railway station, in a word, it loves public settings (*obschestvennye zavedeniia*)."[4] Moscow, of course, served for him just as a good example of life in the rest of Russia: the country was pervaded by a stifling tyranny of family arrangements and connections, hierarchies and incessant tea drinking. In St.Petersburg the most miserable apprentice in a fashion shop longed for a minute to abandon her chores and run for a cup of coffee in the closest café.

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[3] Vissarion Belisnky, "Peterburg i Moskva", in N. A. Nekrasov, ed., *Fiziologiia Peterburga* (originally published in 1845), Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1984, p. 47, 49.
[4] Ibid., p. 55-56.

Belinsky's insistence on certain liberties offered by the essential sociability of life in St. Petersburg was upheld by some latter day thinkers as well. George Fedotov will be my best example in this respect. In a short essay written in 1945 in New York, and reflecting on the prospects of freedom in post-war Russia, this famous émigré thinker stressed the component of freedom in St. Petersburg life that outside observers tended to overlook. In his opinion, Western Enlightenment had brought to St. Petersburg only some degree of yearning for political freedom, but a surprising freedom in private or social life, what Fedotov calls *fakticheskoe raskreposchenie byta,* the effective liberalisation or de-enserfment of everyday life. The development of political freedom – a story familiar to many a reader of Russian history – had failed: the 1730 attempt at putting the monarchy into a constitutional framework and the Decembrists are obvious examples. But freedom in everyday life did not. "Usually we do not sufficiently value this freedom in everyday life that Russian society had enjoyed already since Peter the Great and which allowed it for a long time to ignore the absence of political freedom. The tsar Peter was still putting his enemies on the stake, Biron's executioners were still subjecting to strappado torture everybody who was suspected in anti-German feelings, but in the palace, at tsar's festive dinners and assemblies, a new courteous way of behaviour was asserting itself, almost equalizing the yesterday serf and his master."[5] As a consequence, Fedotov registers a certain political influence of this way of life in St. Petersburg: having had the most wide divine-sanctioned powers to persecute each of his subjects at his own whim, the tsar rarely used this power. Not only was he looking at his civilized German cousins, but also the Russian aristocracy gradually made him accept the proposition that he is the first among aristocrats, and hence the primary example of civility, secular virtues and fine manners.

Russian aristocrats serving the tsar, writes Fedotov, were the very agents of power who imposed and maintained this rule of civility. According to an unwritten law, an aristocrat could be exiled or executed, but his body or dignity could not be assaulted. Personal honour coupled with the liberation of aristocrats from compulsory state service under Catherine the Great freed them for liberal professions and world of learning, and founded the future Russian intelligentsia. This initial layer of the educated was later accepting people from all ranks, and education became a means to enter the aristocratic estate. "Graduation from a secondary… school transformed a human being from a *moujik* into a lord (*barin*), that

[5] Georgii Fedotov, "Rossiia i svoboda", in Fedotov, *Sud'ba i grehi Rossii.* St.Petersburg: Sofia, 1991, vol. 2, p. 290. Hereafter I will cite this two volume set, giving the title of the article and indicating the volume and page number.

is, a free person, defended his personal rights from arbitrary power to a certain extent, and guaranteed polite procedure in a police precinct, in a prison. The gendarme was saluting the student, whom he could beat only on special occasions – during rebellions. This everyday freedom was, of course, a privilege, as it was everywhere in the early days of liberty. This was just an island of St. Petersburg in the Muscovite sea. But this island was consistently growing, in particular after the liberation of serfs."[6]

Now, one may legitimately doubt the panegyric aspects of this description of an opening of the worlds of free pursuit of one's goals in private sphere, civility and meritocratic learning that had somewhat liberated the former serfs, or put them on the par with masters. Equality in dignified treatment and democracy of street life are not linked directly to broad changes in the political rights of estates – otherwise revolutions would be unnecessary. But one could hardly doubt certain democratic qualities of street life on Nevsky prospect, in the theatre, or in a St. Petersburg café: there a former master and servant mixed, intermingled and brushed sides, ruled by common norms of polite comportment and civilized behaviour. Baudelaire's flaneur could easily find himself at home on Nevsky, similar to a Paris boulevard. Hence the thesis of the book by Marshall Berman, which misinterpreted the city in quite many respects but this one: Walter Benjamin's analysis was applicable to a city where conflicts between classes are reflected in personal encounters of protagonists in fleeting meetings on Nevsky. We find these scenes in Gogol, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and so on.[7]

Fedotov's thesis may of course be criticized as largely influenced by his personal experience. A distinction between political and social freedom that he outlines in his 1945 essay might have been a common place among West European émigrés who had been arriving in America after 1939. Fedotov moved to New York from France in 1941, but he could have shared the feelings that Hannah Arendt - who had moved to the US not long before him – aired in a letter to Karl Jaspers. She found an amazing degree of political freedom against the background of a pervasive social unfreedom. For a European of her generation, it was an inspiring and elevating experience to see her New England lady, with whom she first stayed and learned English, write letters to her senator or participate in local township meetings. This surely was what the Germans lacked and what could have forestalled the advent of fascism, in her opinion. But this political freedom was coupled with a ferocious

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[6] Ibid., Fedotov 2: 291.
[7] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Sold Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982

insistence of the New England lady on constantly pointing out the right mores to an émigré and enforcing them, since she did not have obvious basic social skills necessary for life in a different culture. Fedotov, as I said, might have seen the same, given his constant laments that his Russianness was not properly heeded, and his consistent effort to explain in English the depths of Russian heart and the beauty of Russian life to his American audiences. Political freedom was accompanied by a social unfreedom, a situation opposite to the one of the tsarist Russia that he had described in so much detail. The prospects of liberty in the world, as it seemed in 1945, depended on furthering both.

However, looking at an earlier period of his work, one finds a different type of lauding St. Petersburg's freedom, not yet dependent on his American experience. Writing in 1926 for an émigré journal in France, Fedotov first articulated the contrast between Moscow and Petersburg as part of reflections on three historical capitals of Rus' (Kiev included). Only recent post-revolutionary years, suggested Fedotov, "have revealed with particular clarity in the city of Peter the Great the city of Alexander Nevsky, the prince of Novgorod."[8] In the hungry years after 1917, looking for such mundane things as potatoes, Petersburgers went to their most immediate province – what they had never done before – and discovered that chapels of Northern Russia and its religious freedom were next to them. Of course, this renascent feeling of proximity to the medieval civilization of Novgorod became possible because of the radical deterioration of transportation during and after the Civil War: Moscow was now at the end of the world, Ukraine – in the nether land, and only Ladoga, Pskov, Belozersk, Vologda and Novgorod itself were proximate. But there is another, non-geographical proximity that was revealed by the experience of 1917-25: "Rich and complicated is Novgorod the Great. Even now we cannot understand how it could combine its rebellious public assembly (*veche*) with monastic quest, Russian icon with Hanseatic commerce… But in the heritage of Great Novgorod bestowed upon St. Petersburg there is something that cannot be understood by anybody else except for the city of Saint Peter. First – Alexander's testament – never to ruin the fruits of the victory on the Neva, to defend… the Neva shores. Second – to preserve the sanctuaries of Northern Russia, the most pure and elevated entity in the Russian past. Third – to listen to the voices coming from across the sea, not losing sight of Hanseatic beacons. The West, that once saved us and that afterwards almost corrupted us, should enter with its just share into the creation of

[8] "Tri stolitsy", Fedotov 1: 55.

national culture… And even if all the country has this vocation, here, in Petersburg, is heard this historical calling…"[9]

Novgorod Liberties

Novgorod plays a special role for the conception of freedom in Fedotov, because he also distinguishes two types of liberties - liberties of the spirit and liberties of the body. Novgorod, whose heir St.Petersburg allegedly is now, was the embodiment of liberties of the spirit, which had contributed to the grandeur of this medieval Russian *civitas*, but in its republican institutions liberties of the body were not upheld to the same extent. This distinction - in contrast to the previously mentioned distinction between social and political freedom – allows Fedotov to articulate what Russia lacks now and articulate a program of building a free society in Russia in a more pointed way. In his opinion, liberties of the spirit – including religious, intellectual, moral, political beliefs and the liberty of their public expression - are originally linked to the wars of XI century for *libertas Ecclesiae*, which had ensured the dichotomy of the religious and secular powers. Liberty of faith is the first freedom, in this respect, which had paved way for other liberties of belief: "an ideal Christian… my give his body, possessions and even life to the tyrant, and even see in this non-resistance his duty of imitating Christ. But he will never bow in front of the idols, he will never abandon Christ on request from the emperor." This liberty developed in Western Europe in struggles between the church and the state, but it also existed in Novgorod which clearly separated the bishopric and secular powers. The liberties of the body - exemplified in *habeas corpus*, but also including other defences against arbitrary humiliation, arrest and execution – developed in struggles between civil society and the state.[10] And its West European origins in the checks on the monarchy by the feudal *corps intermediares*, that is, for example, by privileges of barons, cities and guilds, should not be forgotten.

This theorization is needed by Fedotov to propose his program for the revitalization of freedom in modern world in 1944, when it still seemed to be in serious danger. First, Fedotov opts for a restoration of absolute religious freedom – the most decisive part of liberties of the spirit - that would oppose any attempts at building a totalitarian state. This proposal, however, could now seem to some readers as also curtailing the freedom of intellectual quest. Second, he wants to fight the danger of totalitarian temptation by the rebirth of the grassroots autonomous groups that remind him of the "feudal beginnings of the society's youth", which

[9] Ibid.
[10] "Rozhdenie svobody", Fedotov 2: 259-261.

would buttress assaults on liberties of the body more effectively than modern centralized state institutions. For the aims of our exposition, however, his project is not as interesting as his attribution to Novgorod the cherished liberties of the spirit, and designation of St. Petersburg as an heir of Novgorod in this respect. Given other habitual remarks on theocratic elements in the governance of the Russian empire, this designation is bound to surprise us. But let us give Fedotov a benefit of doubt. Indeed, can looking at St. Petersburg through the prism of Novgorod life reveal to us some interesting aspects of St.Petersburg's freedom?

This elusive public thing

The narrative of the development of Novgorod political institutions is well known.[11] Since at least 1136 and up to 1471, as the conventional story goes, Novgorod was inviting princes to serve as military leaders on the basis of a set of clearly stipulated contractual obligations. Also, the city inhabitants started electing their bishop, *posadnik* and *tysiatskii*. *Posadnik* was similar to the post of *podesta* in the Florentine republic and represented the city when it wanted to check the power of the prince: according to extant contracts, no judicial decision of the invited prince could go into effect without *posadnik*'s approval. This *podesta* position was also the main political post in the city, becoming a collective person in the fifteenth century, with five *posadniki* representing the five main boroughs of the city. *Tysiatskii*, a "thousandman", was in charge of collecting trade taxes since no later than the 1180s, regulating trade and economics and conducting civil litigation. The bishop, elected by the laity since at least 1156, resided next to the cathedral of St. Sophia, which - as we would say now in modern parlance - was the symbol of Novgorod for many citizens. However, in the language of the day, the importance of the bishop's position came from the fact that "where St. Sophia was, there stood Novgorod", if we are to believe what the chronicles say, and the interventions of this female saint played the most important role in the life of the city.

It is hard to decide whether the Novgorod republic had public funds in our sense of the word: the prince, the *podesta*, the thousandman and the bishop all extracted certain taxes that contributed to their personal possessions. Of course, out of these funds some public works could be

[11] I will mainly follow the most influential exposition in Valentin Ianin, *Novgorodskie posadniki.* Moscow: Izdatelstvo MGU, 1962. Since the book had appeared, many of its minor points were challenged by generations of historians, but the main assertions seem to have withstood the test of time.

funded[12], but the principal jurisdiction over the extracted taxes was personal. These possessions, however, could be reclaimed during violent rebellions when the households of a *podesta*, or a thousandman and their cronies would be seized and divided among the storming public: this seemed justified since in the first place they had amassed their fortunes as executives of public functions. The event or the place for stormy public gathering is most frequently designated as *veche*, one of the primary sites for citizens' action in the chronicles. *Veche* is the most mysterious and beloved subject for historians' debates: but given the scant evidence, we do not know for sure on who had the right to participate in it or actually took part, how the decisions were taken there, and what were the limits of its power. Still, *veche*, rather than St. Sophia, became the main symbol of the Novgorod republic for the nineteenth and twentieth century political discourse on the topic.

Now, instead of looking at the mechanisms of decision-making and liberties that the Novgorodians might have enjoyed – a topic long-studied and continuously disputed in historical literature – I would opt for a study of the things they shared in their republic. This attention comes from a recent development in sociology that has started to concern itself with humans linked together by things rather than with just naked humans, engaged in interpretations of symbolic meaning of social action or in observable and allegedly rule-governed behavior.[13] *Res publica*, most famously known as Cicero's equivalent for the Greek terms *polis* and *koinonia politike*, has the word "thing" right in its very designation: *res publica* means "things or affairs public", and the republic, as we say, concerns itself with these things and affairs. The sociology of things has pointed our attention to the things that the Romans, Venetians or Novgorodians shared: indeed, what was this *res* that had an essentially public character for the citizens? Of course, as the studies of early Latin legal codes show, *res* was usually taken to mean "an affair", an object of contention in the court, and only later it came to designate the object as such, a material possession over which the conflict might have arisen.[14] Consequently, in their *res publica* the Romans discussed the affairs such

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[12] See e.g. Alaxander Khoroshev, *Tserkov' v sotsialno-politicheskoi sisteme Novgorodskoi feodalnoi respubliki*. Moscow: Izdatelstvo MGU, 1980, p. 147 on the role of the bishop in funding public works, or Ianin, *Ocherki kompleksnogo istochnikovedeniia*, Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1977, p. 110 on thousandmen organizing the funding and construction of the Volkhov bridge.

[13] Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot, *De la justification*, Paris; Gallimard, 1991. Bernard Conein, Nicolas Dodier and Laurent Thevenot, *Les objets dans l'action*. Paris: EHESS, 1993. Nicolas Dodier, *L'homme et la machine. La conscience collective dans les societes technicisees*. Paris: Metaillie, 1995. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

[14] Yan Thomas, "Res, chose et patrimoine (Note sur le rapport sujet-objet en droit romain)", *Archives de philosophie du droit*, vol. 25, 1980, pp. 413-426.

as matters of war and peace, but also could concern themselves with such most tangible things as *ager publicus*, public arable land, which was parcelled out for agricultural usage by citizens' families.

Novgorod's *veche* concerned itself with things, *veshchi*, as well. Phonetics relentlessly suggests to us that there must be something in common between these two words. Some commentators even tried to theorize this curious fact.[15] Interpreting the public gathering in Novgorod, *veche*, as the most important thing, *veshch'*, that united the Novgorodians and that they had in common, also seems to find support in philosophy. Heidegger has famously pointed out the "gathered" character of any true thing, if we understand the thing in the way it used to exist before modern age, and not as an object to be perceived or instrumentally used by a modern European subject.[16] The word "thing" in old German and Scandinavian languages meant *ding*, or *dinc*, a public gathering to deliberate and decide on the matters of a tribe or a settlement. In modern Icelandic they still use the word *Althingi* to designate the national parliament. Heidegger would say that these premodern forms of life that had allowed things to "thing" - that is, to reveal their capacity to bring what he calls in his poetic language the "fourfold" of mortals, Gods, earth and sky together - are marginal now, in the midst of the predominantly technical mode of living with things. But remembering the old ways of life, one could wait for a change in the instrumental mode of being and aspire to make the advent of a new, different mode of being more visible.

The Novgorod thing called *veche* seems to fit very nicely all pronouncements of Heidegger on the fourfold gathering that the generic thing, *veshch'*, carries and reveals. *Veche* might be very neatly interpreted as the Heidegger-like *veshch'* that was bringing the mortal Novgorodians together with their gods, and opened up their common destiny in uniting the prospects of their earthly affairs with heavenly concerns. But such statements are not corroborated by scientific linguistics: the etymologists would insist that *veshch'* and *veche* are unrelated. Dictionaries of Ancient Russian language and recognized etymological compendia like Vasmer would tell us that *veche*, the gathering, comes from Indo-European **vetio*, that also gave in Russian *sovet* (the form of direct democracy in 1917-18, but also the Privy council of any prince in XI- XX centuries) with a derivative *soveschatsia* (to make deliberations), and also the family of words like *izveschenie* ("message", as in the tile of the newspaper *Izvestia*) and *veschanie* (broadcast). On the contrary, *vesch'*, the thing,

[15] M. A. Isaev, *Tolkovyi slovar' drevnerusskih iuridicheskih terminov*. Moscow: Spark, 2001, p. 24
[16] Martin Heideger, "The Thing," in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

allegedly comes from another Indo-European root **vektio*, which has parallel developments in Lithuanian and Polish, linked to Russian word *rech'* meaning "speech", compare *Rzecz Pospolita*, the official title of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom in middle ages, which was a translation of *Res Publica* into Polish. Of course, one may doubt all these conjectures of the etymologists' community as just a temporarily accepted academic consensus on contrived, but non-existent, Indo-European roots. For example, why does the thing "things", that is, speaks in both Russian and Polish – e.g. when *vesch' veshchaet* – but the link between the public assembly that speaks and the thing that reveals the gathering are denied us by etymologists, notwithstanding the obvious ordinary usage?

The objective of our detour through an inquiry on Novgorod politics and things, however, is not about questioning or correcting professional linguists. Rather, the question is what can one say about sharing common things in republican Novgorod that would reveal us some aspects of its famous liberties and freedom, which we might find inherent in St.Petersburg as well. What and how did the Novgorodians share when they had their *res publica*, and how is this linked to the fate of St. Petersburg? One could articulate many events they shared, of course, or point at the St. Sophia that united all Novgorodians, but I choose to concentrate on a seemingly very simple and physical thing, which is consistently mentioned in the First Novgorod Chronicle – the bridge that linked the two parts of the city together.[17]

The Great Bridge and Human Grandeur

The bridge is an obvious example of a thing, which the whole city shares, i.e. an example of *res publica*, common affairs or concerns. First of all, in conventional parlance, this bridge is a prerequisite for city politics: it brings the distinct and different groups of people together, uniting them in their difference – because in order to attend the city public gathering or to fight for predominance, inhabitants of boroughs of one part of this city, situated on both shores of the river Volkhov, had to cross this bridge. But also the bridge involves and invokes other entitites when it brings people together, and thus it cannot be described as a passive object that only human subjects use, if one truly follows what is written in medieval chronicles about it.

In brief, the problem with this thing called the bridge is that it is part of the collective practice at the time (or a gathering, as Bruno Latour would

[17] All quotes in the following section are taken from *Novgorodskaia pervaia letopis' starshego i mladshego izvodov*. Moscow: AN SSSR, 1950. Translations are mine.

say, an assemblage that has not been yet broken into technical and political parts). And thus one cannot take it to be just an object. For example, in the chronicle one does not ever contemplate it alone, staring at it as if it were opposing the viewer as an ob-ject, a *Gegen-stand*. Rather, the bridge is part of different types of collective action which is concerned with felicity of its endeavours more than with the qualities of the bridge for individual perception. Hence the bridge of the chronicles does not even have adjectives that would describe it as red, bulging, sacred or whatever else. Its only designation is Great, and sometimes new or old. The bridge links the people, the elements, and God in their intertwined fate and serves as an arena for their struggles.

In the First Novgorod chronicle we first meet the bridge in the record for 1133, which says that the Novgorodians "have renovated the bridge that collapsed, and two wooden churches have been cut". After that repairs and renovations are mentioned as major part of the city's history, usually as an event of central relevance in a record for a given year, next to a description of either God's premonitions as comets or sun eclipses, or God-glorifying activities like (most frequently!) churches being built or ameliorated. Of course, fights within the city, between the city and surrounding principalities, or among principalities comprise most of events in the chronicle, but if something happens to the bridge, this is recorded with due diligence, surprising a contemporary reader – why bridges should have the same prominence as matters of religion, power and warfare?

A typical full record of events worthy of inclusion into the chronicle as an entry under a given year comes from 1144: "A whole new bridge over Volkhov was being built, next to the old decrepit one. The same year Archbishop Nifont has painted all ceilings in cathedral of St. Sofia. Then also a post of city *posadnik* was given to Nezhata. That same year a stone church of Virgin Mary was built in the Merchants' borough." And that's it: there are no more events to report, since God did not act, and also there were no factional strife within the city or military crusades beyond its walls.

The immediate agents that unleash the action of rebuilding are usually the elements: "the water was high, as it never happened before, and displaced 10 sections of the bridge", as the record for 1338 says. Altogether the bridge is undergoing major repairs, apart from 1133, also in 1305, after the huge city fire of 1299; in 1336 after the flood of 1335, in 1338 immediately following yet another serious flood, in 1340 after the fire of the same year, in 1421 after the huge passing piles of ice destroyed it, and

in 1437 after a flood of 1436. This rebuilding then seems like not a very frequent event, according to our modern taste, but in between the bridge plays a role in other events, which ensures the central significance of its rebuilding.

First, since the public assembly of all free citizens meets only after one part of the city crossing the bridge, the decisions of this assembly are frequently put into effect with the help of the bridge. Literally, those found guilty or proclaimed ostracized are physically tossed into river water from the bridge. Immediately after the Volkhov bridge is ever mentioned, it performs this function next year, in the first sentence for the year 1134: "The Novgorodians have started discussing the war with the principality of Suzdal', and killed some of their own men and threw them from the bridge on Pentecostal Saturday". The verb *svergosha* ("threw") that the chronicle uses is interesting: in modern Russian they mostly use it to designate dethroning, unseating from the throne. Here we have some powerful people unseated from the bridge. It is also rather curious that one of the first common actions of the city as a republic is execution on the bridge. The bridge appears in the chronicle two years before the accepted date for the establishment of republican rule (1136), though the chronicle documents events since 854.

The city gathering in Novgorod was famous for its hectic and quite abusive character, so killing was not something out of order – many gatherings ended in the elimination of the losing side, and looting of their houses and lands. The executed are being thrown into the river water in 1141, 1186, 1291, 1316, 1398, 1418 and 1442. In 1209 the citizens even made an attempt to toss the remains of the former hated *posadnik* that were brought back for reburial into the city some years after he had fled from people's rage. In 1141 and 1418 the thrown managed to survive the fall (a religious connotation?) and saved their lives by either swimming or being picked up by fishermen. In the second case, the house of a helping fisherman is stormed and ravaged by the indignant crowd. In the first case, God's intervention is recognized, so after the tossed reaches the shore, he is just fined an immense sum of money, and put into the dungeon for the rest of his life, with hands being chained to his neck.

This brings us to a second very important role of the bridge: it is what helps God say His word. Not that it is just a tool of God's providence, rather, very often, it is a space, or a part of an arena where God can speak and reveal His will. In 1251 the flood after "great rains" displaces the whole bridge, and in 1299 a fire has it (*ogon' zaial*). In 1230 unattended corpses of people dead from unknown desease fill public spaces – "city

streets, the market, and the Great bridge" which thus serve as a theater of death. All these instances are viewed as God's punishment for the sins of the Novgorodians, when God tries not to demolish the sinner, but to elicit repentance and spiritual rebirth. (Another similar admonishing punishment that allows God to reveal his discontent with the Novgorodians is famine, but for some reason it does not involve the bridge).

In 1228, 1335 and 1388 God also enters the scene at the decisive moment, though not to punish, but to save. He acts when city inhabitants from opposing factions or sides of the city stand in full armour, ready to cross the bridge and fight to death, rather than compete in discursive warfare in a joint public gathering. As the record for 1228 says: "God did not want to see bloodshed among brothers, neither did he want to allow the devil rejoice". Hence God unleashes the elements. In 1228, for example, "the lake Ilmen' was frozen for three days and then the southern wind blew and tore the ice, and brought everything into Volkhov and tore 9 sections of the Great Bridge, and 8 of them were found in the village of Pidma on St. Nicolas's day, while the 9th on December 8." After God intervenes, the people disband and elect a different *posadnik* and thousandman, which satisfies everyone and thus the reason for internal warfare is abandoned. The same pattern is demonstrated in 1335: when ice and snow enter Volkhov and displace 15 sections of the Great bridge, the chronicle concludes: "God did not allow for bloodshed among brothers to happen, though after devil's tricks one side pitted itself against another, and in armour stood each half of Novgorod, but God took care of these and citizens condescended together (*snidoshasia*) in love". In 1388 the description of God unleashing the elements is as formulaic, but even the arrival of ice that destroys the bridge cannot initially calm the emotions of the separated sides: "and they started to beat the boat people, and cut their boats, and were without peace for a week, but then condescended together in love, and gave the *posadnik* post to Vasillii Esifovtich."

The devil wins, however, at least temporarily, when God's interference into the bridge functioning is unable to stop the warfare from breaking out – the bridge's destroyal then is credited to the hands of the people, who had tried to deconstruct the bridge (*peremetasha*), with the Russian word literally meaning "de-ject", or "re-ject", in contrast to "ob-ject" (*pred-met*). The bridge is not thrown in front of a contemplating subject, as the etymology of the word "object" would imply, rather, it is un-thrown, kicked out of existence. But in 1218, when the weaker side of the city conflict managed to destroy sections of the bridge, the other side

crossed the river in boats and bloodshed ensued – "O brothers this miracle was done by the cursed devil", says the chronicle. In 1358 two city coalitions in a violent quarrel over the person of the *posadnik*, stood for three days in full armour, separated only by the "dejected" bridge, and after that "God did not allow the devil to rejoice fully": a new *posadnik*, suiting both parties, was elected with the mediation of archbishop, and the warring factions' armies disbanded. Finally, in 1384, instead of one city gathering, factions staged two gatherings on opposing river shores and were ready for fratricidal war, with the weaker side "dejecting" the bridge, but St. Sophia and God took care of the problem, and peace was restored.

Now, contemporary historians read class interests or faction politics for control over the *posadnik* position into these events and point out the mediating role of the office of the bishop. In the most spectacular case of 1418, the bishop enters the bridge to stop bloodshed which has already started. Here is how the story goes. Initially a commoner named Stepanko had asked the people to help him defend himself against the offending boyar; the public assembly then tossed the offender from the bridge into the water, but he was literally fished out from water by others, and started arming against the plebs. In the ensuing battle on the bridge itself, warriors from both sides died from arrows and swords, as the chronicle duly mentions. Because of sizable losses, "all the city started to tremble and a great fear engulfed both sides". Archbishop Semeon then "ordered that the Holy Cross and the icon of the Virgin Mary be taken, went on the bridge, and after him went the priests and clergy and Christ-loving people… And he came and stood in the middle of the bridge, and blessed both sides with the life-creating cross, and they – seeing the honorable cross - wept." After that the bishop sent emissaries to both sides, and – what a good miracle! – both sides disband, "and calm arrived in the city".

Modern historians conclude that the bishops' "office" did this mediation rather often. For example, in 1342, the archbishop is present at one of the two contending public assemblies vouching for power and nominations of the *posadnik*, and then goes to broker the deal with the leadership of another one. While he is doing this, the city splits into two armies on opposing river banks, but somehow the bishop manages to end this in peace, and "the Cross was glorified, while the devil was put to shame." 1342 events stress the exceptional character of events in 1418 revolt: instead of just brokering the deal between warring sides by crossing the bridge a number of times, the bishop had to block the bridge with the cross and the icon, thus stopping the potential warriors.

The central role of the bridge as an essential place for main events in the life of the city and its politics is obvious here. But the bridge understood as a *veshch'*, does not speak for itself (in Russian - *veshchaet*), really. Rather, God speaks by disrupting the bridge, or disrupting interchange between different parties that might have otherwise met, if the bridge existed. Ice, water, wind, fire, the cross and the icons are other important agents with whom the bridge lives its life, and among numerous people that the bridge brings together and affects, the chronicle singles out the bishop, the clergy, and the boaters. All these people, heavenly and earthly elements and God together make the unique assemblage which is the true Great bridge itself, with all the *grandezza*, as Machiavelli would have said, that is, greatness and aggrandizement that is appropriate to it. Decompose this assemblage into social and physical elements, invite a modern bridge scientist to look at it, and one finds a frail half-rotten wooden structure dangling over the water so lowly that a stray pile of floating ice in spring can dislodge it from its place. But with Gods and elements in place, this bridge leads the Novgorod people to greatness comparable to the one of the Greeks.

This brings us to the third feature of the bridge – it brings people together with their great destiny not only when they physically cross it, destroy it or fall from it, but when they get involved with it, in it, and by it in other ways as well. One may understand how this happens by looking at what interests modern economic and political historians: how were its constructions and repairs financed? That is, the fact that some people are more affected by the bridge events, like the boaters or even like the bishop who uses the bridge for religious service, does not seem very surprising. In the case of bishops, this parallels the role of priests in republican Rome who were given the title of *pontifex*, the "bridge-maker" as Varron had deciphered it for us, while imperial Rome transferred the traditional title of *pontifex maximus* onto the Pope. But how were lives of other Novgorodians linked with the life of the bridge – those Novgorodians of whom we think in our modern way as being rather distant from either bridge-maintenance or bridge-usage?

We have two direct instances in the chronicle when the bridge finances are mentioned. In the first instance, in 1229, after Novgorod invites on a contract basis prince Mikhail of Chernigov to be its military defender and gets rid of previous prince Iaroslav, "Novgorodians received from Iaroslav's closest ones lots of money and from other citizens (who supported him) but did not ravage their households and gave this money for the Great bridge". As I mentioned, given that there was no public treasury in Novgorod, taking over the deposed prince's or *posadnik*'s

assets seemed justified as a reclamation of the money amassed during the execution of public functions. Here the chronicler even lauds the restraint of looting masses and the good goal – a transfer of funds for public construction. However, since part of prince's taxes were given to the bishop, bishops funded the execution of some functions we now call public as well. Thus, in 1338, "they were making the Great bridge that had been displaced, following the command of archbishop Vasilii, since he himself looked after it, and started and ended with his own people (belonging to the feudal estate of the St. Sophia - O.Kh.), and he did much good for the Christians".

Doing good for *all* Christians as a result of building the bridge? Here comes my last, fourth point on the life of the Great bridge in Novgorod: its construction and reconstruction is not a technical process, and not only an event of public significance, but a good work, an act of existential guidance that brings together God, nature and people together. The vocabulary of the chronicle is pretty straightforward about it: as the text says very often, *most delasha*, "they did the bridge", rather than *svershasha*, "made", "finished", or *tvorisha*, "created". A look at this heavy moral usage in other instances of the word *delo*, "an act", or "an affair", may illuminate the point. In the First Novgorod chronicle, *delo*, noun, or *delat'*, verb, first and foremost appear to designate the evil deeds of humans. Already the introduction tells us that God sends punishments for evil deeds of Russians, and the record from 955 quotes Solomon on divine retribution for impious deeds. This becomes a formulaic statement repeated at least twenty times in the chronicle. However, *dela* could be good as well, when the city builds churches, for example. Another example of good *dela* is the bishop's affairs in general, which he is called to discuss with the metropolitan of Moscow, in both 1397 and 1401. And when it is the bishop who builds the church, this is undoubtedly a good deed for all the Christendom: for example, when Manturii in 1198 and Evfimii in 1442 construct new churches, they do engage in more than just ordering and funding brick-laying and painting. In 1198 Manturii conducts a liturgy after the deed of church building is over, since he is "blessed in heart and soul, because he has arranged for his eternal remembrance and procured for all Christians a good monastery". In 1442 Evfimii, "blessed in his heart and soul, rejoiced while looking at the cathedral of the Savior, because he saw the good beginning of *the deed* that he had committed for his eternal remembrance and exculpation of sins, and because all Christians saw the shelter and joy and gaiety for the faithful", while the bishop conducted festive ceremonies. To conclude: bridge-building seems to fall into this type of *dela* - acts, invested with heavy moral meaning, since it not only allows the passage of humans

through space but also founds existential coordinates for their joint destiny with Gods, and heavenly and earthly things.

Of Common Things and Common Weal.

This epic of the bridge has demonstrated the four decisive features of the common thing that had contributed to founding a republic, if not one of *rerum publicarum* itself. First, the thing in question is essential for bringing together the inhabitants of the city and is a prerequisite for the conduct of its political life. Second, the common thing allows the gods to speak. Third, this thing opens up to people their great destiny. Fourth, it is a result of a good work, or, one may say, a part of a sought Arsitotelian "good life": the construction and reconstruction of this thing is not a technical process, and not only an event of public significance, but an act of existential guidance that brings together God, nature and people together.

However, one understands that this common thing is not necessarily conducive to a condition of modern liberal democracy; and perhaps its republicanism is very often of a despotic kind. But the liberty of opening up the skies and showing the great destiny of a free people is already there. This sharing in greatness resides in similar common things that had founded other types of political regimes, even in those regimes we frequently take to be non-democratic and sometimes consider tyrannical. It was this understanding of the public character of shared things underlying even the Muscovite principality that allowed Sigismund von Herberstein call his 1549 book *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*, while Giles Fletcher penned down in 1591 even a more radical tile – *Of the Russe Commonwealth*. What allowed or pushed them to talk about *res Moscoviae* on the model of *res Romanae*, or about Russian Common Weal (the first form of this English term), when the main thesis of both books was that Muscovy was not about a monarch pursuing a common good, but rather was a plain tyranny? Fletcher who took a model for writing his treatise from Sir Thomas Smith's *De republica Anglorum*, (1583) knew that Smith was basing himself on the discussion of Cicero in *De re publica* that had tried clearly articulating those types of political affairs (*res publica*) that had not been worthy of the title *res publica*, a democratic republic in our more narrow modern understanding. When things public were stifled by the tyranny of a single individual, by an oligarchic rule or by despotism of the crowd, they were all inappropriately called *res publica*, in Cicero's opinion. For example, "wherever a tyrant rules, we ought not to say that we have a bad form of

commonwealth, as I said yesterday, but, as logic now demonstrates, that we really have no commonwealth at all (*nullam esse rem publicam*)."[18]

Still, Fletcher used the term "Commonwealth". This, of course, might be just taken as a convenient designation for a nation state at that time, when the term "state" was not yet frequently used. As the conventional story goes, it was Raleigh and Hobbes in the beginning of the seventeenth century who had solidified the modern usage of the word "state" in English, which came to designate a country, or its apparatus of power distinct from both the rulers and the ruled.[19] Thus, Fletcher talks about "the state or forme of their (Russians') government", but here, as in another chapter - "on the state of the Communaltie, or vulgar sorte of people in the country of Russia" - the word "state" means "condition". It would seem that "Commonwealth" was a more preferable generic term than " the state" to designate a "countrie of Russia". Hence the title. But given that the state of government of Russe Commonwealth was "plain tyrannical, Fletcher rarely used the word "commonwealth" in the body of the text. In one of the rare exceptions, the term with capital "C" appears in the acerbic discussion of the absence of chances of meritocratic promotion for the commons: "This order that bindeth every man to keep his rancke, …wherein his forefathers lived before him, is more meet to keep the subjects in a servile subjection and so apt for this and like Common-wealths, then to advance any vertue, or to breed any rare or excellent qualitie in Nobilitie or Commons."[20]

Still some other considerations might have made him use this word as well. First, Fletcher, even if he copied an indictment of Muscovite political regime from Herberstein, as Samuel Baron has persuasively shown, also added certain subjects of discussion that Herberstein lacked. For example, these additions included a detailed account of the central government administration, the ruler's council, and what he dubbed as the Muscovite Parliament, a *sobor* of members of ruler's council and the hierarchs of the church.[21] Could this addition give grounds to talk about the commonwealth, that is, *res publica*, rather than *res Moscoviticae* that his predecessor had described? In Fletcher's chapter on the parliament we find the phrase "common wealth" two times: first in discussion of

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[18] Cicero, "The Republic", III, xxxi, 43, in Cicero, *De re publica. De legibus*. With an English translation of C. W. Keyes. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928, pp. 218-219.
[19] Quentin Skinner, "The State," in T. Ball, J. Farr and R. Hanson, eds., *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989
[20] Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, facsimile edition. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966, p. 49
[21] Samuel Baron, "Herberstein's Image of Russia and Its Transmission Through Later Writers", in Baron, *Explorations in Muscovite History*, Brookline, VT: Variorum, 1991, part XIII, p. 256.

approval by the Metropolitan and the top clergy of tzar's decisions because "the Emperor and his Councell are… far better able to judge what is profitable for the common wealth", and later in the description of the announcement of the *sobor*'s decisions when it is proclaimed that "His Highnesse with those of his noble Councell… have found the matters proposed to be verie good and necessarie for the common wealth of his Realme."[22] Clearly, it was the common good of the people - even if, in Fletcher's opinion, appealed to in a rather hypocritical manner here - that justified talking about the Russe Commonwealth. Also, *res publica*, the Common-wealth with a capital "C", carried a connotation of greatness, Machiavelli's *grandezza*, as Fletcher's description of the commons shows: otherwise why should Fletcher use this term in the discussion of the absence of this greatness, that is, no opportunity to "excell in any noble or principal quality" in Muscovy?

Now, instead of repeating the indictment of tyrannical government in Muscovy, let us look at what physical things the commons could share with the decision-makers. In Novgorod, as we remember, it was the *veche* square and the bridge that brought all of the people together to decide. In contrast, Fletcher notices no physical grounds for common meeting or deliberation, where the commons, the tzar and the nobles could be brought together: "and first touching their libertie how it standeth with them (the commons), it may appear this: that they are reckoned in no degree at all, nor have any suffrage nor place in their *Zabore* or high court of Parliament…"[23] The deficiency of sharing the common thing called the Commonwealth is glaring: not only are there no "common consultations for the publique benefit", as Fletcher thinks there should be, but there is also no physical place in the *sobor*, where the liberty of the commons might stand! This attention to a common space is obvious because the chapter on the Parliament gives us precise processions and arrangements in space of the decision-makers: the tzar sits on the throne, while "in the next place not far from him at a small square table (that giveth roome to twelve persons or thereabouts) sitteth the Patriarche with the Metropolites and Bishops, and certeine of the principall Nobilitie of the Emperours Councel", with the rest placing themselves on the benches around the room in order of precedence. The whole scene is called by Fletcher *Stollie*, from which we might fathom links to *prestol*, the throne, or *zastolie*, getting together around a table for commensality (with which the sitting of the Parliament concludes).[24]

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[22] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, p. 24.
[23] Ibid., p. 45
[24] Ibid., p. 22-23.

In a nutshell, here is my hypothesis. What we find in Muscovy is a certain deficiency of sharing common things in comparison with Novgorod. On the one hand, some sharing is there, and Fletcher recognizes it. Therefore, Fletcher, points our attention to what in his opinion ties people of the country together. Because of "publicke affairs" and institutions he feels he has the right to call what he sees a Commonwealth: the Muscovites have a common ruler, whose treasury, policies and courts link them all together. On the other hand, this sharing is deficient. If only the ruler and his apparatus of power really strove for the common good, sighs Fletcher. Thus, given no strong laws and defences against arbitrary power, one cannot call this regime a republic, a commonwealth in the narrow sense of the word, even if some servile subjects of the tzar justify his rule by appeal to the rhetoric of the "common wealth of the Realme." But if we step back from his account, and transfer our attention from intangible institutions to tangible things, then we see another secret of this difference between tzardom and a democratic republic. This difference was already pointed out by Fletcher, but remained untheorized: it is the absence of tangible and durable common things in Muscovy. In Fletcher's time the commonality of sharing some physical things that had been enjoyed by the whole people of Novgorod, had already become in Muscovy a specific fate of only one estate - a vulgar mix of lowly people, "the Communaltie". The tzar, his servitors, and the top clergy do not engage in this tangible sharing. Summing up: the commonality of the whole populace is what Muscovy lacks and that St.Petersburg inherits from Novgorod. It is the mingling and mixing together in common spaces, which gives grounds first for upholding the common manners and later for the reestablishment of elements of common deliberation.

The Freedoms of St. Petersburg

The condition of St. Petersburg reflected in the Novgorod mirror may help us now see the different freedoms of St. Petersburg in a sharper light. First of all, both cities share a characteristic of *res publica*, a certain commonality of things, but their commonalities are of a different kind.

The Novgorod commonality is constituted by shared things that serve as the basis for the great destiny of this city, and the grandeur of its spiritual achievements. However, in Fedotov's terminology, to this set of liberties of the spirit a set of liberties of the body should be added. Here *habeas corpus* is most important together with all other aspects of negative freedom: this is Fedotov's 1926 program for the realization of the calling of St. Petersburg when he urges that West European liberties of the body, produced in the struggle of civil society against that state, "should enter

with its just share into the creation of [Russian] national culture." As he repeats this in the 1944 article, "our freedom is negative – a freedom from something…"[25] Isaiah Berlin could have uttered the same thesis ten years later, in a slightly different vocabulary: to the positive freedom of the Novgorodians – that is, the freedom to realize themselves as they collectively see it fit - should be added a negative freedom from arbitrary interference. This is the liberal westernizing project of St. Petersburg.

The commonality of the nineteenth century St. Petersburg is constituted by another type of shared things, that is, *res publica*. Here lord and former peasant brush sides on Nevsky and aspire or are forced to live in the common space of polite manners. This is different from a commonality of things in Novgorod, precisely because St. Petersburg does not ensure the positive freedom to discuss politics and participate in deliberation on the common destiny of the city or the country. St. Petersburg of that time allows for a more or less untrammelled pursuit of one's wishes in private and liberation from patriarchal oppression, IF one does not claim the right to participate in politics. This is the hailed social freedom that Jermann, Belinsky and Fedotov recognize. In the vocabulary of Isaiah Berlin once again, St. Petersburg guarantees the negative liberty in the social sphere at the price of an almost total abnegation of positive liberty in politics. This freedom of St. Petersburg then invokes a disturbing spectre of Tocqueville's democratic despotism, unless this negative freedom people enjoy is balanced by a measure of positive liberty, which implies taking part in a deliberation on the common fate. This balancing is a republican – in the narrow modern sense of the term - project of St. Petersburg, the creation of the Commonwealth of Cicero's vision of true *res publica*, worthy of this high title.

But apart from asserting these negative and positive freedoms of a Petersburger, there is perhaps also another freedom, a freedom of St. Petersburg itself. This should not necessarily sound very strange. "Freedom reveals itself as the 'letting-be' of what is,"[26] wrote Heidegger in one of his enigmatic essays, where he mulled over the relationship between the fundamental practices of showing and revealing, on the one hand, and objects showing up as a result of these practices, on the other. The freedom in question was not conceived as a freedom of the human being; rather, it was the freeing quality of the disclosive space where phenomena appear. This freeing quality allows things to be, lets them out of nonexistence into existence. Heidegger is speaking here of the move

[25] "Rozhdenie svobody", Fedotov 2: 257.
[26] Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," trans. by R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick, in *Existence and Being*, London: Vision, 1959, pp. 330, 333.

that sets up «the world», understood phenomenologically – not as a space-time continuum of modern physics, but as a set of perspectives for meaningful human action with and among things, in the way we speak of a world of a child that is the different from a world of a grown up, a world of a woman as different from the world of a man, or a world of a scientist as different from a world of a poet. The world of St. Petersburg could be another example of such a disclosive space.

In each of these worlds free action of humans makes sense and takes place. Thus, the initial move of disclosing a world sets up the later possibility for the negative and positive freedom of a human being in this world. But the setting up of this world is not a feat appropriate to any single human being. Thus the freedom of setting up this world does not belong to any single individual. Heidegger writes: "Freedom is not what common sense is content to let pass under that name: the random ability to do as we please, to go this way or that in our choice. Freedom is not license in what we do or do not do. Nor, on the other hand, is freedom a mere readiness to do something requisite and necessary... Over and above all this ("negative" and "positive" freedom) freedom is a participation in the revealment of what-is-as-such."[27]

Heidegger's insight illuminates the freedom of St. Petersburg from an unexpected angle. The freeing of St. Petersburg into existence as St. Petersburg and not any other city in Russia from the very start presupposed an appearance of individuals who shared the common things, the *res publica*. Of course, afterwards these individuals could start caring about the negative or positive freedom of their acts, and about providing the standard set of human rights and liberties for every inhabitant of the city. But before these freedoms of its dwellers, a more fundamental and originary freedom of St. Petersburg consisted in freeing into existence of the world of more or less equal city-sharers, an event obvious to so many observers.

I repeat. Thanks to this originary freeing of St. Petersburg into existence the struggles for asserting the negative and positive freedoms of St. Petersburgers became possible and are still raging. Furthermore, St. Petersburg tried extending these struggles onto the whole country: millions of Soviet people died in the name of the rhetoric of positive freedom so loathed by Berlin, and thousands of Russians are struggling now to ensure and solidify its counterpart, the negative freedom. The successes of this current struggle are very often put into question. But

[27] Ibid.

perhaps the idea of the transposition of positive and negative freedom from the city level onto the country level was not and could not be so successful because of the absence of the shared *res publica* at the country level. The commonality of Nevsky prospect and its coffee shops can not be easily recreated at the country level. As all classical republican thinkers asserted, from Cicero to Montesquieu and Rousseau: republics should be small, otherwise they will collapse.

We know the classical modern solution to this problem in France and United States: this was representative democracy, which seemed to ensure republican rule on the national level of a vast country. However, recurrent problems of these gigantic republics may alert us to another search for solution that St. Petersburg harboured following the bequest of Novgorod but so far failed to achieve. This quest of St. Petersburg can be summed up in a question: is there a way to maintain *res publica* without ceding direct, almost manual access to common things that the etymology of the word "maintain" implies?

Machiavelli famously wrote about *mantenere lo stato* as the main preoccupation of the prince or *podesta*, and Berlin did not accidentally describe the positive freedom with the help of the same felicitous metaphor: people want authority "placed in their own *hands*".[28] St. Petersburg was the work of many hands as well. Peter the Great chose the name of the city - among other reasons – because his patron saint was the proverbial rock on which a durable church could be built, as the Bible says and as the etymology of name Peter tells us. One can take it as a metaphor, but it was the non-metaphorical rocks of the churches that had made *res ecclesiastica* durable and tangible for centuries. The pebble pavement of Nevsky might have made *res publica* of St. Petersburg durable and tangible in a similar way. Indeed, what could be more tangible and within the touch of one's hands than the rock foundation of churches (that embodied the Church that St. Peter built), the bridge of the Novgorodians or the founding qualities of Nevsky? This founding and fundamental quality of St. Petersburg – the freedom of letting the world be between us in a tangibly manual and durable way of existence of common things, of *res publica* – might still harbour another answer to a question on how one can *mantenere res publica* in the modern age. Perhaps revealing this answer is the vocation of St. Petersburg.

[28] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", in Berlin, Four Essays on Liberty. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 166.