

Political in Form, Cultural in Content:
Civic Activism and Historic Preservation in Leningrad during Perestroika

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Abstract

This thesis aims to reveal the emergence, operation, and transformation of the grass-roots groups involved in historic preservation during Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms of glasnost and perestroika in Leningrad. It attempts to locate the crystallization of the independent groups within a broader framework of late Soviet Leningrad and re-evaluate the ideologically loaded concept of *neformaly* which was labeled by Soviet journalists and scholars to the grass-roots groups formed outside of the official institutions. In doing so, it attempts to explore under which circumstances were these civic associations created during perestroika and how did they operate and evolve. By analyzing various types of primary sources that reveal different layers of the self-organizational practices in late Soviet Leningrad, this thesis indicates the complexities faced by the grass-roots initiatives of historic preservationists. These findings not only revise the existing historiography but also continue an ongoing debate on the paradoxes and ambiguities of late Soviet society.

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Note on Transliteration

In this thesis, I follow a simplified Library of Congress system for transliterating the Russian alphabet into English, with exception for geographical and personal names that have gained a common spelling, such as Mayakovsky instead of “Maiakovskii”, Joseph instead of “Iosif”, Yevgeny instead of “Evgenii”, Delvig instead of “Del’vig”, and Nevsky instead of “Nevskii”.

List of Abbreviations and Glossary

GIOP, Gosudarstvennaya inspeksiia po okhrane pamiatnikov istorii i kul'tury (State Inspectorate for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments): the state body for the protection of cultural monuments.

Glavlit, Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatel'stv (General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press): the official censorship and state secret protection organ in the Soviet Union.

Lengorispolkom (Leningrad City Executive Committee): the executive agency of Lensovet.

Lensovet (Leningrad Soviet of People's Deputies): the main organ of municipal government.

Lenzhilniiproekt (Research and Design Institute for Leningrad Housing): the institution which was responsible for elaboration of the project documentation for major works and reconstruction of the buildings and constructions.

LITO, Literaturnoe tovarishchestvo (Literary Association): a literary association or grouping below the level of (and sometimes independent of) the Writers' Union.

LZTI, Leningradskii tsentr tvorcheskoi initsiativy (Leningrad Center for Creative Initiative): the Komsomol-led organization established to unite nonformal initiatives.

Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR (Supreme Soviet of the USSR): the senior legislative body of the Soviet Union.

VOOPiK, Vserossiiskoe obshchestvo okhrany pamiatnikov istorii i kul'tury (All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture): the public organization engaged in the protection, restoration, and promotion of cultural heritage.

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Introduction

In 2006, the giant Russian oil company Gazprom proposed to erect a 300-meter glass skyscraper to headquarter its subsidiary Gazpromneft' in St. Petersburg. Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller planned to construct the building in the historic district of the city behind the Smolny Convent, the Baroque cathedral designed by Bartolomeo Rastrelli in the middle of the eighteenth century. Although the project was immediately supported by St. Petersburg Mayor Valentina Matvienko, who had forced the chief architect of the city to approve it, the public dissent headed by civic initiative *Zhivoi gorod* (Living City) revealed that the prospective territory of construction lies within the area of UNESCO protection as a world heritage site. Apart from traditional awareness-raising efforts such as disseminating reports, collecting signatures, and making petitions to parliamentary committees, the activists decided to hold a public action at the exhibition of Gazprom's projects in St. Petersburg Academy of Arts. On November 21, 2006, the activists dressed in costumes imitating belfries of the Smolny Convent and wearing gas masks, entered the Academy's lobby holding the posters saying "*Ostorozhno – gazy!*" (Warning: Gases!). Meanwhile, supported by the actors of the Petersburg Interior Theater, the activists portrayed Catherine II, Empress of the Russian Empire, and her favorite Grigory Potemkin, who artistically condemned the construction of the skyscraper and suggested sending its author to Siberian exile.¹ Although the Academy's guards prohibited activists from continuing the performance, it was, nevertheless, widely covered by media provoking a huge resonance in the city. As a result of public pressure, in 2010, the authorities relocated the tower project to the city's suburb,² fearing the exclusion of Petersburg

¹ "'Alive Smolny Cathedral' was not allowed to attend the 'Gazprom-city' exhibition," *Rosbalt*, November 21, 2006, last modified March 1, 2020, <https://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2006/11/21/275822.html>.

² For more detailed account on the incident see, David Ransel, "From the Del'vig House to the Gas-Scraper: The Fight to Preserve St. Petersburg," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 2 (2016): 405-431; Boris Gladarev, "Istoriko-kul'turnoe nasledie Peterburga: rozhdenie obshhestvennosti iz duha goroda" [Historical and Cultural Heritage of St. Petersburg: The Birth of Publicity from the Spirit of the City], in *Ot obshhestvennogo k publichnomu*, ed. Oleg Kharhordin (Saint Petersburg: izd-vo EUSPb, 2011), 70-304.

from UNESCO, while methods of cultural resistance were firmly established on the agenda of urban activists.³

Surprisingly, the emergence of Living City had a direct connection to the autonomous social activities during *perestroika*, when the policies introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in May 1985 produced the conditions for spawning independent movements. In Leningrad, this process was headed by *Gruppa spaseniia pamiatnikov arkhitektury* (The Group for Rescue of Architectural Monuments, hereinafter the GR) – a group of young people who in 1986-1987 similarly expressed disagreement with city urban planning to prevent the destruction of cultural and historical sites. Generational continuity between both initiatives is attributed not only to the fact that Living City was created by the daughter of the perestroika-era activist but also by the methods of so-called “protest performances” accompanied by artistic forms of expressing disagreement.⁴ Therefore, the movements of both epochs have contributed considerably in the improvement of state heritage management. Technological progress and relaxed political context enabled a younger generation to achieve public resonance much more effectively, whereas late Soviet pioneers of heritage preservation (and of any independent activism of Leningrad) enjoyed less favorable conditions in their endeavors to protect the historical integrity of the urban fabric.

Nevertheless, the protest activities of the GR resulted in an unprecedented level of self-organization during the final years of the Soviet Union’s existence. In late March 1987, right after the mass demonstration on Saint Isaac’s Square against the demolition of the Hotel Angleterre, all independent associations united in *Sovet ekologii kul’tury* (The Council for Cultural Ecology, hereinafter the CCE).⁵ Representing a host of nonformal groups in the city, the CCE aimed to coordinate and support activists working in the field of “cultural ecology” (*ekologiya kul’tury*). The concept had been proposed in 1979 by prominent Soviet historian and philologist Dmitry

³ “Activists will hold a festival of excursions in defense of Basevich’s house,” *Internet-Newspaper Karpovka*, last modified February 8, 2020, <https://karpovka.com/2020/02/10/395529/>.

⁴ Boris Gladarev, “Istoriko-kul’turnoe nasledie Peterburga: rozhdenie obshchestvennosti iz duha goroda,” 118.

⁵ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen, Fond 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul’tury*, no. 1 (1987).

Likhachev who assumed “that the entirety of humanity’s cultural production parallels the entirety of material nature, and the preservation of both is considered valuable”.⁶ Appropriated by the leaders of the CCE, the concept formed the symbolic basis of its operational principles, marking the beginning of their close cooperation with Dmitry Likhachev and support of the Leningrad branch of *Sovetskii Fond Kultury* (Soviet Cultural Fund) headed by him.

At the end of March 1987, a dissension arose in the CCE, resulting in separation of some culturally oriented groups into *Sovet kul’turno-demokraticheskogo dvizheniia “Epitsentr”* (The Soviet for Cultural-Democratic Movement “Epicenter”).⁷ “Epicenter” posed a wider oriented alternative to the CCE, aiming to gather research and cultural groups and reflect on independent activism in the samizdat bulletin *Merkurii* (Merkury), whereas the CCE, with its samizdat journal *Vestnik po ekologii kul’tury* (Gazette for Ecology of Culture), remained focused on the practicalities of urban historical preservation. The concept of “cultural movement” was elaborated in 1985 by Boris Ivanov, an activist of the long-standing “second culture” movement in Leningrad. It implied a semantic substitution for the existing self- and public definitions of independent culture as “unofficial/second/underground”. Instead, the notion proposed by Ivanov identified the cultural movement as “freed and independent from the institutions, and standing against Soviet, conservative, self-satisfied culture.”⁸ Putting forward the task to engage in dialogue with the official culture and to strengthen its credibility with the authorities, the “cultural movement” of the perestroika-era appropriated the “democratic” prefix to respond to the Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms. Glasnost and perestroika evoked enthusiasm for politics among nonformal activists who

⁶ Maria Sonevytsky and Adrian Ivakhiv, “Late Soviet Discourses of Nature and the Natural Musical Avtentyka, Native Faith, and “Cultural Ecology” after Chornobyl,” in *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature*, ed. by Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe (New York: Routledge, 2016), 137. See also, Dmitry Likhachev, *Russkaia kul’tura* [Russian Culture] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 2000), 98.

⁷ *Obshchestvennaia zhizn’ Leningrada v gody perestroiki. 1985 – 1991: sbornik materialov* [Public Life in Leningrad during Perestroika. 1985-1991: Collection of Materials], eds. Oleg Ansberg and Aleksander Margolis (Saint Petersburg: Serebrianyi Vek, 2009), 736.

⁸ Boris Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81* [History of the Klub-81] (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’sтво Ivana Limbaha, 2015), 248.

until that moment showed little interest in it.⁹ Yet a seminal form of the movement was predominantly shaped by cultural activities, which were gradually brimming with political content.

This thesis will focus on the GR and the CCE as the pioneering self-organized groups of late Soviet Leningrad: according to the GR's leaders, they "brought" perestroika to Leningrad.¹⁰ The motivation behind choosing these groups also comes from the design of my research, which attempts to situate the first grass-roots activities stimulated by the reorganization of the socialist system under Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms. The third reason is that studying the pioneering initiative enables me to trace cultural continuities with and intellectual legacies of pre-perestroika independent movements in Leningrad.

Therefore, this thesis aims to reveal the trajectory of the GR's and the CCE's operation and their gradual politicization while also outlining the context in which it happened. Accordingly, the questions that I will raise in the research are the following: how did the cultural context of late Soviet Leningrad influence the crystallization of the grass-roots groups of the perestroika period? What place did the GR and the CCE occupy within the perestroika-era society in Leningrad? What were the properties of interaction and relationship between the activists and the Leningrad authorities? What were the reasons behind the groups' politicization?

Historiography

Much of what is known about Leningrad independent activities during perestroika in general, and about the GR and the CCE in particular, comes from scholars of history, sociology, cultural studies and political science. Despite a methodological diversity in tackling the issue, none of the scholars in these fields focused on the phenomenon of self-organized groupings in depth. Indeed, while late Soviet sociologists and journalists were engaged in conceptualizing and

⁹ Alexei Yurchak, *Eto bylo navsegda, poka ne konchilos. Poslednee sovetskoe pokolenie* [Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation] (Moscow: NLO, 2014), 276.

¹⁰ Viktor Rezunkov, "Zashchita 'Angletera' v 1987 godu i sovremennaiia situatsiia v Peterburge [Defence of 'Angleterre' in 1987 and Contemporary Situation in St. Petersburg]," *Radio Svoboda*, April 11, 2007, last modified April 30, 2019, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/391633.html>.

categorizing these independent initiatives,¹¹ post-Soviet scholars considered them either as a quasi-civic society of late socialism, or evidence of youth politicization during perestroika.¹² Contemporary sociological research, despite a comparative perspective and extensive empirical and theoretical base, reproduces a descriptive and uncritical view of the groups.¹³ Altogether, these approaches omitted the role of individuals and their intentions in changing sociocultural conditions of the period. The same aspect can be noticed in regional history, according to which the GR legalized preservationism as a tool of sociocultural confrontation, which facilitated public discussion on the city's historical and cultural problems.¹⁴ Recent studies of modern history of Saint Petersburg, examining different stages of preservationism in the context of relations between the authorities and the population, conclude that the actions taken by the GR introduced a new stage in the history of monuments' protection, highlighting the scale of their impact on the sociopolitical life of late Soviet Leningrad.¹⁵ Hence, although the spectrum of historiography suggests the variety of thematic and methodological fields, in my thesis I intend to complicate the understanding of independent self-organization on a local scale, overcoming the generalization and a one-dimensionality inherent in existing scholarship. By bringing forward new primary sources, I am going to analyze the GR and the CCE as a synthesis of paradoxes peculiar to the late Soviet period. By focusing on the changing context of the Leningrad cultural and political environment, I intend to investigate how people tried to adopt by searching for the boundaries between allowed and forbidden.

¹¹ Sergei Nenashev, *Molodezhnye ob'edineniia: problemy istinnye i nadumannye* [The Youth Associations: Real and Invented Problems] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1988); Sergei Nenashev, and Sergei Pilatov, *Deti andegraunda: priglashenie k razgovoru* [Underground Children: The Invitation to Talk] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1988); Andrei Gromov, and Oleg Kuzin, *Neformaly: kto est' kto?* [Neformaly: Who is Who?] (Moscow: Mysl', 1990).

¹² Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed* (London: Routledge, 1994); Elena Omel'chenko, *Molodezhnye kul'tury i subkul'tury* [The Youth Cultures and Subcultures] (Moscow: Int sociologii RAN, 2000), 87.

¹³ Boris Gladarev, "Istoriko-kul'turnoe nasledie Peterburga: rozhdenie obshchestvennosti iz duha goroda," 74.

¹⁴ Emily Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of 'Kraevedenie'* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 179.

¹⁵ David Ransel, "From the Del'vig House to the Gas-Scraper: The Fight to Preserve St. Petersburg," 405-431.

Sources

Writing the history of independent activism from a micro-historical perspective demands an approach from different angles, sides, and contexts. Accordingly, I base my study on various types of historical sources that reveal different layers of the self-organizational practices in late Soviet Leningrad.

The operation of Leningrad state institutions for maintenance and preservation of historic buildings and monuments is documented in the materials of the Central State Archive of Literature and Arts of St. Petersburg. Including minutes of congresses, decisions of the meetings and correspondence on 1985-1987, the collection sheds light on the projects on restorations, reorganization of the preservation system, as well as appellations and requests from the GR and the CCE to state bodies on the issues of poor maintenance of historic buildings. Other party-level sources accessed from the holdings of the same archive contain documents, notes, and reports on the work of the Komsomol and the Center for Creative Initiative with the youth and newly emerged groups and associations. I particularly emphasize the minutes of the GR and the CCE meetings, which fixed the scheduled activities, debates, and ideas proposed by the activists.

To understand the GR's negotiations with the state bodies after the demolition of the Angleterre Hotel – a turning point of the group's existence – I analyze its correspondence with the local and central governments that is located in the holdings of the Leningrad Regional Committee of the CPSU at the Central State Archive of Historical-Political Documents in St. Petersburg. Two aspects justify the use of these documents. Firstly, it reveals the agency of the GR illustrated by its appeals to local and central bodies to obtain reorganization of the state preservation system. Secondly, the documents show how local state bodies lost their influence in the Central Committee due to the GR's demands for them to follow the law.

The debate among the city dwellers over the GR is represented in the local periodicals (*Smena*, *Izvestia*, *Literaturnaia gazeta* and others), which are located at the National Library of Russia at St. Petersburg and at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives in Budapest.

Through *Smena*, the Leningrad youth newspaper, the GR spread information about the conditions of historic buildings and actions toward their improvement. *Izvestia* and *Literaturnaia gazeta*, frequently classified as “liberal Soviet newspapers”,¹⁶ played a substantial role in the construction of the groups’ positive image, preventing repressive measures against them.

The activities of the CCE are represented in the samizdat journal *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury* located in the holdings of the Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen and Memorial St. Petersburg (Fond Ioffe). The journal covered the current events in the socio-political and cultural life of Leningrad, discussing the issues of heritage preservation and the return of historical street names. Including the reports from the founding conferences, declarations of initiatives under the branch of the CCE, articles, related news, and announcements, the collections illustrate a framework of a newly emerging public that did not have a voice before. In this sense, although the journal had a limited circulation in 40-50 copies, its existence as samizdat was a necessary measure that provided an opportunity for the group to act independently from the state censors and create a pluralism of opinions, albeit in the context of underground media.

Methodology

Methodologies of the research are based on the post-revisionist school in Soviet history, which focuses on the interaction between the state and the people in more sophisticated ways.¹⁷ According to Lewis Siegelbaum, “having shifted their attention so decisively toward the everyday practices of ordinary people, historians would do well to try to connect them upwards, as it were, with intermediary groups and ultimately with politics.”¹⁸ This research optic enables me to look at the dynamics of the GR and the CCE from the multiple perspectives of agents. Therefore,

¹⁶ Vera Tolz, *The USSR's Emerging Multiparty System* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 15.

¹⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Revisionism in Soviet History,” *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 87.

¹⁸ Lewis Siegelbaum, “Whither Soviet History?: Some Reflections on Recent Anglophone Historiography,” *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 1, no. 2 (2012): 228.

official Soviet documents will not be treated as reliable reflectors of social reality, but, instead, as contextualized and viewed from the perspective of their creation.¹⁹

Samizdat sources will be treated as evidence of not only socio-political activity led by the CCE but also as a reflection of intellectual production mirroring the political and cultural imagination of the actors. Rather than attributing these texts exclusively to the dissidents and their ideological struggle with the regime,²⁰ I intend to analyze samizdat not as epistolary products opposing to the Soviet system, but as evidence that they were deeply integrated into the regime and aimed at its enhancement, not its subversion. This approach reveals how the texts of *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury* echoed the rhetoric of the regime, rather than positioned themselves outside of or underneath it.²¹ Moreover, this perspective expands the boundaries of the existing historiography on Soviet samizdat that tends to be not only inseparable from dissident movement²² but also “Moscow-centric” and neglecting Leningrad along with other peripheral locations during the perestroika period.

I will analyze articles in periodicals and newspapers to reveal patterns of how the groups’ actions were evaluated by different audiences, such as youth (*Smena*), intelligentsia (*Izvestia*, *Literaturnaia gazeta*), professionals of urban development (*Leningradskaia panorama*) and others. This choice aims at assessing the critical debate on perestroika as well as to trace the logic of understanding and articulating the processes of “democratization” in the context of late Soviet society. For instance, the changing dynamics of the newspapers’ title reveals the debate between the Leningraders: whereas representatives of the authorities accused the GR’s activism of being

¹⁹ Jochen Hellbeck, “Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 80.

²⁰ Serguei Oushakine, “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat,” *Public Culture* 13, no. 2 (2001): 192. For historiographical review of scholar treatment on samizdat see: Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov, *Samizdat and Tamizdat: Entangled Phenomena?*, in *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism*, eds. Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 8.

²¹ Serguei Oushakine, “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat,” 192.

²² See, for instance, Gordon H. Skilling, “Samizdat: A Return to the Pre-Gutenberg Era?” in *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Eastern and Central Europe* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1989), 3-18; Polly Jones, “Socialist Worlds of Dissent and Discontent after Stalinism,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 3 (2014): 637-652. The only exception is Ann Komaromi’s focus on Leningrad literary texts: Ann Komaromi, “Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics,” *Slavic Review* 71, no. 1 (2012): 70-90; Ann Komaromi, “Literary Samizdat and Samizdat Publics,” *Enthymema*, XII, 2015, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/enthymema/article/view/4942>.

illegal and contradicting the law,²³ or mocked its leaders calling “the boys from St. Isaac’s Square” blaming for amateurism and discuss concealment of the truth and “vainglorious interests”,²⁴ others endorsed the group’s desire to develop public opinion supporting the protection of cultural heritage. In other words, pluralism of opinions made possible by the Gorbachev’s reforms started to enter previously closed spheres one after another.²⁵

In addition, the excerpts from oral history interviews would enable me to deepen the data from the official sources. The use of this method highlights the common and differing interpretations of the shared experience about the meaning of the events. Taking into consideration the complexity of oral history interviews as a historical source due to the memory distortions and power-authority relations, my accumulated data promotes understanding of motivations, attitudes, opinions, and informal encounters that are not available in other types of sources.

In comparison with approaches used by other scholars of the field, who mainly focus on one particular type of method and source, the complex of methodologies mentioned above suggests a new optic on the socio-cultural context in Leningrad during perestroika through a micro-history perspective. In other words, I propose to analyze the case of the GR and the CCE from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives considering the intellectual, social, and political contexts that facilitated its crystallization.

The Structure of the Research

This thesis aims to reveal the emergence, operation, and transformation of grass-roots groups involved in historic preservation during reforms of glasnost and perestroika in Leningrad. It first sets out to introduce the debate on the late Soviet period in historiography and how my research could contribute to it. The chapter also aims to show *neformaly* as key figures of the

²³ Viktor Kokosov, “Zakon pretenzii ne imeet” [The Law Has no Claims], *Smena*, no 67, March 21, 1987.

²⁴ Mikhail Chulaki, “Eshhe raz o pol’ze glasnosti” [One More Time about the Benefit of Glasnost], *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 13, March 25, 1987.

²⁵ Vera Tolz, “The New Role of the Media and Public Opinion under Mikhail Gorbachev,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 2 (1993): 197.

period whose perception was exposed to constant changes depending on the social and political climate.

Following the conceptual history of neformaly, in the second chapter, I reconstruct the development of alternative spheres in late Soviet Leningrad. This chapter demonstrates the context which influenced the crystallization of independent activism and how the practices of cultural confrontation took shape during this period in the city. The chapter ends with the introduction of Gorbachev's perestroika and its influence on the position of alternative associations.

The third chapter traces the development of heritage preservationism in Leningrad from the early Soviet discourse of *kraevedenie* to the civic grass-roots initiative of the perestroika era. It proposes the reasons behind the actualization of heritage debate initiated by the activists of the GR during perestroika and traces how they pursued an endeavor to preserve the historically important buildings from demolition.

The final chapter provides an analysis of the turning point in the activism of the GR and the CCE. It introduces how the activists negotiated with the authorities on the issue of heritage preservation, demonstrates the scopes and methods of the activists' self-organization as well as explores how the activists experienced politicization.

Chapter 1. *Neformaly* and Studies of the Late Soviet Society

This chapter addresses the historiographical debate on the late Soviet period as a time full of paradoxes and considerable transformations. Following the scholarly discussion on the ambiguities of the late Soviet society, I will demonstrate the relevance of my research for the evolving field of studies of the late Soviet socialism. Apart from that, I will shed light on the perception of *neformaly* as protagonists of my research and key actors of the perestroika period, who embodied and successfully implemented these paradoxical practices in their activism.

1.1. Ambiguities of Perestroika

Over the past several decades, scholarship on Soviet history has experienced a dramatic change under the influence of the post-revisionist paradigm. Historians of the Soviet Union shifted from policy-oriented scholarship towards the examination of resistance to the state, aspects of everyday life, ordinary people, and Soviet subjectivity.²⁶ These studies along with the heyday of anthropological research into post-Communist change in everyday practices in the former Soviet Union brought anthropological influence to bear on historical study, making Alexei Yurchak's 2006 book, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, one of the most influential works of recent years. Offering a completely new perspective for understanding late socialism, it not only challenged the totalitarian paradigm of the Soviet history but also proposed alternative language for the analysis of socialism, thereby shifting attention towards the complexities of socialist life and its often-paradoxical cultural forms. It inspired many scholars to probe social and cultural transformations of late socialism through the prism of his theoretical model, exerting a significant impact on the scholarship. Therefore, writing a social and cultural history of the late Soviet period becomes almost inconceivable without reference to Yurchak's monograph, which remains one of the most cited books in the field of Soviet studies.

²⁶ For the detailed account on the writing of Soviet history see, Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Soviet Union in the 21st Century," *Journal of European Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 51-71.

And yet, citations and references have not always proved to be entirely convincing. Sometimes it seems that careful reading and understanding of the Yurchak's book is displaced either by its "compulsory" mention in studies of the late socialism²⁷ or by the "blind" implementation of theoretical models on various temporal or territorial research entities. Derived from the peculiar experience of young Leningraders and applied to other research areas and periods, Yurchak's concepts of "deterritorialization" or "imaginary West" may pose inevitable implications for other geographical and temporal research units, causing historical distortion and inaccurate generalization. No doubt, Yurchak proposed an original analytical language to explore late Socialism generally, though it is important to understand that this book is first of all about a special group of Leningrad educated and carrier-oriented youth striving to realize its ambitions through the Komsomol.²⁸

What is also missed by the scholars behind extensive citation of and theoretical implications from Yurchak's monograph is the critical debate around the book that evolved during the last couple of years. One of these debates deserves special attention for its insight into the perestroika period. Yurchak concluded the monograph with perestroika as a moment when the Soviet system was "discursively deconstructed," by focusing exclusively on the linguistic erosion of the regime. However, Yurchak did not continue to develop his argument on (a)political behavior as an intrinsic feature of late Soviet Leningraders, who preferred living *vnye*. Such neglect stimulated Kevin Platt and Benjamin Nathans to assume that this "stance of apolitical, alternative behavior concealed political energies that came home to roost as a result of Gorbachev's reforms."²⁹ Yurchak's response to Platt's and Nathans's critique was addressed in the Russian edition of the book. There he argued that apolitical behavior as an integral part of the being *vnye* on the contrary, was a political position but filled with unconventional meaning.³⁰ Taking few

²⁷ Alexei Yurchak, *Eto bylo navsegda, poka ne konchilos'*, review by Zinaida Vasilyeva, *Laboratorium* 8 (2016): 188.

²⁸ Alexei Yurchak, *Eto bylo navsegda, poka ne konchilos'*, review by Jeanne Kormina, *Antropologicheskii forum* 26 (2015): 216.

²⁹ Kevin Platt, Benjamin Nathans, "Socialist in Form, Indeterminate in Content: The Ins and Outs of Late Soviet Culture," *Ab Imperio* 2011, no. 2 (2011): 322.

³⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Eto bylo navsegda, poka ne konchilos'*, 269-270; 472.

steps back to the theoretical model of Yurchak, it is important to understand that the discourse of the late Soviet period offered the binary understanding of “political” that could be either “Soviet”, meaning favour of the system, or “anti-Soviet”, implying antagonism toward the regime. Neither of these categories, according to Yurchak, could describe the position of those Leningraders who lived *vnye*; therefore, concludes Yurchak, Platt and Nathans, who consider living *vnye* as a strictly apolitical stance, are mistaken. Taking into consideration Platt and Nathans’s assumption with regard to perestroika as well as Yurchak’s scholarly intervention positing a non-binary understanding of Soviet/anti-Soviet, I want this research to demonstrate how the actors who inherited the practices of living *vnye* from the pre-perestroika decades, manifested themselves in Leningrad during the period of the Gorbachev’s reforms. But before embarking on the analysis, in this chapter I would introduce those who embodied and successfully implemented these paradoxical practices in their activism during perestroika in Leningrad, being colloquially referred to as *neformaly* or “non-formals”.

1.2. Defining *Neformaly* in Historical Context

The term “non-formal social movement” (*neformal’noe obshchestvennoe dvizhenie*) or for short “non-formals” (*neformaly*) was introduced by Soviet journalists during perestroika to define newly emerged heterogeneous youth formations formed outside official institutions.³¹ Denoting a broad spectrum of youth activities, the term defined the groups of hippies, rockers, bickers, adherents of various religions and political ideas, defenders of human rights, ecological activists, and many others. None of them had a *formal* status, which meant that they were not officially recognized and incorporated into the state or official sector and were largely considered by bureaucrats as deviant phenomena of perestroika’s early years.³² However, the lack of attributes, characteristic of official Soviet institutions like the Communist Party and the Komsomol, did not necessarily mean that the groups were *informal* in their organization or

³¹ Sergei Nenashev, *Molodezhnye ob’edineniia: problemy istinnye i nadumannye* [Youth Associations: Real and Far-Fetched Problems] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1988), 7.

³² Sergei Nenashev, Sergei Pilatov, *Deti andegraunda: priglashenie k razgovoru* [Children of Underground: The Invitation for a Talk] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990), 6.

activity. To illustrate, *neformaly*, who stood in the vanguard of perestroika in Leningrad, *formalized* their operation by borrowing attributes of formal sector and imitating their bureaucratic language to describe own principles of the organization. Therefore, according to Hilary Pilkington, “non-formality” signified the existing of this kind of activity, which was not recognized and incorporated into the state or formal sector.³³

By the end of 1987, the authorities reassessed the sociopolitical significance of *neformaly*. At the same time the Komsomol, which was responsible for executing the party directives, was faced with a failure to manage a growing number of activists outside of state control and was instructed to elaborate a so-called “differentiated approach” toward heterogenous non-formal formations. Their required classification divided *neformaly* into three categories: “positive” (ecological, *pro-perestroika*), “neutral” (hippies, bikers, punks, music fans), and “negative” (religious, political, and nationalist groups, neo-fascists, “delinquent” groups, *anti-perestroika*).³⁴ Thus, these designations defined and evaluated the groups in terms of their relation to party-led programs of perestroika.³⁵

Each group was prescribed a different approach elaborated by the research department of the Higher Komsomol School of the Komsomol Central Committee.³⁶ For instance, while the “neutrals” were supposed to be “reeducated,” and “negatives” were to be opposed, positively evaluated *neformaly* were viewed as an indicator of the success of perestroika. This course reflected the principles of “democratization” and encouragement of “independent social initiative”, advanced by Mikhail Gorbachev on January 27, 1987, during the Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee. Consequently, the term *neformaly* obtained a positive connotation and then

³³ Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed* (London: Routledge, 1994), 115.

³⁴ Hilary Pilkington, “‘The Future is Ours’: Youth Culture in Russia, 1953 to the Present,” in *Russian Cultural Studies*, eds. Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 375; Elena Omelchenko, *Molodezhnye kul'tury i subkul'tury*, 87.

³⁵ Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed*, 89.

³⁶ Ibid.

was substituted by “amateur youth associations” (*liubitel'skie ob'edineniia molodezhi*) and “non-formal associations” (*neformal'nye obyedinyeniya molodezhi*).

The change of attitude toward *neformaly* during perestroika was also stimulated by the scholarly and popular contributions to identifying ways of dealing with the rapidly growing phenomenon. From 1987, “the youth question” dominated scholar debate among sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, and culture critics of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the research department of the Higher Komsomol School of the Komsomol Central Committee, which pioneered youth surveys. Studies discussed different aspects of non-formal activism and youth subcultures including the forms and methods of operation, the dynamics of a relationship between grass-roots initiative and state bodies, as well as a comparative perspective on the ways of dealing with youth in the socialist countries and the West.³⁷ Although the majority of them were descriptive, based largely on the results of the surveys and uncritical stance towards the reasons of the youth alienation from the Komsomol, they constituted one of the first attempts to comprehend the phenomenon of *neformaly*.

The expert view on the youth was paralleled by the more straight-forward and critical observations made by those journalists who did not have affiliation with the official media. Under the influence of glasnost, they covered youth activities through the bottom-up perspective, giving voice to the activists and the Komsomol workers.³⁸ Revealing the difficulties faced by *neformaly*, pamphlets and volumes of independent journalists highlighted the systematic pitfalls in the

³⁷ Ivan Kuchmaev, ed. *Subkul'turnye ob'edineniia molodezhi: kriticheskii analiz: Prepr. dokl. vsesoiuz. nauch. konf. "Kul'tura i ee rol' v aktivizatsii chelovecheskogo faktora"* [Subcultural Youth Associations: Critical Analysis: Preprint of the Report for the Conference 'Culture and Its Role in Activization of Human Factor'] (Moscow: In-t filosofii AN SSSR, 1987); Viktoriia Semenova, ed. *Neformal'nye ob'edineniia molodezhi vchera, segodnia... A zavtra?* [Non-Formal Youth Associations Yesterday, Today... Tomorrow?] (Moscow: VKSH, 1988); Valentina Levicheva, ed. *Neformal'naia volna* [Non-Formal Wave] (Moscow: VKSH, 1989); Vadim Berezovskii, and Nikolay Krotov, *Neformal'naia Rossiia. O neformal'nykh politizirovannykh dvizheniiakh i gruppakh v RSFSR* [Non-Formal Russia. On Non-Formal Politicized Movements and Groups in RSFSR] (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1990); Elena Zdravomyslova, “Mobilizatsiia resursov demokraticheskogo dvizheniia v Leningrade (1987-1990 gg)” [Resource Mobilization of the Democratic Movement in Leningrad (1987-1990)], in *Sotsiologiia obshchestvennykh dvizhenii: empiricheskie nabliudenii i issledovaniia* [Sociology of Social Movements: Empirical Observations and Research], ed. by Vladimir Kostiushev (Saint Petersburg: In-t sociologii RAN, 1993), 110-132.

³⁸ Sergei Nenashev, *To Find Oneself. Leningrad "Informals": Who Are They?* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1990); Sergei Nenashev, *Molodezhnye ob'edineniia: problemy istinnye i nadumannye*; Andrei Gromov and Oleg Kuzin, *Neformaly: kto est' kto?* [Neformaly: Who is Who?] (Moscow: Mysl', 1990), 103.

Komsomol's operation with young people. That was not the case regarding the official press, the tonality of which was distinguished from one newspaper to another. Whereas some of official journalists reported the "positive" contribution of *neformaly* in raising the issues of common importance, others criticized "negatives" for idleness and societal parasitism.³⁹ Therefore, despite official encouragement of the "independent social initiative", its public approval remained predominantly selective, focusing on the "socially desirable" *neformaly*.

Paradoxically enough, there were those among nominally "positive" *neformaly*, whose activism did not receive an unambiguous evaluation in the media. Like their predecessors, who were neither "pro-Soviet" nor "anti-Soviet" in Yurchak's terms, these groups of *neformaly* fell out of the binary oppositions of "pro-perestroika" and "against perestroika" stances. In Leningrad, *neformaly*, who were involved in the efforts to preserve historical monuments, received mixed responses on their activism, that, according to the regional branch of the Komsomol, was considered as "anti-social activism".⁴⁰ By 1988, the Leningrad Komsomol equated them with "the political extremists who strived to use the process of democratization of social life for personal interests" and to take control over the Communist Party by using the interest to the Orthodox religion.⁴¹ It is important to note that the Leningrad Komsomol identified not only the group *Pamiat'* which pursued truly nationalistic goals in their preservation activism but also "other similar associations established on the basis of fascination with the struggle to preserve monuments of history and culture of the Russian people, promotion of the values of Russian national culture."⁴² Given the fact that the GR stood in the vanguard of historic preservation in the city of Leningrad, protecting the monuments associated with the cultural figures of the Russian Empire and religious sites in the suburbs of the city, there can be no doubt what exactly was meant by the reference.

³⁹ Viktor Bulavin, "Koshachii refleks ili k chemu privodit bezdumnoe uvlechenie psevdomodoi" [Catlike Reflexes or What Mindless Fascination with Pseudo Dashion Leads To], *Smena*, no. 141, June 19, 1986.

⁴⁰ Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga [Central State Archive of Historical-Political Documents in St. Petersburg (hereafter TsGAIPD SPb)], F. P-881k, op. 31, d. 6, 53.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Another category of “socially undesirable” *neformaly* comprised the “parallel structures” aimed to establish the independent formations operating alongside the official ones. They comprised “unrecognized” writers, poets, and artists of unofficial culture, who, according to the Leningrad Komsomol, “confronted creativity (*tvorchestvo*) based on the standards of socialist realism.” In the Komsomol’s view, the “paralleled structures” strived to transform into political parties and other Soviet public authorities, threatening the monopoly of the Communist Party. These groups were considered by the Leningrad Komsomol to profit from the importance of involving amateur associations in reconstruction (*perestroika*) of the Soviet public life.⁴³ Therefore, the Leningrad Komsomol advised the governmental authorities, public organizations, and media to disband and eliminate these groups in order to prevent any opportunity for these and others “negatively evaluated” associations to be legalized.

The compilation of these classifications required methods for “localization and clearance” of the “anti-social” groups following the “differentiated approach”. However, whilst initially, groups were evaluated according to their correlation with party-led programs of *perestroika*, in Leningrad the approach shifted towards the groups’ recognition of the Komsomol’s leadership, regardless of their agenda. Facing a failure of their campaign for attracting youth in the course of *perestroika*, the Komsomol used ideologically biased rhetoric in drafting profiles of *neformaly* in attempts to restore their influence.

At the same time, the Komsomol’s attempts to regain their past power over *neformaly* did not bring much success: by 1989-1990, they were popularly defined as a phenomenon that affected society as a whole regardless of the members’ age. From 1990, sociologists, political scientists, and other scholars considered *neformaly* as an embryonic civil society which tried to engage a dialogue with the authorities and exerted influence on the political decisions.⁴⁴ The term *neformaly* featured less in the public discourse being gradually substituted by “civic initiative”

⁴³ TsGAIPD SPb, F. P-881k, op. 31, d. 6, 53.

⁴⁴ Carole Sigman, *Politicheskie kluby i perestroika v Rossii: oppositsiya bez dissidentstva* [Political Clubs and Perestroika in Russia: Opposition without Dissidence] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 24.

(*grazhdanskaia initsiativa*), “social movement” (*obshchestvennoe dvizheniie*),⁴⁵ and, at the end of the day, with “civic society”. Brought by dissidents and human rights activists, understanding *neformaly* as a “civic society” in embryo implied a direct opposition to Mikhail Gorbachev and Soviet regime,⁴⁶ signifying a dramatic shift from the previously dominant meanings.

Therefore, taking into consideration the scope of the meanings carried by *neformaly*, in the given research, I would apply a more neutral term “the activists” to avoid biases of the perestroika-era’s rhetoric. As the protagonist of this thesis, they will be studied as the bearers of the pre-perestroika practices of non-binary stance specific to social and political environment of Leningrad and the reform-minded people striving for qualitative changes of the system.

⁴⁵ Elena Zdravomyslova, “Sotsiologiya obshchestvennykh dvizhenii - stanovlenie novogo napravleniia,” in *Sotsiologiya v Rossii* [Sociology in Russia], ed. by Vladimir Yadov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Instituta sotsiologii RAN, 1998), 505-522. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, and Ludmila Alexeyeva, *Nyeformaly: Civil Society in the USSR* (New York: Helsinki Watch, 1990), 2.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985); Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, and Ludmila Alexeyeva, *Nyeformaly: Civil Society in the USSR* (New York: Helsinki Watch, 1990); Andrew Arato, “Social Movements and Civil Society in the Soviet Union,” in *Perestroika From Below: Social Movements in The Soviet Union*, eds. Jim Butterfield and Judith B. Sedaitis (Boulder, Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 197-214; Geoffrey Hosking, *The Awakening of the Soviet Union* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1991); Alexander Sungurov, *Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo i ego razvitiie v rossii* [Civic Society and Its Development in Russia] (Saint Petersburg: Jutas, 2008).

Chapter 2. Late Soviet Leningrad and the “The Second Culture” Movement

Following the conceptual history of neformaly as one of the key actors of the perestroika period, this chapter presents a retrospect of the pre- and early Gorbachev’s era, which framed the practices of civic self-organization in Leningrad. Given the fact that in late Soviet Leningrad the unofficial life of the city was associated with culture and literature, this chapter will show the context which influenced on the crystallization of these practices by looking at the social and political climate of the period. Without seeking to enter into the details on the generational or methodical differences between the representatives of the unofficial culture movement, I intend to outline how some creative Leningraders pursued non-conformist thinking and acting and adjusted to the Soviet system by creating “isles of freedom”. Shaped by the relaxation of the Thaw and tightening of the regained freedoms during Leonid Brezhnev era, they had to opt for literature and art as a familiar and safer language for dissent expression. Finally, I would present the changes brought by perestroika and glasnost in the politics and attitudes to independent organizations, which were mostly constituted by youth.

2.1. The Literary Thaw in Leningrad

After Joseph Stalin’s death in 1953, followed by the election of Nikita Khrushchev as General Secretary of the CPSU, Soviet society experienced considerable alterations in almost all its spheres. From the early 1960s, the fresh wind of change under the Thaw proved to be especially dramatic in the realm of culture, enabling the artists, writers, and filmmakers to address previously forbidden issues. This cultural resurgence brought an increased interest to lyric poetry readings, especially among the youth, fascinated by such iconic poets as Andrei Voznesensky, Yevgeny Evtushenko, Bella Akhmadulina, and Bulat Okudzhava.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Eleonory Gilburd, and Denis Kozlov, “The Thaw as an Event in Russian History,” in *The Thaw : Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, eds. Eleonory Gilburd, and Denis Kozlov (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 53; Petr Vail’ and Aleksander Genis, *60-e. Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* [The 60s. The World of the Soviet Man] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1996), 12; Steven Lovell and Rosalind Marsh, “Culture and Crisis: The

In Leningrad, lyric poetry returned to the pages of literary journals and newspapers after 1953; it had been abandoned before because of the Zhdanov's attack on Anna Akhmatova in 1946.⁴⁸ During the Thaw youth enthusiasm for poetry was sparked by the Leningrad Branch of the Writers' Union through the grass-roots organizations colloquially known as LITO (*literaturnoe ob''edinenie*), that existed in pre-war Leningrad, but multiplied to almost fifty during the Thaw.⁴⁹ Being attached to the universities, the Houses of Culture, public libraries or even factories and supervised by a member of the Leningrad Branch of the Writers' Union, LITOs functioned as forums for poetry readings and discussions, while doing educational work with young writers, bringing young poets together on biennial conferences and competitions and promoting them for work in the Writers' Union.⁵⁰ The aegis of the Writers' Union did not necessarily impose restrictions: some of the LITOs were curated by supervisors who were born at the turn of the century and absorbed the intellectual traditions of the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia or by those who were imprisoned in the Gulag and experienced the ordeals of Stalinism.⁵¹ The teachers with this different background not only communicated their views to the younger generation but also introduced them to the practices of self-publishing, embodied in handwritten magazines, collections of student poetry, almanacs, and newsletters.⁵² Therefore, differing substantially from the ideological activism of the Komsomol, the city's LITOs operated as isles of freedom, gaining huge popularity among Leningrad youth attracted by the cultivating of independent thought and creative freedom.

Intelligentsia and Literature After 1953," in *Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, eds. Catriona Kelly, and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.

⁴⁸ Emily Lygo, "The Need for New Voices. Writers' Union Policy Towards Young Writers 1953–64," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. by Polly Jones (London: Routledge, 2006), 193.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 198, 200. See also Viacheslav Dolinin, and Dmitrii Severiukhin, "Preodolen'e nemoty" [Overcoming the Silence], in *Samizdat Leningrada. 1950-e – 1980-e. Literaturnaia*, ed. Viacheslav Dolinin (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 13.

⁵¹ Emily Lygo, "The Need for New Voices. Writers' Union Policy Towards Young Writers 1953–64," 199.

⁵² Vladimir Britanishskii, "Studencheskoe poeticheskoe dvizhenie v Leningrade v nachale ottepeli" [Student Political Movement in Leningrad at the Beginning of the Thaw], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 14 (1995): 170.

With the folding of the Thaw in 1962-1963, which was accompanied by the growing conservatism of the Soviet political course, the board of the Writers' Union tightened control over these literary circles. The first manifestation of change was the trial on Josef Brodsky who was found guilty under the pretense of "social parasitism", while conservatively oriented members of the Leningrad branch of the Writers' Union made no attempt to help him. Secondly, another young poet Viktor Sosnora was prevented from career promotion, which was supported by Moscow's but opposed by Leningrad's Union.⁵³ The 1962 publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* appeared to be one of the last breathes of the Thaw, followed by the official prohibition issued by *Glavlit* to mention the period of Stalinist repressions, claiming it "disrepute of the Soviet regime".⁵⁴ Neo avant-gardist ruptures from the literary standards of socialist realism were also unwelcome to the official Soviet literary institution. Consequently, the growing tightening of the liberties, which were gained during the Thaw, formed a realm of the writers whose works were prohibited for official publication by the Writers' Union but were disturbed on typewritten copies clandestinely among acquaintances. The LITO's former spirit was displaced to the underground, giving rise to the late socialist phenomenon of unofficial literature. However, before consolidation of free-thinking poets and writers into a movement, it took a while to find like-minded people, since the search for them had to be constrained to friends and acquaintances.

2.2. The Great Coffee Revolution and Culture of "Saigonants"

From the early 1960s, two city cafes, which were furnished with Hungarian "Omnia" coffee machines, increasingly gained popularity among Leningraders.⁵⁵ Offering the visitors a strong coffee and pastries, these places constituted a new context of communication between different groups of people, which resembled circles (*kruzhki*), clubs of interests or professional collectives, but lacked state institutional organization and registered membership.⁵⁶ As city public

⁵³ Emily Lygo, "The Need for New Voices. Writers' Union Policy Towards Young Writers 1953-64," 204-205.

⁵⁴ Viacheslav Dolinin, and Dmitrii Severiukhin, "Preodolen'e nemoty", 13.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 21. Lev Lurye, "Malen'kii dvoynoi perevorot" [A Small Double Coup], *Ogonek* 32 (2013): 46.

⁵⁶ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 144.

spaces, open for a wide audience, these cafes had become not only a place of encounters but also intellectual forums for discussions, sites for news exchange or hanging out (*potusovat'sia*) on a neutral territory, safe from ideological constraints and Soviet officialdom. Although the cafes were located not far from Nevsky Prospekt, which made it a popular and crowded destination, the tone of the intellectually free atmosphere was set by frequenters, among which were litterateurs, philosophers, young writers, artists and poets who were forced to move from the LITOs. Unlike the elegance and aesthetic of Parisian or Viennese coffee houses, that similarly functioned as arenas for open communication in public, newly emerged cafes of Leningrad were neither comfortable nor beautiful, having an ugly interior and standing arrangement. Therefore, they could remain unnoticeable for laypersons while being an ideal place for countercultural milieus.

Through shared attitudes, common social practices, and lifestyle, some groups of the café's visitors formed *tusovka* – a meaningful slang self-naming used to signify not only the places of gathering in the city but also a group of people with common interests and the style of social interaction, a group who rejected the life course of “normal” Soviet citizens.⁵⁷ Opposing institutional structures and restrictive regulations imposed from above,⁵⁸ members of *tusovkas* – bohemians, artists, poets, students, black marketers, or criminals – enjoyed fluid boundaries between each other, mixing together in a relatively autonomous atmosphere far away from the Soviet socio-cultural order.⁵⁹ Their alienation from the norms of Soviet society during the Brezhnev period could be explained by their disillusionments in socialist ideals left by the Khrushchev's Thaw. They were reluctant to be involved in the officialdom, while the socialist system, despite seeming strong and stable, had been progressively eroding from within.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ For more on “normal Soviet man” see, Alexander Beliaev, “Preface. An Anthropologist's View of Alexei Yurchak's Book,” in *Eto bylo navsegda, poka ne konchilos. Poslednee sovetskoe pokolenie*, ed. by Alexei Yurchak, 11-17.

⁵⁸ Tatiana Shchepanskaia, *Sistema: Teksty i traditsii subkul'tury* [Sistema: Texts and Tradition of Subculture] (Moscow: OGI, 2005), 43; Elena Zdravomyslova, and Viktor Voronkov, “The Informal Public in Soviet Society: Double Morality at Work,” *Social Research* 69, no. 1 (2002): 64.

⁵⁹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 164.

⁶⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 102–108. See also Kevin Platt, and Benjamin Nathans, “Socialist in Form, Indeterminate in Content: The Ins and Outs of Late Soviet Culture,” 301–324.

Therefore, youngsters, hanging out in the cafes, opted for not formally registered unrecognized, but the vibrant environment of being *vnye* over Brezhnev's stagnant times and political routines.

Among the wide range of the visitors, young writers and artists perceived the cafes not just as a place of encounters and hangout, but favored them as informal cultural centers for discussion of poetry and exchange of ideas, books and samizdat publications, which started to take shape in *kulinariia* (cooking) on Malaya Sadovaya Street.⁶¹ In the summer of 1964 the first coffee machines of Leningrad had been installed there and, several months later, another café, which was attached to the restaurant "Moscow" located at the intersection of Nevsky and Vladimirsky Avenues, was also furnished with the machines. The latter enjoyed more popularity than the former, being a more spacious site and a hub location for a broad audience. Covertly called "Saigon" with the reference to the Western antiwar movement,⁶² the café became a particularly important communicative hub for informal interaction among poets. Both cafes mixed different creative people who together created an atmosphere for the independent cultural environment. Spreading into poets' apartments, unofficial literary culture took the forms of home concerts, readings, exhibitions and seminars (so called *kvartirniki*) documented in samizdat publications. They included not only literature, and poetry but also sociocultural, philosophical and historical writing as well as translations of foreign literature.⁶³

2.3. Leaving the Underground

The omnipresence of literary (semi-)clandestine activism in Leningrad did not mean the absence of political one, although from the 1960s onwards the Soviet dissident and human rights movement considered Moscow its center, leaving the underground for public protests.⁶⁴ At the

⁶¹ Viacheslav Dolinin, and Dmitrii Severiukhin, "Preodolen'e nemoty", 21.

⁶² The explicit origin of the naming is surrounded by rumors. For more details see, Svetlana Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 164; Elena Zdravomyslova, "'Saigon' v rasskazakh zavsegdataev 1970-kh godov" ['Saigon' in the Stories of the Frequenters], in *Sumerki "Saigona"*, ed. Juliia Valieva (Saint Petersburg: Zamizdat, 2009), 338.

⁶³ Viacheslav Dolinin, and Dmitrii Severiukhin, "Preodolen'e nemoty", 25.

⁶⁴ Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*, 295. For Moscow unofficial culture see, Courtney Doucette, "Norton Dodge in Lianozovo: Transnational Collaboration and the Making of the Soviet Unofficial Artist," *Reconsidering Stagnation: New Perspectives on the Brezhnev Era*, eds. Dina Fainberg, and Artemy M. Kalinovsky (Latham: Lexington Books, 2016), 147-162. A comparative perspective for Moscow and Leningrad unofficial culture and samizdat see, Viktor Krivulin, "Zolotoi vek samizdata"

same time, in Leningrad, from 1957 until 1982, a series of closed trials and arrests took place against many disseminators of “anti-Soviet” literature and samizdat: editors of political samizdat journal *Kolokol*, members of the All-Russian Social Christian Union for the People’s Liberation,⁶⁵ the leftist group of “Revolutionary Communards”⁶⁶ and many other activists and even poets who were involved in political dissent or irritated authorities by leading “the life of a parasite”. According to Ludmila Alexeyeva, the lack of open public political life in Leningrad was explained by the regional authorities’ strict control and punishment of any sign of unorthodox activities. Therefore, the activists tended to avoid joining up with the political activists who could draw much more attention from the KGB, than did the unusual interests of the writers and poets. Consequently, combined with a Leningrad’s traditional confrontation with Moscow as the center of the developed public activism, Leningrad groups generated the motto “down with politics!”, which was frequently encountered in the following years.⁶⁷

Indeed, the wealth of activity of the unofficial culture in “the cultural capital” appears to be an outstanding phenomenon. The spheres of independent activities could even demonstrate a “specialization”, with the more politicized activism centered in Moscow and a culturally oriented movement in Leningrad.⁶⁸ However, contrary to Alexeyeva’s claim, attitudes towards political involvement varied greatly among different groups of writers: while some of them imposed restrictions on the dissemination of their publications in politically oriented samizdat journals in order to avoid the risk of being arrested,⁶⁹ others belonged for some time to an Initiative Group for

[The Golden Age of Samizdat], in *Samizdat veka*, eds. Anatolii Streliaannii, Henry Sapghir, Vladimir Bakhtin, and Nikita Ordynskii (Minsk: Polifact, 1997), 342-354.

⁶⁵ Nikolay Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia. Dvizhenie russkikh nacionalistov v SSSR. 1953-1985 gody* [Russian Party: Movement of Russian Nationalists in the USSR. 1953-1985] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 212-235.

⁶⁶ Evgeny Kazakov, and Dmitry Rublev, “Koleso istorii ne vertelos’, ono skatyvalos’. Levoe podpol’e v Leningrade, 1975–1982” [“The Wheel of History Did Not Turn. It Rolled Down”. The Left Underground in Leningrad, 1975–1982], *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 5, no. 91 (2013): 156–175.

⁶⁷ Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*, 299, 356; Viacheslav Dolinin, and Dmitrii Severiukhin, “Preodolen’e nemoty”, 25.

⁶⁸ Ann Komaromi, “Literary Samizdat and Samizdat Publics”, *Enthymema*, XII, 2015, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/enthymema/article/view/4942>.

⁶⁹ Stanislav Savitsky, *Andegraund: istoriia i mify leningradskoi neofitsial’noi literatury* [Underground: History and Myths of the Leningrad Unofficial Literature] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002), 10.

Human Rights.⁷⁰ Thus, although the members of the unofficial culture were much more widespread in Leningrad than those associated with the human rights or politics, litterateurs were compelled to avoid political activism while instead opting for legitimization of their existence through the struggle with the Soviet Writers' Union to obtain official status.

As a Leningrad version of “dissent,” from the end of the 1960s onwards the members of the movement of the unofficial culture sought to be recognized by and accepted to the Writers' Union, that, however, proved to be unsuccessful. Unofficial writers had been confronted with a *fait accompli* that their literature was “marginal,” while its distribution was possible only outside of the state structures.⁷¹ Several factors explained this position. First of all, despite the successful 1975 exhibition of the avant-gardists which replenished Leningrad unofficial culture, the writers were refused publication of their poetry collection “*Lepta*” by the Writers' Union.⁷² Secondly, following the adoption of the regulation “On Work With Creative Youth” of October 12, 1976, that encouraged creative unions to establish the councils to involve youth in their cultural institutions,⁷³ the writers sent a proposal to *Lengorispolkom* to reorganize the Leningrad branch of the Writers' and Artists' Union. They proposed to establish the Creative Youth Council (*Sovet po rabote s tvorcheskoi molodezh'iu*) that could incorporate the associates of the Soviet “creative” Unions, publishing houses and “non-Soviet” youth, meaning those who did not belong to the Komsomol – namely, the members of the unofficial culture. They were convinced that such a plan would “give a fuller representation to a new generation of Soviet creative intelligentsia” and “familiarize the readers with new forms of artistic expression”.⁷⁴ However, as previously, the writers' attempt for legalization within the official structures was ignored.

⁷⁰ Ann Komaromi, “The Unofficial Field of Late Soviet Culture,” *Slavic Review* 66, no. 4 (2007): 601.

⁷¹ Stanislav Savitsky, *Andegraund: istoriia i mify leningradskoi neofitsial'noi literatury*, 41.

⁷² Viacheslav Dolinin, and Dmitrii Severiukhin, “Preodolen'e nemoty”, 27.

⁷³ *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuzu v rezoliutsiakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK (1898-1986 gg.): v 14 t.* [The Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Resolutions of Congresses, Conferences and Plenums of The Central Committee (1898-1986): in 14 vols.], vol. 3 (Moscow: Politzdat. 1986), 139.

⁷⁴ Boris Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81*, 15.

The Writers' Union unrecognized the existence of the association operating in parallel with the official structures, though the movement did not diminish its creative energy. By the middle of the 1970s, the movement of Leningrad unofficial culture had been joined by the new generation brought up during Brezhnev period and unburdened with the illusions on the further official relaxation of the communist regime.⁷⁵ The works of these writers were written without the hopes for official publication and, thus, lacking self-censorship. Not deluding themselves but keeping in mind their intentions to reintegrate into the Writers' Union or gain some form of institutionalization, they published the "thick" journals "37" and "*Chasy*" in samizdat, translated the essays of foreign writers and scholars, organized seminars⁷⁶ and exhibitions at the apartments, held the conferences in 1979 and even established a literary prize in the name of Russian novelist Andrei Bely to praise the spirit of free literature. Spreading the information about these activities via the wide network of samizdat journals and encounters in "Saigon", the Leningrad unofficial culture had been replenished with new individuals, who united fragmented units into the movement, though with fluid boundaries.

2.4. "Official" Organization of Unofficial Poets

By that moment, the movement's activities did not remain unnoticed by the KGB, though the disclosures were not followed by arrests or imprisonment. Instead, the KGB proposed to create a platform within which the unofficial movement could operate "freely", intending to take full control over their activism.⁷⁷ At the same time, the members of the unofficial movement still strived to gain institutionalization in this or that form. As a result of negotiations between the KGB, the Writers' Union and the "unofficials", the *Klub-81* was founded, being registered in 1981 at the Dostoyevsky Literary Memorial Museum.⁷⁸ In practice, the KGB's efforts to control the Klub turned to be unlucky: as one KGB officer remembered, the Klub's board ignored the KGB's

⁷⁵ Viacheslav Dolinin and Dmitrii Severiukhin, "Preodolen'e nemoty", 25.

⁷⁶ For more details see, Josephine von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious-Philosophical Seminar 1974-1980: Music for a Deaf Age* (London: Routledge, 2016); Mark Lipovetsky, and Lisa Ryoko Wakamiya, eds., *Late and Post-Soviet Russian Literature: A Reader* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015).

⁷⁷ Boris Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81*, 28.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 33.

requirements, continuing to expand the samizdat network and declaiming their poetry without censorship restrictions.⁷⁹ Thus, faced with the organized association of “anti-Soviet elements”, as the writers were considered by the militia, the KGB was unable to take command of the Klub’s work. Although hampered by the Writers’ Union which postponed the publication of the poetry collection “*Krug*”, Klub itself greedily exercised available newfound freedoms, including into its ranks musicians, theatricals, and painters.⁸⁰

In practice, the Klub as a forum for discussions and interaction between the members of the unofficial culture fulfilled earlier functions – hosting lectures, seminars, and discussions on the literature, art, and humanities. What distinguished the Klub from its old form is, first of all, an opportunity to perform in other clubs, houses of culture, on radio and TV. Secondly, like any other official Soviet institution falling under the jurisdiction of Soviet law, the Klub had a constitution that regulated the Klub’s operation, the process of joining, the structure and order of governance. Thirdly, contrary to the LITOs that were open for an amateur public, the Klub set high entry standards demanding that poets, novelists, critics, playwrights, and interpreters “meet the high professional requirements”.⁸¹ These official functions transformed the Klub’s self-identification from “underground”, “unofficial” or “the second culture” towards “a cultural movement,” taking the role as an alternative, not dissenting or subversive element of the system, that could coexist with Soviet cultural standards. Following the “fathers” of the Leningrad unofficial culture, the Klub demonstrated the preference of culture to the “disfigures” of politics, calling for the repudiation from the political issues. By 1983, as Boris Ivanov recalled, this peaceful agenda was

⁷⁹ Eduard Shneiderman, “Klub-81 i KGB” [The Klub-81 and the KGB], *Zvezda*, no. 8 (2004): 217.

⁸⁰ When underground rock musician Boris Grebenshchikov was persecuted by the KGB, the Klub-81 defended him by incorporating in its community. In 1982, Grebenshchikov initiated the formation of the Klub of Modern Music (later known as the Rock-Club) and the “Association of Experimental Fine Arts” (TEII), which united nonconformist artists on a legal ground under the aegis of the Klub-81. For the foundational agreement of the Klub of Modern Music with Klub-81 see, Boris Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81*, 130-131. More on Leningrad Rock Club see, Yngvar Steinholt, *Rock in the Reservation: Songs from the Leningrad Rock Club, 1981–86* (New York: MMMSP, 2005).

⁸¹ Boris Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81*, 71. By the end of 1981, more than half of the Klub’s members had a higher education, although the majority preferred unskilled work. For this phenomenon see, Alexei Yurchak *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, 151-155.

recognized by the KGB, the Writers' Union and other city politicians, allowing the book publisher "Sovetsky Pisatel'" to release "Krug" in 1985.

By the beginning of perestroika, the movement of "the second culture" established in Klub-81 became an influential platform for the crystallization of *neformaly* in Leningrad. Boris Ivanov recalled that "it was the high time when there was not a single organization in the city which knew how to communicate with young people meaningfully and constructively."⁸² In particular, Klub provided newly created groups of *neformaly* with places of meetings and conferences, brought them together to share knowledge and learn how to express their discontent. But most importantly, the Klub conveyed "the contempt for political and social reality and... retreat into a culture, into spiritual and environmental problems."⁸³ In Leningrad, where authorities exercised a rigid political control over freethinking intelligentsia and political dissidents,⁸⁴ issues of ecology, culture and heritage preservation became the only accessible means of expressing discontent with the Soviet system. Promoted by the members of the Klub through debates, lectures and conversations, the inevitable primacy of culture, environment, and history as the issues of concern to the broader public became a powerful instrument in the hands of young Leningraders by the beginning of perestroika. In other words, the devastating condition of heritage preservation system in Leningrad, uncovered by glasnost, triggered the mobilization of non-formal organizations, enabling them to voice civic protest against the destruction of historical sites associated with the common cultural past.

2.5. "The Creative Force for Revolutionary Renewal": The Gorbachev Factor

After coming to power in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev inherited the Soviet Union in a state of a deep crisis requiring multiple solutions in economic, political, and social spheres. The reforms were launched at the April 1985 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist

⁸² Boris Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81*, 309.

⁸³ Ibid., 360.

⁸⁴ Arvi Duka, Nikolay Kornev, Viktor Voronkov and Elena Zdravomyslova, "The Protest Cycle of Perestroika: The Case of Leningrad," *International Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1995): 87. For more details on dissidence in Leningrad see also Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent. Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*.

Party which became known as the *uskoreniye*, which meant “acceleration” intended for the growth of social, economic, and technological development. In 1986, facing the failure of these endeavors, the 27th Party Congress replaced acceleration with *perestroika*, which meant the “restructuring” or “reconstruction” and collective goal of fundamentally renewing society.⁸⁵ Gorbachev argued that the restructuring process would be impossible without social input, which implied giving voice to those groups that had been deprived of voices before.⁸⁶ That is why in June 1986 Gorbachev equated *perestroika* with “revolution” and framed the concept within “democratization” intended to energize the masses and renew the elites.⁸⁷ Exhorting of media to take up *glasnost* or “openness” Gorbachev’s reform was publicized among the Soviet population permitting more criticism of the drawbacks of the Soviet system, exposing bureaucratic inertia and, thus, broadening the range of the permissible.⁸⁸ In other words, these changes were numerous and considerably influenced the practices of grass-roots self-organization in late Soviet society.

During this period the Komsomol, the party organization responsible for organizing youth activities, political as well as cultural, social, musical, and sporting events, was revealed as unloved by the population it was serving.⁸⁹ The youth perceived the Komsomol as a highly ideologized state body unresponsive to ideas from below that did not provide the means to tackle problems affecting youth. Subsequently, it resulted in a loss of trust and authority of the Komsomol among young people.⁹⁰ That is why, even before the beginning of Gorbachev’s reforms, young people might maintained a passive membership or withdraw from the Komsomol, while joining rapidly a

⁸⁵ Galina Rakitskaia and Boris Rakitskii, “Reflections on Perestroika as a Social Revolution,” *Soviet Review* 31, no. 1 (1989): 21.

⁸⁶ Jim Butterfield, and Judith B. Sedaitis, “The Emergence of Social Movements in the Soviet Union,” in *Perestroika From Below: Social Movements in The Soviet Union*, eds. Jim Butterfield, and Judith B. Sedaitis (Boulder, Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 4.

⁸⁷ Artemy Magun, *Negative Revolution: Modern Political Subject and Its Fate After the Cold War* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 16. For the discussion on “revolutionary” nature of the reforms see, John Gooding, “Perestroika as Revolution from Within: An Interpretation,” *The Russian Review* 51 (1992): 36-57; Archie Brown, “Perestroika as Revolution from Above,” in *Russian Politics from Lenin to Putin*, ed. Stephen Fortescue (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 127-151.

⁸⁸ Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World. Perestroika in Perspective*, 92.

⁸⁹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, 81. For detailed account on the perception of the Komsomol meetings during the late Soviet period see the chapter “Ideology Inside Out: Ethics and Poetics,” 77-125.

⁹⁰ Jim Riordan, “Soviet Youth: Pioneers of Change,” *Soviet Studies* 40, no. 4 (1998): 559.

growing number of non-formal youth groups that represented their interests better.⁹¹ To counterbalance the popularity of unofficial communities, reclaim youth attention and thereby recover the reputation before the youth, the Komsomol, first of all, approved “Regulations on Amateur Association and Club of Interests” in May 13, 1986, which, along with the decision taken by the leadership of the USSR in December 1986 to abandon the criminal prosecution of dissent,⁹² legalized the existence of the non-Komsomol clubs and provided them with official sponsorship and support. Secondly, it established youth recreation departments whose major task was to supervise the alternative informal organizations.⁹³ In Leningrad, this function was performed by the Center for Creative Initiative (*Leningradskii tsentr tvorcheskoi initsiativy*, hereinafter LZTI) established at the end of 1986 as a counter-platform to Klub-81.⁹⁴ To attract youth attention, in April 1986 the Center created a column under the title “Call Us, We Will Help You!” on the pages of the youth newspaper *Smena*,⁹⁵ addressing criticism towards the existing forms of leisure activities and suggesting ways to renovate and establish new forms of leisure clubs. These modifications were enshrined in the 20th Congress of the Komsomol on April 16, 1987 that declared youth to be “the creative force for revolutionary renewal” and “active and conscious participants of perestroika”.⁹⁶ In this sense, perestroika could be credited for encouraging an atmosphere in which “non-party” youth activity was less severely restricted. On the other hand, however, it turned out that *neformaly* played a dual role being at the same time on the two sides of the barricades pursuing their own agenda.

⁹¹ Nicolai Petro, “Perestroika from Below: Voluntary Sociopolitical Associations in the RSFSR,” in *Perestroika at the Crossroads*, eds. Alfred Rieber and Alvin Rubinstein (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 105.

⁹² Eduard Shneiderman, “Klub-81 i KGB,” 22.

⁹³ Arvi Duka, Nikolay Kornev, Viktor Voronkov, and Elena Zdravomyslova, “The Protest Cycle of Perestroika: The Case of Leningrad,” 85. See also, Jim Riordan, “Komsomol,” in *Soviet Youth Culture*, ed. Jim Riordan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 27.

⁹⁴ Boris Ivanov, *Istoriia Kluba-81*, 310.

⁹⁵ Sergei Pilatov, “Zvonite, pomozhem!” [Call, We Will Help You!], *Smena*, no. 85, April 11, 1986.

⁹⁶ “Molodezh’ – tvorcheskaia sila revoliutsionnogo obnovleniia. Vystuplenie M. S. Gorbacheva na XX s’ezde VLKSM [Youth is the Creative Force for Revolutionary Renewal. Statement by the Mikhail Gorbachev on the 20th Congress of the Komsomol],” *Pravda*, April 17, 1987, 1-2.

2.6. Concluding Remarks

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the cultural and political climate of late Soviet Leningrad provided an impetus for crystallization of alternative spheres, which during the relaxation of Khrushchev's Thaw originated at the universities, the Houses of Culture or public libraries in LITO's and developed a sense of creativity and free-thinking. Following the folding of the Thaw, a rigid line of Brezhnev's politics brought the tightening of opportunities for "dropping-out" from the Soviet order and eradicated the potential for counter-political reaction. For that reason, a language of culture, literature, and art was chosen as a safer and almost imperceptible realm of non-conformity, the place for which was carved out by "undesirably" creative Leningraders in café "Saigon". As a hub site and forum for communication in *vnye*, "Saigon" provided an opportunity for joining people of common interests in *tusovka* and, thus, shaped the movement of "the second culture".

At the same time, despite the stance of living *vnye*, unofficial writers and artists strived for the legitimization of "non-socialist" standards of art within the Writers' Union. This endeavor was crowned with success by 1981 when the quasi-official Klub-81 was established and operated fruitfully despite the KGB's attempt to take it under control. By the beginning of perestroika, the activism of the Klub-81 prepared a solid ground for socialization of emerging neformaly and provided them with space of interaction and cultural leisure. While the Komsomol lacked a clear understanding of how to deal with neformaly, the popularity of the Klub-81 grew considerably. Thus, "the spillover effects" of the gradual widening of permissible boundaries for legitimate civic activism were reflected in their growing effectiveness, particularly when youth social groups attempted to define their agendas, which might or might not correspond to party-defined goals.

Chapter 3. Historic Preservation and Civic Initiative in Leningrad

As I have shown in the previous chapter, facing the excessive power of Leningrad authorities during the late Soviet period, the neformaly replaced the practices of political dissent with cultural activism leading to the institutionalization of the unofficial culture movement within the Klub-81. As a creative union, the Klub-81 not only initiated the discussions of literature, religion and philosophy, but also worked on local history that coincided with the revival of interest in history of Saint Petersburg and Leningrad shown by the official cultural establishment. While the official institutions of culture sought to elaborate forms and practices of heritage preservation in Leningrad as early as 1960s, a decade later the publicists and historians of unofficial culture reflected on the Soviet architecture, wrote about local history and worked on the samizdat encyclopedia devoted to the shrines and orthodox churches of Saint Petersburg.⁹⁷ The Klub-81's interest in regional history and historic preservation was taken up by neformaly, who during perestroika were encouraged by official rhetoric to pursue "revolutionary renewal of the society". This chapter therefore seeks to explore the evolution of heritage preservationism in Leningrad from the early Soviet discourse of *kraevedenie* to the civic grass-roots initiative of the perestroika era. By tracing (dis)continuities between preservationism pursued in different periods of late Soviet Leningrad, I will demonstrate how neformaly preserved the built environment of Leningrad during perestroika and illustrate the forms of public actions which they applied.

3.1. Historic Preservation as Civic Participation

Historic buildings as a representation of the past or embodiment of historical or collective memory⁹⁸ play a significant role in the construction of national identity.⁹⁹ The state or local actors as representatives of the nation (selectively) create or preserve historic buildings, promoting the significance of some and diminishing others. That is why, as a part of state-building strategy,

⁹⁷ Viacheslav Dolinin, and Dmitrii Severiukhin, "Preodolen'e nemoty", 40.

⁹⁸ For the notion of a monument as a means of construction collective memory see, Jan Assman, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹⁹ Marc Thatcher, "Introduction. The State and Historic Buildings: Preserving 'The National Past'," *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 1 (2018): 22.

preservation of built heritage intends not only to elaborate legal resolutions on conservation of historical buildings and monuments but also sees an important political function in shaping citizens' understanding of national identity.¹⁰⁰

In the Soviet Union, the mobilization of preservation movements was heavily dependent on the ideological context which facilitated or severely suppressed endeavors to protect historic sites. During the early Soviet period, the Bolshevik administration was hostile to “bourgeoise” and religious sites of Tsarism and dictated radical transformation of the semi-privatized imperial system of historic preservation toward nationalization, appropriation, and, paradoxically, studying the imperial “tangible” legacy.¹⁰¹ Seem as an expression of political and national power of the Russian Empire, the historic buildings of the pre-revolutionary period time were often vandalized and abandoned, while heritage preservationism as a movement and activity occupied a marginal place.¹⁰² At the same time, the ongoing development of scientific associations throughout the whole territory of the RSFSR led the ground for the evolution of *kraevedenie* with a “theoretical center” in Petrograd largely due to the scholarly elaboration of theories and practices on the mechanisms of historical buildings' preservation and sightseeing institutionalization.¹⁰³ For that reason, in 1922 Petrograd hosted the First Conference of Scientific Societies for the Study of Local Regions (*krai*), which resulted in the establishment of the Society for the Study and Preservation of Old Petersburg and the Central Bureau of *Kraevedenie* under the control of the Academy of Sciences.¹⁰⁴ The institutions aimed not only to study and preserve monuments and historical buildings but also to popularize the practices of heritage and cultural preservation by holding conferences, elaborating educational programs, organizing lectures and excursions. Moreover,

¹⁰⁰ Marc Thatcher, “Introduction. The State and Historic Buildings: Preserving ‘The National Past’,” 25.

¹⁰¹ Boris Gladarev, “Istoriko-kul'turnoe nasledie Peterburga: rozhdenie obshchestvennosti iz duha goroda, 94.

¹⁰² Catriona Kelly, “The Shock of The Old: Architectural Preservation in Soviet Russia,” *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 1 (2018): 91-92.

¹⁰³ Marina Loskutova, “‘Nauka oblastnogo masshtaba’: ideia estestvennykh raionov v rossiiskoi geografii i istoki kraevedcheskogo dvizheniia 1920-kh gg.” [“Science of Regional Scale”: The Idea of Natural Areas in Russian Geography and the Origins of the Kraevedenie Movement of the 1920s.], *Ab Imperio* 12, no. 2 (2011): 87.

¹⁰⁴ For a more detailed account see, Emily Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of ‘Kraevedenie’*; Ekaterina Mel'nikova, “Tsentrebeznaia sila: kraevedenie na okrainakh Leningrada v 1920–1930-e gg.” [Centrifugal Force: Local History on the Outskirts of Leningrad in the 1920s and 1930s], *Rossiiskaia istoriia* 5 (2013): 43-58.

concentration of intellectual resources in the city not only made a significant impact on the development of *kraevedenie* as a discipline and activity in Petrograd/Leningrad but also provided the foundation for what is now called “myth of St. Petersburg”, elaborated by historian and scholar of culture Nikolay Antsiferov. He claimed that this city had a *genius loci*, a special sole, shaped by the totality of legends, tales, and literary works on the origin of Saint Petersburg.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, as the former imperial capital, in the early Soviet period, Leningrad enjoyed some freedom for scholarly study of the legacies of old Petersburg.

During the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), heritage preservation came under threat not only for financial reasons with the beginning of industrialization but also for ideological constraints and was equated to counterrevolutionary activity.¹⁰⁶ Followed by the *Shakhty* case and the academic purges of 1929-1931, *kraevedenie* was considered as a potential source of opposition to Moscow’s hegemony which the state considered particularly important for regaining the control over Leningrad after the murder of Kirov in 1934. Furthermore, the transformation of Leningrad into a “model socialist city” from 1931 resulted in the demolition of many historic buildings and churches¹⁰⁷ threatening the efforts made by the early Soviet historians. Thus, until the 1950s access to the preservation of the built heritage was closed to the wider public, while an official monuments protection body – the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Monuments (GIOP) responsible for supervising monuments – had limited space for maneuver.¹⁰⁸

Khrushchev’s Thaw rehabilitated heritage preservation as one of the most “peaceful” legitimate civilian activities outside of the CPSU. This legitimization was especially felt in Leningrad due to the formerly flourishing activism of the city protectionists in the early Soviet period.¹⁰⁹ Conceived by the RSFSR’s authorities and the Soviet leaders of culture as an expression

¹⁰⁵ Nikolay Antsiferov, *Byl’ i mif Peterburga* [True Story and The Myth of St. Petersburg] (Moscow: Kniga, 1991).

¹⁰⁶ Catriona Kelly, “The Shock of The Old: Architectural Preservation in Soviet Russia,” 93.

¹⁰⁷ Catriona Kelly, “From ‘Counter-Revolutionary Monuments’ to ‘National Heritage’: The Preservation of Leningrad Churches, 1964-1982,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 54, no. 1 (2013): 140.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Catriona Kelly, “‘Ispravlyat’ li istoriyu?’ Spory ob okhrane pamyatnikov v Leningrade v 1960-1970-kh gg.” [‘Are We to “Correct” History? Discussions on the Preservation of Monuments in 1960s and 1970s Leningrad], *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 2 (2009): 117-139.

of civic and social aspirations, a movement for heritage protections was crucially important for the course of Thaw, given the “unsatisfactory conditions of many cultural monuments in the country (historic, memorial monuments of the history of the Revolution, the Civil and Great Patriotic Wars, monuments of art and particularly monuments of architecture).”¹¹⁰ For that reason, on August 23, 1956, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published a front-page proposal by Konstantin Fedin, Ilya Ehrenburg, and other Soviet writers and historians to create the All-Union Voluntary Society for the Protection of Cultural Monuments with local branches.¹¹¹ The proposal was supported three years later by the Soviet Architects’ Union, which then asked the Bureau of the CPSU to establish the society. Only in 1965, however, when the iconoclasm of the Khrushchev years was forgotten, was the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Monuments (VOOPIiK) established.¹¹² This marked a turning point in the transformation of heritage from a discrete concern of cultural elite into a mainstream activity in which Soviet citizens could and were expected to participate.¹¹³ Indeed, despite the principle of “democratic centralism” enshrined in the Society’s constitution, VOOPIiK proved to be a quasi-autonomous voluntary organization involving non-professionals in the discussion of city planning.¹¹⁴

There is no consensus among scholars on the motivations behind the establishment of VOOPIiK. According to some historians, the foundation of the Society stemmed not only from the reaction to Khrushchev’s urban development that led to the destruction of valuable architectural sites but also from nationalistic sentiments of the party leaders. According to Nikolay Mitrokhin, preservation of the buildings and monuments of Russian history was instrumentalized by nationalistically oriented party members as “a means of strengthening Soviet patriotism.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Catriona Kelly, “‘Ispravlyat’ li istoriyu?’ Spory ob okhrane pamyatnikov v Leningrade v 1960-1970-kh gg.”

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Victoria Donovan, *Chronicles in Stone: Preservation, Patriotism, and Identity in Northwest Russia* (Ithaca: Northern Illinois University Press, 2019), 12. For the reasons of postponement see, Igor Demchenko, “Decentralized Past: Heritage Politics in Post-Stalin Central Asia,” *Future Anterior* 8, no. 1 (2011): 67.

¹¹⁴ Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularization and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918–1988* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 231.

¹¹⁵ Nikolay Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia. Dvizhenie russkikh nacionalistov v SSSR. 1953-1985 gody*, 316. See also Denis Kozlov, “The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953–91,” *Kritika*:

However, as Catriona Kelly argues, affection towards “the rescuing” of Russian culture did not necessarily mean an expression of nationalism. As she points out, the popularity of “retrospectivism” during the 1960s among intelligentsia was explained by resentment of the present, which through reference to the past was exposed to metaphorical criticism.¹¹⁶

The establishment of Leningrad VOOPliK’s branch in 1966 was largely influenced by scholar Dmitry Likhachev and his criticism of the project on Nevsky Prospect’s reconstruction. Lobbying in favour of the “urgent task to preserve the historical and national look of our cities”, he stood against the construction of concrete high-rises in Leningrad, warning that this trend “would create a tasteless pastiche between the new and the old and would make Nevsky similar to hundreds and thousands of other streets in Europe and America.”¹¹⁷ Likhachev’s claims triggered a burst of resentment among Leningrad’s intellectuals, who gathered at the meeting of the Leningrad architectural planning commission and urged them to halt the Nevsky’s reconstruction. Therefore, Leningrad’s spirit of withstanding what they considered cultural vandalism gained ground in the foundation of VOOPliK, while Likhachev himself joined the board of the organization. For the next three decades, Likhachev became the leading figure in the heritage movement, not just in Leningrad, but all over the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸

Although VOOPliK’s members worked independently from GIOP pursuing popularly-oriented activism, the Society regularly put forward ideas for restructuring architectural complexes and individual buildings, some of which were highly appreciated by GIOP and Lensovet.¹¹⁹ Indeed, officially, VOOPliK, like its pre-war predecessors, was responsible not only for

Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 2, no. 3 (2001): 593; Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 69-70, 139-140.

¹¹⁶ Catriona Kelly, “‘Ispravlyat’ li istoriyu?’ Spory ob okhrane pamyatnikov v Leningrade v 1960-1970-kh gg,” 123; Victoria Donovan, “‘Idia nazad, shagaem vpered’: kraevedcheskie muzei i sozdanie mestnoi pamiati v severozapadnom regione, 1956–1981,” [‘While Going Backward, We Are Stepping Forward’: Local History Museums and The Creation of Local Memory in The Northwestern Region, 1956-1981], *Antropologicheskii forum* 16 (2012): 383.

¹¹⁷ Vladislav Zubok, *The Idea of Russia. The Life and Work of Dmitry Likhachev* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017), 97.

¹¹⁸ Catriona Kelly, *Remembering St. Petersburg. The Companion Volume to St. Petersburg: Shadows of the Past*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 146.

¹¹⁹ Catriona Kelly, “‘Scientific Reconstruction’ or ‘New Oldbuild’? The Dilemmas of Restoration in Post-Soviet St. Petersburg,” *Revue des études slaves* 86, no. 1 (2015): 11.

propagating the protection of monuments via the means of excursions, exhibitions, and lectures but also for the preservation of the city fabric, which, in fact, was approached by the Society quite selectively. According to Catriona Kelly, the monuments of the communist past enjoyed marginal attention of the VOOPliK's preservationists in contrast to the buildings of pre-revolutionary period which were favored by the volunteers. Largely, it was facilitated by the fearless and at times contemptuous relationship of VOOPliK's board with the city bureaucracy and party officials.¹²⁰ For that reason, the working methods of heritage movement in Leningrad could be considered as a revolt against the local officials who had dominated urban development for 50 years. As a camouflaged form of protest, "commitment to the preservation, and more broadly the commemoration of historic Saint Petersburg started to be the vehicle for broadly-based disaffection with Soviet values",¹²¹ though, of course, it is important not to attribute "subversiveness" to each individual among the hundreds of the movement's members.

Yet, the canon of selective preservation was also pursued by GIOP. In January 1966, the State Inspectorate evolved its policy, giving priority to the aesthetics of the building, and only then to its usefulness, typicality, and progressivity.¹²² That, in turn, laid the foundation for the shift from a policy navigated by individual "monuments" to a broader concept of "zones" or entire areas requiring protection.¹²³ Zoning was based on the principle of architectural "ensembles" – a coordinated set of architectural features or complex of buildings which were united into one particular area falling under protection. Following the regulations introduced by the RSFSR, Lensovet proposed the principle of a "preservation zones" (*okhrannye zony*) in 1969,¹²⁴ which were vaguely defined around embankments of the Neva, Fontanka, and Moika Rivers in the central part of the city. They also regulated the order of preservation and the use of the monuments on the respective territories imposing strict limitations on new constructions and reconstruction of the

¹²⁰ Catriona Kelly, *Remembering St. Petersburg*, 147-148.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 152.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ "1973 Law of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: On the Protection and Use of Historic and Cultural Monuments," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 5, no. 1 (2008): 78.

buildings within the territory of the established zones.¹²⁵ Thus, the introduction of zones demonstrated the transformation of the urban planning practices, which from that period were based on the principle of the spatial unity of monuments and buildings.

Professional architects of GIOP and volunteers of VOOPiK were not the only Leningraders concerned about the issues of historic preservation and archeology. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Leningrad Pioneers' Palace established an archeological *kruzhok* (circle) as a form of extracurricular leisure and offered schoolchildren an opportunity for adventures and traveling to the sites of archeological excavations. In fact, the circle evolved into a close-knit community, a tight milieu, not constrained exclusively by the archeological expeditions to different parts of the Soviet Union. Sitting around bonfires during the expeditions, members of the circle recited the poetry of the Silver Age, which for a long time had been unpublished in the Soviet Union for ideological reasons, and sang songs of bards, whose freedom-glorying songs of the 1960s were considered problematic by the state.¹²⁶ For that reason, as sociologists Boris Gladarev notes, some of the circle's members had the impression that the "real culture" existed before 1917, being then substituted with "*sovetchina*"¹²⁷ – a derogatory term used to describe the Soviet-era type of living and thinking. Therefore, shaped by the spirit of independence similarly to the frequenters of "Saigon", the circle's members had a feeling that they were different from "ordinary" Soviet existence or what Yurchak called "living in a deterritorialized world". The drastic dissonance between the outside world and relationships within the circle became a magnet for its members and forced them to spend time together for some creative and useful activity.

By the middle of the 1980s, VOOPiK has lost its former authority as a lobbying group and was criticized by the Party Central Committee for its "administrative-bureaucratic inertia... with

¹²⁵ "The Decision Issued on February 12, 1969, No. 120 by the Executive Committee of the Lensovet 'On Protected Zones of Cultural, Architectural and Historical Monuments'," accessed June 5, 2020, <https://www.gov.spb.ru/>.

¹²⁶ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 137.

¹²⁷ Boris Gladarev, "Formirovanie i funkcionirovanie *milieu* (na primere arheologicheskogo kruzhka LDP-DTJu 1970—2000 gg.) [Formation and Functioning of *milieu* on the Example of Archeological Club of the Leningrad Pioneers' Palace, 1970-2000]," in *K 30- letiiu arheologicheskogo kruzhka DTJu*, eds. Alexander Vinogradov, and Andzhei Ikonnikov-Galickii (Saint Petersburg: AOS, 2001), 240-276.

no real rights.”¹²⁸ The momentum was taken over by the Soviet Cultural Fund (*Sovetskii Fond Kultury*, hereinafter SCF), established in November 1986 at the initiative of Dmitry Likhachev. The SCF was a pioneering non-governmental organization with branches in major centers throughout the USSR and representatives in local and remote areas. Contrary to VOOPliK, SCF’s scope of activities was much broader: apart from protecting of architectural monuments, it strived to encourage amateur cultural activities, especially those preserving the village and urban heritage.¹²⁹ This endeavor was backed and sponsored by almost all public and cultural institutions of the Soviet Union, including “creative” Unions (of Writers, Artists, Journalists, and others), the largest museums of Moscow and Leningrad, the agencies of Soviet cultural diplomacy, VOOPliK, and even the Komsomol.¹³⁰ As a site for investment in cultural matters of the flagging Soviet state, SCF attracted more than 13 million rubles in donations and 2.5 million dollars in in-kind gifts to raise the awareness of “the homeland and the world’s culture, the aesthetical, patriotic, and internationalist education of the Soviet people, especially the youth.”¹³¹ Coinciding with an explosive increase of independent groups, clubs, and associations of neformaly, Likhachev’s agenda echoed the rising self-organization and assertion among the youth.

3.2. Youth on Guard of Pre-Revolutionary Past: Delvig’s House

By the beginning of perestroika, heritage advocacy, like environmental protection, turned into a major grass-roots movement of the Soviet Union. Taking advantage of the VOOPliK’s passivity, movements for heritage preservation used opportunities of glasnost to voice publicly their concern for the deterioration of monuments and historical buildings. In Leningrad, whose residents had expressed deep appreciation of the city via the preservation activism in the previous

¹²⁸ Albert Schmidt, “Soviet Legislation for Protection of Architectural Monuments: Background,” in *Impact of Perestroika on Soviet Law*, ed. by Albert Schmidt (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1990), 340. The criticism of VOOPliK was also expressed in the newspaper article by Anatoly Kirpichnikov, “Kak zashchitit’ nasledie,” [How to Preserve the Heritage], *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, November 20, 1986.

¹²⁹ Albert Schmidt, “Soviet Legislation for Protection of Architectural Monuments: Background,” 346.

¹³⁰ Vladislav Zubok, *The Idea of Russia. The Life and Work of Dmitry Likhachev*, 130.

¹³¹ *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 19 November 1986, 1. Cited from Vladislav Zubok, *The Idea of Russia. The Life and Work of Dmitry Likhachev*, 130. See also, Catriona Kelly, *Remembering St. Petersburg*, 51; Ludmila Alexeyeva, *Nyeformaly: Civil Society in the USSR*, 83; Viktoria Donovan, *Chronicles in Stone: Preservation, Patriotism, and Identity in Northwest Russia*, 112.

decades, grass-roots groups for restoration of the city's heritage enjoyed a special position in the development of perestroika. Indeed, special attitude toward the city was caught by young Leningraders, who joined together in the beginning of 1985 to spend hours with each other walking through the city, discovering aesthetic details, and unraveling hidden stories associated with the buildings.¹³² This creative and vivid interaction, very distinct from ideologized formalities of the Komsomol, "contributed to the shaping of their alternative existence and subjectivities."¹³³ At the end of March in 1985, a group of nine enthusiasts obtained permission to conduct restoration works in the Church of St. Catherine on the Nevsky Prospect, one of the oldest buildings of the Catholic church in the city. Afterward, these volunteer clean-up programs were held weekly in other city buildings such as the Hermitage, the Hermitage Theatre, Peter and Paul Fortress, the Church of the Savior on Blood, as well as architectural monuments in Leningrad suburbs like Pushkin and Pavlovsk.

Volunteer work of the group could hardly be considered as "restoration" in its pure sense: they cleared the building of construction debris and carried out heavy objects. But in the evening after the completion of daily activities, the youth gathered together in Klub-81 to sing guitar music, recite poems and prose, discuss articles on pressing issues and themes, or just enjoy lively conversations, that in many ways resembled the archeological circle of the Leningrad Pioneers' Palace. According to Vladimir Veretennikov, the group's head, "some people came to us not so much for the monuments, but for the sake of warmth of human communication and relations, which many people are now missing so much."¹³⁴ The influence of this particular environment thereby shaped the future group called *Mir* which besides restoration works sought to engage in educational and cultural activities with schoolchildren and establish a network with other youth

¹³² Alexei Yurchak, "Aesthetic Politics in Saint Petersburg: Skyline at the Heart of Political Opposition," National Council for Eurasian and East European Research Working Paper, April 11, 2011, https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2011_824-15_Yurchak.pdf.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen, F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 4 (1987).

amateur associations.¹³⁵ As a result, by 1987, the group was registered as a public commission for the restoration of historical and architectural monuments at the Leningrad branch of VOOPliK.

Apart from *Mir*, which quickly managed to gain an institutionalized position within VOOPliK, perestroika conferred upon some of the youth groups a much more powerful impetus for activism. At the end of February 1986, after the beginning of the 27th Party Congress, young historian Alexei Kovalev, and his friend Sergei Vasiliev, a student of the history faculty of the Leningrad State University, debated creating of a social movement that was legal, but independent from the CPSU social movement, which could provide a forum for raising the problems affecting every person in his home, district, and city.¹³⁶ In Kovalev's understanding, an association whose goal was to protect the public interest was less exposed to the risk of closure and arrest, whereas the creation of a non-political organization could change and "move the political situation... from the dead zone, and give space for people to express themselves."¹³⁷ In hindsight, they aimed to redesign the urban system of historical buildings preservation which by the beginning of perestroika found itself in a state of crisis due to VOOPliK's passivity.

Already in September 1986, Kovalev's commitment toward urban enhancement had been translated into efforts to halt the upcoming demolition of the two-story building on Zagorodny Prospekt 1, to make way for the construction of subway vestibule on Vladimirskaia Square undertaken by *Metrostroii*. According to Leningrad guidebooks, the building on Zagorodny Prospekt that was built in 1811-1813 was attributed to the memorable places of Alexander Pushkin, and his closest circle of friends including Anton Delvig, with whom he got acquainted in the Imperial Lyceum in Tsarskoye Selo. Although Delvig inhabited the building slightly more than one year from the end of 1829 until January 1831, the site was considered by the guidebooks as a place of historical importance where Delvig together with his friends published *Literaturnaia*

¹³⁵ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen, F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 4 (1987).

¹³⁶ Alexei Kovalev, "Istinnaiia istoriia Gruppy spaseniia [True History of Gruppy Spaseniia]," *Pchela* 10 (1997): 10.

¹³⁷ *Memuary i interv'iu. Alexei Anatol'evich Kovalev [Memoirs and Interviews. Alexei Kovalev]*, in *Obshchestvennaia zhizn' Leningrada v gody perestroiki. 1985 – 1991: sbornik materialov*, 531.

Gazeta and the almanac *Severnye Tsvety* as well as gathered prominent figures of literature and art.¹³⁸ Apparently, at that point for Kovalev and Vasiliev, the building did not possess any historical connotations, though from 1983 its facade was decorated by the commemorative plaque. According to Vasiliev,

I remember that it was a surprise for us that Delvig's House was there. And this was such a small two-storey nice building, basement and two floors, located on the corner of Shcherbakov Alley of Vladimirskaia Square. <...> And the building next door was also a pity, but Delvig's House was even more pitiful, not because it was Delvig's House, but because, well, just like that... it was a prominent place. There were many places in the city. Despite the pitiful state of Delvig's House, we felt then that we need to do something to protect what we love.¹³⁹

Even journalist Natalya Kurapzeva, from whom Vasiliev sought the assistance in publishing the articles on the issue in local newspaper *Smena*, in her oral history interview confessed:

When Sergei called me, I first asked: "Sergei, where is Delvig's House?" He said, "You know, it's a shame, but I didn't know either (*laughs*). That means that the very phrase "Delvig's House" arose, but where was this Delvig's House... we did not even know it initially."¹⁴⁰

Therefore, Delvig's name received importance in endeavors to *rescue* the building from demolition, but it was not the dominant motivation for the action. As a part of the architectural ensemble of Vladimirskaia Square, the building had never been rebuilt; it survived the centuries in its pristine appearance and, according to the activists, was granted with the status of a revealed (*vyiavlennyi*) historical and cultural monument,¹⁴¹ though there is not enough evidence to support the status. Following the USSR's law "On the Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Monuments", the destruction of the historical monument required permission from the Ministry of Culture of the USSR which in the case of the Delvig's House was not obtained and, thus, made the pretensions of *Metrostoi* on the building illegal. Thus, the activists not only intended to

¹³⁸ *Sankt-Peterburg. Petrograd. Leningrad: Entsiklopedicheskii spravochnik* [Saint-Petersburg, Petrograd, Leningrad: Encyclopaedic Dictionary], eds. Larisa Belova, Gennady Buldakov, Aleksandr Degtiarev (Moscow: Nauchnoe izdatel'stvo Bol'shaia Rossiiskaia Entsiklopediia, 1992), 182; Valentina Vitiazeva and Boris Kirikov, *Putevoditel' "Leningrad"* [Guidebook 'Leningrad'] (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1986), 179.

¹³⁹ Speech by Sergei Vasiliev in the Anna Akhmatova Museum within the framework of the project "From Old St. Petersburg to the Living City." 25.12.2015.

¹⁴⁰ Natalya Kurapzeva oral history interview conducted by Margarita Pavlova in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, December 10, 2016.

¹⁴¹ "Memuary i interv'iu. Aleksei Anatol'evich Kovalev," in *Obshchestvennaia zhizn' Leningrada v gody perestroiki. 1985 – 1991: sbornik materialov*, 531.

preserve the architectural aesthetics of the city they admired and lived in but also strived to uphold “compliance to the law”.¹⁴²

When Kovalev approached organizations responsible for the planned deconstruction, he presented himself on the behalf of *Gruppa Spaseniia Pamiatnikov Arkhitektury*, a new public organization for the protection of monuments aimed to save cultural and historical sites. This was facilitated by the registration of the GR under the aegis of the Center for Creative Initiative (LZTI) at the Ilyich House of Culture. Registration implied incorporation of the group under the supervision of LZTI (which was established on behalf of the Komsomol), obliging the GR to operate as its subdivision and to adopt the foundational program, similar to those which were required from Klub-81. However, affiliation with the Komsomol-related organization did not prevent the GR from operating independently: the activists took control over the building and asked for expert conclusion of its physical condition, initiated publication of several critical articles on the issue of preservation in the city, and approached the official institutions responsible for heritage oversight. In other words, the GR’s unrestricted activism on the Delvig’s House demonstrated the Komsomol’s inability to cope with rising self-organization of the youth, which was associated with its gradual alienation from the state control.

Meanwhile, Natalia Kurapzeva published several critical articles on state cultural politics in *Smena* which raised awareness of the issue.¹⁴³ In one of them, she questioned the legitimacy of the Delvig’s House demolition and underlined passivity of the state bodies in comparison with the GR’s active position. Quoting Vasiliev, she wrote: “We do not want formalists and bureaucrats to make any decisions that may shape the destiny of *our city*. We do not want to sacrifice Delvig,

¹⁴² Research Information Center “Fond Iofe”. Archive of Non-Traditional Periodicals and Documents of Social Movements. F. A.9.1.2., d. 2.

¹⁴³ Natalya Kurapzeva, “Ostanovka: ‘Dom Del’viga!’” [The Next Stop: ‘Delvig’s House!’], *Smena*, no. 230, October 4, 1986; her, “Solnce liceiskogo bratstva” [The Sun of Lyceum Brotherhood], *Smena*, no. 243, October 21, 1986; “Gruppa ‘Spasenie’ deistvuet” [The Group Spasenie in Motion], *Smena*, no. 279, December 4, 1986; “Kogda rubiat korni, derevo ne rastet... Otkrytoe pis’mo rabochim 3-go tunnel’nogo otriada ‘Lenmetrostroy’” [When the Roots are Cut, the Tree Does Not Grow... Open Letter to the Workers of the 3rd Tunnel Detachment ‘Lenmetrostroy’], *Smena*, no. 283, December 9, 1986.

Dostoevsky, Saltykov-Shchedrin, or any other part of the history for the metro station.”¹⁴⁴ The activists’ rhetoric demonstrated not so much the prioritization of the pre-revolutionary figures of culture over the functional development of the city, though it obviously stood in line with VOOPliK’s selectiveness of historic preservation pursued in previous decades. Rather, it implied an articulation of the “right to the city”, meaning “an active right to make the city more in accord with... hearts’ desire.”¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the GR’s objection to the possible loss of the historically important building could be explained as an attempt to reclaim the power balance in the city and affirm the right to influence on and participate in the regulation of the city’s visual fabric reflecting the grass-roots “democratization” within perestroika. Therefore, the language of Russian nineteenth-century culture which framed Leningraders’ “right to the city” implied a camouflaged dissent with the city leaders who by their actions threatened the historical integrity of the built environment.

A few days before the scheduled action, the GR approached an amateur Interior Theater which suggested organizing a public theatrical performance on October 19 to commemorate the anniversary of the Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum’s opening in 1811. Artistic director Nikolay Belyak elaborated the scenario of the public action, which seemed to him “a primary artistic event”¹⁴⁶: he was convinced that “the monuments should not be protected by petitions and protests, but by an appeal to the cultural memory of the citizens.”¹⁴⁷ Aligned with the Komsomol and city authorities, albeit not without difficulties, the GR together with Interior Theater managed to hold a complex event combining elements of performance, carnival, and demonstration. The action started on the signal from the bell tower of Vladimirskiy Cathedral located just right in front of the building. It

¹⁴⁴ Natalya Kurapzeva, “Ostanovka: ‘Dom Del’viga!’” [The Next Stop: ‘Delvig’s House!’], *Smena*, no. 243, October 4, 1986.

¹⁴⁵ David Harvey, “The Right to The City,” in *Divided Cities: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 2003*, eds. Richard Scholar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 101. See also Nathaniel Trumbull, “Urban Pulse – Claiming ‘The Right to the City’: Architectural Preservation in St. Petersburg as Cultural and Political Catalyst,” *Urban Geography* 33, no. 7 (2012): 1000-1007.

¹⁴⁶ “Memuary i interv’iu. Nikolay Vladimirovich Belyak [Memoirs and Interviews. Nikolay Belyak],” in *Obshhestvennaia zhizn’ Leningrada v gody perestroiki. 1985 – 1991: sbornik materialov*, 421-425.

¹⁴⁷ Sergei Vasiliev, “Gruppa spaseniia. Kak eto nachinalos’,” in *Fontanka: kul’turno-istoricheskii al’manakh* (Saint Petersburg: TsGPB im. V. V. Maiakovskogo, 2016), 7.

was followed by an announcement from the speakers which were inserted in the empty building and declared: “Delvig’s House is speaking! Delvig’s House is speaking!”.¹⁴⁸ Standing on the building’s balcony, prominent scholars, professors, tour guides, and activists of Leningrad declared their concerns about the fate of the city’s historic sites and urban architecture which was followed by readings of Pushkin’s poetry and singing of songs. At the same time, the GR’s activists collected signatures on a petition against the demolition of the building. Finally, trumpeters of Interior Theater who climbed on the roofs of Delvig’s House played Reinhold Glière’s “Hymn to the Great City”.¹⁴⁹

As Belyak recalled, “it was the first informal street rally in the country... which was held not by any official organization on behalf and under the control of the authorities, but by the freely gathered *public*.”¹⁵⁰ Indeed, press coverage of the event including open letters to the newspapers and telegrams to the Central Committee stimulated a powerful reaction against the demolition of the building, resulting in a suspension of *Metrostoi*’s plans. As later Kovalev explained, “...we sought to enlighten people, to give them a clear understanding of what for and how to fight, to make the action as an artistic performance in order to avoid dry slogans.... the very comparison of the ongoing vandalism with the cultural context of the city prompted people to act.”¹⁵¹ At the same time, the fact that the demonstration that did not result in the participants’ punishment, arrests, dismissals, or expulsion from their place of work or study contributed significantly to the revival of urban public life: previously unknown underground associations started to open up for publicity, which gave impetus for new clubs to emerge. As Belyak noted, “this rally has become an important event for *our city*, a symbol of the struggle for civil freedom and at the same time for the preservation of cultural and historical values.”¹⁵² Therefore, after the action on the

¹⁴⁸ Boris Gladarev, “Istoriko-kul’turnoe nasledie Peterburga: rozhdenie obshchestvennosti iz duha goroda, 110.

¹⁴⁹ “Memuary i interv’iu. Nikolay Vladimirovich Belyak,” 422.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 422.

¹⁵¹ “Gorod: ‘Epokha’ Gruppy Spaseniia [The City: ‘The Epoch’ of Group for Rescue], in *Arkheologiia i ne tol’ko...: k tridsatiletiiu Sibirskoi arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii Leningradskogo Dvortsia pionerov* (Saint Petersburg: AOS, 2002),” 315.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Vladimirskaya Square, the problems of city-preservation in Leningrad received a strong resonance in the media: *Smena* and another city newspapers began publishing numerous articles with letters of citizens, reports of the action and proclamations to preserve the memory about all the figures of science, culture, art.¹⁵³

3.3. Not by Pushkin Alone: Dostoevsky and Churches

Not far from Delvig's House at the crossroad of Vladimirskiy Prospekt 11 and Graftsky Alleyway 10,¹⁵⁴ there was another three-story dilapidated building, scheduled for the renovation. The plaque on its facade demonstrated that the building was constructed in 1839 and was known as a place where Fyodor Dostoevsky from 1842 until 1845 wrote his first published novel *Poor Folk*. The GR's activists found out that the planned renovation of the building was justified by the permission obtained from the Ministry of Culture earlier;¹⁵⁵ however, due to the sluggishness of Leningorispolkom and the city organizations responsible for the urban development, the physical condition of the building quickly deteriorated.¹⁵⁶ In order to prevent the building from further collapsing, the GR attempted to draw the public and authorities' attention by arranging an excursion on December 14 following "Dostoevsky's places", associated with the buildings where he spent his life. Guided by Sergei Belov, a literary critic specializing in Dostoevsky studies, the excursion ended up with collecting signatures to petition to Gorbachev and was followed up by the unsanctioned exhibition "Dostoevsky and Petersburg" held the following week on December 21, 1986, by the unofficial artists from the "Association of Experimental Fine Arts" (*Tovarishchestvo eksperimental'nogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva*, hereinafter TEII) and the *Mitki* movement.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the building on Vladimirskiy Prospekt 11 was preserved from demolition, while the local activity to conserve a particular site evolved into the years-long

¹⁵³ Natalya Kurapzeva, "Solnce liceiskogo bratstva" [The Sun of the Lyceum Brotherhood], *Smena*, no. 243, October 21, 1986

¹⁵⁴ *Sankt-Peterburg. Petrograd. Leningrad: Entsiklopedicheskii spravochnik*, 116.

¹⁵⁵ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 5/1.01 *Obvodnyi Canal* no. 12 (1987).

¹⁵⁶ "Isполkom Lensoвета reshil: Vnimanie – pamiatnikam istorii i kul'tury," [Executive Committee of Lensovet Has Decided: The Spotlight is On the Monuments of Culture], *Leningradskaia pravda*, September 23, 1987.

¹⁵⁷ "Gorod: 'Epokha' Gruppy Spaseniia," 315. For more details on unofficial art of Leningrad and Mitki see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 238-246.

campaign aimed to maintain around 10 memorial sites associated with Dostoevsky's life and work in Leningrad. Accompanied by additional expert conclusion of the buildings, collective letters and appeals to the state bodies¹⁵⁸ and with the assistance of historians, restorers, engineers, and writers, the campaign demanded not only to take urgent measures to preserve memorial buildings from demolition caused by local authorities' negligence, but also to create a "Dostoevsky zone" in the old part of Leningrad where Dostoevsky lived into a single historic site.¹⁵⁹

Since 1987, the work of the GR had become systematic affecting the growing involvement in the problems of preservationism in Leningrad. According to the project plan of 1987, the major activities had been divided into several directions, based on a balance between urgency and the feasibility of addressing the issues.¹⁶⁰ The detailed plan, which included the huge number of sites scheduled for maintenance, demonstrated that the impetus for the majority of these activities was based on the authorities' failure either to museificate memorial sites or to improve the devastating condition of historic buildings in Leningrad. Therefore, an endeavor to take responsibility for historic preservation in the city became the primary motivation for the GR.

In the winter of 1987, the activists, in attempts to gain cooperation with the authorities, approached scholars and writers to seek their assistance and the support for raising awareness around preservation in Leningrad. Following the excursion of the literary critic Sergei Belov to "Dostoevsky's places," the activists approached the historian Sergei Lebedev, who from 1985 worked on creation of memorial zone on Dostoevsky.¹⁶¹ Based on Belov's project, the GR sent a proposal to the first secretary of the Leningradspolkom, demanding installation of plaques on the memorial buildings.¹⁶² Furthermore, at the end of January, the GR addressed Dmitry Likhachev, who by then already headed the Soviet Cultural Fund and offered to hold a seminar "Ecology of

¹⁵⁸ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 4 (1987); Research Information Center "Fond Iofe". Fond A.9.1.2.

¹⁵⁹ Sergei Nenashev, *To Find Oneself. Leningrad "Informals": Who Are They?*, 29.

¹⁶⁰ Research Information Center "Fond Iofe". F. A.9.1.2. For more on memorialization of Saint Petersburg see, Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva [The Central State Archive of Literature and Arts in St. Petersburg, (hereinafter TsGALI)], F. 105, op. 6, d. 173, 40.

¹⁶¹ TsGALI, F. 105, op. 6, d. 173, 5-11.

¹⁶² TsGALI, F. 105, op. 6, d. 173, 1.

Culture” to discuss the practicalities of the movement which was gaining momentum in Leningrad.¹⁶³ The conference was held in November 1987, while the letter of invitation to the conference paved the way for years-long cooperation of young preservationists with Likhachev. As a result of social networking, the activists obtained the support of scholars and intellectuals that, according to their view, could secure a better stance in negotiations with the authorities.

From the middle of February 1987, the GR was actively involved in the preservation of the crumbling small orthodox church built at the end of the eighteenth century by architect Nikolay Lvov in the city’s suburb town Murino.¹⁶⁴ According to the GR’s research, the reconstruction of the building had been postponed by the town’s executive committee for several decades, while the physical condition of the church rapidly deteriorated. Only in 1985, after numerous expert consultations held by the independent architectural institution, restorers launched the reconstruction process, which, however, was implemented with numerous violations and affected the authenticity of the architectural design. By the beginning of winter 1987, inertia of the local executive power and GIOP made it clear that the building would not be restored. For that reason, *Mir* and the GR joint together to improve the situation: while *Mir* handled cleaning up of the site, the GR took the “administrative” responsibilities by drafting an ultimatum to the city organizations and demanded from them to fix minimally the physical condition of the church, though it did not have much effect because of long bureaucratic procedures. Qualitative changes were reached only after the festival organized by the GR on March 15, 1987, to celebrate the birthday of the church’s architect. Apart from the voluntary cleaning up of the territory around the church, the festival included not only lectures by the expert but also theatrical performance of the activists in the costumes of the eighteenth-century epoch, accompanied by the folk chorus.¹⁶⁵ As a result, in

¹⁶³ Research Information Center “Fond Iofe”. F. A.9.1.2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Mikhail Talalai, “Sud’ba odnogo shedevra,” [Fate of One Masterpiece], *Smena*, no. 65, March 19, 1987; Tatiana Likhanova, “Slovom i delom. Eshche raz o ‘Gruppe Spaseniia’,” [By Word and By Deed. One More Time on The Group for Rescue], *Smena*, April 24, 1987.

1988, the church came under the jurisdiction of an orthodox community, which eventually took responsibility for restoration.

Thus, the preservation of the buildings that were considered by the activists to be important from the historical, not aesthetic, perspective, appeared to be a highly effective form of civic activism in the dialogue with the local bureaucrats. Re-articulation of the memory of Anton Delvig, Aleksander Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and other figures of the pre-revolutionary Russian cultural canon had a high mobilization potential which, as further events would demonstrate, was underestimated by the Leningrad authorities. The buildings, which were assigned certain historical importance by the actors, embodied a cultural memory of non-communist and the Western-like Petersburg, which was threatened by an ineffective system of local urban development and the regional executive government. Therefore, it would be wrong to explain the GR's actualization of Pushkin or Dostoevsky as straightforward expressions of extremist nationalistic sentiments, as the Komsomol stated. Rather, the self-identification of the groups' members expressed in their writings suggests that they genuinely sought to make a positive contribution to the preservation of the city, following the literal meaning of perestroika. The shared feeling of the city's uniqueness provided the activists with the moral indignation when "the cultural capital" seemed to be under assault from the inadequate considerations of urban development.¹⁶⁶ Catriona Kelly provides another interpretation for computing "significance" of the building, referring to Michael Herzfeld's idea of a "writable past". In this interpretation, Leningraders were driven not so much by the interest in old walls and arches for their own sake, as by their associations of those structures with some prominent person or event. As Kelly explains, "Such buildings did not just have plaques placed upon them; they had also to be kept looking like they had when the person being honored was still alive."¹⁶⁷ This special affection for the city appeared more vividly in the subsequent demonstration, which proved to be a watershed moment for the GR.

¹⁶⁶ Oleg Kharkhordin, *Republicanism in Russia: Community Before and After Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 107.

¹⁶⁷ Catriona Kelly, *Remembering St. Petersburg*, 138.

3.4. The Group for Rescue is Gaining Momentum: Battle for the Angleterre Hotel

The turning point of the GR's activity was the March 1987 campaign for the defense of the Angleterre Hotel. Constructed in the 1840s, the building was located not far from St. Isaac's Square and was famous for the popular folk poet Sergei Esenin, who in 1925 committed suicide in the hotel. Having been informed accidentally on the eve of the planned works during a meeting in the Writers' Union, the activists did not have much time to prepare; therefore, it was decided to take immediate action to preserve the building. During the next three days from 16-18 March, the activists went into the square and organized a demonstration demanding to halt the dismantling of the Angleterre Hotel, which had been approved by the Lengorispolkom, but not permitted by the Ministry of Culture, without which any reconstruction works were illegal. Despite the cold weather, the protesters stood guard near the construction days and nights and tried to literally prevent the access of the wrecking ball to the hotel's walls not only by their bodies but also through telegrams to Mikhail Gorbachev,¹⁶⁸ and negotiations with the authorities and state bodies responsible for the heritage preservation. However, both Lengorispolkom and urban development institutions provided conflicting accounts of the events, misleading the activists by contradictory or even false information: while some asserted that the building would not be demolished pending authorization from Moscow, others argued the opposite.

At the same time, a number of protesters including tourists, students, nonformal youth, and concerned Leningraders grew increasingly up to 500; they brought posters calling on workers "not to destroy our culture" and put them on the construction fence. Near the fence, the activists installed an informational stand and placed there the GR's constitution, the report about their last preservation campaigns in the city, the text of the law "On Protection and Use of the Historical and Cultural Monuments" as well as the petition for collection of the signatures.¹⁶⁹ The totality of the information on the stand was subsequently called *Post obshchestvennoi informatsii* (Post of

¹⁶⁸ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 113.

¹⁶⁹ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 5/1.01 *Obvodnyi kanal*, no. 12 (1987).

Public Information) which was conceived to propagate and document the activities of the demonstration and the demonstrators on the square. These informational activities were not only an important step toward the first-hand coverage of the event on Saint Isaac's Square to pre-empt expected misrepresentation of the events in local media, but the activities were also a manifestation of the groups' emergence and existence which they wanted to convey to Leningraders.¹⁷⁰

On March 18, the activists were invited for a conversation in Lengorispolkom with the deputy chairman, the head of GIOP, the chief city architect, and other officials who were implicated to the works. In an attempt to end the demonstration, they tried to justify the necessity of demolition, presenting the working project for the reconstruction of the hotel. While the activists argued against the proposed project, providing the evidence from the legislation on monuments' protection, the militia tightened the circle around the building and dispersed the people, providing the space for the wrecking machines.¹⁷¹ As a result, the consensus with the authorities had not been reached, while the hotel building was destroyed.

Therefore, the activists' failure to achieve their immediate goal of preserving the hotel Angleterre as an important historical site not only revealed the reluctance of the local authorities to follow Gorbachev's course of glasnost, but also, paradoxically, demonstrated the potential of the grass-roots preservation movement in Leningrad. Along with previous endeavors of the GR to raise awareness on the devastating conditions of the historic buildings earlier, "the battle for Angleterre", as it was called by the journalists, had caught the attention of students, scholars, non-formals, artists, regional historians, and those who were not indifferent toward the fate of the city. Saint Isaac's Square provided a platform for interaction where the activists not only shared indignation, caused by the looming threat of local bureaucrats but also found common interests and merged in communities to continue the "battle" for the historical integrity of Leningrad. According to Elena Zelinskaya, a participant of the demonstration, the authorities thought the

¹⁷⁰ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 252, d. 79, 12.

¹⁷¹ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 1 (1987).

Angleterre was “a nest of bed-bugs no use to anyone”, “but in the opinion of Leningraders, it is an inalienable part of our city’s historical identity.” Thus, the Angleterre had become a test case for “how democracy cannot be created by fiat from above.”¹⁷²

3.5. Concluding Remarks

The given chapter has demonstrated how heritage preservation as a grass-root activity evolved in Leningrad throughout the twentieth century and by the beginning of perestroika provided neformaly with a “toolkit” of civic activism. Contrary to VOOPIK, which pursued selective preservation as a camouflaged opposition to the authorities’ directives, the GR’s selectivity did not necessarily illustrate the same, though it similarly focused exclusively on the buildings of the pre-revolutionary epoch. Rather, the GR’s motivation to protect the historical integrity of the city, which was facilitated by the VOOPIK’s inertia and the perestroika’s calls for “democratization” of the Soviet society “from below”, stemmed from an intention to apply a relatively safe and clear language of culture for creation of civic association able to influence the urban politics. The language of culture was implemented in the artistic festivals and literary excursions which could hardly provoke the suppressive reaction of the authorities. At the same time, while articulating deep dissatisfaction with urban policy and monitoring the authorities’ (non)compliance with the law, the activists ordered the expert conclusion, drafted collective letters, sent appeals to the state bodies securing the support of prominent Soviet intellectuals and elaborated projects on the museification and maintenance of the city’s buildings. Therefore, claiming their “right to the city” through the demands for participation in urban development, the activists represented not only activation of grass-roots initiative in the Soviet Union but also an endeavor for *perestroika* (reconstruction) in the system of state heritage preservation, which did not imply a straightforward opposition to the local authorities.

¹⁷² Catriona Kelly, *Remembering St. Petersburg*, 160.

Chapter 4. “After Angleterre”: Explosion of Self-Organization in Leningrad

The unsuccessful campaign to preserve the hotel Angleterre from demolition provided the GR and other newly emerged grass-roots associations with a powerful impetus to fulfill “the right to the city”. The demonstration created a climate where the issue of heritage preservation and urban development could be discussed and practiced openly, though it proved to be short-lived. At the same time, the growing reaction to Lengorispolkom’s intervention in the integrity of the historical urban fabric and noncompliance with the law “On Protection and Use of the Historical and Cultural Monuments” took the form of appeals to the central government. The activists addressed not only the matter of Angleterre’s demolition but also proposed a project on how the Soviet institutions responsible for heritage preservation could be modified. However, given the authorities’ restrictions imposed on the increased public activism and the growing desire of neformaly for autonomous operation, the latter were compelled to change their working methods. For that reason, the GR probed the limits of the permissible and sought for new, more effective forms of public activism. Therefore, in the given chapter, I will explore how the GR engaged in dialogue with the regional and central governments on the matter of heritage management in Leningrad, striving for qualitative changes in the system of preservation. The chapter argues that the GR’s mode of action was based not so much on opposition to the local authorities or the Soviet order in general, but rather on an attempt to collaborate with the governmental bodies and state institutions for the sake of improvements in heritage preservationism. Finally, I will demonstrate how this commitment was expressed in the situation of the authorities’ tightening up of the grass-roots initiative.

4.1. Negotiating with the Authorities

Apart from picketing the hotel’s building with posters, the activists on Saint Isaac’s Square took advantage of the opportunity to negotiate with central governmental bodies and report on the illegal decision of Lengorispolkom. On March 20, 1987, the activists presenting themselves as *Gorodskoi sovet ekologii kul’tury* issued an appeal on the behalf of Leningrad public (*obshchestvennost’*) to the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union demanding a governmental

commission of inquiry into the “illegal demolition” of the hotel Angleterre building. According to the appeal, local authorities concealed the project of the building’s reconstruction not only from Leningraders but also from the specialists of the Leningrad branch of the Soviet Architects’ Union. The activists referred to the engineering report issued on April 22, 1981, by *Lenzhilniiproekt*, which confirmed the necessity of partial renovation by replacing the wooden ceilings,¹⁷³ and demanded that officials take responsibility for the unreasonable destruction of the building. According to the CCE’s activists, the hotel Angleterre was important for its historical significance and witnessed the “whole history of the nineteenth century”. Built in the very beginning of the nineteenth century as a profitable house, the building evidenced the Decembrist uprising and the erection of Saint Isaac’s Cathedral. At different periods of its existence as a hotel from 1876, the building hosted such prominent figures of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century culture as opera singer Feodor Chaliapin, writer Anton Chekhov, poets Alexander Blok, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Sergei Esenin, the later of whom committed suicide in one of the hotel’s room in 1925. In the pre-revolutionary times, the building was related to the operation of Lenin’s newspaper *Pravda*, and during the siege of Leningrad, the hotel functioned as a military hospital. Therefore, while presenting the importance of the building for the city history, the activists underlined cultural and historical “sacred” nature of the site, the deliberate destruction of which, according to them, was equated to crime.¹⁷⁴

The activists were offended not only by encroachment on the city’s historical environment but also by the insubordination of Leningradskiy Sovetskii Narodnyi Komitet (Lengorispolkom) to the central government and the law “On Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Monuments”. For that reasons, the CCE’s appeal to the Supreme Soviet questioned the legitimacy of the destruction, which, according to the information obtained by Kovalev from GIOP,¹⁷⁵ went against the orders of the Central Committee of VOOPiK (hereinafter CC VOOPiK) and the Ministry of Culture. On March 17,

¹⁷³ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 53.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 45-50.

¹⁷⁵ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 252, d. 79, 5.

Lengorispolkom had requested permission for reconstruction of the hotel building. The next day in a telegram, the Presidium of CC VOOPIiK asked Lengorispolkom to provide a detailed project of reconstruction, which had to be agreed with the Ministry of Culture and the CC VOOPIiK.¹⁷⁶ On the same day, the building on Saint Isaac's Square was demolished by Lengorispolkom's command without permission. After being informed about the dismantling and in the absence of a reply from Lengorispolkom, the CC VOOPIiK sent a further telegram acknowledging the violations of the law "On the Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Monuments" and demanded to terminate the construction work immediately.¹⁷⁷ As a result, dismantling of the building had not been halted, while Lengorispolkom tried to exonerate themselves by declaring the telegrams to be "lost".¹⁷⁸

From the one side, the given evidence acknowledges the unlawfulness of the Angleterre's destruction, justifying the GR's claims. But from the other, according to the remarks of Alexander Zhuk, an honored architect of the RSFSR and professor of the Academy of Arts, Lenzhilniiproekt was entrusted with the task of developing a project for reconstructing the hotel as early as 1978, which then was discussed and approved by the city-planning council. Consequently, the project of the Angleterre's reconstruction was endorsed by the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union; therefore, there was no room for arbitrariness.¹⁷⁹ Secondly, the building's state of disrepair was officially documented by the Ministry of Culture of the RSFSR in January 1987, though the Ministry suggested an additional study of the building's condition to preserve the historical facade.¹⁸⁰ Thirdly, minutes of the March 21st meeting of the Leningrad activists with vice-chairman of Lengorispolkom, professor of civil law specializing in the monuments' preservation, and the city's chief architect, also presents a slightly different perspective on the reasons behind the Angleterre's destruction. According to the professor's juridical expertise, the building of

¹⁷⁶ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 51.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁷⁸ A handwritten footnote on the document to the telegram of March 25, 1987.

¹⁷⁹ Yury Kirillov, "Davaite nachistotu: protivostoianie" [Let Us Be Clear: Confrontation], *Leningradskaia pravda*, March 21, 1987; "Komu zhe verit'?" [Who to Believe?], *Leningradskii rabochii*, April 24, 1987.

¹⁸⁰ TsGALI, F. 105, op. 6, d. 213, 64.

Angleterre, unlike neighboring Astoria, was neither identified as a monument of historical significance nor fell into the “preservation zone”; therefore, its reconstruction did not require permission from the Ministry of Culture. Conforming his argumentation, the city’s chief architect noted that Angleterre being “a monument of local importance” could be identified as a monument only by the statutory act issued by the Ministry of Culture. The vice-chairman added that the state bodies responsible for the reconstruction did not approach Angleterre as an unprotected building. In contrast, willing to preserve at least the walls of the historic hotel, they were reassured by engineers who documented the poor condition of the building and so opted for the close reconstruction of authentic facades from the nineteenth century. Therefore, the Leningrad authorities neither diminished the historical authenticity of the hotel nor abandoned Esenin’s memory: as the vice-chairman concluded, the project of the building’s reconstruction comprised not only the recreation of the room no. 5 arrangement, where Esenin committed suicide writing a final verse in his own blood, but also placed a memorial plaque on the facade commemorating the poet.¹⁸¹

Indeed, as detailed drawing below demonstrates, the hotel’s building did not fall in the “preservation zone”. At the same time, it was identified as a monument of architecture, the reconstruction of which, as the activists rightly pointed out, still demanded the permission of the Ministry of Culture.

¹⁸¹ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen, F. 5/1.01 *Obvodnyi Canal*, no. 12 (1987).

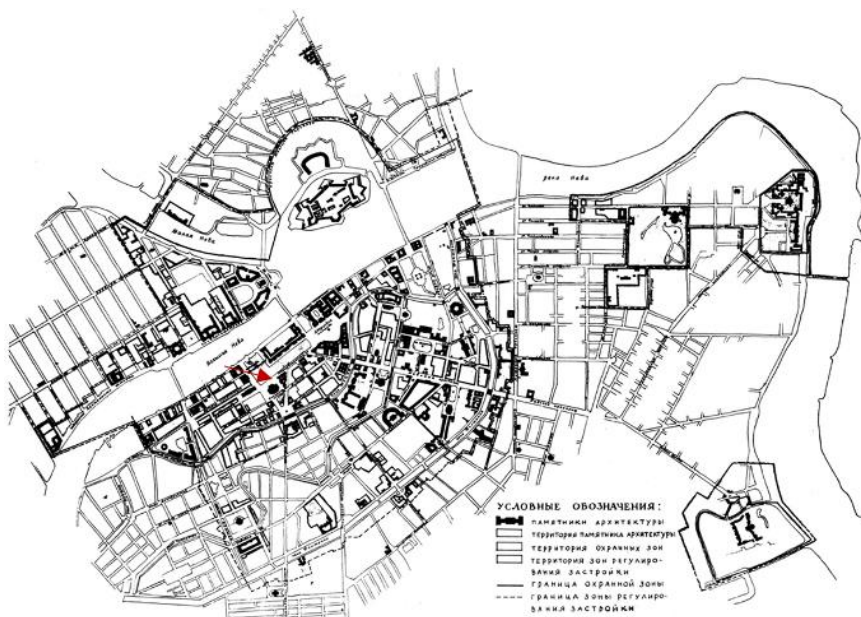


Figure 1. Architectural monuments, integrated preservation zone and development regulations zones in the historic center of Leningrad. Approved by Lengorispolkom in 1969.

The monuments of architecture are highlighted in black bold. Location of the hotel is pointed by red arrow.

In Sergei Sementsov, “Formirovanie printsipov sokhraneniia arkhitekturno-gradostroitel’nogo nasledii Sankt-Peterburga na osnove zakonomernosti ego trekhvekovogo gradostroitel’nogo razvitiia,” [Formation of Principles for Preserving the Architectural and Urban Heritage of Saint Petersburg on the Basis of the Regularities of its Three-Century Urban Development], *Vestnik SPbGU* 15, no. 2 (2013): 201.

Hence, although it may seem that the activists were reproached fairly for insufficient awareness of the Angleterre’s demolition¹⁸² and for their “the lack of legal culture”,¹⁸³ the origin of the conflict lay rather in the reluctance of local authorities to follow the instructions of Ministry of Culture and to disclose the matter of cultural heritage given the public’s right to participate in such matters. For that reason, the people in power were condemned by the activists for deciding the fate of the city’s historic building behind closed doors with no public input¹⁸⁴ and for misleading Leningrad *obshchestvennost’* with contradictory information.¹⁸⁵ In fact, only on the second day of

¹⁸² Natalya Kurapzeva, “Istoki konflikta” [The Origins of the Conflict], *Smena*, no. 67, March 21, 1987; Alexandra Olenina, “Spasat’ ne slovom, a delom” [Save Not by Word, But by Deed], *Smena*, no. 67, March 21, 1987.

¹⁸³ Viktor Kokosov, “Zakon pretenzii ne imeet” [The Law Has No Claims], *Smena*, no. 67, March 21, 1987.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Orttung, *From Leningrad to St. Petersburg: Democratization in a Russian City* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 45.

¹⁸⁵ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 123.

the protests on March 17, the editors of *Leningradskaia pravda*¹⁸⁶ and *Smena*¹⁸⁷ interviewed the city's chief architect as a response to the increased number of phone calls and letters to the newspaper offices.¹⁸⁸ While the chief architect affirmed the impossibility to preserve Angleterre in its original form (confirming the importance of the building's reconstruction), as early as March 13th the protesters were informed by a director of the Department for Culture at Leningradskopolkom that the building would not be dismantled; Leningrad radio broadcast the same information. Therefore, even if the activists were wrong about the legitimacy of the Angleterre's deconstruction that is hard to imagine given the arguments they expressed in the appeal to the Supreme Soviet, their activism on Saint Isaac's Square revealed the inadequacy in historic preservation efforts. It also demonstrated a local authorities' reluctance to implement Gorbachev's ideal that the people in power should consult with concerned people before any decision affects the life of the city is made.¹⁸⁹

4.2. Self-Organization and Autonomous Activism

The authorities' arbitrariness did not, however, hamper the development of autonomous activism: by contrast, the meeting's resolution expressed hope for building of a business (*delovye*) relationship with the people in power for the benefit of the city environment. Moreover, the "post-Angleterre" situation not only increased the sophistication and fragmentation of the independent self-organization generated by the growth of independent public life but also led to activist specialization in certain spheres of activism and institutional formalization. The CCE was to serve as a coordination and consultation center, uniting earlier (GR, "Mir") and newly emerged ("ERA", "Nevsky Battle", "Friends of Ropsha", and others) organizations involved in the practicalities of urban preservation in Leningrad and suburb area. At the same time, the grass-roots groups of cultural, social, and research agenda merged into *Sovet kul'turno-demokraticheskogo dvizheniia*

¹⁸⁶ Elena Bogoslovskaja, "'Astoriia': segodnia i zavtra" [Astoria: Today and Tomorrow], *Leningradskaia pravda*, March 17, 1987.

¹⁸⁷ Vladimir Krainev, "'Astoriia' obnovliaetsia" ['Astoria' is Updating], *Smena*, no. 66, March 17, 1987.

¹⁸⁸ Blair Ruble, *Leningrad: Shaping a Soviet City* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 89.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Orttung, *From Leningrad to St. Petersburg: Democratization in a Russian City*, 45.

(The Soviet for Cultural-Democratic Movement, hereinafter the KDD), including Klub-81, TEII, Bureau of Ecological Innovations, ecological group “Delta”, and many others.

On March 28, the Ilyich House of Culture hosted a foundation conference of the Council for Cultural Ecology. Enlisting the support of Dmitry Likhachev as the head of the Soviet Cultural Fund, the CCE was permitted to register as the SCF’s department and, thus, closely collaborate to educate youth in how to address preservation and restoration of the built heritage.¹⁹⁰ Referring to the VOOPiK as a monopolized and ineffective organization, the activists of the CCE underlined the importance of sharing the responsibilities between the multiple organizations, both state and grass-root, while tackling the issues of preservation. According to Talalai:

This creative (*tvorcheskoe*) association became an environment that strengthens the confidence – these groups, fellowships, societies must work together not only just in emergency situations like Angleterre but should establish the constantly working mechanism [of public cooperation].¹⁹¹

Aiming “the restoration of democratic <...> standards of our life” and “the restructuring of public consciousness [*perestroika obshchestvennogo soznaniia*]”,¹⁹² the Council, however, was not just a voluntary organization with open membership. Its operation was regulated by the constitution that defined its structure, organization of work, key responsibilities, an order of entry, rule of voting, and frequency of meetings.¹⁹³ According to the constitution, issues of ecological and cultural activism were to be resolved by the Council seminars and conferences.¹⁹⁴ Plenary sessions of the groups’ representatives functioned as a “supreme body” taking responsibilities for the most important issues on the Council’s operation, while “executive power” was vested in annually elected *pravlenie* (board). Public representation and work coordination were given to the secretaries who were elected from each of the activity sectors into the secretariat. Each of the sectors, in turn, had been empowered to register new members and administer routine matters. Establishment of an advisory board including the representatives of scientific, creative, and socio-

¹⁹⁰ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 4.

¹⁹¹ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 1 (1987).

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Research Information Center “Fond Iofe”. F. A.9.1.2.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

political organizations was outlined in the plan of further action.¹⁹⁵ In other words, the Council was not conceived as an informal conglomerate aiming to take sole control over the independent community of the city; rather, Leningraders involved in social and political activism and representatives of official organizations like the Soviet Architects' Union, the Council of Young Scientists, the Leningrad Committee of Environmental Management, and others expressed an interest in collaboration, offering assistance in the further operation.

As the demonstration on Saint Isaac's Square illustrates, the emergence of grass-roots organizations meant a profound transformation of the way in which members of the public expressed their views. However, the linguistic form and the semantic content of the Council's constitution still mirrored Soviet bureaucratic vocabulary, with vague wordings, typical officialese, and formulations. Apparently, the activists' appropriation of such linguistic patterns was not only their familiarity through being involved in such Soviet institutions as the Komsomol or VOOPIK. Rather, I argue that their use of the Soviet bureaucratic vocabulary was conceived as an attempt to embed the Council into the existing structure, an intention which was later expressed by registering the GR in Lensovet.¹⁹⁶ Hence, from this view, the process could be understood as the institutionalization of neformaly through the surplus of administrative hierarchies, an overabundance of the officers and organized chain of command, and the language of Soviet bureaucracy. Essentially this process was a step in the transformation from the friendly community, united around *tusovka* with its own language system, into an official organization claiming political participation within the existing structure. But from the other side, this process replicated the old organizational forms carried by familiar categories while building a new "democratized" society.

A fear of the Council's "bureaucratization" was soon expressed in *Vechernii Leningrad* by journalist Sergei Shevchuk, who criticized the activists for demagoguery, amateurism, and politicking. Condemning the Council's leaders for their voluntarist approach to decision making

¹⁹⁵ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 5.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 26.

and invocation to morality (*nравstvennost'*), democracy, and humanism, Shevchuk expressed concern over the activists' exploitation of glasnost in favor of their own political interests.¹⁹⁷ Some other journalists mocked the activists, scornfully calling them “the boys from Saint Isaac’s Square” and accusing them of deliberately concealing the truth and of “vainglorious interests”.¹⁹⁸ Others, while highly appreciating the GR’s endeavors to sway public opinion on preserving historical buildings in the city, criticized its leaders for ineffective methods of activism. Instead, they encouraged them to place greater emphasis on the more detailed research of the problem prior to the public announcement.¹⁹⁹ Some justified the GR’s activism by arguing that the demonstration against the demolition of Angletierre illustrated the reluctance of the Leningrad authorities to follow the course of glasnost and perestroika.²⁰⁰ And still others acknowledged the passivity of the specialized institutions responsible for the preservation and conservation of the urban fabric that prompted young people to regain the initiative away from the formalized bodies.²⁰¹ However, despite a huge resonance in media, the Leningrad press, contrary to Moscow, remained predominantly hostile to the activists.

Nevertheless, the GR continued to express its political agency by reporting violations committed during the “battle for Angletierre,” not only locally but also by sending letters to Moscow. In one of the first letters sent to Gorbachev just after the end of the demonstration on the behalf of the Council, the activists complained about the militia’s use of physical force and unwarranted detention while dispersing the crowd.²⁰² In the following collective letter to Gorbachev on March 21st, the activists presented a detailed outline of the events on Saint Isaac

¹⁹⁷ Sergei Shevchuk, “Blistat’ i pozhinat. Snova o ‘soвете po ekologii kul’tury’ i ego liderakh” [To Shine and Reap. Once again on the “Soviet for Ecology of Culture” and its Leaders], *Vechernii Leningrad*, no. 103, May 5, 1987.

¹⁹⁸ Mikhail Chulaki, “Eshhe raz o pol’ze glasnosti” [One More Time about the Benefit of Glasnost], *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no 13, March 25, 1987.

¹⁹⁹ Alexandra Olenina, “Spasat’ ne slovom, a delom” [Save Not by Word, But by Deed], *Smena*, no. 67, March 21, 1987.

²⁰⁰ Andrei Ezhelev, “Uchit’sya demokratii. Komu urok?” [Learn Democracy. To Whom the Lesson?], *Izvestia*, no. 86, March 27, 1987.

²⁰¹ Yury Novikov, “Dolzhno stat’ pravilom!”, accessed May 1, 2020, https://www.save-spb.ru/page/spasenie/dolzhno_stat.html?section=spasenie.

²⁰² TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 116-117.

Square, requesting him “to take measures to restore the law”.²⁰³ On April 13, Kovalev approached a secretary of the Leningrad Regional Committee of the CPSU with a broad outline of GR’s claims for the demolition of the Angleterre. Arguing against Lengorispolkom’s arbitrariness in the management of historical buildings, Kovalev insisted on the necessity to hold a criminal investigation of the unlawful demolition and to prosecute bureaucrats responsible for the destruction. According to the activist, the Leningrad post office was ordered not to accept telegrams signed by the activists²⁰⁴ – therefore, neither wires nor collective letters sent shortly before and after demolition reached Moscow. Moreover, noting the censorship and the biased coverage in the Leningrad press and radio,²⁰⁵ Kovalev asked for a special investigation of the discreditation campaign carried out by the local authorities. In a letter of reply, secretary of the Leningrad Party Committee acknowledged insufficient coverage of Angleterre’s reconstruction by the city authorities and fundamental shortcomings in the operation of historical preservation services of the city. However, as he admitted, the Leningrad procuracy identified neither violations during reconstruction works nor in administrative detentions implemented by militia. Nonetheless the Bureau of the Regional Committee of the CPSU pointed out to Lengorispolkom the necessity of a radical restructuring [*korennoi perestroiki*] in working methods for involvement of Leningrad *obshchestvennost’* in economic and social development off the city.²⁰⁶

After losing confidence in the Leningrad authorities, Kovalev and Vasiliev on the behalf of the Council sent a letter on April 19th to the Central Committee of the CPSU outlining their own version why the dismantling was illegal; they accused Lengorispolkom of misleading Leningraders by manipulating the law.²⁰⁷ The activists argued that even despite the head of Lensovet admitted receiving the March 30th telegrams from the Ministry of Culture to stop reconstruction work, he still disobeyed Moscow’s instructions. Concluding that the responsibility

²⁰³ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 88-90.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 93-96.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. See also Vera Tolz, *The USSR’s Emerging Multiparty System* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 29.

²⁰⁶ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 85-86.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 80-84.

rested with him and other Leningrad bureaucrats involved in the issues of culture and urban development, the activists expressed their intentions to boycott the local authorities during the election campaign for Lensovet. In another collective letter to Alexander Yakovlev, head of the propaganda department of the CPSU Central Committee, the activists asked him to dispatch a commission of inquiry on the illegal demolition supervised by the Attorney of the USSR.²⁰⁸ Although these and similar letters and telegrams had little effect, either on the composition of the Leningrad bureaucrats or on the qualitative changes in the system of urban preservation, the very fact of the activists' attempts to challenge the local authority's decision by appealing to Moscow marked a profound change in late Soviet society. These negotiations, the significance of which was not limited to the fate of old buildings, illustrated not only the obstacles faced by the activists in implementing perestroika in the locality but also the beginning of a process leading to the forging of powerful organizations to oppose the local party executive government. With the growth of antagonism to Leningradspolkom, some of whose representatives were regarded as "enemies of perestroika", the activists considered themselves not as opponents of the party governments as such, but rather as allies of "the progressive center" in their endeavors to realize a new politics.²⁰⁹ Therefore, unlike Magnitogorsk, where a desire for change was expressed by the citizens, who were paralyzed by their inability for social mobilization,²¹⁰ Leningrad as one of the central cities of the RSFSR illustrated the tremendous scale of societal response to the Gorbachev-led reforms.

4.3. A Game with Permissible Boundaries

Besides negotiations with the legal bodies and their representatives, the Council was involved in preparing an eventful program including discussions on preservation and restoration issues. The included *subbotniks* in the Leningrad suburbs of Pushkin, Pavlovsk, and Gatchina, public lectures on the genesis and modality of bureaucracy, the debates on the renaming of

²⁰⁸ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 43.

²⁰⁹ Arvi Duka, Nikolay Kornev, Viktor Voronkov and Elena Zdravomyslova, "The Protest Cycle of Perestroika: The Case of Leningrad," 91.

²¹⁰ Stephen Kotkin, *Steeltown, USSR. Soviet Society in the Gorbachev Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Leningrad and urban historical topography, gatherings on the working issues, and many other events open for the public.²¹¹ Yet it did not take long before Leningrad authorities took revenge on the activists' reconquered freedoms. On May 18, 1987, Leningradskoye goskom introduced a Provisional Regulation on the Holding of Assemblies, Meetings, Demonstrations, Marches, and any other mass events on the streets, squares, parks, and gardens of Leningrad.²¹² The Regulations considerably restricted the procedure for issuing a permit to hold demonstrations and appealing in case of the permit's denial. A written application to hold a meeting, demonstration, or street procession had to be signed by the "authoritative representative of the organization" and then submitted to the executive committee of the local Soviet no more than 10 days before the planned event. The application should indicate the purpose, form, place, and time of the event, the expected number of participants, the organizers' names, places of residence, and work or study.²¹³ Then the executive committee had to examine the application for 3 days and inform the organizers of their decision. In the case public order was violated during the event, the organizers and participants were subjected to administrative prosecution.²¹⁴

As a reaction to increasing public participation, new regulations authorized local bodies to regulate any public manifestation of independent self-organization. Indeed, the beginning of perestroika brought rapid growth of people's public engagement. These people appeared to be proactive and independent from the authorities in the organization of demonstrations, assemblies, collection of signatures, and other forms of public activism. After the Komsomol failed to take responsibility for establishing control over such groups by creating the centers for youth activities, committees, and clubs (in Leningrad this function was performed by the Center for Creative Initiative at the Ilyich House of Culture), the authorities attempted to deter the self-organization

²¹¹ Research Information Center "Fond Iofe". F. A.9.1.3.

²¹² Ibid., F. A.9.1.2.

²¹³ Ralph Ruebner, "Public Demonstrations and the Rule of Law in the Age of Glasnost and Perestroika," *American University International Law Review* 5, no. 1 (1989): 21.

²¹⁴ Carole Sigman, *Politicheskie kluby i Perestroika v Rossii: oppositsiya bez dissidentstva*, 212.

that they claimed.²¹⁵ Therefore, following Leningrad, on August 11, 1987, the executive committee of Mossovet adopted similar regulations designed to prevent demonstrations held by neformaly.²¹⁶ Moscow was followed by Sverdlovsk, then Odessa, then by some capitals of the national republics and other big cities of the Soviet Union where independent demonstrations were held. The public and the activists criticized the regulations heavily, emphasizing the ineligibility of the executive committees and local Soviets to adopt such acts on their own in contradiction to the freedom affirmed by the Soviet constitution. However, already the next year, on July 28, 1988, the regulations were enshrined at the all-Union level by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. They adopted a Decree on the Procedure for Organizing and Holding Meetings, Rallies, Street Processions, and Demonstrations in the USSR upholding previously regulations enacted by the regional executive committees. Authorizing the internal troops of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) to protect public order, the decree was, in fact, a response to the increasing relaxation of the regime under perestroika and an attempt to find mechanisms to contain public activism.

The restrictions imposed by the Leningrad party authorities caused a huge dissatisfaction among the activists. First of all, since the majority of the nonformal initiatives were registered under the Houses of Culture, the requirement to approve the application with the head of the organization, under which the initiative was registered, was almost impossible – the heads of the Houses of Culture could hardly to make such a risky deal for their cherished occupation.²¹⁷ Secondly, contrary to the positive evaluation in the press, the activists perceived the Regulations as the most effective means for the regional bureaucrats to quell dissenting activism of Leningraders.²¹⁸ Following the critical rhetoric of the activists, the Regulations were seen as a

²¹⁵ Nikolay Vitruk, *Stat'i. Doklady. Retsenzii. 1963-1990* [Articles. Reports. Reviews] (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia pravosudiia, 2012), 487-488.

²¹⁶ Carole Sigman, *Politicheskie Kluby i Perestroika v Rossii: oppositsiya bez dissidentstva*, 211; Nikolay Vitruk, *Stat'i. Doklady. Retsenzii. 1963-1990*, 488. On Provisional Regulation in Moscow see, Inna Braginskaia, "O moskovskikh vremennykh pravilakh" [On Moscow Provisional Regulations], in *Mercury*, no. 8 (1987): 56-62.

²¹⁷ "O prave svoem isprosi razresheniia..." [Beg a Permission on your Right], *Mercury*, no. 5 (1987): 1-2.

²¹⁸ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35. *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 9 (1988).

threat to perestroika imposed by local authorities attempting to obstruct the promotion of “democracy” in Leningrad.²¹⁹ As the lawyers admitted, the imposition of such restrictions of freedom that were guaranteed by the Soviet Constitution did not come within the competence of Lengorispolkom being incorporated within the jurisdiction of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet,²²⁰ that was implemented a year later. Accordingly, the enactment of the Regulations illustrated the dilemma faced by the authorities, that, from the one side, sought popular support for perestroika, but from the other, tried to maintain the rule of the CPSU.

4.4. “Strange Samizdat”: Coming Back to the Underground?

Governmental endeavors to keep nonformal groups under scrutiny forced the activists to abolish operation of their publication, *Post obshchestvennoi informatsii* as early as May 7, 1987. Based on the Lengorispokom’s Resolution issued on June 19, 1972, allowing to hang posters, newspapers, and adverts only on specialized stands and billboards,²²¹ the *Post* ceased to function on May 31, successfully operating as an unofficial news board for two months. The initial goal of the *Post* to collect the signatures supporting the request to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet for a governmental inquiry commission into Hotel Angleterre demolition was not realized – a conversation with the Presidium did not go far beyond the ministerial notification of acceptance for governmental consideration.²²² Nevertheless, spreading the first-hand news on the operation and development of the Council and other unofficial movements, the *Post* set a precedent of fully-fledged and grass-roots glasnost.

Restriction of control over the independent initiatives did not stop the expansion of the independent self-organization in the city coinciding with (or had given rise to?) the growing circulation of independent journals. Indeed, even despite glasnost and the relaxation of censorship, which opened an opportunity for publication in the official press, samizdat was not just replenished

²¹⁹ Viktor Monachov, “Mnenie iurista” [Legal Opinion], *Mercury*, no. 5 (1987): 5-6.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 9 (1988).

²²² Ibid., *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 1 (1987).

with new journals, but also multiplied its circulation. Some of these samizdat journals had been being published by the representatives of “the second culture” movement from the 1970s under the aegis of Klub-81, whereas others were launched by newly emerged non-formal groups and initiatives which aimed to spread information on their activism to a wider audience. In practical terms, the later continued to operate like their samizdat predecessors without official registration and copyright; they duplicated materials on typewriters and in a relatively limited number of copies.

However, in contrast to pre-glasnost generations of Leningrad underground publishers, the editors of the perestroika-era journals identified their product firstly as an “independent publication”, not just samizdat *per se*. Secondly, unlike the underground samizdat publishers of previous decades in Leningrad, independent publications of the perestroika period had much freer access to the means for publishing and (photo)copying, practicing open dissemination of the journals via public libraries and intentionally publicizing the editors’ names and addresses for correspondence for communication with the readers.²²³ Thirdly, contrary to samizdat “thick journals” of late Soviet Leningrad, which did not circulate far beyond the boundaries of unofficial culture movement, open dissemination made the periodicals more inclusive for the authors and readership.²²⁴ Finally, as compared to the formerly circulated samizdat journals, mostly Moscow-based, independent periodicals of the perestroika-era lacked the strong anti-Soviet element or any other forms of subversive agitation. By contrast, recognizing the selective openness in the media and trying to compensate for the one-sided treatment they received in the official press, the editors of independent socio-political journals intended to counterbalance the ambivalent tonality of the official coverage by introducing the first-hand open reflection on their activism. Accordingly, from

²²³ Ann Komaromi, “Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics,” 79. Catherine Fitzpatrick, and Ludmila Alexeyeva, *Nyeformaly: Civil Society in the USSR*, 30. For terminological on how to differentiate samizdat and unofficial press during the perestroika period see, Sophie Kotzer, *Russian Orthodoxy, Nationalism and the Soviet State during the Gorbachev Years, 1985-1991* (London: Routledge, 2020), 116.

²²⁴ “Stenogramma informatsionnoi vstrechi-dialoga redaktorov nezavisimyykh izdaniy” [Transcript of the informational meeting-dialogue of editors of independent publications], HU OSA 300-85-12:253; “Zhurnal zhurnalov” [Journal of Journals], 1987-1989; Subject Files; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

one side, independent print materials of the perestroika era continued the “classic” samizdat of the Leningrad’s 1970s and early 1980s, being limited by unofficial position within the society. But from the other, the political climate of glasnost brought considerable changes in self-identification of these independent groups’ editors, encouraging them to actively engage in the reconstruction of socialist society and at the same time attempting to retain a monopoly on the spread of ideas through the printed word.

All these and others distinctive differences were discussed during the dialogue-meeting held by Klub-81 on October 24-25, 1987, which brought together representative from 20 independent from party journals of Leningrad, Moscow, and Riga, the editors of samizdat and unofficial publications of pre-perestroika and perestroika periods, as well as the reporters of official newspapers and the representative of the local Komsomol.²²⁵ Being tacitly approved by the authorities,²²⁶ the conference was an unprecedented event of the glasnost era, providing an opportunity for a dialogue between parallel structures. It allowed those attending to discuss the relationship between the official and unofficial press during glasnost, the latter of which experienced difficulties in disseminating “the free printed word”. Firstly, the editors of independent journals expressed hope that wider access to copying machines would be allowed.²²⁷ Secondly, as it was pointed out by samizdat editors, the unofficial journals experienced negative attitudes of the government and, thus, demanded legal status which would enable to register their independent journals as cooperatives. However, these hopes had not been realized under the pretext that the journals lacked technological bases.²²⁸ Therefore, despite the calls for more

²²⁵ “Stenogramma informatsionnoi vstrechi-dialoga redaktorov nezavisimyykh izdaniy” [Transcript of the informational meeting-dialogue of editors of independent publications], HU OSA 300-85-12:253; “Zhurnal zhurnalov” [Journal of Journals], 1987-1989; Subject Files; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

²²⁶ “B-Wire. USSR – Congress for Editors Demand Freedom of Press,” October 30, 1987, HU OSA 300-85-12:64; “Gruppy: neformal’nye” [Groups: Informal]; Subject Files; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Samizdat Archives; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

²²⁷ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Chasy* 66, 202.

²²⁸ Dietrich Loeber, “Glasnost as An Issue of Law: On the Future USSR Law on Press and Information,” in *The Impact of Perestroika on Soviet Law*, ed. Albert Schmidt (Leiden: Brill | Nijhoff, 1990), 103. Vera Tolz, “Soviet ‘Informal Groups’ Organize,” in *Soviet/East European Survey, 1987-1988. Selected Research and Analysis from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, ed. Vojtech Mastny (New York: Routledge, 1989), 232.

openness, private enterprise and the consequent proliferation of independent journals, the continuing demands to enable their transfer from the long-standing practice of clandestine self-publishing to free and independent publishing demonstrated a lack of speech freedom in the Soviet Union.

The Council's journal *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury* was among many other unofficial publications formed by Leningrad activists, who were eager to bring periodicals into the open. The journal was conceived by the CCE's activist Mikhail Talalai shortly before the demonstration on the Saint Isaac Square to reflect monthly on the activity of Council; however, the increased workload of the activists postponed the edition to July. By the summer of 1987, when the ambiguous treatment of neformaly in the official media became apparent, the agenda of *Vestnik* shifted toward the informationally resisting to the state journalists' misrepresentation among other topics. Apart from the essays dialoguing with the official press, the journal comprised a huge variety of materials such as minutes of the meetings, reports on the operation of the Council and its member groups, discussions of the problems with historic buildings' preservation, urban planning and topography, news summary, survey results, and other pieces written either collectively or individually. The spectrum of the materials resulted in the 50-85-page journal with a circulation over one hundred carbon copies, which demanded from the editors and typists a considerable investment of energy, time and money. By virtue of Talalai's friendship with Likhachev and his employment in the SCF, *Vestnik* had access to an electronic copying machine which was installed in the admission room of the Fond.²²⁹ However, excessive usage of the machine led the SCF's authorities to complicate access, and intentions to create cooperative publishing houses had to be abandoned. Thus, despite Gorbachev's promises to continue implementing "glasnost through the press <...> with active participation of the citizens themselves" relying on the "personal activity (*samodeiatel'nost'*) and creativity (*tvorchestvo*) of

²²⁹ "Memuary i interv'iu. Mikhail Grigor'evich Talalai [Memoirs and Interviews. Mikhail Talalai]," in *Obshhestvennaia zhizn' Leningrada v gody perestroiki. 1985 – 1991: sbornik materialov*, 639.

the masses,”²³⁰ *Vestnik* was not provided with a legal status until the end of its existence. “Strange samizdat”, as *Vestnik* and another journal of Leningrad were called by Talalai: they were visible to the official press but had to continue their clandestine existence until they ceased to exist at the end of 1988.²³¹

4.5. Projects for Reconstruction

For the period of its existence, *Vestnik* provided a forum for documenting the gatherings and articulation of the ideas and projects concerning the existing preservation system of the Soviet Union. Already in the first issue of the journal in June 1987, the GR’s activists, based on their short, but highly fruitful experience questioned the economic framework for the functioning of the institutions responsible for urban development and restoration. The second issue asked about the monopoly of Lenzhilproekt on the issuing of technical expert conclusion of the building. The conduct of expert conclusion held by other organizations was neglected as undesirable and provided allegedly “unwanted” result justifying the demolition. Finally, the activists emphasized that unless the glasnost would enter the system of heritage preservation and cultural management in the city, positive changes in the sphere could hardly be attained.²³²

The project proposal of the reconstruction of the existing system of monuments’ preservation in Leningrad was shaped by the beginning of July in the telegram sent by Kovalev to Raisa Gorbacheva, who by that moment headed the SCF. By emphasizing the core principle of the GR to preserve not just a single building, but “the historical appearance of Saint Petersburg – Petrograd... exposed to a barbaric overhaul that destroys the interiors and authenticity of a building,”²³³ he suggested taking under protection all buildings of the city that were erected before 1930. Secondly, by proposing to reorganize the existing system of preservation, he suggested

²³⁰ Dietrich Loeber, “Glasnost as An Issue of Law: On the Future USSR Law on Press and Information,” 104.

²³¹ “Korol’ umer. Da zdravstvuet korol’!” [The King is Dead. Long Live the King!] by Mikhail Talalai, May 13, 1988, HU OSA 300-85-12:253/10; Samizdat: Journals / Periodicals: M: “Mercury”, 1987-1989; Subject Files; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Samizdat Archives; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

²³² The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul’tury*, no. 1 (1987).

²³³ Ibid.

establishing the State Committee for the Restoration and Protection of Monuments with local departments independent from local authorities. Considering that hierarchical uniformity of the system would inevitably lead to its inefficiency, Kovalev, by referring to the CCE as a prototype, proposed a formation of autonomous organizations specializing in certain fields.²³⁴ Finally, he stressed the importance of enshrining a principle according to which procedure of demolition or reconstruction of the building had to be considered at the highest level, whereas those who disregard the regulations should be imposed on administrative and criminal punishment.²³⁵ In other words, by assuming a refusal from the existing institutional practices embodied in VOOPliK or GIOP, the GR put forward the task of searching new forms in preservation. However, the project proposal along with the role of the GR as a civic grass-roots organization was not taken seriously, though the drawbacks of the existing system were officially acknowledged by the chief architect of the city.²³⁶

4.6. Towards Consolidation of *Neformaly*

After summer vacations, the Council renewed its operation from taking part in the first officially sanctioned all-Union meeting of neformaly “Public Initiatives During Perestroika” (*Obshchestvennye initsiativy v perestroike*), held in Moscow on August 20-23, 1987. By bringing together 50 independent groups and associations from 12 cities of the Soviet Union, the dialogue meeting aimed to discuss the role of public initiative in the perestroika period.²³⁷ The conference hosted approximately 600 persons including the party members, writers, workers, well-known dissidents, and human rights activists to acquaint with each other and establish the mechanisms of the independent groups’ coordination to follow “the restructuring [*perestroika*] of the societal life”.²³⁸ The meeting was authorized by the Moscow City Party Committee, though the very permission to gather informal groupings from the whole country reflected the continuing

²³⁴ TsGAIPD SPb, F. 24, op. 217, d. 12, 5.

²³⁵ Ibid., 55.

²³⁶ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 3, 1987.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ralph Ruebner, “Public Demonstrations and the Rule of Law in the Age of Glasnost and Perestroika,” 14.

ambiguity of the authorities towards the grass-roots movements. Even if some power branches promoted civic initiative for their own political interests, it, nevertheless, illustrated the lack of a clear understanding by authorities how to deal with neformaly given the fact of the recent regulations adopted by Mossovet on August 11, 1987, to prevent demonstrations held by unofficial groups.

The delegates of the Council took part in the section on “Ecology of Culture” that raised the issues of shortcomings in the existing system of historic preservation, noncompliance of the restoration institutions with legislation, and ineffectiveness of VOOPiK as a state organization responsible for preservation of tangible cultural and historic heritage. For that reason, the participants of the section proposed to establish an all-Union association of the groups involved in ecologically cultural activism that could enable collaboration of the activists.²³⁹ The intention toward associational consolidation was realized during the conference on theory and practice of cultural ecology, which grew out of the February invitation for Likhachev to hold a seminar on the ecology of culture. Consequently, the activists received his support to organize a conference under the aegis of the Leningrad branch of Soviet Cultural Fund.

The meeting was held on November 14-15, 1987, putting forward a task to discuss past and present of the movement for cultural ecology, share the practicalities of dealing with the state bodies responsible for heritage preservation, as well as elaborate on the possible directions of how to enhance the existing system on cultural heritage preservation. Basing on experience in dealing the existing system of monuments’ preservation and restoration in the Soviet Union, the activists discussed not only the proposals of how it could be enhanced but also how “the will of the society” represented by the civic or voluntary sector, could contribute to the preservation of historical environment.²⁴⁰ Therefore, as the result of the conference, it was proposed to establish the Centre

²³⁹ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 3 (1987).

²⁴⁰ “Ekologiiia kul'tury: teoriia i praktika. Leningradskaia vstrecha. Problematika” [Cultural Ecology: Theory and Practise. Leningrad Meeting. Problematics] HU OSA 300-85-12:253; “Zhurnal zhurnalov” [Journal of Journals], 1987-1989; Subject Files; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

for Grass-Roots Undertakings in the Field of Cultural Ecology (*Tsentral'noye obshchestvennoye zdaniye nachinaniy v oblasti ekologii kul'tury*), headed by the Council and supported by SCF to unite culturally ecological initiatives from the whole Soviet Union into one association for the dialogue between them.

Thus, the numerous conferences held by the activists demonstrated the growing alienation of the unofficial groups from the official structures, that not only lost their credibility among them, but also hesitated to take robust action in relation to them, though still sought to impose restrictions on their operation, trying to maintain a monopoly on publication, or just turned a blind eye on the activism of the cultural and ecological groups. For that reason, the majority of the activists, observing the reluctance of the authorities to engage in the dialogue with them, took further action behind the walls of discussion clubs applying new tactics in the public space.

4.7. From *Neformaly* to *Deputaty*

Apart from involvement into the conferences and working for consolidation, the Council along with the GR expanded the scope of its operation by enlarging the number of the preserved buildings and installed plaques commemorating Domenico Trezzini, an architect of Petrine Baroque style, Arkhip Kuindzhi, a landscape painter, Nikolay Gumilyov, a Silver Age Russian poet, avant-gardist Daniil Kharmis, and many others. The group managed to organize more than 20 gatherings with the city restorers, architects, historians, engineers, and sculptors, continued to keep supervision under the previously preserved buildings, and recently incorporated, as well as engaged in the campaign to restore historic place names. At the end of 1987, the GR along with “ERA” held several campaigns to preserve a building of the terraced housing²⁴¹ built in the nineteenth century on Bol'shaia Raznochinnaya 14, as well as the architectural ensemble of the buildings from the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries in the suburbia village Rybatskoye. But unlike

²⁴¹ According to Catriona Kelly, terraced housing or, as she calls it, “routine building” (*ryadovaya zastroika*) was used instead of “monument” to define those buildings which begged questions about the historical and aesthetic value. As she assumes, “These were lumped together under the term “routine building”, which was considered as ripe for redevelopment, except in the immediate area of a “monument” (its so-called “preserved zone”).” Catriona Kelly, *Remembering St. Petersburg*, 136.

the previous campaigns, accompanied by picketing and demonstrations, “post-Angleterre” protests against the demolitions were tightened by May Regulations, which considerably restricted the right of public assemblies. For that reason, the number of the public actions dropped considerably, while already established forms of rescuing such as reports and appellations to the official institutions were not particularly efficient. Therefore, although the huge investment of energy and time helped to preserve buildings of Rybatskoye,²⁴² the terraced housing in the center of the city was destroyed by the wrecking ball.²⁴³

At the same time, by the end of 1987, the twofold effects of the Regulations became more apparent. From the one side, despite the introduction of restrictive measures on self-organization, the number of the independent groups and the forms of their self-organization increased significantly. Apart from the conferences held at the end of 1987, in March 1988 the GR took part in forum “Baltika-88” devoted to the issues of ecology²⁴⁴ and organized a festival “The Day of the Citizen” on Vladimirskaia Square with the assistance of Interior Theatre under the aegis of the LZTI. But from the other, the authorities were extremely reluctant to allow neformaly to hold demonstrations and considered them as troublemakers and demagogues. Indeed, despite the well-intentioned agenda of the GR and the CCE, neither the Komsomol nor local party bodies or institutions responsible for preservation acknowledged their motivations. While the Komsomol criticized the group’s working methods and harsh position towards city authorities,²⁴⁵ the activists of the GR were gradually losing their hopes to establish a working relationship with the local authorities in the course of “socialist transformation of society” charted by Gorbachev. The support of the SCF was limited and did not allow the proposed projects to be implemented. Therefore, while the gap between the intentions of the authorities and their ability to enforce them grew

²⁴² The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 9 (1988).

²⁴³ Ibid., *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 5 (1988).

²⁴⁴ *Merkurii*, no. 10, March 1988, last modified June 1, 2020, <http://zelinskaya.info/merkurij-vypusk-10/>.

²⁴⁵ Tatiana Menshikova, and Yury Mikhailov, “Na perekrestke mnenii. Poniat' znachit pomoch'...” [At the Crossroads of Opinions. To Understand Means to Help], *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, September 10, 1987.

tremendously,²⁴⁶ the GR moved ahead from the issues of historical preservation while probing the limits of possible action.

From 1988, the GR engaged in the discussion of the Regulations which were condemned by the many activists from independent political groups. To bring closer attention to the issue, Kovalev proposed to hold an all-Union campaign “For Fair Regulations on Assemblies” and called neformaly of the Soviet Union to follow several steps. The campaign included holding mass meetings that could popularize the hampering effect of the Regulations as an impediment to the development of “socialist democracy” by the means of public discussions, forwarding resolutions to the Supreme Soviet and collecting signature against the Regulations.²⁴⁷ Advocating the Soviet constitution, Kovalev, thus, stood for a public reaction before the final adoption of the law at the highest level and urged the activist to unite in “The Union for Fair Regulations on Assemblies”.

In fact, there is little evidence on how Kovalev’s endeavors were fulfilled across the Soviet Union. In Leningrad, on May 28, 1988, the activists of the CCE and the GR gathered in front of Kazan Cathedral on Nevsky Prospect for the discussion without the permission of Lengorispolkom. Obviously, despite the firm belief in postulates of the Soviet constitution granting the right for open expression of opinion, the activists were brutally arrested by militia and condemned for “anti-Soviet” and “provocative” behavior in *Vechernii Leningrad*.²⁴⁸ In other words, the reaction of Lengorispolkom once again demonstrated the futility of seeking resolution of the conflict through the means offered by glasnost, perestroika, and democracy.

For that reason, by the middle of 1988, the organizational form of a group or a club as an active actor of the perestroika process was questioned by the activists for its inefficiency.²⁴⁹ While in Moscow groups of neformaly were replaced mostly by the parties which contested the authority of the CPSU, pro-perestroika activists of Leningrad in June 1988 joined Popular Fronts

²⁴⁶ Mark Beissinger, *Nonviolent Public Protest in the USSR: December 1, 1986 – December 31, 1989. Report*. (Washington: National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1990), 53.

²⁴⁷ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 9 (1988).

²⁴⁸ *Obshchestvennaia zhizn' Leningrada v gody perestroiki. 1985 – 1991: sbornik materialov*, 103.

²⁴⁹ Carole Sigman, *Politicheskie kluby i Perestroika v Rossii: oppozitsiya bez dissidentstva*, 233.

(*Leningradskii narodnyi front*, hereinafter LNF) – the political platform “unifying the adherents of radical democratic changes”.²⁵⁰ To prepare bodies of state power, it, in fact, proposed affiliated candidates for the election in the Soviet of People’s Deputies – a Gorbachev-era governmental body probed in 1987 aiming to refresh the composition of the executive power in the Soviet Union by granting officially registered amateur organizations with the right to propose its candidate.²⁵¹ In practice, it meant that for the first time in the history of the Soviet Union, people with different attitudes toward the Soviet system were given an opportunity to be admitted to government, while LNF established a framework and mechanisms for this process.

The GR also joined LNF, which, however, was only partially true – of course, not every member of the group expressed interests in politics as Kovalev did. It is important to stress here that the GR from its inception did not have a clearly articulated idea of groupness which shaped it as an entity in the context of perestroika. That was explained by the origin of the GR from *tusovka*, a friendly community of young people hanging out together; the communication inside the group was “practiced for the pleasure of communication itself, a means to joke around, to play with words for the sake of the game itself”;²⁵² it did not set a strict criterion for enrollment into the group, accepting a variety of individuals with different views and lifestyles and avoided the establishment of regulative structures for the community, basing predominantly on friendly ties and trust to each other.²⁵³ That is why the ways of engagement into this creative *tusovka* started in the Archeological Club of the Leningrad Pioneer Palace, café “Saigon”, Klub-81, LZTI and finished on Ital’ianskaia Street at the private apartment of Kovalev, “whose mother made tea and fed everybody with black crackers”.²⁵⁴ Therefore, the GR as a heterogeneous group of people with

²⁵⁰ *Severo-zapad: Izdanie dlia Leningradskogo dvizheniia za perestroiku* [North-West: Publication for the Leningrad Movement for Perestroika] 3, 1988.

²⁵¹ Evan Mawdsley, and Stephen White, *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Gorbachev: The Central Committee and its Members 1917-1991*, 205. See also, Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World. Perestroika in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 114. See also, David Lane, *Soviet Society Under Perestroika* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57-94.

²⁵² Oleg Kharkhordin, *Republicanism in Russia: Community Before and After Communism*, 113.

²⁵³ Sergei Vasiliev, “Gruppa spaseniia. Kak eto nachinalos’,” 16-17.

²⁵⁴ Svetlana Motovilova oral history interview conducted by Margarita Pavlova in Saint-Petersburg, Russian Federation, April 4, 2017.

different backgrounds, goals, and interests was primarily conceived as a community of friends engaged in some culturally important activity.

The importance of culture over politics was expressed by the end of 1987, when the GR and the CCE articulated a straightforward rejection of the politics of dissidents and human rights activists. Considering them as the opponents of socialism and adherents of “alternative ideologies”, the GR’s leaders were convinced of the hazardous position for existing political order position they placed.²⁵⁵ No less malicious elements, according to the GR, were the Moscow-based editors of the nonformal journal *Glasnost*, who were suspected in collaboration with some bureaucrats and, thus, prohibited to disseminate CCE’s materials in their publication. Therefore, the GR considered the politics of confrontation with the regime to be subversive and, thus, undesirable.

At the same time, the activists stated, “it did not mean that we are apolitical, and we do not want to pretend like we do not notice the political side of our activism.”²⁵⁶ Indeed, the GR’s primary motivation was an endeavor to influence the urban planning and redesign the system of heritage preservation that, however, cannot be apolitical *per se*. Such perestroika’s principles as “pluralism” and “democratization” were considered by the activists as a condition for the changes in heritage preservationism, not as the ultimate objective of their activism. For that reason, before Angleterre, the members of the group, while absorbing Gorbachev’s rhetoric of the perestroika period, hoped for establishment of working relationships with the city authorities and institutions responsible for monuments’ preservation and wished to make a positive contribution in the heritage preservation through the joint efforts.

By 1988, when the reluctance of the authorities for collaboration became apparent and the activists lost confidence in an opportunity to make an impact on the society “from below”, the groups sought to help the preservation “from within” by nominating Alexei Kovalev to the election

²⁵⁵ The Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies at University of Bremen. F. 35 *Vestnik soveta po ekologii kul'tury*, no. 4 (1988).

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

in the Leningrad Soviet of People's Deputies via LNF.²⁵⁷ As a result of two rounds, Kovalev went successfully through the selection and on April 3, 1990, became a member of Lensovet, which for the first time in late Soviet history was replenished by the grass-roots activists and intelligentsia demonstrating the defeat of the Communists authorities.²⁵⁸ As a Lensovet's deputy, Kovalev lobbied for legislative improvement in the system of monument protection, an extension of "preservation zones" and referendum on the return of the city's historical name. As a result, on September 6, 1991, Leningrad became Saint Petersburg, while in December of the same year, the deputies of Lensovet voted for the expansion of the enclave of protected historic buildings in the city center, which created one of the largest "preservation zones" in the world.²⁵⁹

4.8. Concluding Remarks

The chapter has demonstrated that despite Gorbachev's endorsement of the independent youth initiative, the initial indifference and subsequent confusion of the regional authorities' over "socially undesirable" activism pursued by young preservationists had been replaced by its suppression in May 1987. At the same time, the grass-roots groups of preservationists multiplied, fragmented, and grouped in the Council for Cultural Ecology that illustrated an alienation from the Komsomol. The imitation of the Soviet bureaucratic vocabulary in the CCE's constitution and the Soviet administrative structures in its administrative composition illustrated an attempt to mimic and embed in the Soviet order, not confront it. Likewise, the appeals to the Supreme Soviet to invoke the responsibility of Leningradskii gosplan for the demolition of the building could also hardly be explained by opposition to the Soviet order. Rather, the GR's motivation behind the contestation of the demolition was a demand to follow the law, violation of which resulted in the dismantling of the building they considered historically important for the urban environment. Moreover, the

²⁵⁷ For detailed account on the LNF see Alexander Sungurov, "Leningradskii klub Perestroika kak prototip tsentra publichnoi politiki," [Leningrad Club 'Perestroika' as a Prototype of the Centre for Public Policy], *Publichnaia politika* 1 (2008): 102-109.

²⁵⁸ Daria Shevchenko, "Poslednii Lensovet: vybory i nachalo deiatel'nosti (aprel' 1990 – avgust 1991 goda)," *Obshchestvo. Sreda. Razvitie* 4 (2014): 53. For more on electoral law of 1989 in Leningrad see Robert Orttung, *From Leningrad to St. Petersburg: Democratization in a Russian City* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995).

²⁵⁹ Boris Gladarev, "Istoriko-kul'turnoe nasledie Peterburga: rozhdenie obshchestvennosti iz duha goroda, 115.

activists demanded legitimization of independent publishing and requested the authorities to provide the conditions for secure and mass production of samizdat journals which spread information on their activism. They, after all, organized conferences to gather independent associations and discuss how the state system of heritage preservation could be modified. For that reason, attribution of neformaly to “anti-Soviet” elements, as it was pursued by the Leningrad Komsomol and the regional authorities, proved to be a delusion deriving from a reluctance to take up the course of Gorbachev’s politics. Therefore, by 1988, when the inability of the groups to implement their endeavors became clear, one might say, that the GR as a former friendly tusovka experienced fragmentation into individuals some of whom managed to implement their expertise in historic preservation “from within” in Lensovet, but not “from above” as it was encouraged by Gorbachev at the beginning of perestroika.

Conclusion

Comprised of four chapters, this thesis attempted to propose a new understanding of civic activism during perestroika. As I have shown in the thesis, an impetus for the groups' crystallization could be traced back to the Thaw. Its cultural and political environment provided an opportunity for the establishment of LITO's under the aegis of the Writers' Unions which operated as platforms for young poets to speculate on literature and art. Following the folding of the Thaw, a rigid line of Brezhnev's politics ceased alternative platforms to exist that forced "undesirably" creative Leningraders to search for new spaces. Among them were café "Saigon" and private apartments which hosted seminars on religion and philosophy, discussions on the avant-garde, poetry readings, and gatherings of writers, artists, scholars, and those who were excluded from the state institutions for not being in line with the officially established standards. Over time, the stratum of "unrecognized" intellectuals formed a movement of the "unofficial culture" or the "second culture", the members of which sought recognition by the Writers' Union and attempted to legitimize their art. Therefore, as I have demonstrated, excessive control of Leningrad authorities over dissent displaced the issues of politics leaving culture as the only accessible and relatively secure realm for "dropping-out" of socialism.

However, even the cultural "non-conformism" of Leningrad was subjected to control of the KGB; as a result of negotiations, the unofficial culture was institutionalized in quasi-official Klub-81. As I have illustrated, by the beginning of perestroika, the Klub-81 was the only platform in Leningrad which provided newly emerged groups of neformaly with space for socialization and cultural leisure activity. Apart from poetry and music, the Klub-81's interest in regional history and historic preservation was taken up by the GR, popularly known as neformaly. Encouraged by Gorbachev to take up "revolutionary renewal" of society, the GR, following the formerly established practices of cultural activism as a relatively secure and familiar realm, initiated several successful campaigns on the preservation of the buildings, on which they imposed a historic, not aesthetic, significance. Thus, I assume, that the language of culture which was applied to preserve

the built environment of Leningrad and fulfill “the right to the city” proved to be a highly effective tool not only for mobilization of Leningraders but also for the articulation of dissent with urban planning.

At the same time, the unsuccessful campaign to preserve the Hotel Angleterre from demolition in March 1987 created a situation when the issue of heritage preservation could be discussed and practiced openly. I have demonstrated that this opportunity was applied by the GR and the CCE for negotiations with the authorities on the matter of compliance with the law on heritage preservation, which, in fact, did not bring a positive outcome. The activists were provided with a short-term opportunity for consolidation and articulation of their dissent with Lengorispolkom before it introduced the Regulations in May 1987. For that reason, the authorities’ imposition of the restrictions on the grass-roots activism and neglect to recognize the activists as fully-fledged actors of perestroika compelled the GR (or, better say, its leader) to opt for political participation in 1988. Therefore, this thesis demonstrates the complexity of the perestroika’s implementation in the localities.

Moreover, this thesis continues to debate on the paradoxes and peculiarities of the late Soviet period. I have examined that by the beginning of 1988, the initially cultural language of the activists became more explicitly political but filled with unconventional meaning. Namely, the groups’ understanding of “politics” implied the genuine commitment to improve the deteriorating system of heritage preservation and confront bureaucratic and “anti-democratic” tendencies in cultural development, as opposed to subversive “politics” of dissidents and human rights activists, who stood against the Soviet system. Therefore, by developing Yurchak, Platt, and Nathans’s assumption on the (a)political stance of late Soviet people, I have presented how living *vnye* was manifested by the activists of heritage preservation in Leningrad during the period of the Gorbachev’s reforms.

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