

# INHABITING PROPAGANDA



Let's convert Moscow into an exemplary communist city!

When one sees huge volumetric letters on top of a building saying “Let’s convert Moscow into an exemplary communist city”, she doesn’t take it as operating propaganda but, instead, feels the atmosphere of history in it. However, we can benefit both from the power of propaganda and the tradition of text in the city. For this, we have to choose the right quotes, not the generic ones as before, but the much more specific and telling ones, those which uncover the ideology of city development characteristic to this or that period of time. We have to take the quotes which indicate the most significant moments or turns in the vision of Moscow’s future. By placing them on the facades of the buildings which happened to be the physical manifestations of the policy to which the quotes belong. By doing this, we are combining the monumental qualities of the sentences with the monumental qualities of the buildings on top of which they are places.

“A modest four-story building is as different from a today’s panel 16 to 25 storey house as the first airplane differs from the contemporary spacecrafts.”

(Ready-built reinforced-concrete unified skeleton: construction experience in Moscow. Design, research, fabrication, installation, perspectives of the development. Y.Dyachovichniy, V. Maksimenko. Moscow, Stroyizdat, 1985)

For school kids in Russia the history is very simple – first there was Pushkin then he died and then Lermontov was born, after he died, finally, Dostoyevsky was born. Often they do not know that there were actually some overlaps between them and different characters of epochs might have had influenced each other. The history of literature also is kept in a different dimension from political history, or the art history. The history is something abstract which lives in the history books.

The history of Russia of 20th and 21st centuries is extremely rich on the radical changes of its own vision of the future. This is what made Moscow’s architectural landscape so diverse and interesting. These visions of the future were so strong that when one reads about a certain historical period she always has a temptation to overestimate the presence of these visions in the actual Soviet city. In reality, those things were often only small futuristic inclusions in the architectural landscape. Moreover, each period has a moment of inertia, and of course not everything could have been changed at once with the turn of the party line. This way, even after Khrushchev’s turn towards industrial housing, we can still see the traces of the Stalinist approach in what was actually built.

When you read the documents which were part of the ideology around the avant-garde architecture of the 1920s and the political vision of that time, its radical view on the world makes you think that all at once Moscow had been changed from a traditional 19th century city into a modern city. This perception is also reinforced by contemporary culture. A lot of movies made in 1920s drew our attention to the progress, especially related to the city. In the films of new genre of “city symphonies” film directors always emphasized the amount of the innovative in the city. For example, such tipick as traffic, closely related to both the technological progress and the new esthetics of dynamics, was always subject for exaggeration on the movies. All the cinematic tricks were used to create the atmosphere of a non-stop movement on the cars in such films as “Tretya Meshyanskaya” (1927, dir. Abram Room), for example, even if in reality Moscow was not as much packed with the private transport [1].

However strong the feeling of the new and the official ideology seemed to be at those times from the documents and fiction, the residential buildings in which this ideology has manifested, the communal houses, nowadays are often neglected by the contemporary government and not noticed by the citizens. The visions of the

future very quickly become outdated. They do have a second chance though. At some point the buildings and the past ideology starts to form part of the history and become appreciated because of that. The physical world around us is exactly the manifestation of history and we only need to be able to read it. Part of the people refuse to read it since it brings back the memories of the Soviet times, the other part is not able to read it, being too young to know what each building stands for. Nevertheless, the city demonstrates the history even better than a painting or a film, since the latter two only show the history up to this particular moment when they were created, and the city shows as well how the later period of time was interpreting the previous one. One can see whether during the later period of time people were perceiving the earlier one, as a treasure which needs to be protected or as a mistake that needs to be erased. Thus, the city consists of different layers of history, and each of them represents a certain period of history with its own political, economical and cultural context.

Different periods of history produced different amount of architecture. Of course, the number of avant-garde buildings can’t be compared with the amount of industrially produced buildings. Nevertheless, all of them at the moment when they were created both of them were envisioned as the only possible concepts of Moscow’s future development. If they were not interchanging each other that often, Moscow’s landscape would have been probably very monotonous. One can imagine the whole Moscow built only with avant-garde architecture, or uniquely with the Stalinists palaces.

### **“THE PHYSICAL WORLD AROUND US IS EXACTLY THE MANIFESTATION OF HISTORY AND WE ONLY NEED TO BE ABLE TO READ IT”.**

However big the intentions were, they never were changing the city fully and at once. Looking at the photos of Moscow at that time, one realize that the avant-garde building reflecting the ideology of “new man” were only single touches of the future in an old town. They may have looked even out of place, and time was needed for them to become fully incorporated in the city. Added by the new layers of the history, these futuristic inclusions faded and become part of the historical landscape. Only later they became again appreciated by a group of specialists who drew attention to their architectural qualities. It resulted into new preservation organizations such as “Archnadzor” (created in 2009), for example. The same happened to Stalinist architecture. If the Stalin’s seven sisters were almost single high-rise buildings in the Moscow’s landscape, now, on the background of Moscow city skyscraper cluster they stopped being so striking just because of their scale. Nevertheless, those are the layers that add to the diversity of Moscow’s landscape.



Leninism is our  
manifesto



Communism will win!



The importance of Tula for the Republic is enormous / V.I. Lenin/

*"A modest four-storey building is as different from a today's panel 16 to 25 storey house as the first airplane is from a contemporary spacecraft."*

Y.Dychovichniy, V. Maksimenko,  
Ready-built Reinforced-Concrete Unified Skeleton:  
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Above: Long life to the Communist party of the Soviet Union  
Below: Towards the victory of communism





Above: Glory to the Soviet People  
Below: Baltika. Russian beer brand

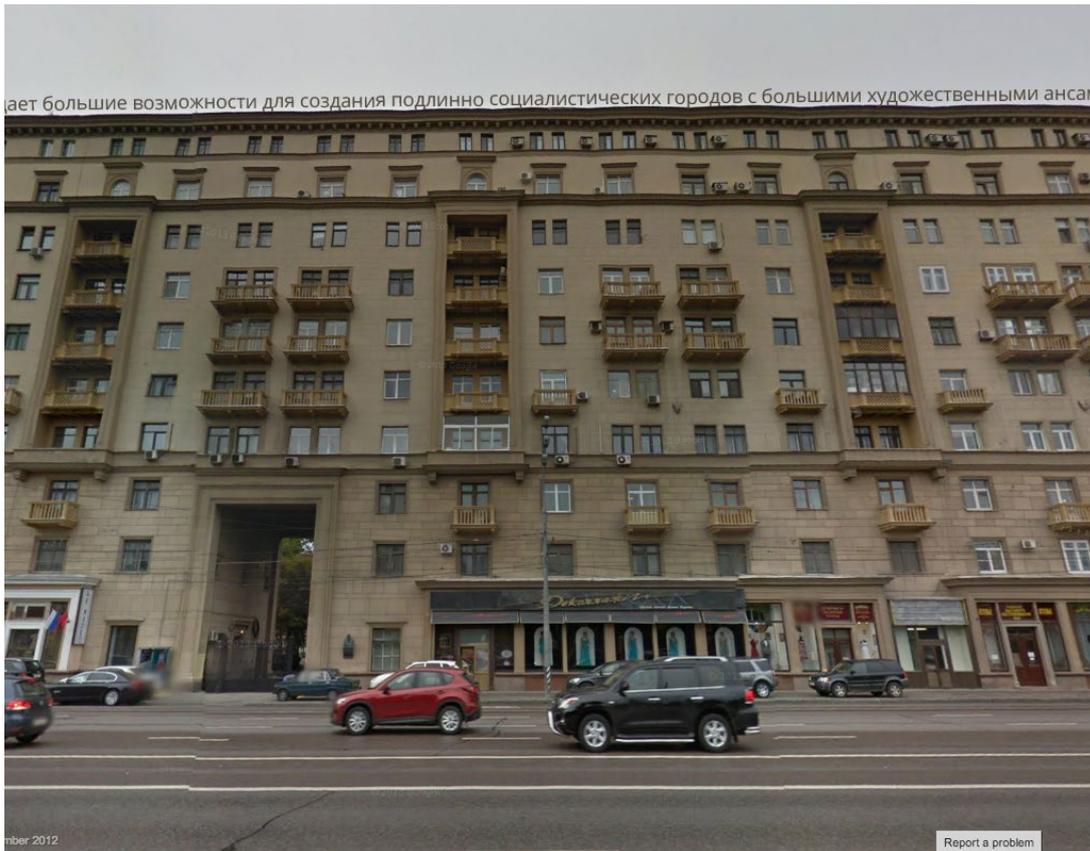




Socialization of satisfaction of everyday needs will optimise the use of women's productive forces.  
Leonid Sabsovich,  
Socialist cities.  
1930

An essential condition for the well-being is socialization of "byt" and abolishment of any form of the family life.  
L. Sabsovich, Soviet Union  
in 15 years,  
1929



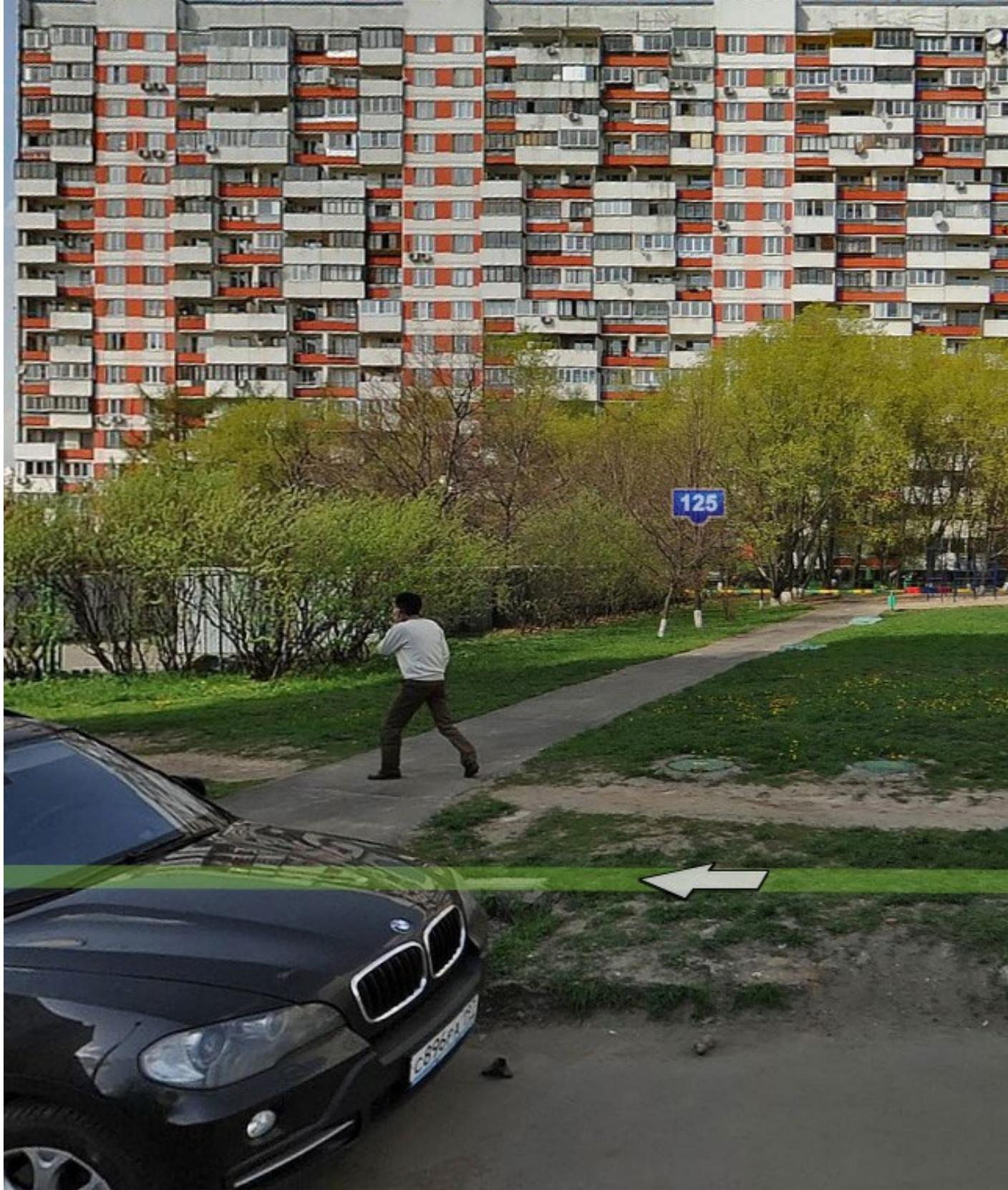


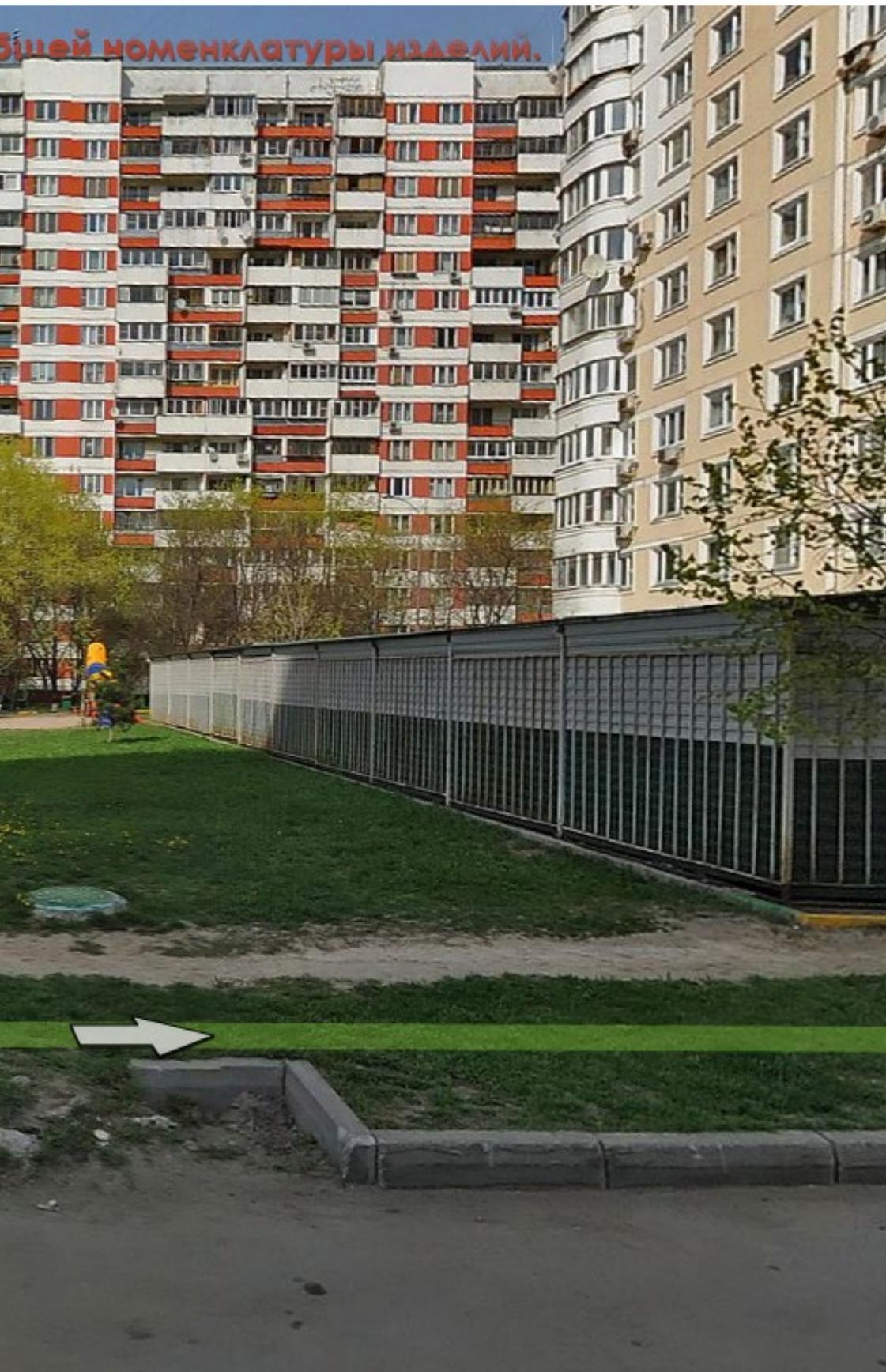
Architectural arrangement of the capital must fully reflect the grandeur and beauty of the socialist epoch". Resolution of the Central Commute of All-Union Communist Party on the General Plan of Reconstruction of Moscow 1935

Architectural arrangement of the capital city must fully reflect the grandeur and beauty of the socialist epoch. Resolution of the Central Commute of All-Union Communist Party. 1935



Массовые изделия должны составлять не менее 80% от об





Mass produced elements should represent at least 80 per cent of the whole nomenclature of the elements.  
Instructions for designing the panel housing units.  
1977