

Invisible bigness: soviet skyscraper in a post-soviet world

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Hypothesis

Moscow's seven Soviet skyscrapers have "disappeared" from people's perceptions as a result of a shapeless culture of memory.

The last century still remains a burning question in our society – it was a time of great achievements and great losses. The country was as big as the roman empire, one of the greatest military victories was won, man traveled into space, but at the same time more or less everyone suffered from terror. It was the time of big narratives, big dreams but simultaneously a time of big fears and big sacrifices. This time is over, politics have changed, but society seems to somehow remain in that period – there have been no serious discussions and no global decision was taken on how to deal with the Soviet past.

The Soviet period is somehow – maybe formally – gone, but it left many traces. One of the most powerful and durable elements embodying this time is architecture. Totalitarian architecture is a very special case as its ideological message is very strong. In our research, we took Moscow's seven sisters, which were the most symbolic buildings of Stalin's time, and we endeavored to the best of our ability to follow their mythology. These Soviet skyscrapers were created to be a part of the culture of memory, to glorify the socialist era, and we wanted to figure out what they stand for today and tomorrow--or, more broadly, determine the place

of Soviet utopia in contemporary Moscow.

We traced their place in history, culture and media as well as the in the stories of inhabitants and of Soviet architecture lovers. We found out that their significance in Moscow's urban culture changed dramatically from a central element to a structure that is not that much recognized anymore and "absent" from people's perceptions. They symbolize a time that people do not know how to deal with. The difficulties that the entire society has with these symbols render them almost invisible.

Methodology

First, we outline the timeline of the cloud of meaning surrounding these buildings, i.e. their mythology.[1] They were made to commemorate the époque, but later events changed much of their destiny and created new meanings. New meanings were added, old meanings were forgotten, time went by and their importance declined.

We intended to discern what they stand for today, i.e. their current

meaning in urban culture with the help of cultural and media references, a social survey and a real estate study. We wanted to prove our feeling that these buildings remain the "hidden obvious" in the city, Soviet bigness has paradoxically vanished from people's perceptions.

Our explanation relies on the conditions of the culture of memory in Moscow – shapeless, diffused and even nonexistent. We made a comparison

with Berlin's conditions of culture of memory and its attitude towards Stalinist architecture. We discussed another strategy for dealing with heritage and weighed its advantages and disadvantages.

Finally, we created a manifesto with a proposal for how to establish these buildings in the urban culture of contemporary Moscow. Our main goal is to develop the culture of memory, as we feel that there is a cry for a one.



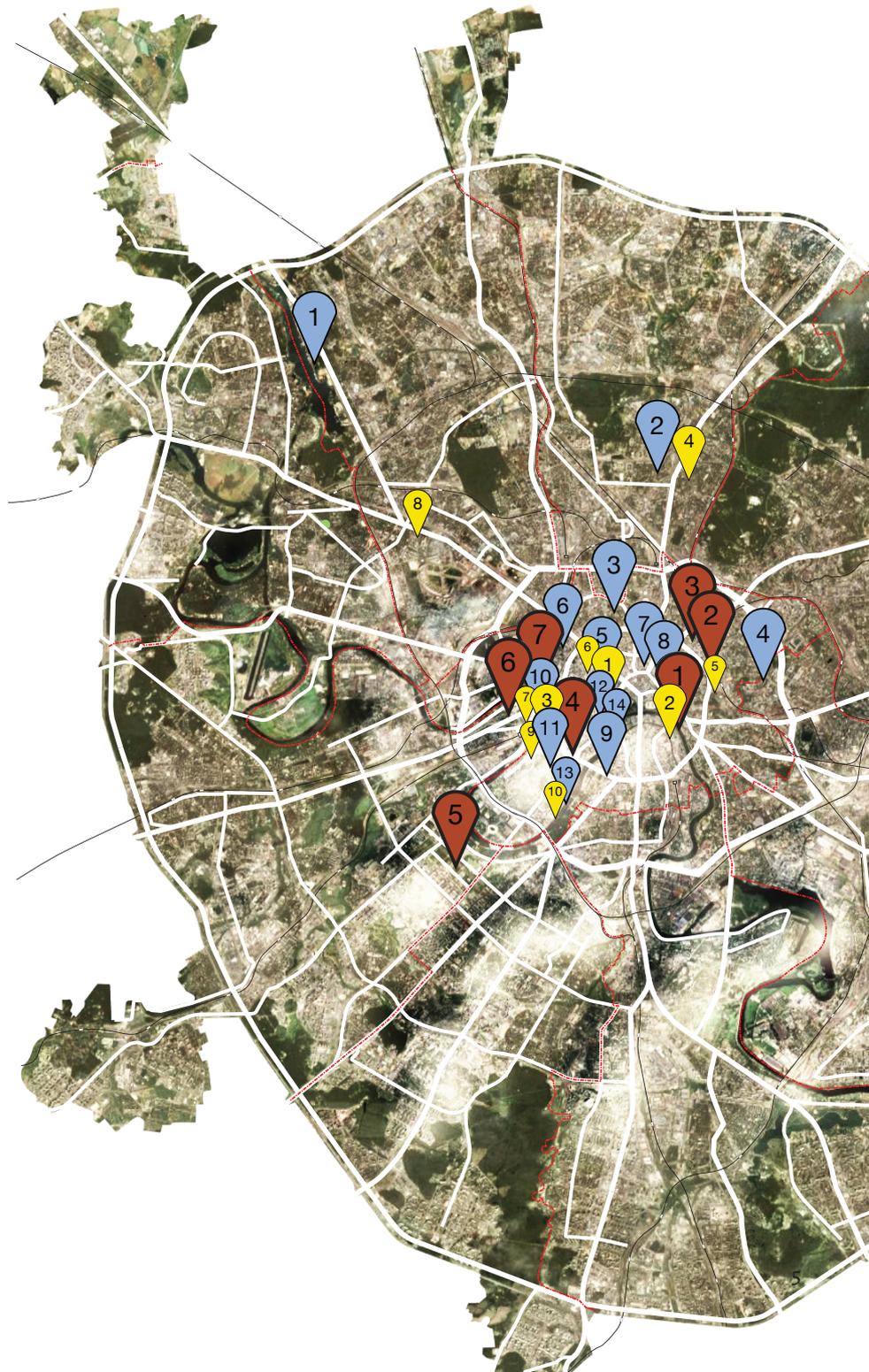
SYMBOLIC BUILDING

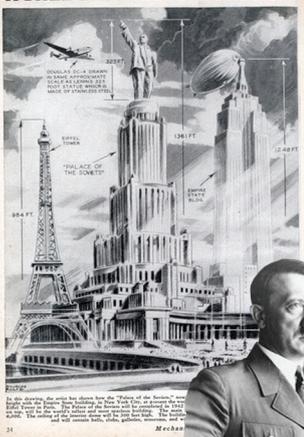
A symbolic building is a building that has a strong ideological message, i.e. in the design of these buildings ideology is at least as important as their functionality

During Stalin's (1928-1953) administration, around 5,000 buildings were constructed in Moscow [2]. They had differed values: most of them were quite ordinary, but some of them were more important due to their ideological message. These "politically important" buildings can be divided into three categories: (1) Functional-

ity dominates over ideology, these are remarkable houses, constructed in neoclassicism style, with a light ideological message; (2) Functionality is as important as ideology, and these are building-symbols, mostly constructed in empire style, due to their strong ideological message they became the symbol of the time; (3) Ideology dominates over functionality, these are very important buildings, with the strongest ideological input, made to glorify the socialist era and to compete with other countries. The seven Soviet skyscrapers fall in the third category- they are Soviet architectural attempts to represent bigness.

1	HOUSE ON MOHOVAYA STREET BY GEOLTOVSKY	
2	HOUSE ON KOSMODENI-ANOVSKAYA EMB.	
3	HOUSE ON NOVINSKY BOULEVARD, 18	
4	HOUSE ON PEASE AVENUE, 120	
5	HOUSE ON ZEMLYANOV VAL, 46	
6	HOUSE UNDER THE SKIRT	
7	HOUSE ON T.SHEVCHENKO EMB.	
8	HOUSE OF GENERALS (LENINGRADSKY AVENUE, 75)	
9	HOUSE OF ARCHITECTS (ROSTOVSKAYA EMB., 5)	
10	HOUSE ON FRUNZENSKAYA EMB., 24/1	
1	NORTHERN RIVER-BOAT STATION	
2	VDNH MAIN PAVILION	
3	THEATRE OF SOVIET ARMY	
4	BAUMAN MSTU	
5	THEATRE OF MOSSOVET	
6	"PEKIN" HOTEL	
7	STATE COUNCIL	
8	"MOSCOW" HOTEL	
9	GORKY PARK MAIN ENTRANCE	
10	HOUSE OF NKVD WORKERS	
11	FRUNZE MILITARY COLLEGE	
12	PEOPLE'S COMMISSARIAT OF MILITARY AND SEA AFFAIRS	
13	MAIN BUILDING OF HEADQUARTERS OF LAND FORCES	
14	HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT	
1	MOSCOW STATE UNIVERSITY BUILDING	
2	"UKRAINE" HOTEL	
3	HOUSE ON KOTELNICHESKAYA	
4	FOREIGN MINISTRY AFFAIRS BUILDING	
5	BUILDING ON KUDRINSKAYA SQUARE	
6	BUILDING ON KRASNYE VOROTA SQUARE	
7	"LENINGRADSKAYA" HOTEL	





1931

1935

Timeline

Moscow's seven Soviet skyscrapers (so called Vysotkas) were created as a very instrumental and strong tool to create a special culture of memory. In other words, they were commissioned to commemorate the Soviet period forever.

These buildings were an inseparable part of communist narrative of

bigness, as opposed to the big liberal narrative in the U.S. and the big narrative of the Nazis in Germany. Vysotkas continue the line of Palace of Soviets (project declared in (1931), the result of an architectural competition with American skyscrapers and Shpeer's palace in Berlin. The main embodiment of soviet greatness, the Palace of Soviets was broadly criticized but didn't change much and even devel-

oped a subordinate genplan of city reconstruction (1935). In 1937, the symbolical meeting of world powers happens at the Paris exhibition as the apogee of competition in bigness with the Soviet and Nazi pavilions standing side by side. Soon after this, World War II begins. The post-war destiny of Palace of Soviets is not very clear—as it has never been embodied and remained only a →



1951

1955

Vysotkas were created as a strong form of ideological communication with an appropriate design and position. As a whole, this impetus failed with a growing ideological distance in the years afterwards.

Khrushchev's resolution on excess in design (1955) changed completely the mythology of Moscow's skyscraper, transforming it from the exemplary

model to the forbidden example. The Vysotka is now considered a symbol of a time that is fading - and the "Khrushchevka" becomes the symbol of modernity. Big narratives lose their scale not only in scope of construction - people's minds are occupied with smaller things - like planting corn or furnishing their new apartment. However, this all takes place on the background of a man

flying to the space - as the last echo of outgoing bigness. Breshnev continues Khrushchev's trend in low-cost housing, which leads to disappointment and a kind of hatred of architecture. It seems that the technology of construction goes away completely; the seven sisters are regarded as a technological miracle that can never be achieved again. Positive meaning →



13 января 1947 г. Совет Министров СССР принял предложение товарища Сталина о строительстве в 1947–1952 гг. многоэтажных зданий.

„Пропорции и силуэты этих зданий должны быть оригинальны и своей архитектурно-художественной композицией должны быть увязаны с исторически сложившейся архитектурой города и силуэтом будущего Дворца Советов... Протирирующие здания не должны повторять образцы известных за границей многоэтажных зданий“.

(Из постановления Совета Министров СССР)

1937

1947

1949

powerful idea that surprisingly spited in seven high-rise structures, the so-called Vysotkas. Vysotkas were created during the post-war renovation (1947) to glorify the victory, support the Palace of Soviets and symbolize the prosperous future. The mythology was unfolded even before the buildings were constructed, as it was broadcasted using all possible channels. These high-rise buildings

were said to (1) create the best lifestyle for working people, (2) reflect the greatness of socialist era and (3) preserve the historical roots of Moscow. After receiving Stalin’s awards in 1949, the Vysotka became very popular, very prominent, and it was supposed to appear in every USSR city. A sort of “cult of Vysotkas” is created with the release of stamps, postcards, even step-by-step instructions for how to build a

Vysotka from snow. The mythology of the Vysotka is spread not only throughout the country, but also to the west (GDR) even in children’s games. Berlin also tried to create its own Vysotka. It appeared in first drafts in 1951, but it was never realized and, like the Palace of Soviets, it remained only a powerful idea that was subordinated to city reconstruction. It means the internalization of mythology.



1979

2003

2006

of post-war renovation seem to render the seven sisters symbols of power that is gone. A new wave of souvenir production (stamps, etc.) mark a new wave of public interest in them. This is created and supported by attempts to reconsider Soviet architecture, both in literature and cinema (Paperny’s “Culture 2”, 1985, Smirnov’s “Truth and honor”, 1979, Trifonov’s “house on en-

bankment”, 1976) and in architecture- -Chechulin’s White House (1979). In the global context of postmodernism, one of Vysotka’s architects revised his own project. Thus, Stalinist architecture is now considered an example of classical heritage. This line of reinterpretation of Stalinist style followed in the second decade of Luzhkov era. Among the

great variety of projects, appears the so-called Neostalinist style. The first forms of fake-Stalinist architecture are the Paveletskaya Plaza (2003) and the Triumph Palace (2006). Thus, the state of culture of memory is so diluted that there is no difference between the original and the fake.

The Kotelnicheskaya case

In our previous chapter, we highlighted the decline of the importance of these buildings, a growing ideological distance in communication with their cultural value going down.

To study their current value and to analyze the contemporary mythology of Vyotka more precisely, we took one building, the house on the Kotelnicheskaya embankment. It is not as close for people as the administrative buildings of FMA at the Red Gates, but it has a good location and a great number of quasi-public spaces. To study its intangible and tangible value, we traced this building in media (newspapers, journals), cinema, and checked out real estate prices and studied the history of its public spaces.



In 1950s, Vysotkas were mostly discussed all together, like seven sisters –only Moscow State University was discussed individually from the very beginning –it was the only building meeting the official myths as it was open to the public. As a whole, media in the 1950s broadcasted the myth created by propaganda. Vysotkas were “reflecting the greatness of socialist era”, “a symbol of progress of Soviet architecture” and “defining the image of the future Moscow”. It was very popular and bold, it was supposed to be the central part of the city forever. In modern media the building has almost lost its value as people seem to be more interested with those who live in the building than in the building itself. No universal narrative can be

People seem to be more interested with the people who live in that building than in the building itself

found in Russian media. The most popular topics are illegal activities of its inhabitants and the review of their luxurious apartments (20% of articles), the history of famous inhabitants of the past (16%), activity of city government (cleaning/turning lights out etc – 12%), reflections in the arts or literature (12%) and some historical overviews (16%). By contrast, in foreign media outlets a strong respected narrative can be found – Vysotkas symbolize the power that is gone but in some cases is related to the present power (12%). The Vysotka on Kotelnicheskaya is highlighted as an indisputable landmark and the center of Taganskaya neighborhood (100% articles highlight this fact, 75% pay attention to its history and mythology) and a museum that you can live in—with a broader discussion of real estate situation in the press (25% vs. 8% in Russian media).

The cinema of 1950s (“True friends”, 1954 “Alyosha Ptitsin improves his personality” 1953, “In the right moment” 1956), as all the media of that time expresses the official myth that was discussed in the previous section. These films are positive and enthusiastic, Vysotkas are shown as the main achievement of the time, the symbol of renovation and a prosperous future for everyone. The best people live in this type of building, and thus it is a great stimulus, spurring students to enter MSU, pursue a career and then work or live in other Vysotkas. Almost nothing remains from their mythology in modern cinema, which can be divided into two groups. The first group, the “pseudo-historical films” (“Hipsters”, “The spy”) use this

Power is no more related to Vysotka – only well-to-do people. No continuity of mythology can be found here

building as decoration to speak about the Soviet period but differ greatly in terms of the atmosphere. The Vysotka is shown to be a close and prestigious apartment block for the nomenklatura. The second group of films (“Moscow I love you”, “The brigade”, “Brother 2”, “Moscow skyscraper”) mark the decline of the building more precisely and describes the current context of Vysotka as being in a state of total disorder. These films are marked by a depressed mood and demonstrate social inequality. Power is no longer related to the Vysotka, it only belongs to well-to-do people. No continuity of mythology can be found here.

In literature, the situation is nearly the same as in media and cinema, with a number of books appearing during the Soviet era (Oltargevsky, 1953 Kuleshov and Pozdnev, 1954, Bylinkin, 1951) about all the buildings and special books dedicated to MSU (Voronkov and Balashov, 1954). Since Paperny’s “Culture 2”, no serious attempts have been made in professional literature to reconsider these buildings. Vaskin’s and Kruglov’s books seem to be just a collection of well-known facts without any special point of view. In fiction, the Vysotka on Kotelnicheskaya embankment appears rarely as a part of historical background to tell unbelievable stories about a totally different and very vulgar world of the Soviet elite (“Moskva-kva-kva”)

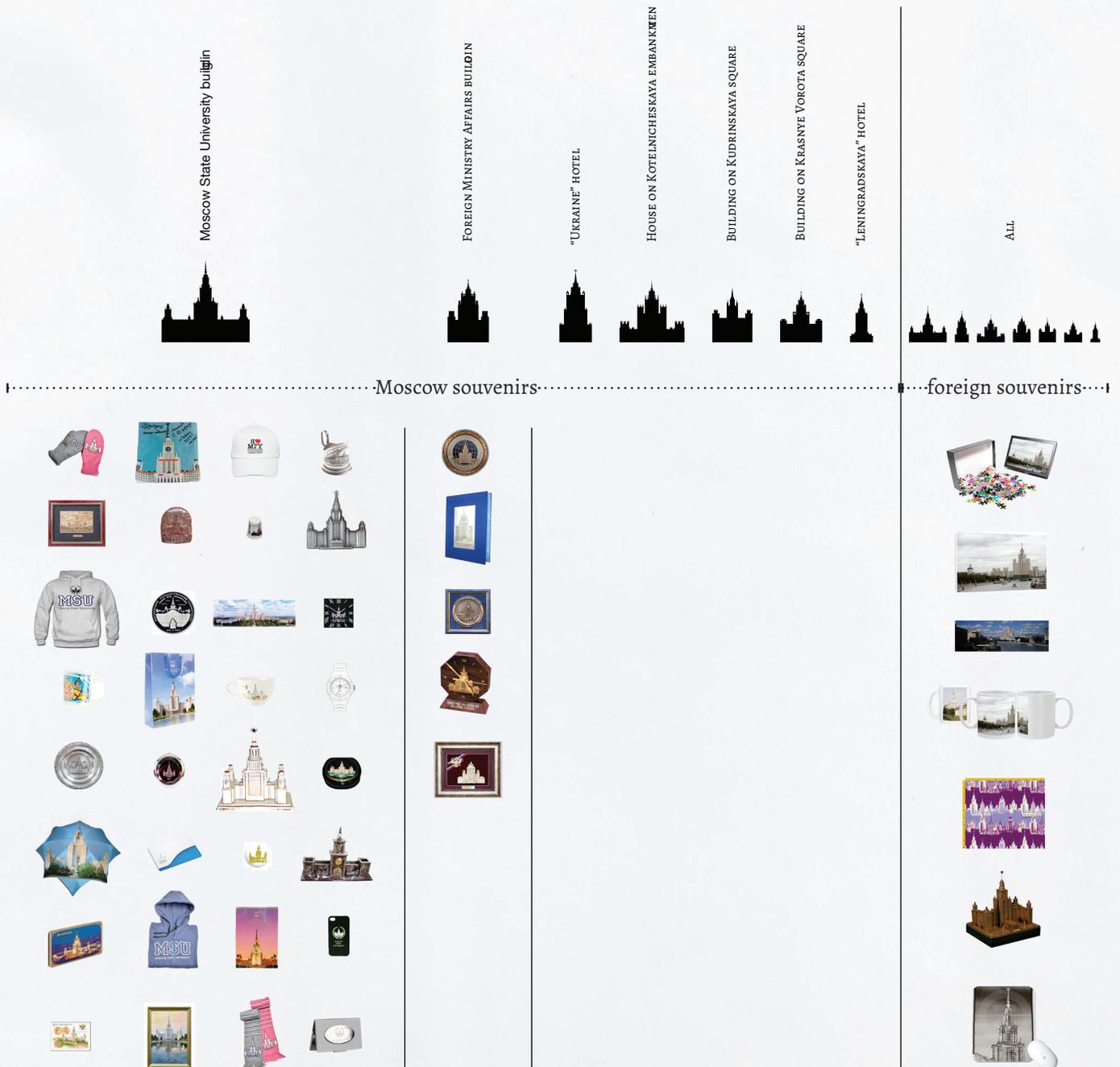
Foreign audience is much more interested in the subject

or to reveal the depressive atmosphere inside them (“Medeya and her children”). Serious works even by Russian authors (like the “Architecture of Stalin era”, Tarhanov and Kavtavadze) and foreign authors (for example, the serious social study of Kotelnicheskaya inhabitants by A.Nivat) are written in English, published abroad and never translated into Russian. Thus, it seems that the foreign audience is much more interested in the Vysotkas’s culture of memory.

SOUVENIRS, CITY POLITICS

While discussing mythology, we marked two waves of souvenir production and three big waves of public interest in these buildings: (1) after the Stalin award in 1949, (2) in the 1970s, due to their broad cultural discussion. Modern souvenir production marks a decline of interest in these buildings and is quite poor, especially in comparison with the number of foreign souvenirs celebrating them (at amazon.com you can find prints and mugs with them. American designers create cloth with their images, etc.). In a rare Moscow souvenir shop, you can find a

magnet or a postcard only with MSU. All Vysotkas are monuments of regional importance, but they do not appear much in city branding. However, we think that they have a great potential. Vysotkas are not in the list of official symbols of Moscow (resolution about use of city symbols, 1997[3]) with the exception of MSU, which appears in the city emblem as one of four city symbols. Excursions covering all seven sisters are rare (two to three times a year), and, in official holidays, festivals seem to cover all the city, come to every yard, with the exception of Vysotkas, where nothing happens.



SUBCULTURES

While being ignored by the official city policy and city culture, Vysotkas appear in different subcultures like roofers, racers, cyclists and Vysotka lovers. Among the most remarkable ones, we picked rap-culture, roofers and cyclists.

Since rap-artist Alexander Dolmatov (Guf) tattooed the seven sisters on his back, the Vysotkas seem to have become an important part of Moscow's rap culture. Guf used the image of the Vysotka to express his love for Moscow and at the same time to transfer a totally different culture, the American one. Dolmatov takes the part of mythology that relates to the American influence and ignores the rest. The fragmentation of mythology does not stop and the process goes on spontaneously. While Alexey Dolmatov fans

wear t-shirts and stick images with Vysotkas on their cars, the images have become a trend in themselves. Cars with these stickers appear in different regions with no relation to Stalinist architecture and Guf himself, and thus pop-culture somehow helps forgetting.

At the present moment, roofers are the most influential poets of Vysotka – they create an enormous interest in public with their frightening videos and photos. Some roofers are true fans of Stalinist architecture and study its history in detail. Vysotkas are the central element of urban culture for them. V. Raskalov has even copyrighted the phrase, "Moscow's roofs for me are Vysotkas". Among them, the Vysotka building on Kotelnicheskaya is the most popular after the one on Kudrinskaya to roof.

Cyclist culture is

remarkable as they organize their own tours covering all seven Vysotkas (similar official excursions are rare). They engage experts and architects who tell the history of these buildings during the trip. But the interest of local is not there. People who participate in these excursions are not that interested in the Vysotka so much as in the cycling. Surprisingly, foreign tourists participate in these excursions, even if they do not understand Russian and are not cycling lovers. Their interest is piqued by the Vysotkas.



GUF

CLIPMAKER

PHOTON-714
tv broadcast

GUF FANS AND FOLLOWERS

MOTORISTS

SURVEY

Our social survey (100 participants) showed that urban perceptions of Vysotkas have changed much since their establishment. People do not see them as being as relevant and significant as they did 60 years ago. Today, they are not perceived as being big (with the exception of MSU), but they have a strong relationship with Soviet bigness (15%). The second most frequent association in people's minds is their quality of construction (14%) while the third most common association is the Moscow of the 1950s (13%). Associations with Stalin (8%), power and war (2%) are not that popular, marking the special conditions of the culture of memory. These topics are not spoken about, and it seems that they are somehow ignored. They almost vanished in people's perceptions as it is extremely difficult for most peo-

ple to figure out what is the current meaning of Vysotkas, what they stand for today. "That's a difficult question. I don't know" – that's what everybody says. Their number and history are unknown both to Muscovites and Russian tourists (only 5% know about the origin of their construction and only 45% know their exact number); foreign tourists know their narrative much better, relating it to the narrative of Soviet utopia and power.

After revealing the modern context in culture and asking people in the street we decided to study tangible changes: what happened with the public spaces and the real estate situation in the building? First, we interviewed the building's concierge who introduces us to the building.

45%

know that there are 7 Vysotkas in Moscow

5%

know that they were constructed to celebrate the Day of Moscow

What is your first association with seven soviet skyscrapers?

- 1 BIGNESS
- 2 QUALITY OF CONSTRUCTION
- 3 MOSCOW OF 50-ES
- 4 DON'T KNOW

CONCIERGE INTERVIEW

According to the concierge, the Kotelnicheskaya building has survived many interior change. Today, the apartments are mostly rented, and their inhabitants are constantly changing. Thus, the Kotelnicheskaya building seems to have been transformed into a kind of hotel with a flexible interior. The first thing that new tenants do is refurbishment. Concierges are not able even to remember all the inhabitants – what remains in their memories are moldings and door handles thrown out. With this constant change, inhabitants do not form a community any more. The yard that was once used for meetings and festivals is now in disorder. The building was designed to be a closed, autonomous space and somehow it is still independent in its infrastructure. It still houses the council of veterans, passport management, its own renovation service, utilities and

a children’s room. But some services of the building are open to everyone, like the children’s room, as they are commercial. Concierges mark a new wave of interest in Vysotkas that began two years ago and has a link to the roofers’ subculture. A 70-year-old lady knows the English word “roofer” because every

day she catches someone attempting to climb the building. Today roofers seem to show the strongest interest in the Vysotka. Another group interested in the subject are foreign tourists that come in crowds to see the building and try to get inside, especially in the summertime. Compared to foreigners, locals’ interest is indisputably low.



photo: Vitaly Raskalov

REAL ESTATE

All of the tenants noticed the surprising fact that the rental price is not high and nearly the same as everywhere else in center. Realtor agencies assess the price as \$3000-4500 per square meter, that’s “not that much as the houses stand in the very center of Moscow” [4]. Renting is also quite cheap and comparable with apartments situated far away from the center– with 55,000 rubles per month for a 2-bedroom apartment. Apartments are even rented out by the day. Due to this financial policy, residents do not stay for a long time, and the Vysotka becomes a kind of hotel where inhabitants are constantly changing. Rich inhabitants are fighting against this phenomenon with attempts to create their own TSG that will help them to transform this place in a more luxurious, close and unique.

RENTING PRICE FOR 2 ROOMS APARTMENT IN DIFFERENT AREAS (AVERAGE MINIMUM)

LOCATION	AREA (M2)	PRICE (₽)
 KOTELNICHESKAYA NAB, 1\15	62.0	65.000
 KRASNYE VOROTA	59.3	68.300
 SYHAREVSKAYA	63.0	67.300
 BOROVITSKAYA	60.0	65.000
 TSVETNOY BL.	59.0	66.000
 CHEHOVSKAYA	60.0	81.000

PUBLIC SPACE

In the 1950s, the building seemed to be a whole universe with a unique composition of bookshop, cinema, bakery, two big provisions shops, pharmacy, laundry, post office, telegraph and the biggest atelier № 1 in Moscow. As these shops were open for everyone and all the neighborhood gathered there early in the morning to buy fresh bread, it was a famous bakery until it was closed in the 2000s. A part of the building was a hotel, and thus open to everyone (or just declared to be open). Today nearly all of them are closed with the exception of cinema “Illusion”, the post office and the big provisions shop. The public space consists today of three banks, a hairdressing salon instead of a bookshop, the Marocana restaurant instead of a pharmacy and a big furniture shop instead of an atelier. The atelier and pharmacy are still there but occupy a small space in the yard. Even in those quasi-public spaces that survived from the soviet time, culture of memory is not there as the tenants do not preserve the atmosphere of that time. Only ceilings, molding and some small details like Soviet posters at “Illusion” or the mail box in the post office are preserved. However, the spirit is far more away in the new banks and restaurants that consciously change the atmosphere completely—like the restaurant Marocana that tries to create a spirit of 1001 nights in the Stalinist heritage. To understand the origins of this process, we conducted several interviews with tenants, such as the restaurant Marocana, cinema “Illusion” and a bar called Vysotka that has yet to open. All of them highlight the uniqueness of building and uniqueness of its inhabitants – the target audience – and do their best to create a unique public space like the Arabic café or a unique gourmet bar. However, their attempts are not successful. In sum, they create a nonspecific set that could appear anywhere in modern Moscow – with exotic cuisine, good bar, network banks and hairdressing.

EVGENY, 25,

CHIEF COOK AND
CO-OWNER OF
“VYSOTKA” BAR



“Unique people lived here – and we will create a different world for unique people. We will play up the uniqueness of this location. We will preserve every wall crack. <...>The renting price was not high, comparable to stable price in the city center.”



MARIA, 35,

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
AT “MAROCANA”
RESTAURANT



“There are very few restaurants with Maroccan kitchen in Moscow. Today it's difficult to talk about any uniqueness in Moscow, but we do our best. <...> we chose this place because we were satisfied with quality-price ratio, location and intrigued by famous inhabitants. We tried to preserve the interior and did only cosmetic renovation.”



MARIA, 25,

ADMINISTRATOR AT
“ILLUSION” CINEMA



“We are going to preserve the uniqueness of the place, so it will survive the renovation with a minimum changes <...> We don't pay rent as we are a government financing structure”



Conclusions

Since the creation of Vysotkas, the skyline of Moscow has significantly changed in line with changes in the density of buildings. The only Vysotka that survived with a minimum of changes is the MSU building, but MSU had a special destiny since the very beginning. It was a unique skyscraper-university with perfect infrastructure, designed for the general public with excursions organized, and finally it was the highest building in Moscow. Today MSU maintains its special situation due to its good location and infrastructure and appears frequently in city branding and souvenir production.

Thus, Vysotkas are not coherent anymore, they have split into seven entities, each with its own fate in people's perceptions. Among them, some are more prominent – like MSU. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also quite

powerful due to its strong institutional appearance. Two of the Vysotkas were transformed into European-standard hotels, which more or less pay respect to the original façade and interior.

Three are residential buildings, and their destiny is somehow similar to the Kotelnicheskaya's.

The Vysotka on Kotelnicheskaya embankment does not seem to have any special distinction in people's minds.

In the 1950s, it was very special and popular, but this has almost faded out by today. It became quite accessible as rent price is nearly the same as in every building in city center.

Inhabitants are constantly changing and well-to-do people are the most interesting part of the building today.

It almost vanished as a central part of urban culture in Moscow. The building does not appear as a landmark in city branding and only subculture show in-

terest in it. Roofers study its history in detail, cyclists organize guided tours, rap-artists broadcast their mythology to the hinterlands of Russia. Only in subculture can we find any continuity (even fragmented) of mythology in these buildings. No universal narrative can be found in modern culture and as a whole they have no strong relation to present time. They somehow disappeared from people's perceptions and knowledge.

The situation with foreigners is the opposite: Vysotkas are an indisputable landmark that appear in most TV broadcasts on the city as a symbol of Moscow. Foreigners celebrate these buildings with books and films, dream of living there and relate them to a political narrative of the power, both in the present and past – which seems to be “forgotten” by Muscovites.

The Berlin case

To understand this phenomenon we decided to compare it to the destiny of Stalin heritage abroad. We took Berlin as an example as the topic of culture of memory is broadly discussed there and is a big issue in city branding.

A Vysotka has never been realized in Berlin, and it appeared only in drafts and plans, so to make a fair comparison of cloud of meanings we had to choose another object. We took Karl-Marx allee, the main event of the Soviet period in Berlin, where the majority of Stalinist architecture is situated.

This area is perceived as a unique object that cannot be compared with anything else in Germany. Thus, Karl-Marx allee is carefully preserved in Berlin – in every small part and as a whole architectural structure. Cafes create museums of these spaces and gather objects from different time to preserve the atmosphere. In apartments, even the bathroom tile is preserved. The history is preserved as well, and the whole area is covered

with information desks. We call the last situation the conservation of myth.



conservation of mythology

In comparison with the Nazi repressions, the topography of communist terror is not so carefully worked out as all East Berlin (and East Germany as a whole) is considered to be a “big concentration camp” or “victimhood”. [5] As seen in the example of the Palace de

Republic, the destiny of soviet heritage remains a burning issue and reveals broad discussions.

Karl-Marx allee is carefully preserved but it should be understood that its role in the urban culture of the city changed much as in the case of Vysotkas. Today, it remains just a prestigious living area for a close-knit community of connoisseurs. A similar process happens here: particular destruction and strange public spaces with ethnic cuisine on the ground floors. As well as the Vysotkas, Karl-Marx allee seem to lose any relation with present time, thus representing only a time that is gone forever.

In both cases, Moscow and Berlin, Soviet architecture seems to be in a kind of metaphorical decay. The main difference between Moscow and Berlin lies in the different kind of culture of memory. In Berlin, the society decided what they stand for and what is their current meaning. However, in attempts to preserve it, Berlin turned this alley into a kind of lifeless monument commemorating a not-so-simple time that is gone forever.

Culture of memory

Culture of memory is a social agreement on how the past should be remembered. It dictates the global narrative and selects details that are to be remembered or forgotten. As with individual memory forgotten facts are a field to investigate as they can be the symptom of cultural disease.

As a whole and especially in comparison with Berlin's, the condition of Moscow's culture of memory are very poor. There were no serious public discussions about the Soviet years and no agreement on how modern Russian society treats it. [6] The Soviet era was a time of big narratives and big achievements but at the same time big losses, and the most contradictory figure of the Soviet past remains Stalin. In social surveys, anywhere from 20 to 40% [7] cannot choose between positive or negative meaning for almost all the events that happened during his government.

In this context, Vysotkas become a dangerous symbol for the government to use and a difficult object for society as there has been no decision on what these objects stand for. For this reason, it is much easier to leave them in

peace and not touch them, somehow ignore them, and they become a kind of hidden yet obvious landmark in the city that disappeared in a shapeless culture of memory.



fragmentation of mythology

Manifesto: a proposal for a change

In our research, we questioned the value of the seven Soviet skyscrapers as a part of current culture of memory. The concept of culture of memory in the Vysotka has been diluted over time and today it has disappeared almost entirely. The relationship of today is awake: some people support it, others do not, official authorities do not want to be proactively connected to it anymore as it is a dangerous symbol to use.

Our intention is to change the situation, i.e. to reconsider the value of these buildings as a part of new culture of memory that we want to develop.

Developing the culture of memory is a two-sided problem: on the one hand, you have to deal with the past, on the other hand, you have to look to the future. We do not want to fix the seven sisters more in the past and make them a symbol of the Soviet time reconsideration despite the fact that they seem to be easily used in this way. At the same time, in attempts to put them in a modern context it is easy to ignore their complex and problematic mythology.

We found a two-step solution:

1. Use the day of the city as a tool to bring them into the focus of attention. This holiday was created by Stalin to explain the necessity of their foundation (800 years – eight skyscrapers) and didn't exist before the official resolution on high-rise building.[8] Very few people know about this fact, only 5% of our respondents. This day can be used in different ways to celebrate these buildings. For example, to make them more open to public.
2. To touch a more serious problem, a problem of memory, we decided to write (or to broadcast in any other way – exhibitions, excursions) seven or more stories that would tell each story. This would be a different point of view, a different story, a different myth about these buildings (like American influence, Russian identity, terror contexts, luxuries in architecture, etc.). Being contradictory, these stories will show different ways to perceive this complex object, thus representing the complex cloud of meaning around this building. These stories will thus affirm the current state of culture of memory in which there is no consensus on the way to remember the past and different stories, myths, and points of view coexist.