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## WHY SOCIALIST REALISM? SPACE AND PROPAGANDA – THE BIRTH OF MYTH

### Abstract

There is no single definition of socialist realism, nor is there a single name - either in Europe or in the world, for the entire propaganda and artistic movement. Technically speaking, the name of socialist realism is not widely used in Russia itself, but it is difficult to overestimate its role in the birth of a new myth, a new transcultural code that emerged nearly 10 years after the October Revolution as a result of rejecting constructivist accomplishments by the political establishment. The article strives to search not only for the definition but also for the roots of socialist realism, by mapping out new paths of its cognition. The role of propaganda in the recent history of Russia, is generally underestimated.

**Keywords:** socialist realism, October Revolution, Soviet Russia, USSR, Joseph Stalin, Lenin, World War II, socialist propaganda, constructivism

## DLACZEGO SOCREALIZM? PRZESTRZEŃ I PROPAGANDA – NARODZINY MITU

### Abstrakt

Nie ma jednej definicji socrealizmu, nie ma również jednej nazwy – tak w Europie jak i na świecie – zarówno dla propagandy jak i całego ruchu propagandowo-artystycznego. Formalnie rzecz ujmując, nazwa socrealizm nie jest powszechnie używana również w samej Rosji, jednak jego rolę trudno przecenić w narodzinach nowego mitu, nowego kodu transkulturowego, jaki wyrósł blisko 10 lat po rewolucji październikowej w wyniku odrzucenia przez polityczny establishment zdobywczy konstrukttywizmu. Poniższy artykuł sięga do poszukiwań nie tylko definicji, ale i genezy socrealizmu, wytyczając nowe szlaki jego poznania. Powszechnie nie docenia się roli propagandy w najnowszej historii Rosji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** realizm socjalistyczny, rewolucja październikowa, Rosja Sowiecka, ZSRR, Józef Stalin, Włodzimierz Lenin, II wojna światowa, propaganda socjalistyczna, konstrukttywizm

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*In the Russian Communist revolution the power was exercised not by the real proletariat, but by the idea of the proletariat ... the myth of the proletariat.*

Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*  
(Бердяев 2008, 264)

## INTRODUCTION. SOCIALIST REALISM – DEFINITION AND STEREOTYPES

There is no single definition of socialist realism, nor is there one valid name for this period either in art or in propaganda. Formally speaking, the name “socialist realism” is not even widely used in Russia. The literature on the subject provides such terms as the “Stalinist empire” (*Сталинский ампир*), “soviet art deco” (*Советское ар-деко*), “socialist classicism” (*социалистический классицизм*), “Stalinist architecture” (*Сталинская архитектура*), “totalitarian aesthetics” (*Тоталитарная эстетика*) or “post-constructivism” (*постконструктивизм*). The first term to go down in history, i.e. “socialist realism”, appeared in “Literaturnaya Gazeta” (*Литературная Газета*) on 23 May 1932 (23 мая 1932) and it referred to the practice of agitating writers (Хмельницкий 2007). Two years later, it gained on popularity and was finally accepted thanks to the famous statement made by Maxim Gorky in 1934 at the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers about the creative principle which was to be “realistic” or rather “national in form and socialist in content”. It was, therefore, an ideological system of reference in manifold areas of artistic creation implemented by the USSR party apparatus and, as it is generally understood today, mainly supporting the personality cult of the head of the *социалистический реализм* state (Калабухова 2017). In the architecture and visual arts, it boiled down to the realization of Lenin’s statements from the early 1920s about the future “combination of two expressive values: monumentalism and propaganda” (Коненков 2017). The new trends in this area were heralded by the tendency on the part of the new authorities to reduce types and forms of design to a strictly defined number of solutions approved and adopted by party officials. (Хмельницкий 2017).

### 1. GENESIS AND THEORY SOCIALIST REALISM

The genesis of socialist realism stems from the need to redefine the overall concept of Russia at the time of abandoning traditional values which for nearly thousand years had provided Russian spirituality with solid foundations. A conviction of Russia following its own path beyond the idea of the European West prevailed already in the writings of all nineteenth century authors, i.e. Slavophiles, with A. Khomyakov (А. Хомяков) in the forefront (*Русский Архив* 1896). Those writers regarded it an indispensable element of the Russian mission to constitute a new form of monarchy in Russia, one opposite to Western absolutism. In the place of the king’s supremacy, they proposed a tripartition of power based on the three areas of values that supported and complemented each other, namely,

Orthodoxy, folkism and the power of the tsar, however, not as an absolute ruler, but a guardian of the first two values. Nineteenth-century Russian messianism as expressed in the statements of its representatives from Dostoyevsky to Soloviev, rejected Western Christianity on the grounds of its being contaminated by the pride of intellectualism, wrongly justified in their opinion as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Jesuits). This element of folkism was exactly what the 1905 Revolution called for, while the tsar acted as Western systems of authority. It provoked a dramatic decline of the tsar's popularity already shaken by the country's defeat in the war with Japan in 1904, which was also interpreted as a threat to the first of the three pillars, that is, to the Russian Orthodox Church in the Far East.

Socialist realism was able to emerge on the basis of the nineteenth-century philosophy of Russian messianism due to a skillful transformation of the entire mythical triad which retained and sustained the three former pillars of Russian spirituality, i.e. Orthodoxy, autocracy and folkism.

This issue is addressed, for example, in the book *History of Russian and Soviet Art* by Dmitri Sarabianov (*История русского и советского искусства*, Сарабьянов et al. 1989, 382-402), in which the author argues that folkism is still present in socialist realism in the form of Sovietism, just as ideology takes the place of Orthodoxy, and concreteness or, in other words, the act understood as determination in action, replaces former autocracy. Thus, the old triad: Orthodoxy, autocracy and folkism, is now replaced by a new one, semantically identical, but presented in the guise of different symbols, i.e. ideology, concreteness and Sovietism. According to the formula of socialist realism this Sovietism translates directly into a *community of comrades* - the working people of cities, towns and villages. Idealism, or the idea of the great mission occupies the former place of Orthodoxy, and act, i.e. the determination to change, or concreteness, replaces autocracy.

That message relied on the intuitive subconscious of the people, and it was made legible for millions through the personification of the old nineteenth-century symbols, among which the key role was played by enthusiasm, youthfulness and femininity. Russia is perceived as eternally youthful and it recurrently revives in the semblance of the world reviving with the annual return of springtime (Потяга 2017). Such is also the allegorical significance the *matryoshka doll*, a Russian wooden figurine (Kwiatkowski 2013, 502-503). The succession of those symbols galvanized the entire propaganda machine of the Stalinist period. In other words, it was not propaganda that inspired the image of the "socialist woman", i.e. the "female worker", but rather, it was the image of a woman that gave power to that propaganda. According to this new national spirituality, folkism (Sovietism) was represented by youth, honesty, simplicity and intelligibility of forms, autocracy was fulfilled in action, act and change, while Orthodoxy was embodied in femininity.

The above is clearly evident in one of the most famous novels of this period, *The Mother* by M. Gorky, in which it is a woman who becomes a depository of the Orthodox Church (Горкий 1985). By rejecting the heritage of the West, just

as the nineteenth-century messianists (Бердяев 2008, 57-59), socialist realism consciously ignored the whole legacy of the Christian medieval Europe, including Byzantium. Instead, it brought to life a new Byzantium, one that will never fall again, hence, socialist realism contains references to the military powers of the ancient period, such as Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome, and it is Rome, specifically the ancient Rome, that opens the way for the whole heritage of the European Renaissance and classicism. As argued by Sarabianov (Сарабянов et al. 1989, 382-402), the essence of socialist realism sprung from and appealed to the mythical space, which was meant to provide substance for the new state-building idea. This could only be achieved by rejecting constructivism and suprematism, movements considered, after all, as the art of revolution in the years 1917-1918. Disavowal of constructivism and suprematism was precisely dictated by those artistic movements' clear references to the Western art and in their origin in futurism and cubism born in the West. An important role in the birth of socialist realism was also played by Moscow as a city and an old capital, which, unlike St. Petersburg, was not built in the Western fashion. Although the revolution broke out in St. Petersburg, it was not a coincidence that Moscow became its capital, and later, the capital of the new communist state.

As A. Kuliapin and O. Skubach contended in *Mythology of Soviet everyday life in literature and culture of Stalin's times: monograph* (*Мифология повседневности в литературе и культуре сталинской Эпохи*, Куляпин and Скубач 2013, 18-24), socialist realism was primarily a Moscow phenomenon. Over the years of communism, there even emerged the phenomenon of a Moscow complex, as a perfect capital which everyone misses and in which everyone would like to live. The very word "capital" gets back in good graces in the context of that city. *Начинается Земля как известно от Кремля*, as V. Mayakovsky put it in one of his poems. Moscow was frequently and not only in poetry referred to as the center of the cosmos. On the city's 800th anniversary, Stalin claimed in his speech that Moscow provided a model for all capitals of the world (Куляпин and Скубач 2013, 18-24). This idea found its fulfilment in theory put forward by Slavophiles of Russia's specific character, according to which it was neither East nor West. It was itself, and so, it had to define and determine itself. It can be seen most clearly through a new vision, a new idea of the capital, different from any other existing so far in the world (Бердяев 2008, 48). Moscow's contemporary domination over other cities of the Russian Federation (the only megametropolis of this part of Europe), is practically in every respect based on, among others, the huge legacy of the 1930s' heritage of socialist realism.

Socialist realism as a mythologized state-building idea is perfectly illustrated, for example, in a well-known painting by Yuri Pimenov, *New Moscow* from 1937 (*Пименов 1937*). It contains all three elements of the above-mentioned mythical message, namely: 1) action - dynamism - youth (Sovietism), 2) metropolitenity (clarity of form, i.e. concreteness) and 3) femininity (ideology - hidden Orthodoxy).

Its message is also allegoric, because the high buildings depicted in the painting, the famous skyscrapers - *высотки Сталина*, did not exist yet in 1937 and were all erected at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s.

## 2. LENIN'S FUNERAL

Moscow is also the place where the funeral of V. Lenin was celebrated. The event, which is rarely linked with the birth of socialist realism, provided the foundation for the new history of the state and nation. The role of propaganda, which at that time was already fully apparent, and which became triumphant and ubiquitous in the Stalinist period, is in this event generally underestimated. This celebration, which spread over a number of days and became a manifestation of the nation's unity, was deliberately designed to launch a new personality cult, even before Stalin seized the power. The party supported financially thousands of people arriving from the entire country to participate in the ceremony, engaging inconceivable amounts of funds. Similarly, the authorities spared no expenses on commemorating this event in numerous film chronicles and documents, in the press, visual arts, paintings, posters or sound recordings. In this way, the celebration took on a para-religious character, and its founding myth was consolidation of the nation's unity around the revolution, personified by its leader, V. Lenin. The slogan "Lenin eternally alive" originates precisely from this myth and it does not refer to V. Lenin as a person, but as an embodiment of the revolution, because it is in fact the revolution, which is "eternally alive". This is how potent symbols were being replaced by new ones. If, formerly it was Rus which was eternal, now it was the revolution, or the New Rus.

That maneuver bore testimony to Stalin's extraordinary propagandist skill, because actually it was Lenin who warned his closest associates against unpredictable consequences of electing Stalin as his successor. Paradoxically, this move resulted in consolidating the nation around the new power and it gave Stalin social legitimacy as the new father of the revolution. Stalin actively and in person joins in the development of the new culture, art and architecture and a consistent exchange of symbols continues. When Lenin's "deification" becomes a fact, Stalin deftly defines himself as the defender of his memory, and thus is acknowledged as his follower, although from the very beginning the leader intends to pursue his own policy. By deifying Lenin, he at the same time deifies the revolution and himself becomes its main "priest".

This play with symbols is still continued. A vast area of former Russia, and later of the USSR, was associated by nineteenth-century Russian mystics with God's blessing (Бердяев 2008, 228-232). Stalin changes its meaning to the blessing of the Sun - the Sun of the Revolution. "The sun never sets on our homeland," as the famous patriotic song of P. Aedonitsky and O. Fadeyev declares (Аедоницкий и Фадеев 2017), while earlier that shining sun was the Orthodox sun. The

revolutionary fighter, i.e. worker and proletarian, is being replaced by Sovietism, the proletariat's achievements, by Soviet achievements, in place of a workman (*рабочий человек*), there is a Soviet man (*советский человек*). This is how a new secular religion is born. The propaganda scene shown in the picture of Grigory Shegal's *Leader, Teacher and Friend*, (*Вождь, учитель, друг*, Шегаль 1937). shows an almost biblical scene embedded in the construction of plans cut out on the Renaissance mode. In the foreground there is a figure of Stalin and 11 out of 14 portrayed participants of the plenary meeting are staring at him. Those numbers are not accidental (12 in Judaism stands for fulfilling the measure of time and the number of Israel's generations, while in Christianity 11 + 1 is, after all, the number of the apostles). Stalin does not mean to gain the position of "god" as it is intended for the revolution and its personification, i.e. Lenin, but he takes the place of the leader, the first apostle, precisely as a teacher and friend. Lenin is becoming perfect, and with him the myth of revolution is developing as perfect and sacred, in place of the former Holy Rus (according to the key: Lenin is Revolution = Revolution is Holy = Revolution is Rus). A young woman situated in the closest proximity to the leader, personifies the living Orthodoxy. It is no coincidence that she is depicted next to Stalin, because in the light of new symbols, Stalin assumes the old role of the tsar as the protector of Orthodoxy, however, it is no longer the old Orthodoxy, which was "rejected by the nation" for the laziness of its representatives, but a new pure and noble one, just as noble as the features of a young girl (on this painting).

### 3. THE BIRTH OF THE NEW PROPAGANDA

What is often underestimated is the fact that Stalin was able to transform the potential of support generated by propaganda into real active participation of the society in following a specific path. For example, having raised adequate funds, Stalin launched large-scale social construction programs for multi-family housing complexes. In result, a newly introduced idea of a flat in the city with heating and hot water in the tap turns into a real dream and an object of desire for thousands of new, potential future residents. What is important, this dream can come true and, for the chosen ones, it actually does. There also appear dreamlike, but equally real: kindergartens, schools, nurseries, hospitals, which themselves become living catalysts of propaganda. It is all taking place according to a simple key: a new hospital, residential house, railway station, or hotel is clean, comfortable and modern, but the most important of all those adjectives is "new", i.e. one that was not here before. The language of communist propaganda manipulates this fact quite audaciously (Меерович 2007, 281-292). A new object is, in the language of propaganda, defined as a gift offered to the nation, because it is this new authority which is reliable, modern and resourceful, that is how the cult of the welfare state is created. In visual arts, but also in propaganda of the authority, the play of colors appears as an element of new mythology. The clean, bright, white clothes of

authority representatives both in paintings and in reality (Stalin's white uniform) convey the same message as the propaganda of the new white houses. Visual art of that period depicts no real image of a construction site, i.e. one associated with gray concrete or red brick. Instead, all presented buildings are white due to the apotheosis of novelty and modernity, the red colour, on the other hand, is reserved for the banners of the new authority. Similarly, Stalin's white uniform was not meant to negate the prevailing bloody terror (as an antidote to the red, brotherly blood shed at that time), but it was rather the color of the New Russia, the new religion, that is, the Revolution of prosperity and modernity for all. White is the whiteness of modernity and change, the color of the Sun's cult, the cult of the new power, where the leader guards and sees everything. Just as the sun is shining and warming the earth for free, the leader is similarly watching over the nation, so that everyone can sleep peacefully.

This uniformity of life at all levels was not accidental. The propaganda of the path, the means and the objective was meant to recall the genesis of the revolution and its patriarchal, hierarchical roots which could be traced back not to the workers' structures but to the army, because in the final game it was the army that decided about the victory of the revolution (Бунин 2004). That is why, all aspects of the revolution had their uniform and rank, their logic, i.e. the army logic, just as the army itself which originates from the people and is given back to the people. In this military logic, everyone had their own task, imposed on them by the revolution. That is why, the propaganda of that period was not, in its expression, addressed to collective but to individual feelings, which stood in contrast to national socialism in Germany. In socialist realism, it is the symbol that is "looking at" an individual, therefore that symbol must have a figural form - a personification. Socialist realism constituted, therefore, a realization of a certain myth, it was a certain order that surrounded the citizens of the new tomorrow of the communist homeland. Present in literature, architecture, in the shaping of space, sculpture and painting, it was to be identified with lavishness, monumentality and implementation of large scale assumptions, it was to arouse pride, be posh, palatial, but also civic, and above all, soviet. From the early 1930s, such terms as workers' and proletarian begin to be eliminated from the cultural and artistic circulation and replaced by the word Soviet - the Soviet state, Soviet man, Soviet homeland (Луначарский 1975).

Implementation of the large-scale socialist realism was possible as a result of the financial stabilization of the new communist state, which took place at the turn of 1929 and 1930. What is often overlooked in the assessment of those events is the fact of a certain coincidence of two important events taking place in the world economy of the twentieth century. Exactly when the Western world plunged into the great global crisis (1929), the USSR for the first time achieved a state of permanent balance of the state's revenue and expenditure. In 1932, by the resolution of the CPSU political office all avant-garde artistic groups were dissolved and all experimentation with the figure and form in architecture was

rejected. This was a clear indication that those searches did not contribute to the development of solutions worthy of the first communist state. It was a sign of the upcoming socialist realism. Already in 1931, during the preparatory works preceding the General Plan of the Redevelopment of Moscow, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, founded as a votive offering for Russia's salvation in the war with Napoleon in 1812, was demolished. The church played a significant role, not only due to its location, since it was a dominant connecting the complex of Kremlin buildings with the old Moscow, situated at the end of the Bulwark Ring at the embankment of the Moscow River, but also because of its role as a cenotaph, a place of remembrance for all victims of the 1812-1815 war.

#### 4. PROCLAMATION OF SOCIALIST REALISM – THE PALACE OF THE SOVIETS

The competition for the Palace of the Soviets (1931) was a breakthrough moment, a time when socialist realism was triumphantly introduced as a binding style of the state. Very soon, this triumphant march entered also the architectural world press. 140 works from around the world were sent to the first part of the competition, which had an open formula. The most famous architectural teams, participating in it included Le Corbusier, W. Gropius, but also, I. Żółtowski (И. Жолтовский), W. Tatlin (В. Татлин) or K. Malewicz (К. Малевич) (Зиновьева 2009, 124). Only few contractors were invited to the second stage of the competition. It was finally won by Boris Iofan (Борис Иофан), who until 1924 stayed in exile in Italy and Switzerland, and who was called to Russia on the express command of the AUCP (B) [All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)]. Together with this competition, monumentalism permanently enters Russian architecture. This is clearly reflected in the proposed height of building, i.e. above 400 m (420 m). It is worth noticing here that the aforementioned role of the myth's personification took on a spectacularly "animated" form in the case of this object as it was crowned with a 75-meter-long naturalistic sculpture of Lenin (the overall size of the statue measured with the outstretched right hand). It should be added, that the winning project contained a number of eclectic elements, harking back to the ancient architecture of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece, which confirms the theses put forward above. The object was to refer to famous buildings, the 7 wonders of the ancient world. The Palace was supposed to draw upon the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the Colossus of Rhodes or to the Lighthouse of Faros. The Lenin statue was to be visible from a distance of 35 km. Because of its crowning with the figural sculpture, this object played a role of a monument dedicated to the leader of the Revolution (Васькин and Назаренко 2009).

At the end of the 1930s, the foundations of the Palace of the Soviets were already laid and it seemed that nothing could prevent its fast construction. However, the matters took a different course, due to the war with the Nazi Germany which erupted in June 1941 and, virtually overnight, led to redirecting all steel production from the construction industry to production of armament.

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## 5. GENERAL PLAN FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MOSCOW

Notwithstanding the fact that the Palace of the Soviets has never been built, its role has always been very significant up to this day. Even at the time of the competition and, later, during the completion phase of the project, it became a showcase of the new architectural style adopted in the USSR, reproduced in hundreds or thousands of publications around the world. 5,000 people were involved in the preparations for the construction, therefore, it is no wonder that it soon became a living legend, on a par with numerous other buildings of humanity which no longer exist today. The planned construction of the Palace of the Soviets at the site of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was dictated by an open struggle with the old symbols of the Orthodox Church, as well with the attempt to create a new image of Moscow as the capital of the communist state. The General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow was meant to serve this purpose (W. Semienov [В. Семенов], S. Chernyshev [С. Чернышев], A. Striemantov [А. Страментов]) Initially, it was to be implemented between 1935 and 1941, but as a result of the war its realization was postponed to the years from 1945 to 1957. This plan announced the construction of high-rise buildings (enforced by the government's decree as late as in 1947) that were supposed to change the skyline of the entire center of Moscow. The key role, next to the Garden Ring (*Садовое Кольцо*) was to be played here by the south-west urban opening of the center to the founding of the University of Lomonosov in the Leninskie Mountains (*Ленинские горы*) (Goldzamt 1956, 293, 305-336). Consolidating the ring of new squares around the walls of the Kremlin was also supposed to support this conception (Баранов et al. 1958, 52-61). The plan assumed, moreover, redefining the spatial arrangements of Moscow's main historical squares, mainly around the Garden Ring (*Садовое Кольцо*), and modernizing (extending by approx. 50%) the main communication routes of the radial street system of the capital (Генеральный 2017)<sup>2</sup>. The whole was to be complemented by the introduction of huge green areas as urban parks, especially in the northern part of the city, such as Ostankino (*Останкино*), VDNKh [Vystavka Dostizheniy Narodnogo Khozyaystva] (*ВДНХ – Выставка достижений народного хозяйства*). The architects planned to link the main railway stations and their squares with new street sections: Tverskaya Zastava Square (*Площадь Тверская застава*) – Belorussky Railway Station (*Белорусский вокзал*), Moscow Kursky Railway Station Square (*Площадь Курского вокзала*) – Moscow Kursky Railway Station (*Курский вокзал*), Komsomolskaya Square (*Комсомольская площадь*) – Moscow Leningradsky Railway Station, Moscow Kazansky Railway Station and Moscow Yaroslavsky Railway Station (Баранов et al. 1958, 52-61).

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<sup>2</sup> Moscow's general development plan was approved on 10 July 1935. It became the first document in the history of urban planning, in which a plan of socialist reconstruction of the largest metropolitan city was drawn up on the basis of a scientific program. The overall plan assumed increasing Moscow's population from 3.66 million in 1935 to 5 million people before 1960 and extension of the urban area from 28.5 thousand up to 60 thousand.

## 6. PRACTICE

The plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union devoted to the reconstruction of Moscow took place on the initiative of Stalin already in 1931. It brought to the end the influences of the disurbanist environment, i.e. experimenters of the linear city, henceforth referred to within the party apparatus as vulgarizers of Marxism. Stalin strongly opted for the economics of traditional big cities. The urban reconstruction of the city included mainly frontage development with increasing the number of floors up to 6-7 (Stalin's direct decision) with sharply defined deep cornices, sometimes a slightly receded last storey, often with arcade motifs of the attic crowning, and from the earlier constructivism period there still remain large windows relatively larger than in historical styles and secession (Хмельницкий 2017). The whole was complemented by the particularly high commercial ground floor. Reconstruction of Moscow's historical squares consisted mainly in their extension, ordering, improving their symmetry or axiality, replacement of buildings with higher and monumental ones (Sudjic 2005).

Two flagship achievements of socialist realist architecture of this period include the Public Library of Lenin (currently of F. Dostoyevsky), whose construction began in 1930 according to the design of Vladimir Gelfreykh and Vladimir Shchuko, and the USSR pavilion for the 1937 world exhibition in Paris by Boris Iofan with the famous 24-meter sculpture of two figures, a worker and kolkhoz woman by Vera Mukhina (yet another example of the new semantic triad personification). Both realizations exemplify a pure, dynamic trend of socialist realism which bears affinity to the contemporary monumental, though not socialist, architecture of other countries, such as the Polish National Museum in Warsaw by Tadeusz Tołwiński, Italian Palazzo dei Congressi by Adalberto Libera or the early works of A. Speer in Germany (Sudjic 2005; Speer 1990, 94-95).

The library design was drawn up in the years 1927-1929 as a result of cooperation between a seasoned architect brought from Leningrad, representative of the older generation, who already practiced widely before the revolution, and a young architect of the revolution, i.e. G. Gelfreich. The design is still embedded in the dynamics of the constructivism era. Its present form is slightly changed, since after the war there appeared numerous reliefs and sculptures held in the symbolism of heroism and socialist triumphalism and devoted to the great victory over fascism, an effect of additions and decorations from the late 1940s.

Compositions of figural sculptures complementarily linked with utility buildings as a form of communicating the state-building idea, become a leading element in this period. This is perfectly visible in the next great design, i.e. in the works on the Paris Pavilion. The architectural concept of the pavilion is indirectly based on the achievements of futurists (Y. Chernikhov) and suprematists (N. Suetin and his activity in the work on interior architecture). The form of the exhibition

pavilion in Paris combines perfect correlation of proportions and arrangement of the building's parts, with the dynamics of the figural group arrested in movement. Both figures step forward, as if resisting the powerful hurricane of history. The air of clarity of action, youth and femininity fully permeates the symbolism of the new spirituality of Russia. It is thus the personification of the entire pantheon of the virtues of the new communist society.

While observing the initiatives taking place in Moscow before the Stalingrad turning point, it is difficult to refer to this situation as a crisis or a war, for example, marginalizing social activity to a minimum. On the contrary, schools, theaters, museums and libraries work at full speed at that time. Major construction programs are being implemented or started from scratch even in the summer and early autumn of 1942. Also in the summer of 1942 "Literaturnaya Gazeta" (*Литературная газета*)<sup>3</sup> announces that the contest for the Monument to the Heroes of the Great Patriotic War will be resolved in Moscow, perhaps it is clear that Stalin already knew he would win against Germans, although the Wehrmacht Stalingrad defeat was to become a fact only a few months later.

## 7. THE WAR AND THE BIRTH OF SOCIALIST TRIUMPHALISM

The war and the crushing victory of the USSR in the clash of two military colossi in World War II brings a clear shift in the development of socialist realism towards the principles of ordering space, outside the historical context of place and style. Those old rules will not be found in new realizations, even on the scale of earlier implementations of the war period (*Архитектура Византия* 2015). A new rhetoric of the apotheosis of the heroes, apotheosis of the heroic state, adopting elements of a specific hieratic attitude, is developing. Those include: palms as a symbol of victory, frequent use of leaves and branches of laurel and laurel wreaths (Зиновьева 2009, 238). Figural sculptures abandon the pose of activity, action and deed in favor of the parade formula and command the weapon (drums, weapons, uniforms appear, but the attributes of work are also retained). There also appear sculptures and figures of women, but they almost always include one woman holding a child in her arms, and usually only with one child, because the place of the former personification of religious faith is now replaced by secular faith. This new woman mother-heroine (*мать героиня*), after all, the idea behind the name of the order (1944) is no longer the depository of the hidden Orthodoxy, but an apotheosis of the victory and the vital forces of the nation, an embodiment of faith in the serene future of the great power<sup>4</sup>. The words hero and heroism recurrently appear in almost every area of life. Urban planning assumptions

<sup>3</sup> In the years 1942-1944, the newspaper was published under other titles: first, "Советское искусство", and then "Литература и искусство".

<sup>4</sup> A greater number of children appear in the image of a woman outside of her symbolic role when the mother shows her real motherhood.

more and more often, but mainly after 1945, include motifs of triumphal arches, similarly in architecture, in the entrance portico of the main facades, large state administration buildings or municipal offices.

## 8. PALACES OF HOPE

The decision to build tall buildings characteristic of this period was determined by a decree of 1947 and was a response to the 800th anniversary of Moscow (Калабухова 2017). Among the “Seven Sisters”, i.e. the seven tallest Stalinist skyscrapers from the period of socialist realism, Lomonosov Moscow State University – MSU’s seat (МГУ- Московский государственный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова) has a special place. It is a benchmark for other buildings of that style and for the entire formation of socialist triumphalism (Зиновьева 2009, 212-230). It reveals a number of borrowings and inspirations from ancient architecture (Kulishov 1954), especially of ancient Egypt (obelisks - axiality - zonation). As regards western architecture, it was the Manhattan Municipal Building (177 m) in New York, built between 1905-1915 by William Kendall, that became the source of inspiration for both that building and all the other Stalinist architecture.

At the same time, the architecture of skyscrapers was firmly embedded in the national tradition. It contained references to the symbolism of the great historical buildings of the Russian heritage. There were references to the towers of the Kremlin, the Ivan the Great Bell Tower (*Колокольня Ивана Великого*), the Menshikov Tower (*Меншикова Башня*) or the Bell Tower of the Novodevichy Convent (*колокольня Новодевичьего монастыря*) (Зиновьева 2009, 213).

Interestingly, what is rarely mentioned, all of the seven Stalinist skyscrapers in Moscow are much lower than the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Science (237m with and 187m without the spire). Many sources contain glaring inaccuracies on that point. And thus, the highest of the Moscow monumental palaces, the MSU building, measures 180m without the spire and 206m with the spire, the next is Hotel Ukraina - 170m, followed by Leningradskaya Hotel – 157m, just as the Kotelnicheskaya Embankment Building (*Котельнической набережной*), the Kudrinskaya Square Building – 120m, just as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, and the Red Gates Administrative Building which measures only 110 m. The skyscrapers were mostly designed by the same architects, members of the same wide team, in different configurations, namely, D. Chechulin, A. Polyakov, N. Borecki, L. Rudniev, A. Mordvinov, V. Gelfreykh, M. Minkus (Goldzamt 1956, 305-336).

## 9. THE RETURN OF MYTH TIMES. THE MYTH OF METRO BUILDERS

The beginnings of Stalin’s rule also mark the beginning of the great construction of the metro network in Moscow. Until 1935, the first section of the first metro line Culture Park - Sokolniki (*Парк культуры – Сокольники*) is

being built serving the strict city center of less than 12 km. Until 1938, a fragment of the second line is built in the direction of the Belorussky Railway Station. During this time, a new stage opens up to the society, the memory of the past is restored, past monuments, excluding the religious ones, are again taken under the state protection, mythology of great national legends is brought back to life and films celebrating great national heroes such as Alexander Nevsky and Ivan the Terrible are made. Besides all this, there is yet another change, probably the most important one, namely the world of old folk tales, the world of childhood is revived and reconstructed. Andresen and the Grimm brothers can be published, and people can again read old Russian folk tales such as *the Humpbacked Horse* (*конек зарбунок*) *czy Emelya and Magic Pike* (*Емеля на печи*). Earlier, in the years 1918-1930, the world of children's books, like the whole world of visual arts, was dominated by constructivists. It was thus subordinated and based on the praise of rationalism. Enthusiasm was generated by the joint action for the common good, white, black and red dominated, everything was in motion, deeply imbued with slogans and the plot was a comic-like propaganda story, where a good, young and well-groomed pioneer, girl or boy always won, princesses and good fairies did not exist, and *Emelya* – if came into being – could only be described as a damage-doer. During this period, there was no individual heroes, only a group, a team, a collective hero existed, and the atmosphere of mystery was replaced by technique and modernity (which was measured by the reading and writing skills – for this reason books were written in a large slogan font, to make it readable for children).

Those changes provide basis for the new beginning of transformations, this time bottom-up ones, the environment of the metro builders, the heroic creators of the underground capital, is consolidating (1935-1941). The myth of mystery, the myth of a great cause is subtly developing. It is a truly ideological one, because not built for the purposes of immediate propaganda, but for future generations. The idealized faces of bas-reliefs have the same facial expressions, identical to each other precisely because they convey the timeless mystery of “the future and the past”: the girl's head with the hair down appearing on the reliefs of the *Komsomolskaya* (*Комсомольская*) station (Фотопроект 2017) tries to surpass the socialist realism convention by referring to the Renaissance painting by Sandro Botticelli *The Birth of Venus*. This may not be the beginning of a new cinquecento, but the materialized world of fairy tales (1938).

Notwithstanding the fact that they delight everyone, the splendor and richness of the metro stations were, paradoxically, not addressed to the contemporary masses, but rather to those who were yet to be born, to the new generations of Moscow residents. It is them who will discover the loneliness of the underground work and believe in the nation, in this kinship of generations united by the rhythm of thousands of hearts subsided in silence, for tomorrow's beloved homeland. To understand this metaphor, as well as all socialist realism, one must know and understand Russia, know and understand Russians. When admiring

the underground pantheon at the Ploshchad Revolyutsii metro station (*Площадь Революции*), one comes up against the ethos of folk tales, the deeply-asleep land of animals and children, and the presented figures are like guardians of an enchanted world, which can only be entered on uttering a magic word. What is this world? Paradoxically, this is not a rhetorical phrase, because in reality, metro provided for many place of refuge, and the word opening that underground world was hope. It was an enclave of great hope for the future in the new Moscow. Works on the construction of the metro were given priority by the state already before the war, but also shortly after. Metro became a place gathering those who were looking for a real ethos of work, work without conformism and efforts for promotions within the party structure, often gathering those who were just unwelcome on the surface: there they found employment and security. This is how, the myth of noble people, the metro builders was born. The Moscow metro was their world, their fruit, their metaphor of the future Russia - these are not the palaces for Stalin but an endless foyer of invisible theaters from which real actors may one day return. Such is the myth of the metro. It is not without reason that the theater is especially loved by the Russians, because it bears significance to them, it signifies something more, something invisible and inexplicable at the same time, something that they did not allow to be taken away from them during the dark night of communism, something that is difficult to understand if one does not understand Russia.

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, it must be stated that the Stalinist period in the visual arts was radically and definitively severed by the war, which brought about a new form of socialist realism, namely, socialist triumphalism. Once socialist realism evolved into socialist triumphalism, it was impossible to recede to its pure original form. Its manifold manifestations involving the ubiquitous rhetoric of victory resulted in undermining the natural internal discourse of the whole direction, and at the same time, the development of socialist triumphalism became impossible without damaging its own doctrine. The whole direction was doomed to slow drifting in time, without the possibility of correction.

It should also be added that socialist realism is not one of many trends in the history of art, architecture, the shaping of space, drawing upon or breaking with the legacy of its predecessors. Socialist realism is first and foremost an attempt to revive a myth and to impose on it the principles of a certain order, e.g. a construction order in architecture on the scale of ancient great imperial powers.

It is also worth drawing attention to the spatial, actual placement of this myth and its close relation with Moscow as the capital of the USSR. Moscow is recognizable for both its citizens and visitors through the Stalinist architecture. This is reflected in numerous surveys carried out, among others, among young people in the years 2008-2012. The identity of Moscow is linked with the architecture

of the Stalinist period among the vast majority of respondents. A similar study was conducted in kindergartens. Children asked to choose from a file of photos the ones presenting Moscow, manifestly pointed to those with socialist realism architecture and rejected others (Dukin 2007, 15-29). It clearly shows that the revival of the myth has become a fact that is hardly disputable.

In conclusion to this search for the genesis of socialist realism, it can be argued that the idea of socialist realism cannot be properly felt and understood without the awareness of people's participation in one common idea, and thus in the resulting individual relations of obligations and civic duties. Socialist realism in architecture in any other place in the world than Russia can only be a pale imitation of the original (Paperny 2002). The works of socialist realism implanted in various parts of the world (in Poland, Latvia, the former East Germany and finally in China) do not allow to grasp the pure idea of socialist realism, but only of the socialist triumphalism, which in fact serves the apotheosis of the Red Army's victory over fascism. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that socialist realism, especially in its early, pure form, found its place in the history of architecture. Inspirations drawing on socialist realism are present in the works of numerous artists of the twentieth century, for example in housing construction realized in France or Spain - in the architecture of Ricardo Bofill, whose attempts can be described as close to neo-socialist realism.

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