

An open letter to President Vladimir Putin concerning the fate of the Shukhov Radio Tower on Shabolovka St. Moscow.
March 13 2014

Respected President Vladimir Putin,

On February 25, 2014, the Russian State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting agreed to the dismantling of the celebrated Shabolovka Radio Tower in Moscow, designed by the engineer Vladimir Shukhov and completed in 1922. No conclusive evidence of danger has been demonstrated, although deferred maintenance has had negative effects on the surface of the structure. This superlative work of modern engineering and architecture has withstood the test of time both in its structural innovation and as a symbol of the city of Moscow thanks to the genius of its designer and builder, Vladimir Shukhov, who is generally considered the Russian equivalent of Gustave Eiffel.

Built in order to broadcast wireless programmes of the early Soviet era, the transmitting tower was developed from the research into hyperboloids undertaken in the late 19th century by Shukhov. Using variants on the basic form, hundreds of water tanks, electrical pylons and lighthouses were erected throughout Russia. So brilliant was the concept that the design was even incorporated into US Navy dreadnoughts where the structural type was used for constructing observation and communications masts. The Shabolovka Radio Tower, the largest such structure ever built, remains as Vladimir Shukhov's masterpiece and his monument. It is one of the emblems of Moscow, and one of the superlative engineering feats of the twentieth century, still influencing and enriching technical and architectural ideas globally. Yet this masterpiece, featured in all the histories of engineering and architecture, is now threatened with being torn down in order to be replaced by new construction. The opportunity presents itself for a speculative developer to take advantage of the fact that, under present planning regulations, it is permitted to build to the same height as an existing structure on any particular lot, without the requirement for any further planning permission. Most of central Moscow, in which the Radio Tower site is included, is restricted to nine stories, approximately 25m. The Radio Tower at 150m, should it be replaced, would permit a structure of about 50 stories, a golden opportunity for a cynical modern Erostratus.

Dismantling the tower and storing its components in order to rebuild it later, even if it were possible to do so, would be extremely hazardous, as there is no guarantee that reconstruction will even be possible. Most importantly, the link of the tower to the Shabolovka neighbourhood, a distinguished housing scheme of the heroic early Soviet period would be lost, also lost would be its function as a key component in the Moscow panorama and cityscape. The hypothetical structure, if it were to be recreated elsewhere, would lose much of its historical significance and all of its urban context. Respected President Putin, we are urging you to take immediate steps to assure the preservation of this essential part of Moscow's heritage, a unique contribution of Russian engineering genius to world culture. Instead of being dismantled, there is an urgent need for its careful conservation along international standards and to nominate this masterpiece into the UNESCO World Heritage List. This necessity has been discussed by national and international experts for decades. Please assure that this great structure be permitted to remain as a beacon and symbol of progressive, forward-looking civilization.

Signed and subscribed to by the following

Tadao Ando, Architect. Osaka.

John F. Abel, PhD, PE, F. ASCE, Past President of the International Association for Shell and Spatial Structures (IASS)

Gorun Aran, Chair, IASS Working Group on Historic spatial Structures, Vice president of ICOMOS-ISCARSAH

Masato Araya, Professor, Engineering, Waseda University, Japan

William Baker, Engineer SOM, Chicago (engineer Burj Al Khalifa, Dhubai, world's tallest building).

Sebastiano Brandolini, Architect, Milan.

Alan Burden, DEng MSc BSc(Eng) DIC ACGI CEng MICE MIStructE. Engineer, London and Tokyo.

Clementine Cecil, Director, Save, London. Founder MAPS (Moscow Architecture Preservation Society).

Henry N Cobb, Architect, New York and President, American Academy of Arts and Letters

Jean-Louis Cohen, Sheldon H. Solow Professor in the History of Architecture, IFA, NYU, New York.

Odile Decq, Architect, Chevalier Legion d'Honneur, Paris.

Elizabeth Diller, Architect, New York and Professor, Princeton University.

Kate Goodwin, Drue Heinz Curator of Architecture, Royal Academy of Arts , London.

Dr. Rainer Graefe, Univ. Prof. Forschungsinstitut Archiv für Baukunst Universität Innsbruck.

John Harris, Founding Curator, RIBA drawings collection, Conservator, London.

Joerg Haspel, Professor, Head of Berlin authorities for Conservation , President, ICOMOS_Germany.

Yoshiharu Kanebako, Structural designer. Professor, Kogakuin University, Tokyo.

Mamoru Kawaguchi, Engineer, Tokyo, past President IASS (International Association for Shell and Spatial Structures).

Rem Koolhaas, Architect, Rotterdam.

Kengo Kuma Architect, Professor, Tokyo University, Tokyo.

Phyllis Lambert, CC, GOQ, FRAIC, FRSC, RCA, Founder, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

Bertrand Lemoine, Architect and Engineer, Research Director, National Centre for Scientific Research, former Director General, Atelier International du Grand Paris, Paris.

Thom Mayne, Architect, Los Angeles, Professor UCLA.

Robin Middleton, Professor Emeritus, Columbia University. New York.

Marc Mimram, Engineer and Architect, Professor, Paris.

Stanislaus von Moos, Professor, Yale University. New Haven. Emeritus professor, History of Modern Art, University of Zurich.

René Motro, President, International Association for Shell and Spatial Structures.

Florian Musso, Professor, Technische Universität München.

Guy Nordenson, Engineer, New York and Professor, Princeton University.

John Ochsendorf, Engineer and Professor, MIT. Cambridge.

Richard Pare, Photographer, Richmond, Yorks, UK.

Leslie Robertson, Engineer, New York (engineer of original World Trade Center and many of the world's tallest buildings).

Mutsuro Sasaki, Engineer, Professor, Hosei University, Tokyo.

Joerg Schlaich, Engineer, Professor Emeritus Stuttgart University, Stuttgart and Berlin.

Sir Nicholas Serota, CH, Director, Tate Galleries and Museums, London.

Isa Willinger, Film maker, Munich.

Hajime Yatsuka, Professor, Shibaura Institute of Technology, Tokyo.

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