2 × 100 mil. m²
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Atomized Modernity

...on architecture of large housing complexes in Czechoslovakia 1914–2014
1914–1948
universal architecture
standardization quantity

1948–1989
universal architecture
prefabrication speed

1989–2014
universal architecture
cataloging individuality

ambition

method need
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Up to 1914 – national architecture
For each healthy human race, there is only one typical kind of habitat that exists for its entire area [...] valid and genuine, and which by its naturalness is the only one.”
Pavel Janák, 1920s

Zlín
“Architects want to build their own monuments, but that is not what we are interested in.”
Tomáš Bata (as quoted by Vladimír Karfík)

“Work collectively, live individually.”
Tomáš Bata’s motto

“Almost all our cities and towns where industry has developed in this country have, in many respects – but during the first generation in particular – suffered a lot of harm. It happened because the invigorating forces which were the achievements of industry and which spread to the countryside were not organised by anyone – or to put it into better words – they were organised in the negative sense of the word, harmful to society as a whole. [...] The Plan of Greater Zlín is a regulation and ordering of the forces flowing from factories so that they serve the people. It has been designed from the aspect of the natural needs of the human being.”
Antonín Cekota, 1929

“It would not be difficult to develop a town with a population of fifty thousand squeezed into barracks-like tenement blocks regardless of how their wives and children are living and what opportunity to earn a living their husbands have. However, our goal is a garden city [...]”
Tomáš Bata, 1931

“Each home has fifty-six square metres of floor space and contains an entrance hall, a live-in kitchen, a pantry, a bathroom and a toilet (downstairs) and a living room and a bedroom (upstairs). In addition, each house has a cellar and a wood and coal shed. It costs seventy-five thousand crowns to build such a home with four rooms, and the weekly rent is fifteen crowns.”
Evžen Erdély, 1932

“We have been trying right from the beginning to make sure that the town grows organically from industrial architecture as a new form to the expression of the architect’s opinion on the workings and the life of an industrial town. [...] The factory building is the main motif of Zlín architecture. This motif repeats itself in a number of variations in other building serving public needs. [...] The external image of Zlín architecture therefore excels in its stylistic uniformity with many variations.”
František Lydie Gahura, 1934

“There have been two milestones in Czech architecture – St. Vitus Cathedral and Karfík’s ‘Twenty-One’ administration building.”
August Perret
Martin Hejl: We’d like to know how Zlín came about and what role Tomáš Baťa played in it.

Ondřej Ševeček: I see this topic from the point of view of a historian, which is a somewhat different perspective than people who study the history of architecture; I’m interested in other contexts and connections, and I also sometimes arrive at different conclusions than architecture historians. I put more emphasis on how things really were created in the urban context, without the templates created by disciplines such as the history of architecture, which claims that there is something called functionalism, a thesis of functionalistic architecture. The question is whether these people really had a vision of the Athens Charter or something similar when they began creating the town, but I don’t think that’s the way it was. Especially in its initial stages, **Zlín was simply a town whose modern development was established by an immensely successful company – in many respects, one of the most successful enterprises in Czechoslovak history.** There have been quite a few examples since the beginning of industrialisation of how such towns were developed within the global context, as well as numerous examples of how the activities of a particular enterprise had grown to a degree that led to the ambition of building a town around it to serve the enterprise. This has been happening since the late eighteenth century under many conditions, and Baťa can be interpreted based
The City with a Centre

Once again and better than before

Most 1967

The largest architectural firm in the world: 12,000 architects and 170,000 engineers compressed both voluntarily and involuntarily into a single organism. A force that repeatedly managed to dam the Vltava River.

A region in North Bohemia. A hilly landscape of rounded, feminine curves. Shove a hoe into the ground in your cellar and you hit coal. Just six architects in the entire region, each one barely over thirty. Will the eight-hundred-year old, foul-smelling town succumb to the steel mining giants? A political decision is a political decision. How must it feel when you finally decide to raise your hand and vote yes? The old will be replaced with the new. It's time for heroic engineering: the river needs to be moved... and the church, too... and what are we going to do with the cemetery, where we buried the bodies of our ancestors?

Heave-ho! Let's do it. Residential buildings are designed through planography, only urban planning matters. The town, surrounded by a barren moonscape on all sides, disappears and reappears like the mystical island of Buyan. A green axis of vegetation, a new lake, and most importantly: a centre to go with the housing. No other city will ever achieve this again...
Josef Holanec
On Moving Buildings

Martin Hejl: Was the church in Most the first building you moved?
Josef Holanec: No. We first moved a house in Jíloviště as an experiment and to get used to the equipment, because there were many people involved in the Most project who had no experience with this type of work. As soon as I started at the company, I carefully studied the church, as there were people who weren’t very familiar with it.

You went to work for a company that was given the task of moving the church.
That company was being formed; I think I was the seventh employee they hired.

And the technology for moving the church had already been developed?
Not yet. We came up with the technology on our own, since no one had ever tried to move anything this big or heavy or over such a distance before.

Was the church the next building moved after the house?
No. We moved some other buildings in a routine manner. The second was a hops warehouse in the Ústí nad Labem region, then a chapel in Benešovice, followed by another chapel in Písek.
In 2013 due to diversified social mix of people in those panel housing estates were the majority of residents in Czechoslovakia satisfied with their housing situation.
Ladislav Lábus
On Postmodernism
in Czech Architecture

Martin Hejl: After graduation you began your career in a design institute in Prague. How did it work?

Ladislav Lábus: I got a job in the Construction Design Institute of the Capital City of Prague, Studio 4 - Delta; I was lucky as there was just a vacancy in Mrs Šrámková’s department. Now people speak about Sial a lot but our design institute was de facto kind of Prague Sial. It was founded as an association of architects and engineers by the architects Machonin, Šrámek and Prager on the basis of cooperative partnership. Although the institute was owned by the city the conditions were freer and more dependent on earnings. Our studio, established by architect Klen, was a little different from the other studios as it was not confined to residential housing but also implemented more exclusive projects such as embassies, sanatoria, department stores or office buildings. At that time the Construction Design Institute of the Capital City of Prague was also exceptional in terms of its size. As far as I know the absolutely largest was the Regional Design Institute in Ústí nad Labem. Our institute had nearly eight hundred employees but was divided into separate operational units, studios, with a staff of fifty or more each further subdivided into several independent architectural groups. Our Studio Delta was divided into two workplaces. Our workplace included, in addition to the department of Mrs Šrámková, independent teams of the architects Jakubec, Kuchař and Pitlach, and the other workplace consisted of the teams of Línek and Milunič.
Epilogue

If this book created in ten short months – between August 2013 and May 2014 – was to conclude by answering the question: What is the architect’s role today?, it, quite to the contrary, poses even more questions.

How did we lose our social status so quickly? Will we wake up from our post-revolution technological fuzziness and keep up? Is architecture making a comeback in the outlying regions of the Czech Republic? Are we living in a time when architects get off the plane and don the aprons of draftsmen?

Are we, as architects, able to exist in Europe or are we doomed to lead a nomadic life, wandering from one economic boomtown to the next?
List of Authors & Collaborators

1914

Jiří Gebrian (1946) – architect
Vlastimil Bichler (1934) – architect
Václav Krejčí (1928) – architect, urban designer
Josef Holanec (1937) – mechanical engineer
Jiří Lasovský (1926) – architect, urban designer
Tibor Alexy (1929) – architect

1924

Ladislav Lábus (1951) – architect
HSH (1969) – architecture studio
GutGut (1969) – architecture studio
A69 (1969) – architecture studio

1929

Matěj Hlásík (1982) – visualization

1934

Jan Maganač (1977) – architect
Miroslav Machacek (1979) – graphic designer

1944

Kryštof Hanzlík (1989) – architect

1954


1964

Pavel Kostlík (1962) – theoretician

1974

Pavel Kostík (1968) – theoretician

1984

Vojtěch Ptáček (1974) – sound engineer

1994

Christian Říha (1985) – architecture studio

2004

Marek Hudáč (1992) – student

2014

Jan Suchal (1989) – student

Blanka Bartošová (1990) – student
Martin Čáslavská (1990) – student
Martin Hudáč (1989) – student
Jana Kálová (1982) – student
Palacká Libusová (1982) – student
Jan Studenský (1969) – architect

Benjamín Brádnya (1976) – architect
Vito Halada (1980) – architect

Ivo Oberstein (1935) – urban designer

Jana Korinková (1980) – student
Pavel Kostík (1962) – theoretician

Michal Dvořák (1986) – student
Martin Lux (1971) – sociologist

Lukáš Grasse (1987) – student
Ivan Gogolák (1987) – student

Martin Husák (1982) – translation, editor
Alessandro L. (1993) – visual artist

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Pavel Kostík (1968) – theoretician

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Blanka Bartošová (1990) – student
Monika Mítašová (1968) – theoretician

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Barbora Jandová (1990) – student
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Jan Studenský (1969) – architect

Jan Suchal (1989) – student
Palacká Libusová (1982) – student
Jan Studenský (1969) – architect

Jana Korinková (1980) – student
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