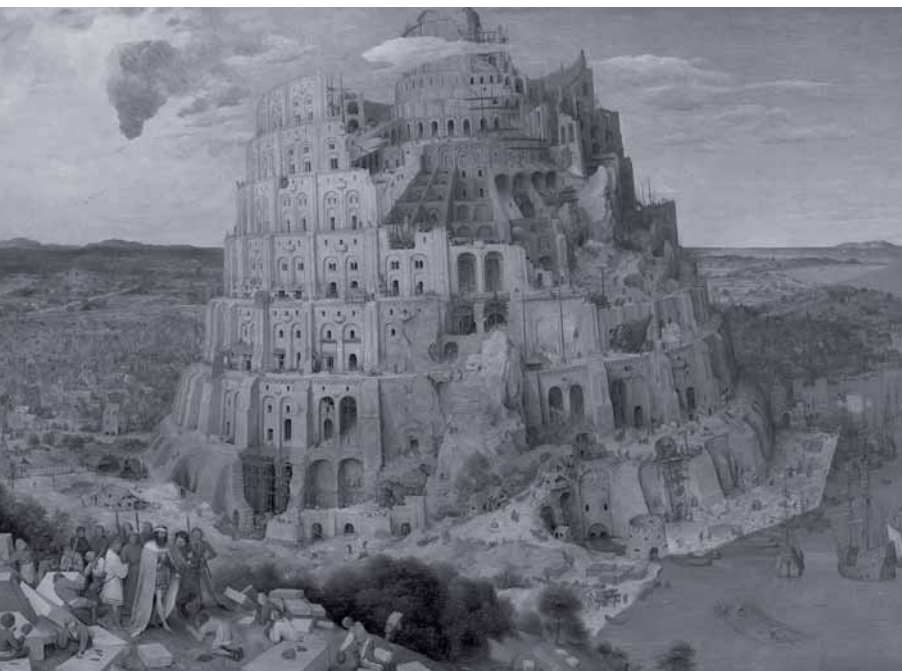


# The Concept of Homage in VAL's E-temen-an-ki Project

Pocta v projekte E-temen-an-ki  
skupiny VAL

Gabriela Smetanová

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**PIETER BRUEGHEL THE ELDER:  
THE TOWER OF BABEL, 1563.  
PAINTING, OAK WOOD,  
114,4 CM × 155,5 CM × 3,8 CM**

PIETER BRUEGHEL ST.: BABYLONSKÁ  
VEŽA, 1563. MALBA, DUBOVÉ DREVO,  
114,4 CM × 155,5 CM × 3,8 CM

**Source** Zdroj: Kunsthistorisches  
Museum Wien

Šesťdesiate roky 20. storočia charakterizovala diskusia kriticky reflektujúca hlavné idey modernizmu. Jej integrálnou súčasťou boli vizionársko-utopické či dystopické idey, ktorých predmetom bol vzťah človeka a prostredia, človeka a spoločnosti, architektúry a krajiny či človeka a kozmu. Generovali celú sériu architektonických projektov, ktoré sú dodnes inšpiráciou pre premýšľanie architektúry. Ukážkou tohto fenoménu bola aj slovenská umelecko-architektonická skupina VAL (*Voies et Aspects du Lendemain*). Aktuálna architektonická diskusia aj súčasná architektonická historiografia intenzívne tematizuje architektonickú tvorbu druhej polovice 20. storočia. V rámci tejto tematizácie sa venuje zvláštna pozornosť práve utopickým a vizionárskym počinom. Súčasný diskurz tak predstavuje vhodný rámec aj pre komplexnejší výskum a reflexiu skupiny VAL a jej príspevku k architektonicko-umeleckej tvorbe minulého storočia.

Skupina VAL na Slovensku pôsobila od sedemdesiatych až po deväťdesiate roky 20. storočia. Skupinu tvorila autorská trojica: výtvarník Alex Mlynárčik, architektka Viera Mecková a architekt Ľudovít Kupkovič. V priebehu rokov 1968 až 1994 vytvorili osem projektov ilustrujúcich potenciálne možnosti nášho budúceho životného prostredia. V tomto príspevku sa zaoberám jedným z dvoch ich posledných projektov – *E-temen-an-ki* – *Sheraton hotel Babylon*, ktorý je datovaný rokmi 1980 – 1994. Skupina VAL v tomto projekte stavia na základoch Babylonskej veže a symbolicky sa tak pridáva ku kontinuite vytvorenej autormi interpretujúcimi vežu od sedemnásteho storočia.

V jednotlivých častiach textu je načrtnutých niekoľko relevantných pohľadov a príkladov stvárnenia Babylonskej veže v priebehu dvadsiateho storočia. Obdobie šesťdesiatych rokov zastupujú československí avantgardisti Karel Honzík a Jiří Hříza, alebo francúzsky teoretik *prospektívnej*

architektúry Michel Ragon, ktorí operujú s Babylonskou vežou ako archetypom predstáv budúcich miest. Neskôr v sedemdesiatych rokoch teoretik Oskár Čepan adresuje cez Tatlinov pomník Tretej internacionály schopnosť Babylonskej veže materializovať dané spoločensko-politické usporiadanie a pomery. Francúzsky teoretik, kritik a filozof Roland Barthes podobne ako Čepan tematizuje „monumentálne“ vlastnosti veže a odvoláva sa na jej schopnosť viazať ľudskú imagináciu.

Príspevok zaoberajúci sa projektom *E-temen-an-ki – Sheraton hotel Babylon* je súčasťou širšieho monografického výskumu o skupine VAL a jedným z cieľov je formulácia autorskej koncepcie skupiny. Ako jeden z charakteristických motívov v tvorbe skupiny som identifikovala *poctu*. V rámci výskumu sledujem, akým spôsobom je použitá v jednotlivých projektoch v priebehu času. Projekt *Sheraton hotel Babylon* je datovaný do osemdesiatych rokov a začiatku rokov deväťdesiatych, pričom skupina začala spoločne tvoriť od začiatku rokov sedemdesiatych. V príspevku je pocta ako jeden z nástrojov tvorby skupiny a ich konkrétne stvárnenie Babylonskej veže konfrontované s rôznymi úvahami o význame veže v priebehu času. Spôsob odpovede skupiny VAL na tento fenomén umožňuje otvoriť otázku zaradenia projektu do kontextu histórie architektúry, prípadne prehodnotenia významu tvorby skupiny.

## Introduction

Active in Slovakia<sup>1</sup> from the 1970s to the 1990s, the group VAL consisted of a trio of authors: artist Alex Mlynárčik, architect Viera Mecková and architect Ľudovít Kupkovič. Between 1968 and 1994, they created eight projects illustrating the potential possibilities of our future environment. Previous works related to VAL have mainly dealt with its position within Czechoslovak and later Czech and Slovak art historiography, mainly as a manifestation of conceptual art<sup>2</sup>. Reflection from the standpoint of architectural historiography is somewhat less extensive.<sup>3</sup> In terms of professional reflection from abroad, VAL is regarded as an Eastern European representative of the few manifestations of experimental architecture in this region, through which it is possible to trace the specificity of responses to global trends<sup>4</sup>. The work of VAL has so far been viewed largely as a unified whole, but some research<sup>5</sup> suggests that it might be useful to examine projects individually. Given that the group has been active for over 20 years, I am interested, as part of my research, in whether it is possible to trace the development of their architectural thinking over time. The assumption of the evolution of the group's thinking about architecture and society is followed by the question of the extent and method of reflection on foreign and local contemporary discourse.

## Addition – Homage

Alex Mlynárčik, in personal correspondence with Tomáš Štrauss, formulates the idea of a creative process that is in its essence “an Addition to the past, but revealed by the scent and breath of the present”<sup>6</sup>. Mlynárčik defines the creative process as the process of interpreting the past in the context of the present, which at the same time allows for a bridge into the future.

In the projects of the VAL group, this Addition – an interpretation of the previous one – is presented as a homage. In all the projects, it is possible to identify some form of homage, whether expressed directly and explicitly<sup>7</sup> or more subtly. In some projects, the homage is a straightforward highlighting of important personalities (*Homage to Hope and Courage*); in others, the homage is in a form of reflection of (artistic or architectural) works by a group of renowned authors (*People's Assembly of Argillia*). I identify the homage as one of the group's artistic tools,

and by examining its specific execution in individual projects, we can open up the question of the group's possible creative evolution.

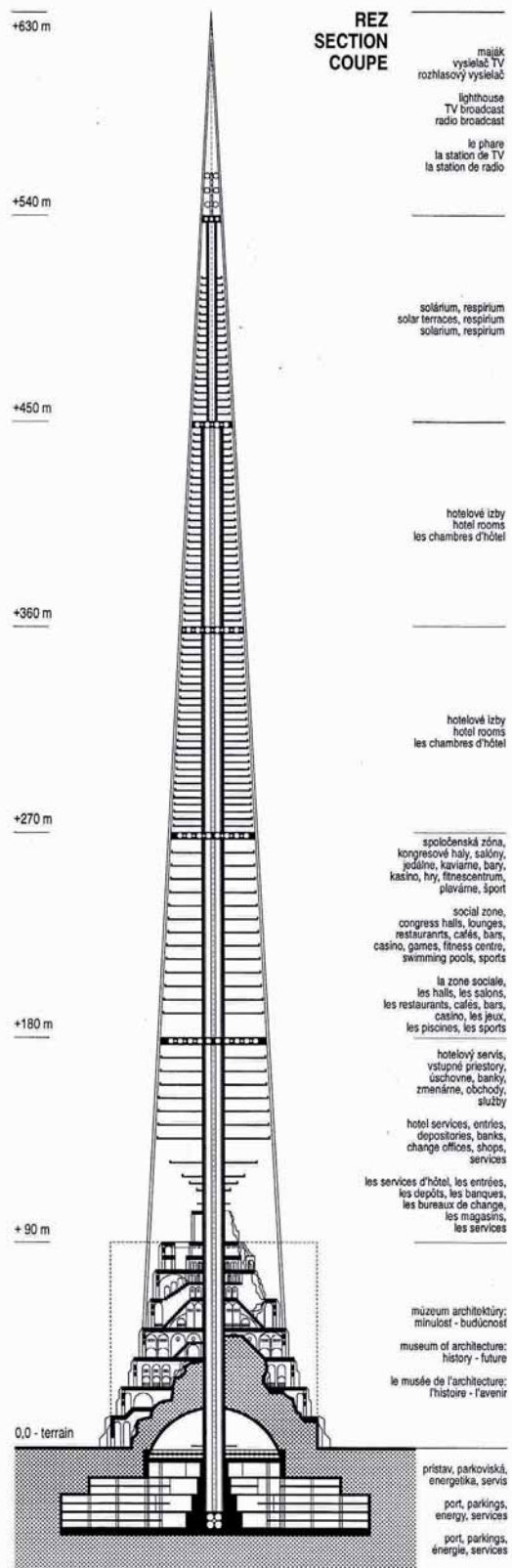
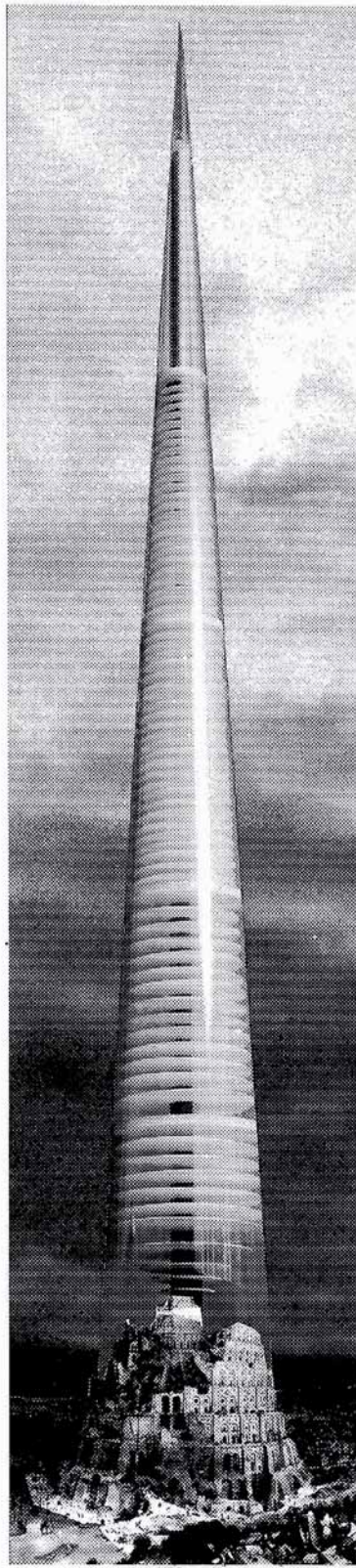
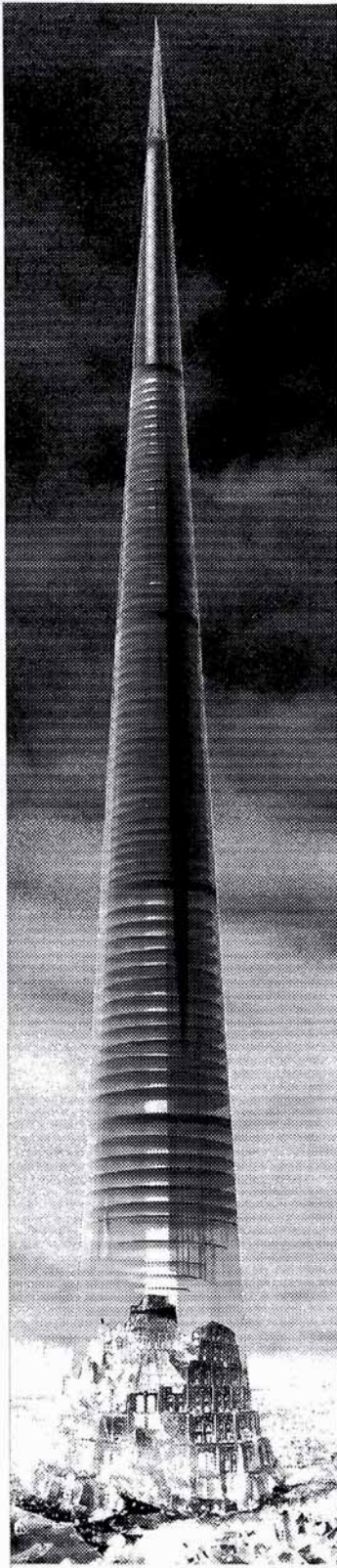
## Brueghel's Tower of Babel

The project *E-temen-an-ki – Sheraton hotel Babylon* is the last of the eight projects listed in the collective catalogue accompanying the first solo exhibition of VAL in Slovakia<sup>8</sup>. Like *People's Assembly of Argillia*, it dates from 1980 – 1994, making these works the group's two “longest” ongoing projects. In this case, the authors of the concept are Alex Mlynárčik and Viera Mecková, and the author of the architecture is Viera Mecková; Ľudovít Kupkovič is not mentioned. The project is an updating of the Tower of Babel in the form of a hotel. “The painting of the Tower of Babel, E-TE-MEN-AN-KI, by the famous Pieter Brueghel the Elder, is probably the best-known depiction of this apparently once existing structure. The project of VAL imprints a trace of modernity on this admirable work.”<sup>9</sup>

E-temen-an-ki is a version of the Sumerian name for the Tower of Babel – “temple of the foundation of heaven and earth”, a ziggurat dedicated to the god Marduk. The Renaissance painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder painted in the 1660s two (known) versions of the tower, “The Great” and “The Little”. The tower that forms the basis of the Sheraton Hotel project of VAL is the Great Tower<sup>10</sup>, which is in the collection of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. Jiří Hřůza writes about this larger version: “The overall configuration of its mass, however, also resembles a ruin, so that the futility of the efforts of the little people who are diligently building it becomes more apparent.”<sup>11</sup> The smaller version, by contrast, shows the tower in a more advanced stage of construction. VAL chose a depiction in which the tower appears simultaneously as under construction and as a ruin.

*Sheraton Hotel Babylon* building is composed of the original Brueghel tower consisting of seven terraces matched with a conical superstructure multiplying the height of the original tower by 7 times.<sup>12</sup> The “superstructure” proposed by VAL further develops the double movement (construction – ruin) that Hřůza suggested in the large version of Brueghel's Tower of Babel – the superstructure is both the completion of the tower and its conservation. “The base of the superstructure shell is formed by





VAL: E-TEMEN-AN-KI – SHERATON  
HOTEL BABYLON, 1980 – 1994

VAL: E-TEMEN-AN-KI – SHERATON  
HOTEL BABYLON, 1980 – 1994

Source Zdroj: KUPKOVIČ, Ľudovít,  
MECKOVÁ, Viera and MLYNÁRČIK,  
Alex. 1995. VAL Cesty a aspekty  
zajtrajška [exhibition catalogue]. Žilina:  
Expresprint, p. 108

the fourth terrace of Brueghel's tower, so that the last floors of this original structure remain well-preserved and conserved in their original state."<sup>23</sup> The first few floors of the superstructure following immediately after the top of the Brueghel tower are not circles of the full width of the given floor defined by the outer shell, but mirroring reflections of the cascades of the Tower of Babel, which gradually widen from the top of the tower to the full floor area, leaving "air" around its top. The original tower remains unburdened by its superstructure, one could say it is even left exposed. The function of this Brueghel torso within the new hotel building is precisely that of the Museum of Architecture: past – future.

## Fantastic Architecture

*Fantastic*<sup>24</sup> or visionary architecture, the "new romantic movement" of the first half of the twentieth century, entered the architectural discourse in the 1960s, thanks, among other things, to the exhibition *Visionary Architecture*<sup>25</sup>, organized by MoMA in New York and published in magazines in many Western European countries. In the Czechoslovak context, it was also cited by the interwar avant-gardist Karel Honzík<sup>26</sup>, or the urbanist and theorist Jiří Hrůza<sup>27</sup>. The exhibition presented more than 30 projects produced during the 1920s to 1950s, addressing social and economic problems, offering radical solutions for transportation and land use. In a press release for the exhibition, curator and MoMA's director of architecture and design Arthur Drexler highlights the "usefulness" of these projects as a pendant to over-rationalization.<sup>18</sup> A similar tone is found in Karel Honzík's reflections on fantastic architecture in his article "Formové otázky architektury" [Formal Questions of Architecture]<sup>19</sup> published in *Výtvarný život* in 1963, in which he discusses the post-Stalinist revival of the functionalist tendency in socialist architecture, its two extreme poles – the rationalist and the emotional – and their comparison with various types of functionalism in Western democratic countries<sup>20</sup>. In direct conflict with functionalism, in Western democratic countries, manifestations of fantastic architecture come into play, which, according to him, are very diverse, but what unites them is "the exclusive interest in unique works, in many cases the resistance to typification and mass production, which goes as far as a bias against modern technology, against serial production and the idea of standards"<sup>21</sup>. Honzík acknowledges that resistance to typification and standardisation stands in direct contradiction to the concept of socialist architecture, but suggests that it is important to learn from the many rational and utilitarian realisations of Western democratic countries that led to such resistance: "Even in our conditions, a non-artistic or over-rationally conceived typified environment could provoke a similar reaction, especially if we add to this the often criticised incompleteness of housing estates without greenery and without the appropriate amenities"<sup>22</sup>. Using the example of authors such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux or Vladimir Tatlin, Honzík speaks of "romantic attempts of a progressive nature"<sup>23</sup> that foreshadow future projects. He draws attention to the importance of the emotional and irrational in architecture, and the importance of their intermingling with rational practices and principles.

In the Czechoslovak environment, Jiří Hrůza paid significant attention to architectural and urban utopias, especially in the 1960s<sup>24</sup>. In 1967, he published a book called *Města utopistů* [Cities of the Utopianists], in which he presented the development of these utopian ideas and thematized their usefulness and relevance for contemporary architectural and urban planning thought and practice.<sup>25</sup> In the chapter entitled "Fantastická města" [Fantastic Cities], he addresses the phenomenon of fantastic architecture – a set of tendencies that he argues were united by "a reaction to the contemporary faded architecture of the same old glass prisms that litter Western cities"<sup>26</sup>.

One of the many important predecessors of fantastic architecture or fantastic designs of cities of the twentieth century is the previously mentioned Tower of Babel. Its depiction by Pieter Brueghel the Elder is, according to Hrůza, one of the "earliest depictions of a highly concentrated form of settlement", which became a precursor to many popular "city – tower" and "city – pyramid" projects of the twentieth century. These types of projects responded to the problems of the density of settlements with an effort to make the most intensive use of land with ever-increasing costs, or to the unsatisfactory results of overly dispersed and spatially amorphous parts of the settlements. Many of the projects addressing these topics work with intensification of land use through spatial vertical structures.<sup>27</sup>

The archetype of the Tower of Babel is also encountered in the theoretical texts of the French theorist and critic of art and architecture Michel Ragon<sup>28</sup> in his publication *Où vivrons-nous demain?*<sup>29</sup> from 1963, which was also published in Czech translation<sup>30</sup> in 1967. In his publication, Ragon formulates the theory of *prospective architecture*<sup>31</sup>, which aims to search for future forms of cities and ways of inhabiting them. Ragon introduces the new "cities of the tertiary era" – "cities with concentrated development, but on an ever-shrinking area and with increasing vertical traffic"<sup>32</sup>. He argues that the increasing population of cities may not lead to their disintegration but could be solved by a higher concentration of population in vertical cities – self-sustaining architectural units. "All the visionary architects imagined the ideal city of tomorrow as a Tower of Babel."<sup>33</sup>

## The Skyscraper

*Sheraton hotel Babylon* is not a "city – tower", because it is not a city – a relatively autonomous settlement, a functionally, socially diversified and structured unit. *Sheraton hotel Babylon* is a hotel: a part of the entertainment business, of leisure, traveling. In an interview with Vlado Záborský, Viera Mecková explains that the function of the hotel was chosen as a period-typical representative of a place for contact, a meeting place, such as airports or train stations, emphasising also their open character as a place for everyone.<sup>34</sup>

*Sheraton hotel Babylon* is a hotel – skyscraper. The Sheraton hotel chain is a United States company that in its early days in the 1950s focused mainly on acquiring existing hotels; it was not until 1957 that it opened its first newly built hotel in Philadelphia. In the 1960s, it expanded beyond the North American continent, and by the late 1980s was the largest international hotel chain. According to Mecková, the name Sheraton was

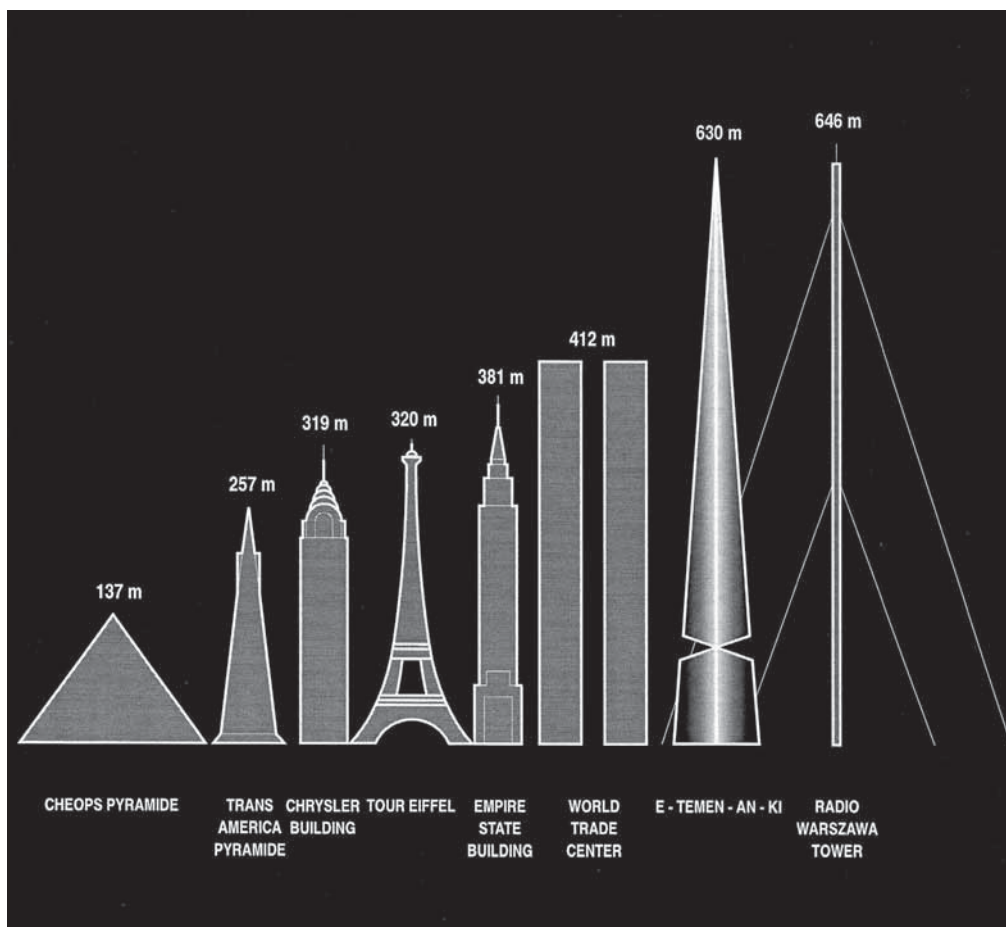


VAL'S RANKING OF BUILDINGS  
BY HEIGHT CONTEXTUALISING  
THEIR PROJECT E-TEMEN-AN-KI –

SHERATON HOTEL BABYLON

REBRÍČEK BUDOVOV PODĚLA VÝŠKY  
VYTVOŘENÝ SKUPINOU VAL,  
KONTEXTUALIZUJÍCÍ ICH PROJEKT  
E-TEMEN-AN-KI – SHERATON  
HOTEL BABYLON

Source Zdroj: Kupkovič, L., Mecková, V.  
and Mlynářčik, A., 1995, p. 109



chosen precisely because it is one of the largest global chains that everyone is familiar with.<sup>35</sup>

One of the images presenting the *E-temen-an-ki – Sheraton hotel Babylon* project in the catalogue is a “ranking” of high-rise buildings. However, this is not a ranking of the tallest buildings in any particular period, because if the criterion were only absolute height, this ranking would be highly selective. In the same year that the World Trade Center in New York was completed (1 World Trade Center – Tower 1 was completed in 1972, 2 World Trade Center – Tower 2 in 1973), an even taller building was built – the Sears Tower in Chicago (now the Willis Tower), which was the tallest until 1998. Several other skyscrapers are omitted. However, the ranking starts with the Pyramid of Cheops (Great Pyramid of Giza), which suggests that it is a ranking of a different kind of “significance” than just absolute height.

### Tatlin's Tower

Among the referential buildings for the *Sheraton Hotel Babylon* project, or among their depictions, in addition to Brueghel's Tower of Babel of 1563 and R. Koldewey's reconstruction of the Tower of Babel of 1899, there is also Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International of 1919 – 1920, and finally The Mile High Illinois, designed by F.L. Wright in 1956.

In the early 1970s, the theorist and critic Oskár Čepan prepared a book entitled *Tatlinova iniciatíva* – an anthology of texts

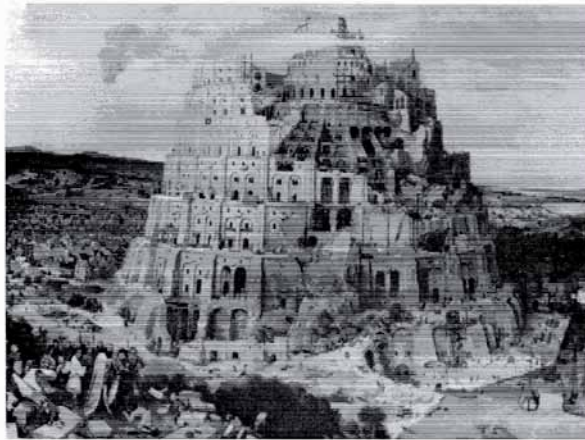
by Tatlin and his contemporaries, and contemporary studies by avant-garde theorists dealing with Tatlin's work and constructivist tendencies.<sup>36</sup> Regarding the Monument to the Third International – Tatlin's Tower - he commented that: “However, it is undoubtedly one of the classic milestones documenting the development of ideas about the materialisation of the constructive-architectural idea in human history, starting with the Egyptian pyramids and the Sumerian-Babylonian ziggurat to the Eiffel Tower, the skyscrapers of American cities, and the masts of contemporary broadcasting radio and television stations.”<sup>37</sup> Čepan includes Tatlin's Tower among the buildings that are not merely purpose-built, but are important manifestations of the evolution of architectural thinking, an approach that seems to be a possible influence on the ranking compiled by VAL.

In the introductory text to a forthcoming publication on the Russian interwar avant-garde<sup>38</sup>, Čepan calls Tatlin's Monument to the Third International a “gigantic monument – tower”. He places Tatlin's Tower in a developmental line of buildings that contrast with “purely utilitarian high-rise structures” of the time. “The clay Sumerian-Babylonian ziggurat with seven levels was in turn a projection of a hemisphere with inscribed quadrants. Its terraces expressed the additive, paratactic idea of the earth's surface and the stepped hierarchy of society of those times. Brueghel's painting, *The Tower of Babel* presents, through the eyes of a 16th-century artist, a vivid idea of the multiple

**REFERENTIAL IMAGES OF BUILDINGS FOR THE PROJECT E-TEMEN-AN-KI – SHERATON HOTEL BABYLON**

REFERENČNÉ VYOBRAZENIA BUDOVOV PRE PROJEKT E-TEMEN-AN-KI – SHERATON HOTEL BABYLON

Source Zdroj: Kupkovič, L., Mecková, V. and Mlynářčík, A., 1995, p. 111

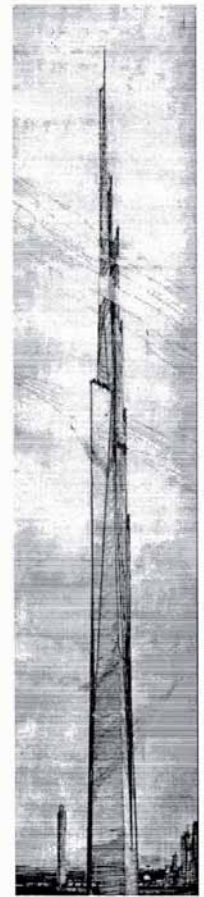
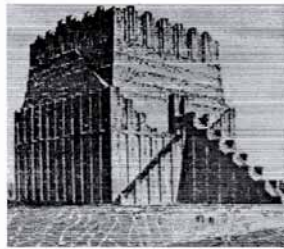


BABYLON TOWER, Pieter Brueghel, 1563

THE MILE HIGH ILLINOIS, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1956

3rd INTERNATIONAL TOWER, Vladimír Tatlin, 1919-1920

BABYLON TOWER, reconstruction, R. Koldewey, 1899



subordination of material, people and space to the despotic idea – to reach the heavens.”<sup>39</sup> Tatlin’s Tower consists of two open spirals materialising the idea of rotation, with three rotating objects in its interior. “The dynamic form of the spiral is de facto stable, and the static objects placed within it are mobile.”<sup>40</sup> Despite various symbolic interpretations related to socialist culture, Čepan argues that symbolism is not only inserted into this object from the outside, but “results from its tectonic and material-formal nature, with the risk that the project will not be able to be realised in a given situation.”<sup>41</sup>

### Monument – Utilitarian Building

Nikolai N. Punin, an art theorist, writer, and Tatlin’s contemporary, explains in his text on Tatlin’s Tower<sup>42</sup> that in addition to the synthesis of architectural, sculptural and painting principles, the Monument to the Third International was to be “a new type of monumental construction in which a purely creative form would be combined with utilitarian forms”.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the outer vertical spirals, Tatlin’s Tower consists of three glass objects – buildings with various administrative and promotional functions.<sup>44</sup>

*Sheraton hotel Babylon* is no longer a utopian city – tower; it no longer offers an image of a new way of life. VAL chose Brueghel’s Tower of Babel for the *Sheraton hotel Babylon* because “it is a beautiful object in itself. As a volume, it is very familiar,

no one needs to explain what it is. Almost everyone knows it.”<sup>45</sup> According to Mecková, the intention was to complete the tower, and the form of the superstructure – the cone – stems from the inherent predisposition of Brueghel’s Tower. Moreover, the effort to design the tallest building possible was not the intention, after all, the Sheraton Hotel Babylon is not even the tallest building in the above-mentioned ranking.

From Mecková’s statements, it seems that Brueghel’s Tower and the intention to “complete” it were present at the beginning. The shape itself is the result of the interpretation of the Tower of Babel. “We had the feeling that this shape would enhance the original building. It’s a bit like Hubáček’s tower on Jěštěd, in that you either make a complete contrast, or you amplify the thing by overexposing it.”<sup>46</sup> *Sheraton hotel Babylon* is a static regular cone consisting of seven equally high parts, of which the first part is Brueghel’s Tower of Babel. The seven equally high parts are regularly subdivided into floors whose height decreases upwards. The floors become lower and smaller in area and therefore denser as the tower peaks. The Tower of Babel is enclosed in the new building, the new building builds on it, literally, as it is placed on its fourth terrace. At the same time the one tower becomes a part of the other, with an articulated point of connection. This is a very contextual approach. Is the tower designed by VAL more of a hotel or a monument?

## Barthes's Eiffel Tower

In his essay "The Eiffel Tower"<sup>47</sup>, published at the end of the 1970s, Roland Barthes presents another view of the myth of the Tower of Babel ("Babel complex"). Using it as an example, he speaks of a naive utilitarianism ("use never does anything but shelter meaning"<sup>48</sup>), which is, however, part of the "oneiric" function that inspired the creation of the tower. Although the Tower of Babel was supposed to serve communication with God, its "real" function or effect is in its meaning – a total monument.

"In order to satisfy this great oneiric function, which makes it into a kind of total monument, the Tower must escape reason. The first condition of this victorious flight is that the Tower be an utterly useless monument."<sup>49</sup> The Eiffel Tower, according to Barthes, is another such Tower of Babel. At its conception, various future scientific purposes were declared which, as Barthes points out, lost their significance once the tower was standing and they are ultimately no longer important at all. "... it has reconquered the basic uselessness which makes it live in men's imagination."<sup>50</sup> According to Barthes, the importance of the Eiffel Tower lies in the dialectic contained in it. "The Tower is an object which sees, a glance which is seen; it is a complete verb, both active and passive, in which no function, no voice (...) is defective."<sup>51</sup> It highlights the double movement that the Eiffel Tower represents. On the one hand, it is a place that is seen, but it is also a place from which one can see everywhere.

## Conclusion

*Sheraton hotel Babylon* is not "useless" at first glance, it has its function – a hotel. However, from Mecková's answers, it seems that the idea of the Tower of Babel (and its completion) was more important than its use. Just as the conical shape and its height is a consequence of the reading and interpretation of the tower, so too is its infill. The hotel represents a place of communication, a contemporary version of the Tower of Babel. The intention to complete the Tower of Babel can be seen as a form

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1 The activity of the members of the group was physically tied to Žilina, where they all lived, but their work was related to universal global themes in addition to local ones. At the time of their activity, the works created by the group were not publicly presented in Slovakia or Czechoslovakia, but in France.

2 ŠTRAUS, Tomáš. 1992. *Slovenský variant moderny*. Bratislava: Pallas; BARTOŠOVÁ, Zuzana. 2011. *Napriek totalite: Neoficiálna slovenská výtvarná scéna sedemdesiatych a osemdesiatych rokov 20. storočia*. Kalligram: Bratislava; CHALUPECKÝ, Jindřich. 1990. Příběh Alexe Mlynářčika. In: *Na hranicích umění: Několik příběhů*. Praha: Prostor, pp. 106 – 122; ŠMEJKAL, František. 1975. Kosmické vejce. *Umění/Arts* 23, pp. 226 – 258; MATUŠTÍK, Radislav. 2000. Umenie akcie. In: RUSINOVÁ, Zora et al. *Dejiny slovenského výtvarného umenia: 20. storočie* [exhibition catalogue]. Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, pp. 163 – 177; HRABUŠICKÝ,

of highlighting, of homage – by erecting a monument formally containing the honoured. *Sheraton hotel Babylon* is a monument full and concrete – both utilitarian and absorbing the honoured. It does not refer to the past, it does not do so allegorically, it makes the past (and the future) present literally – by physically absorbing it and assigning it a new function. The past is the real basis of the present (future?) superstructure.

By interpreting Brueghel's Tower, VAL symbolically joined the continuity established by the authors referring to the Tower of Babel. The few examples outlined indicate a range of perspectives. Honzík or Hruža, in the 1960s, operated with the Tower of Babel as an archetype of utopian architecture or cities, of the vertical direction of the development of construction and the organisation of settlements. Ragon, while reserved towards utopia, also regards the Tower of Babel as a phenomenon to which every visionary architect relates. Čepan, through Tatlin's Tower, perceives it primarily through its capacity to formally express socio-political organisation or cultural development. Barthes refers to its capacity to bind the human imagination and become a monument. The phenomenon of the tower is summed up by Rem Koolhaas "...: catalyst of consciousness, symbol of technological progress, marker of pleasure zones, subversive short-circuiter of convention and finally self-contained universe. Towers now indicate acute breaks in the homogeneous pattern of everyday life, marking the scattered outposts of a new culture."<sup>52</sup>

The way VAL makes use of Brueghel's Tower does not seem to follow the concept of a social utopia or a prospective response to the city of the future. In the *Sheraton hotel Babylon* project, the response to the big and complex questions of the 1960s is absent. As the project is dated to the 1980s and early 1990s, a parallel comparison with the practice of interpretation embodied in the group's other earlier projects would allow for an assessment of the development of their thinking in relation to contemporary discourse.

Aurel. Umenie fantastického odhmotnenia. In: HRABUŠICKÝ, Aurel. *Slovenské vizuálne umenie 1970 – 1985* [exhibition catalogue], pp.143 – 188; BAJCUROVÁ, Katarína – HRABUŠICKÝ, Aurel. *Iné svety*. In: BAJCUROVÁ, Katarína. 2008. *Slovenský obraz (antiobraz), 20. storočie v slovenskom výtvarnom umení* [exhibition catalogue]. Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, pp. 189 – 214; KURACINOVÁ JANEČKOVÁ, Viera. 2000. *Neokonštruktivizmus v slovenskom výtvarnom umení* [exhibition catalogue Trnava: Galéria Jána Koniarka, 2000.

3 DULLA, Matúš and MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta. 2002. *Architektúra Slovenska v 20. storočí*. Bratislava: Slovar; VAL. 1992. VAL 1968 až 1989. *Projekt* 34(1), pp. 8 – 19; VALENTOVIČ, Alexander. 1992. Radosť z napätia. *Projekt* 34(1), p. 2; MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta. 2008. Posledné utópie?. *ARCH* 13(12), pp. 50 – 53; MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta. 2013. Monumentalita v slovenskej architektúre šesťdesiatych a sedem-

desiatych rokov 20. storočia: totalitné, národné, veľké a abstraktné. In: MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta, SZALAY, Peter, DULLA, Matúš, TOPOLČAN-SKÁ, Mária, POTOČÁR, Marián and HABERLANDOVÁ, Katarína. *Moderné a/alebo totalitné v architektúre 20. storočia na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Slovar; HÁJKOVÁ, Ludmila and ŠVÁCHA, Rostislav. 1999. Kde budeme žiť zíttra?. In: Havránek, V. (ed.). *Akce slovo pohyb prostor*. Praha: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, pp. 114 – 145.

4 CROWLEY, David and PAVITT, Jane. 2008. *Cold War Modern. Design 1945 – 1970*. London: V&A Publishing; CYTLAK, Katarzyna. 2017. *L'architecture prospective en Tchécoslovaquie. Convergences et divergences entre l'approche du groupe slovaque VAL (1968 – 1994) et la théorie architecturale de Michel Ragon*. In: RIHA Journal 0179, 25 September 2017, URL: <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2017/0179-cytlak>, URN: [see metadata].

- 5 Cytlak, K., 2017; CYTLAK, Katarzyna. 2015. Complexity and Contradiction in Central European Radical Architecture. Experiments in Art and Architecture in the 1970s. *Umeni/Art* 60(3), pp. 182 – 203.
- 6 “No one will convince me that Einstein did not know how to divide and multiply. No one will convince me that Cézanne, Seurat, the cubists, the surrealists, etc., etc., discovered something out of nothing. The great ones struggled immensely and suffered to find that tiny grain – in other words, the keystone of their existence – the creative moment that meant the Addition. This Addition to the past, but revealed by the scent and breath of the present. The Addition is a bridge that then allows further continuity to the future. That’s how it’s always been.” [“Nikto ma nepresvedčí, že Einstein nevedel deliť a násobiť. Nikto ma nepresvedčí, že Cézanne, Seurat, kubisti, surrealisti etc., etc. objavili niečo z ničoho. Tí veľkí nesmierne tvrdo bojovali a strádali, aby našli to malé zrníčko – ináč klenák ich existencie – tvorivý moment, ktorý znamenal Pridanie. Toto Pridanie minulému, no zjavené voňou a dychom súčasnosti. Pridanie je mostom, ktorý potom dovoľuje ďalšiu nadväznosť na budúcnosť. Tak to vždy bolo.”] From personal correspondence with Tomáš Štrauss. Letter written in Bratislava, July 14, 1979. The correspondence was published in: ŠTRAUSS, Tomáš. *Slovenský variant moderny*. Bratislava: Pallas, SFVU publishing house, 1992, p. 197.
- 7 *Akusticon – Homage to M. Filip, or Homage to Hope and Courage – Memorial to E. A. Cernan*
- 8 The exhibition *VAL – Cesty a aspekty zajtrajška* [VAL – Paths and Aspects of Tomorrow] was held in 1996 at the Umelecká Beseda in Bratislava, then in 1997 at the Klasik Gallery in Žilina. It was also their first exhibition, where all 8 projects were presented.
- 9 KUPKOVIČ, Ľudovít, MECKOVÁ, Viera and MLYNÁRČIK, Alex. 1995. *VAL Cesty a aspekty zajtrajška* [exhibition catalogue]. Žilina: Expresprint, p. 105.
- 10 BRUEGHEL THE ELDER, Pieter. 1563. *The (Great) Tower of Babel*. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
- 11 HRŮZA, Jiří. 1967. *Města utopistů*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, p. 30.
- 12 Kupkovič, Ľ., Mecková, V. and Mlynárčik, A., 1995, p. 105.
- 13 Kupkovič, Ľ., Mecková, V. and Mlynárčik, A., 1995, p. 105.
- 14 Honzík uses the term fantastic architecture on the basis of the contemporary designation of visionary architecture.
- 15 *Visionary Architecture*, 29 September – 4 December 1960, MoMA, New York, curator: Arthur Drexler. Available at: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2554> (Accessed 3 April 2023).
- 16 HONZÍK, Karel. 1963. Formové otázky architektúry [Formal Issues in Architecture]. In: *Výtvarný život*, 8(9), p. 332 – 351.
- 17 Hřůza, J. 1967, p. 151.
- 18 From the press release for the exhibition *Visionary Architecture*: “... Visionary projects, like Plato’s ideal forms, cast their shadows over into the real world of experience, expense and frustration. If we could learn what they have to teach, we might exchange irrelevant rationalisations for more useful critical standards. Vision and reality might then coincide.”
- 19 Honzík, K., 1963, p. 332 – 351.
- 20 Honzík uses the term “capitalist countries” at that time, by which he means countries of the West of the Iron Curtain.
- 21 Honzík, K., 1963, p. 339. For Honzík, the *fantastic architectures* he writes about have their similarities and foundations in Dadaism, Surrealism, cite patterns from Art Nouveau, or refer to the German Expressionists and Utopians of the 1920s.
- 22 Honzík, K., 1963, p. 343.
- 23 Honzík, K., 1963, p. 344.
- 24 HRŮZA, Jiří. 1962. *Budoucnost měst*. Praha: Orbis, 312 p; HRŮZA, Jiří. 1965. *Teorie města*. Praha: ČSAV, 327 p.
- 25 More about the theoretical and practical work of Jiří Hřůza can be found, e.g. in Vojtěch Márc in his text “Prostory očekávání. Socialistická architektura a politika budoucnosti / Spaces of Expectation. Socialist Architecture and the Politics of the Future” in ROLLOVÁ, Veronika, JIRKALOVÁ, Karolína (edd.) 2022. *Budoucnost je skryta v přítomnosti / The Future Is Hidden in the Present*. Praha: UMPRUM, 408 p.
- 26 Hřůza, J., 1967, p. 152. [“reakcia na súčasnú zplanelú architektúru stále rovnakých sklenených hranolov, ktoré zaplavujú západné veľkomestá”]
- 27 Hřůza lists various examples ranging from pyramidal cities (the conical city for 100,000 inhabitants by Corbusier’s pupil J. C. Mazet, F. L. Wright’s Point Park cultural centre in Pittsburgh, or P. Soleri’s biotechnical city) to spatial vertical structures (the projects of Y. Friedman, P. Maymont, or F. Otto, among many others).
- 28 Theorist of *prospective architecture*, and one of the founders of GIAP (Groupe International d’Architecture Prospective). Among other things, personal friend of Alex Mlynárčik.
- 29 RAGON, Michel. 1963. *Où vivrons-nous demain?*. Paris: Édition Robert Laffont, 215 p.
- 30 RAGON, Michel. 1967. *Kde budeme žít zítřa?*. Praha: Mladá fronta, 171 p.
- 31 The theory of prospective architecture is defined by Michel Ragon in the publication *Où vivrons-nous demain?*. Later in 1965, the manifesto of the GIAP group was published. Later, at the end of the seventies, he published a publication – an “encyclopedia” of prospective architecture – in which the VAL group’s project Heliopolis already appears: RAGON, Michel. 1986. *Histoire mondiale de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme moderne: Prospective et futurologie*. 2nd ed. Paris: Casterman.
- 32 Ragon, M., 1967, p. 36.
- 33 Ragon, M., 1967, p. 37.
- 34 MECKOVÁ, Viera and ZÁBORSKÝ, Vlado. 1995. Spomienky na minulosť, prítomnosť i budúcnosť. *Projekt* 36(4), p. 24.
- 35 Mecková, V., Záborský, V., 1995, p. 24.
- 36 As Zervan and Lacko, the editors of the publication *Oskár Čepan a výtvarné umenie* [Oskár Čepan and the Fine Art], write in the preface, Čepan’s book was ready for printing in 1971, but it was never officially published and circulated only in transcripts and copies. “Čepanov projekt nebol len antológiou textov časti ruskej avantgardy. Jeho cieľom bolo ukázať, že Tatlinova iniciatíva motivovala umelecké a teoretické myslenie kontinuálne, napriek politickým prekážkam, aj v šesťdesiatych rokoch a motivuje dodnes.” [Čepan’s project was not just an anthology of texts by part of the Russian avant-garde. Its aim was to show that Tatlin’s Initiative motivated artistic and art-theoretical thinking continuously, despite political obstacles, even in the 1960s and continues to motivate it today.] LACKO, Norbert and ZERVAN, Marián. 2018. *Oskár Čepan a výtvarné umenie*. Bratislava: Academy of Fine Arts, Slovart, p. 11.
- 37 Čepan, O., 2018, p. 49.
- 38 The article by Oskár Čepan was originally a part of the book *Tatlinova iniciatíva*, which was never published. ČEPAN, Oskár. 2018. *Tatlinova iniciatíva*. In: *Oskár Čepan a výtvarné umenie*. Bratislava: Academy of Fine Arts, Slovart, p. 22 – 80.
- 39 Čepan, O., 2018, p. 49.
- 40 Čepan, O., 2018, p. 50.
- 41 Čepan, O., 2018, p. 50.
- 42 The text “The Monument to the Third International” by Punin was also intended to be part of Čepan’s publication *Tatlin’s Initiative* and is included in the publication *Oskár Čepan a výtvarné umenie*.
- 43 Punin, N. N., 2018, p. 80.
- 44 Buildings – rooms are located one above the other and form an aggregate of various harmoniously connected forms. ... The lower building – room (A), which has the shape of a cube, moves on its axis at the rate of one revolution per year. It is intended for legislative purposes. Conferences of the International, sessions of its conventions, and other larger legislative meetings may be held here. The next building – room (B), is shaped like a pyramid and rotates on its axis at the rate of one complete revolution per month. It is designed for executive purposes (the Executive Committee of the International, the Secretariat and other administrative-executive bodies). Finally, the upper cylinder (C) rotates at the rate of one revolution per day and is intended to serve as a centre of information: it is to house an information office, a newspaper editorial office, the publication of proclamations, pamphlets, manifestos ...” Čepan, O., 2018, p. 80.
- 45 Mecková, V., Záborský, V., 1995, p. 24.
- 46 Mecková, V., Záborský, V., 1995, p. 24.
- 47 BARTHES, Roland. The Eiffel Tower. In: Barthes, R. 1997. *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 3 – 18.
- 48 Barthes, R., 1997, p. 240.
- 49 Barthes, R., 1997, p. 238.
- 50 Barthes, R., 1997, p. 240.
- 51 Barthes, R., 1997, p. 238.
- 52 KOOLHAAS, Rem. 1994. *Delirious New York. A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*. 2nd edn. New York: The Monacelli Press, p. 93