



**UNBUILT WINNING DESIGN  
OF EXPERIMENTAL CORNER  
APARTMENT BUILDING AS PART OF  
BLOCK 8 IN PRAGUE-VINOHRADY,  
VLADIMÍR KRÁTKÝ, JAN ALINČE,  
1988–1989**


NEREALIZOVANÝ VÍTEŽNÝ NÁVRH  
EXPERIMENTÁLNÍHO NÁROŽNÍHO  
BYTOVÉHO DOMU V RÁMCI  
BLOKU 8 V PRAZE-VINOHRADĚCH,  
VLADIMÍR KRÁTKÝ, JAN ALINČE,  
1988–1989

**Source** Zdroj: personal archive  
of Vladimír Krátký

# The Return to the City towards the End of the Normalisation Period

## Návrat k městu ke konci normalizace

Petr Vorlík

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Nástup postmoderního étosu je v Čechách spojen nejenom se zklamáním z moderny a s potřebou vymezit se vůči předchozím generacím, ale i s pocitem jejího zneužití režimem a s citlivostí vůči radikálním, přímočarým zásahům do prostředí historických měst. Kořeny těchto hodnotových střetů však můžeme vystopovat hlouběji, už v padesátých letech, kdy se historická jádra po celé Evropě stala předmětem poválečné obnovy nebo revitalizačních aktivit a kdy zkušenost posledního desetiletí vedla k přehodnocení pohledu na jejich roli a podobu. V Československu sehrála v tomto ohledu významnou roli centralizovaná památková péče, metodicky excelentní a krok za krokem koncepčně budovaná, kladoucí důraz zejména na autenticitu a vrstevnatost historických měst (překvapivě ne vždy na jejich celistvost), akceptovaná a protežovaná politickou reprezentací i zástupci avantgardy (kteří se k ní uchýlovali v úniku před ideologicky laděnou doktrínou socialistického realismu). Zároveň však měla podobu nepokrytě výběrové, politicky a národnostně zabarvené ochrany. Výsledná díla, nezřídka narativní a vystavěná na principech kontrastní metody s nemalým podílem nového kreativního vkladu, dosahovala mimořádných kvalit. Vytvořila živnou půdu k pozdější proměně étosu v sedmdesátých a osmdesátých letech, kdy se pozornost odborné obce posouvala od výběrových, ideologicky exkluzivních akcí ke snaze o šetrnou rehabilitaci po dlouhá desetiletí zanedbávaných a drasticky chátrajících větších historických celků a předměstí. Tuto spojnicí výmluvně dokládají materiály z odborných setkání na téma regenerace měst, v nichž se argumentace a nástroje památkové péče a otázky autenticity překvapivě prolínaly, ať už se vedla diskuze o prioritních zájmových objektech, nebo o dosud opomíjených „okrajových a obyčejných“ územích. Navrhovaná řešení tak uplatňují na dobové evropské poměry poměrně střízlivý architektonický jazyk (jakkoliv zahraniční, často postmoderní příklady u nás byly dobře známy a publikovány) a oceňovanými kvalitami se stávají zejména parter, střešní krajina, měřítko a skromná materialita (svou roli však při této umírněnosti jistě sehrály i omezené možnosti tuzemského stavebnictví, v praxi často vedoucí spíše k nežádoucí simplifikaci). Programy „modernizací“ vybraných ulic, náměstí či domů tak přinášely zejména posilování jejich pěších, obytných parametrů (dlažba, mobiliář, obchodní parter, členité průčelí) a protínaly se s aktuálním postmoderním důrazem na malebnou, nadčasovou, nepřímou atmosféru městského prostředí. Významným testem stavební reality a koncepčním etalonem se stal program modernizace nájemných

domů ve čtvrtích 19. a první poloviny 20. století, oficiálně motivovaný především snahou řešit nedostatek bytů a zvyšovat jejich standardy. Ve druhé rovině však představoval i uznání právě těch kvalit donedávna podceňovaných předmoderních čtvrtí, jichž se sídlištěm a nové výstavbě nedostávalo.

V zásadě stejná témata zaznívala i při výstavbě normalizačních sídlišť, u nichž se sice tvůrcům nedařilo prosadit jiné typy a formy panelových domů, ale proměnu postojů mohli promítnout aspoň do uspořádání veřejného prostoru, do důrazu na identitu, snah o evokaci městských bulvárů, bloků či vnitrobloků, do charakteru parteru a v neposlední řadě do budov občanské vybavenosti, u nichž se pozvolna prosazoval i postmoderní nebo výtvarně pluralitní, od normativního mezinárodního stylu či inženýrské a zprůměrněné věcnosti se odklánějící výraz.

Ke změně paradigmatu a orientaci na větší městovost přitom docházelo jen pomalu, zprvu spíše v úzkém segmentu odborné obce, v závěru normalizace už ale i na oficiální platformě sjezdu Svazu architektů či ve vládním usnesení č. 333. Pozvolný odklon od autentického výtvarně či technicistně uchopeného modernismu ke kontextuálnějšímu, narativnějšímu či humanistickému pojetí umožnila také opatrná a novinky spíše jen tolerující deideologizace architektury v osmdesátých letech. A větší dostupnost flexibilnějších technologických řešení, zejména lehkých obvodových plášťů, ocelových konstrukcí a železobetonových prefabrikovaných skeletů. Případně hojně publikované a diskutované experimenty se zušlechťováním, modifikacemi a míšením běžně dostupných konstrukčních systémů, vznikající v zájmu přehodnocení stávající praxe a pod hlavičkou často používaného termínu humanizace architektury a socialistického stavebnictví. Ale také výzkumy na téma nových modulárních konstrukcí, které by umožnily navrhovat hmotově kontextuální a vlastně i postmoderní architekturu.

Téma ovládlo odborný tisk a česká architektura „objevila“ vnitřní cenzuru dlouho potlačované inspirace a kvality; paradoxně právě u té části dědictví, již ještě nedávno kritizovala a odsoudila k postupné asanaci. Podstatnou roli v tomto myšlenkovém posunu jistě sehrály i proluky, novostavby a nové soubory v citlivém historickém prostředí, které tradičně spoluutvářely normotvorný odborný diskurz. Tématu vlastní potřeba kompromisů, i v éře radikálních postojů neutuchající tlak na kontextualitu a do očí bijící občasná selhání se v sedmdesátých letech propojily s osobními postoji a svěbytným rukopisem řady tvůrců mladší a střední generace. Ti své úvahy na dané téma sdíleli a cizelovali v rámci

převážně neoficiálních či polooficiálních spolků a pozvolna je uváděli do praxe; zpočátku většinou spíše stranou hlavního dění, ale se značnou a narůstající odezvou ve vyprahlé odborné obci. A mocnou hybnou silou se stalo také pronikání západní postmoderní syntézy či kontextuálního kontrastu (viz kategorizace

Charlese Jenckse v knize *The Story of Postmodernism*), inspirace často umně namíchané s rysy dosud obdivovaného tuzemského meziválečného funkcionalismu, se setrvačnými dozvuky reformující se západní moderny padesátých let či technicistním jazykem blízkým inženýrsky orientovanému českému prostředí.

## The legacy

In several ways, Czech towns and cities found themselves in a good position at the end of the Second World War, benefiting from the relative continuity of changes in the interwar period. The economic successes of the 1920s and 1930s had yielded prosperity and led to greater care being taken of urban centres, which had retained their elegance and social role. Redevelopment of entire urban blocks or street sections was only rarely attempted, and such projects had to be thoroughly regulated and proven justified, either for reasons of public health or traffic needs or to make way for the construction of public buildings. Large-scale urban interventions were (in contrast to the 'long 19th century') concentrated for the most part in little-developed peripheral areas, the rural parts of the national border regions, and a few rapidly developing industrial agglomerations. One important role in slowing down potentially harmful, large-scale 'cuts' was of course played by private ownership, the steady transformation of society (except for the Sudetenland), the compact nature of residential settlement, the gradual pace in the preparation of urban plans and regulations, the hectic but relatively short period of independence after 1918, subsequently disrupted by economic crises, and, last but not least, the explicit cultural legacy of the National Revival and the still-vivid experience of the devastating redevelopment of the former Jewish ghetto of Josefov in Prague.<sup>1</sup> Czech towns and cities were, moreover, less damaged after the Second World War than those in Western Europe, and until the mid-1960s they remained in a picturesque and relatively authentic state, outside the crosshairs of mainstream post-war development.

In the 1950s, historic centres across Europe became the subject of post-war restoration or extensive revitalization activities, an experience that led to a re-evaluation of their role and form. The theme gradually crystallized into several lines evolving in parallel and raised fundamental questions of the relationship between the past and the present. The core of considerations slowly shifted from efficiency and technical solutions to roles and soft methods; the emphasis concentrated on the scale and habitable qualities of public space, and an architecture to be marked by comprehensive, non-straightforward, synthetic forms or materiality, gradually moving away from the abstract artistic construct of the interwar avant-garde or the normative technocratic line of the post-war international style.

In Czechoslovakia, institutional monument care and its strong political position played a significant role in this aspect. After the war, heritage protection was associated with key institutions (Ateliér R of Stavoprojekt, transformed in 1954 into the influential State Institute for the Reconstruction of Heritage Towns and Buildings, aka SÚRPMO), and grounded on systematic research and anchored in legislation (Decree No. 103.262/50 of 1950 on the protection and regeneration of the most valuable urban areas and Act No. 22/1958 on cultural monuments and heritage reservations).<sup>2</sup> It is impossible not to notice that in the name of the State Institute and the title of the legislation, architectural heritage is treated not just in terms of individual buildings but whole localities in the urban fabric. In the conditions of the new central planning and the nationalised economy and building stock, it was logical and inevitable that architectural heritage was set apart from mainstream development. The political priorities, however, were to solve the housing shortage and build amenities and infrastructure, and to achieve this end through technocratic means, the industrialisation of the construction industry, and a new and efficient form of development. While urban planning did not ignore the historic centres of towns and cities, indeed regarding their potential as vital for commerce, public administration, tourism, and, naturally, the sense of national belonging then politically propagated, it was nevertheless believed that these were areas best left to the hands of specialised architects and selected contractors. Instead, the main action of quantifiable interest to the country's economic plans transpired in the peripheries of towns and cities in the form of new and acontextual (late-) modern construction.<sup>3</sup>

The exacting individual repairs carried out by hand on historic buildings required consistent and long-term financial and political support, as well as a commitment from the owners (in most

**OFFICE MACHINE – RELIEF IN THE  
PASSAGE OF BUILDING  
NO. 378, MŮSTEK IN PRAGUE,  
KAREL NEPRAŠ, ATELIÉR MŮSTEK  
IN SÚRP MO, 1968–1980**

RELIÉF KANCELÁŘSKÉ STROJE  
V PRŮCHODU DOMU ČP. 378, ZÓNA  
MŮSTEK V PRAZE,  
KAREL NEPRAŠ, ATELIÉR MŮSTEK PŘI  
SÚRP MO, 1968–1980

**Source** Zdroj: personal archive of  
Markéta Lierová, photo Pavel Blažek



cases by that time, state institutions), and, above all, a cooperative attitude from construction companies. These commodities, however, were in critically short supply and from around the mid-1950s the physical condition of historic urban centres began to deteriorate dramatically. This process was not uniform; for the reasons mentioned above, by the 1960s some high-profile streets and squares began to receive greater attention and basic maintenance. However, such care never extended as far as the back roads and side streets. Peripheral sites, which tended to be located between the centre and the housing estates, were viewed in many urban masterplans as merely connective areas, underdeveloped and ripe for demolition to allow for construction of civic amenities and transport infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> The 1980s saw the completion of work on certain widely heralded examples of the best approaches to the heritage of the past, such as the revitalisation of the Royal Route (Královská cesta) in Prague's Old Town and along Celetná Street (Stanislav Hubička, SÚRP MO, PŮDIS, 1986–1988) and the area around Můstek (Ateliér Můstek, SÚRP MO, 1968–1980), and work began on the redevelopment of the Franciscan Gardens (Otakar Kuča, 1984–1992).<sup>5</sup> The repairs applied to selected historic areas often involved more than just working on the pavement, technical infrastructure, and street furniture, as the projects also sought to produce more accessible and refined ground floors and façades (or entire buildings) in the streets or squares (e.g. part of Dimitrovova Avenue in Ostrava, Petr Májek, Renata Májková, a Union of Architects assignment, 1981).<sup>6</sup> The most prestigious commissions provided scope for highly individualised and creative approaches and allocated a budget percentage for expenditure on art. When the projects were implemented, protection of the original materials was often resourcefully coupled with the introduction of new elements, with a significant role for outstanding artists whose contextual creations – signboards, door handles, door reliefs, unusual glazing, etc. – were meant to take the place of the work of trades that were extinct or unavailable.<sup>7</sup>

Comprehensive repair of selected streets and their conversion to pedestrian zones could be witnessed equally in small towns in the 1980s. It was a trend triggered by the growing social pressure, as noted above, to repair neglected historic centres (which in previous decades had already been reduced to only some selected buildings), as well as by the rising criticism of the growing number of cars parked in the streets and by the infiltration of ideas from the West about pedestrian zones and ensuring accessibility for the disabled.<sup>8</sup> A significant role was also played by the attractiveness of renovated street-level shops, which were lacking in the newly finished housing estates on the periphery.<sup>9</sup> The result was the creation of model pedestrian zones, small oases of a newly revised approach, intended as a visible gesture and a way to please disgruntled citizens (even though just a few streets away buildings were still crumbling or being demolished).

Apart from economising projects with more of an 'embellishing' function, the late normalisation period also saw the emergence of modernisation projects that involved a considerable number of redevelopment interventions in the inner courtyards of urban blocks (e.g. the modernisation of block 31 between Ostružnická – Opletalova – Pekařská streets in Olomouc, Antonín Škamrada, 1982)<sup>10</sup> or increasing the traffic capacity of streets by demolishing the buildings on one side of the street and constructing varyingly post-modern, contextual, but always high-capacity elevated buildings (e.g. the never-implemented designs for the commercial streets in the centre of Kladno, Milan Brzák, Michal Sborwitz, Tomáš Smrž, the first version Jan Hančl, 1986; or the reconstruction of Bělohorská avenue in Prague, Aleš Bořkovec, Ludmila Machová, Petr Brzobohatý, Pavel Stiborek, Jaroslav Knotek, 1983–1984).<sup>11</sup> This practice marked a significant shift in ideas and a departure from the previously widespread demolitions of whole neighbourhoods, if at the cost of losing some of

**EXTENSIVE DEMOLITION OF REAR WINGS DURING THE MODERNISATION OF BLOCK 31 BETWEEN OSTRUŽNICKÁ – OPLETALOVA – PEKAŘSKÁ STREETS IN OLOMOUC, ANTONÍN ŠKAMRADA, 1982**

ROZSÁHLÉ DEMOLICE ZADNÍCH TRAKTŮ DOMŮ V RÁMCI MODERNIZACE BLOKU 31 MEZI ULICEMI OSTRUŽNICKÁ, OPLETALOVA A PEKAŘSKÁ V OLOMOUCI, ANTONÍN ŠKAMRADA, 1982

**Source** Zdroj: archive of the Department of the Theory and History of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University in Prague, photo Petr Čehovský, 1982



the authentic original buildings and setting ambitions sometimes so high that (fortunately) the projects could not be realised.

One of the most remarkable examples of the paradigm shift was the plan to modernise tenement buildings launched as part of the 7th Five-Year Plan.<sup>12</sup> Although this was largely a pragmatic decision designed to alleviate social tensions by improving living standards, to prevent further unacceptable decline, to reduce the demand for new housing, and to protect the encroachment of housing estates on farmland, it is impossible not to notice that 19th- and early-20th-century neighbourhoods that to that time had been somewhat overlooked or had even been condemned were 'suddenly' seen to represent a surprising alternative and to offer residential qualities that despite every effort the new developments were missing.<sup>13</sup> The urban plan for Prague in 1983 already set as a priority to "preserve and regenerate not only valuable buildings and complexes in the historic centre and adjacent municipalities but also newer complexes with the positive characteristics of an urban environment that enrich the composition of the city (most notably from the Revivalist and Secessionist periods, villa neighbourhoods, etc.)."<sup>14</sup> Analogous considerations and events abroad certainly played a significant role, with domestic architects and urban planners having at least indirect knowledge thanks to personal contacts, international seminars or relatively widely published examples of realizations.<sup>15</sup>

The modernisation plan involved the reconstruction of blocks or streets, and its application to larger neighbourhoods was supposed to increase the efficiency of construction labour and improve the organisation of complicated tasks in a complex historical environment (which in practice, conversely, turned out to be the biggest difficulty), but at the cost of the socially questionable relocation of the buildings' original inhabitants. The main part of the work consisted of increasing the capacity of the below-ground infrastructure, making low-cost repairs to the street-level shopfronts and building façades, often with considerable loss of the original architectural decorations and elements, the cleaning and greening of the courtyards, and basic updates to the furnishings and layouts of the selected tenement buildings, usually through the installation of modified prefabricated kitchen units, built-in wardrobes, and bathroom pods (originally developed and intended for the new prefabricated apartment blocks). Consequently, the results of the modernisation plan in less prominent areas were questionable (e.g. Kamenická street in Děčín); although some experimental projects were more successful (e.g. a block in the Čertův Vrch neighbourhood in Karlovy Vary, Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury / Research Institute of Construction and Architecture, Urbanistické středisko Karlovy Vary / Urban Planning Centre Karlovy Vary, 1977–1983; Havlíčkova and Žižkova Streets in Jihlava, Jiří Jirmus, Stavoprojekt Jihlava, 1982–1987).<sup>16</sup> A project that garnered exceptional attention was the sensitive modernisation of the pilot area Block 21 in Prague-Vinohrady (Vladimír Krátký, Jan Alinče, Tomáš Smetana, Pavel Čajka, Hana Seho, etc., 1983–1985),<sup>17</sup> the results of which must have seemed not just a confirmation of the qualities of the neighbourhoods created in the 19th and first half of the 20th century, but also as a kind of criticism of the dysfunctional nature of the housing estates currently being completed. The modernisation plan also offered unexpected opportunities for enterprising production cooperatives from the late normalisation period, launching production of universal windows and coffered doors suited to older tenement buildings.<sup>18</sup>

MODERNISATION OF HOUSES IN  
LONDÝNSKÁ STREET IN BLOCK 21,  
PRAGUE-VINOHRADY,  
VLADIMÍR KRÁTKÝ, JAN ALINČE,  
PAVEL ČAJKA, 1983–1985

MODERNIZACE DOMŮ  
V LONDÝNSKÉ ULICI V RÁMCI  
BLOKU 21 V PRAZE-VINOHRADĚCH,  
VLADIMÍR KRÁTKÝ, JAN ALINČE,  
PAVEL ČAJKA, 1983–1985

Source Zdroj: personal archive of  
Vladimír Krátký



### Gap Sites

Gap sites and other efforts to patch up the slowly disintegrating urban fabric represented a key and rather tricky issue. Again, the views of the professional community were of course formed by the discussions that had been going on for many years in the architectural and conservation community, and by the positive experiences of the post-war years (e.g. Hotel Jalta, Dům módy / the House of Fashion, and Dům potravin / the House of Food on Wenceslas Square in Prague), alongside news and information filtering in from abroad about the new city-shaping architecture, and, above all, the growing public disaffection with modernism in the historic environment. Surprisingly, another factor was the construction of the Prague metro, built in the midst of the city's most valuable historic sites and thus necessitating several demolitions and the construction of new buildings – initially in the form of a slightly contextual authentic modernism (e.g. Družba, Vlastibor Klimeš, Milan Vašek, Vratislav Růžička, 1967–1976; Vojenské stavby/Military constructions, Jan Hančl, Jiří Fiala, 1973–1982) and then, from the mid-1970s, under the influence of postmodernism and less universal, more individualistic attitudes (e.g. the ČKD Administrative Building, Alena Šrámková, Jan Šrámek, 1976–1983; Provozně-technická budova metra / Metro Technical-Service Building, Aleš Moravec, František Novotný, 1981–1989; Ministerstvo elektropřemyslu / Ministry of Electrical Industry, Vladimír Pýcha, Milan Černík, Vít Kándl, 1978–1991). The characteristic features of these interventions were the consideration they gave to the height and line of the street, the scale, colour, and material qualities of the surrounding buildings, the emphasis on the corners and street-level frontages of buildings, and, last but not least, the application of city-shaping features (e.g. towers, cornices, clocks, ornament, traditional windows in solid walls).<sup>19</sup>

In professional circles, discussions were stimulated by the publication of local as well as foreign reference projects, and their influence coincided with the advent of new technological possibilities – the greater availability of atypical steel frames, predominantly used in projects favoured by the regime or confronting spatial challenges (e.g. the radical reconstruction of Staroměstské mlýny / the Old Town Mills in Prague, Josef Švatal, 1970–1982),<sup>20</sup> and the availability of MS-71, MS-OB, and Konstruktiva prefabricated reinforced-concrete frames and lightweight glass-steel façades intended for the construction of civic amenities.<sup>21</sup> Filling in gap sites in the historic centre grew into an important topic, often with excellent results and opportunities for experimenting with a new architectural language, one that frequently oscillated imaginatively between technicist expression (colour, materiality) and postmodernism (scale, volumes, oversized elements used as architectural vocabulary): e.g., Česká státní spořitelna / Czech State Savings Bank in Liberec, Jiří Suchomel, 1974–1983; Teplotechna in Prague – Nové Město, Věra Machoninová, 1975–1984; Česká pojišťovna / Czech Insurance Company in Havlíčkův Brod, Lubomír Driml, Miroslav Řepa, 1980–1983.

**MULTIFUNCTIONAL CORNER  
BUILDING IN THE HISTORICAL  
CENTRE OF TÁBOR,  
NADĚŽDA DVOŘÁKOVÁ,  
ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK, 1987–1993**

VÍCEÚČELOVÝ NÁROŽNÍ DŮM  
V HISTORICKÉM CENTRU TÁBORA,  
NADĚŽDA DVOŘÁKOVÁ,  
ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK, 1987–1993

**Source** Zdroj: personal archive of  
Naděžda Dvořáková and Antonín Dvořák



In residential and multifunctional buildings, a route to greater contextuality and new forms of expression would have been provided in the future by more spatially flexible monolithic reinforced concrete structures (e.g. an internal competition for an experimental corner apartment building as part of Block 8 in Prague-Vinohrady, the winning design by Vladimír Krátký, Jan Alinče, 1988–1989, unbuilt),<sup>22</sup> or more frequently, modular prefabricated systems with variant ways of setting up the commercial ground floor, garages, pitched roofs, balconies, and corners (e.g. Panel system P2.11, Projektový ústav výstavby hlavního města Prahy, Pražský projektový ústav / Project Institute of Construction of the City of Prague, Prague Project Institute, 1984–1985, unbuilt).<sup>23</sup> However, in the everyday reality of small budgets and a lack of flexible contractors, especially in the case of gap sites that were hard to build on or required a contextual sensitivity to the surrounding buildings, it was instead necessary to modify ordinary panel technologies and artfully conceal them behind jükl profiles, atypical cladding, or coloured paint (e.g. the multifunctional building on the corner of Vršovická and Moskevská streets in Prague-Vršovice, Aleš Moravec, František Novotný, 1986–1990; the apartment building on Záhřebská street in Prague-Vinohrady, Pavla Kordovská, 1987–1989). Often, these atypical situations managed to achieve a unique expression, in which the traces of still admired interwar functionalism mixed with the playfulness, 'intelligible' city-forming character, and 'talkativeness' of postmodernism (e.g. multifunctional buildings at the corner of Budějovická and Vančurova streets in Tábor, Naděžda and Antonín Dvořák, 1987–1993; at the intersection of Fráni Šrámka and Kostelní streets in České Budějovice, Petr Heteša, Jiří Střítecký, Karel Veverka, 1989; at the corner of Bratří Lužů and Seichertova streets in Uherský Brod, Dalibor Borák, 1988–1989).<sup>24</sup>

Even in smaller towns, a heightened sensitivity to the changing character of traditional settlements was slowly bubbling to the surface. Towards the end of the normalisation period, in many places it had become almost unthinkable that the increasing number of new shopping centres, cultural centres, hotels, and Communist Party headquarters, still usually constructed at the price of demolitions and the joining of plots to get bigger construction sites, would not respond to the surrounding context at least through their overall composition. Even these more high-profile new buildings, despite their structural and economic limitations or still largely modernist style of expression, began to respond to the street lines, cornices, scale, and roofscape of the surrounding buildings (e.g. the Rozkvět shop and the Slavia Hotel in Třebíč, César Grimmich, Jaromír Liška, 1972–1983; the Kamyšín Hotel in Opava, Jan Kovář, Jiří Horák, 1979–1985; a shopping centre

SHOPPING CENTRE BUILT WITH  
A MS-OB REINFORCED CONCRETE  
FRAME, ON THE MAIN SQUARE  
IN TIŠNOV, OLGA DRÁPALOVÁ,  
JAROSLAV DRÁPAL, 1981–1982

OBCHODNÍ STŘEDISKO POSTAVENÉ  
Z ŽELEZOBETONOVÉHO SKELETU  
MS-OB NA NÁMĚSTÍ V TIŠNOVĚ,  
OLGA DRÁPALOVÁ, JAROSLAV  
DRÁPAL, 1981–1982

Source Zdroj: personal archive of  
Jaroslav Drápal



nicknamed 'Stodoly' ('The Barns') on the square in Tišnov, Olga Drápalová, Jaroslav Drápal, 1981–1982). In structures such as these, however, a fully postmodern language was only rarely applied (e.g., the cultural centre in Česká Lípa, Jiří Suchomel, 1974–1990; the cultural centre in Konstantinovy Lázně, Antonín Polony, 1985–1989).<sup>25</sup>

### Housing Estates

The ideas described above were further processed and refined in theoretical discussions, mainly led by the middle and younger generations of architects who in the 1980s gathered in informal associations (e.g. Školka/Kindergarden SIAL; Středotlačí / the Middle Pressure; V.E.S.P.A; Obecní dům/ The Municipal House; the circle around Petr Vaňura and later Jiří Ševčík; the influence of the preservationist Milada Radová-Štiková or the expert on industrial architecture Emil Hlaváček) and at a number of noteworthy formative events (e.g. the meetings in Spišská Kapitula, Charles Jencks' visit to Prague, the exhibition *Architekti, malíři, sochaři / Architects, Painters, Sculptors*, and the *Urbanita* exhibition).<sup>26</sup> These activities shared the central theme of inspiration from abroad and its potential domestic applications, or focused on the sharing of ideas and materials (e.g. samizdat translations and foreign journals). The most influential foreign inspirations were positions of "the postmodern synthesis" or "the contextual counterpoint",<sup>27</sup> related to historic heritage and urban ensembles (especially Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi, Mario Botta, Oswald Mathias Ungers, Léon Krier, James Stirling). Those influences were often ingeniously blended with the features of the still admired domestic interwar functionalism, persisting echoes of the reforming Western modernism of the 1950s, or a technical language close to the engineering-oriented Czech architectural culture. On the contrary, 'the postmodern radical eclecticism' surprisingly did not fall on very fertile ground, despite significant domestic interest in historic heritage. Commenting on the exhibition *Painted Architecture*, the Ševčíks remarked: "While a futurological vision may be lacking, there is instead a utopia of the ideal polis, the dream of a city with arcades, streets, squares, a morphology of safe, intimate, enclosed spaces. Inside this metaphorical comparison is a critique of the contemporary state of architecture."<sup>28</sup> Postmodernism was understood not merely as a revolt against the preceding generation of architects and the technicist notion of planning and design, but equally as a protest against the decaying regime and its one single truth. Jiří Ševčík rooted this new and indirect ethos of the Středotlačí in the atmosphere of an uncertain era: "Contemporary reality cannot be encompassed by one overarching programme and therefore we as a creative group cannot adopt it."<sup>29</sup>





**URBANITY 1986 - EXHIBITION  
POSTER ON THE COVER OF  
TECHNICKÝ MAGAZÍN**

PLAKÁT VÝSTAVY URBANITY  
1986 NA OBÁLCE TECHNICKÉHO  
MAGAZÍNU

**Source** Zdroj: Technický magazín, 1986,  
29(9), p. 54

Some indication of the city-shaping, non-linear thinking of the architects in the younger and middle generations is provided by the published projects from the Konfrontace competition, the unofficial attempt to complete Republic Square in Prague (1980), and the more realistic set of designs for the Teplice centre produced by SIAL (since 1977).<sup>30</sup> It need hardly be pointed out that reality lagged far behind the plans and discussions. Nevertheless, the turbulent times provided young artists with the space to demonstrate a new way of doing genuine, playfully creative things, which they usually achieved in small assignments (e.g. the postmodern pavilion above the Antonín Spring and Hudební pavilon / the Music Pavilion in Mariánské Lázně, Michal Brix, 1985–1986, 1986–1991; the now lost Buřtánek / the sausage stand that once stood in Letná in Prague, Jaroslav Kosek, 1987–1988; or the playful bus stop in the small village of Jakartovice-Deštné near Opava, Jan Kovář, 1978). These small structures derived their poetic, subtly postmodern character not just from their more diminutive size and ‘intelligible’ language, or attention to the built context, but also from the materials used and, above all, the personal commitment the architects and artists applied in the usual DIY construction of these projects.<sup>31</sup>

A surprising area for the application of this new approach was offered by housing estates, which towards the end of the regime were subjected to open and fierce criticism from experts and the public. Housing estates – in many cases designed in the 1960s and over the course of the normalisation period rapidly succumbing to moral obsolescence as construction stumbled its way towards completion – represented the most prominent target, despite declarations about the levelling of social differences and the satisfying of public demand, of the silent struggle over the limited human and economic resources highlighted by historians today.<sup>32</sup> The change of paradigm, primarily driven by the dissatisfaction of rank-and-file architects and the lay public, was nonetheless reflected equally on the official level, at the last congress of the Association of Architects and in the key government resolution No. 333.<sup>33</sup>

An eloquent illustration of the paradigm shift then underway is found in the story of the planned redevelopment of the Žižkov district in Prague. This project underwent considerable evolution from its initial idea for the demolition and redevelopment of the entire district. Its motivating factors arose from the quantitative criteria of the state’s economic plans, the standards of panel production, the cliché of Žižkov’s existing development representing a public health problem (a myth born in the interwar period), and, above all, the plans to run a high-volume traffic route through the neighbourhood’s historic centre. As time passed, the project drew negative feedback, and Prague’s transport plan inevitable changed as well (the infamous ZÁKOS – Základní komunikační systém / Basic Communication System, approved in 1974). The first stage of the project managed to demolish a number of original blocks in the eastern part of Žižkov and replace them with prefabricated buildings. These new buildings were of relatively good quality by the standards of the time, as they had to be capable of coping with the difficult terrain, hence introducing an opportunity to create some slightly atypical urban solutions that at least partially evoked the street fronts and courtyards of the original buildings. At the same time, however, the contrast between the original attractive if decayed environment and the weak architectural quality of the prefabricated buildings drew considerable (negative) attention from the professional and popular media. The project for the second stage (1988–1989), carried out under the management of Státní ústav pro rekonstrukce památkových měst a objektů / the State Institute for the Reconstructions of Heritage (!) Towns and Buildings, thus took the form of two proposals – an official one and a more thoughtful alternative. The designers sought compromises, such as preserving buildings with the greatest local and architectural significance and creating a spatial anchoring within buildings in the corners to keep the entire block-like character of the area, designing the main streets to be widened (and demolished) on one side only, and redirecting high-volume traffic underground. In the alternative proposal, the new constructions on the site of the demolitions were even given mildly postmodern features compatible with the surrounding original buildings. Fortunately, owing to a combination of circumstances – the regime’s inability to complete this large-scale project, the extraordinary public resistance, the important role of young architects from the V.E.S.P.A. association and artists close to them, and, above all, the collapse of the regime in 1989 – the planned demolition of Žižkov and its replacement with a uniform housing estate never went beyond the first stage mentioned above.<sup>34</sup>

The clash between the outdated resources favoured by the construction industry and the ideas of the emerging generation of architects is eloquently expressed in the following comment on the Nový Barrandov housing estate in Prague (Zdeněk Hölzel, Jan Kerel, 1979–1989):<sup>35</sup> ‘We designed the



**LANDSCAPING OF A BLOCK,  
SOUTHWEST CITY HOUSING  
ESTATE IN PRAGUE, IVO OBERSTEIN,  
MILAN KLÍMA, IVAN HOŘEJŠÍ,  
MARTIN KOTÍK, VÁCLAV VALTR,  
EVŽEN STEIN, ETC., 1967–1991**

KRAJINNÉ ÚPRAVY VNITROBLOKU  
NA SÍDLIŠTI JIHOZÁPADNÍ MĚSTO  
V PRAZE, IVO OBERSTEIN, MILAN  
KLÍMA, IVAN HOŘEJŠÍ, MARTIN  
KOTÍK, VÁCLAV VALTR, EVŽEN STEIN  
AD., 1967–1991

**Source** Zdroj: Československý architekt,  
1988, 34(22), p. 1



**CENTRAL STREET OF THE NOVÝ  
BARRANDOV HOUSING ESTATE  
IN PRAGUE, ZDENĚK HÖLZEL,  
JAN KEREL, 1979–1989**

ÚSTŘEDNÍ ULICE SÍDLIŠTĚ NOVÝ  
BARRANDOV V PRAZE, ZDENĚK  
HÖLZEL, JAN KEREL, 1979–1989

**Source** Zdroj: personal archive  
of Zdeněk Hölzel

squares, streets, blocks, courtyards, and five-storey buildings that formed these urban spaces. I'd say something similar to Léon Krier's well-known aerial views. And we brought it to Blahomír Borovička and Jiří Hrůza at the Office of the Chief Architect. Hrůza went mad. Vlastimil Durdík saw it the same way, and they couldn't believe what we were showing them: "You can't be serious!" (...) I realised right away we wouldn't be able to avoid prefabricated buildings. (...) The South Town was in the midst of construction at that time in 1977 and the Southwest City lay seven years in the future. We knew what Jiří Lasovský's and Ivo Oberstein's ideas of beauty were, and we said to ourselves, "Nope, there won't be anything like that there". And there wasn't either. The Bolsheviks simply lay the standard crane tracks and brought in prefabs. And these architects were whining about how their designs for wavy buildings had been ruined, straightened out, heightened. They might have expected that. We had a picture of the squares and streets in Barrandov, which we tried to stick to, except that we knew that one panel building was exactly 21 m long and that it'd be better if there were two in a row because of the longer crane track. So we just took the 42-m modules and worked with them. We kept the same urban layout and the parterre.<sup>36</sup> With inspiration from foreign sources (e.g. samizdat translations of writings by Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks, which Zdeněk Hölzel had a hand in) and with ties to the intellectual circles around Jiří Ševčík (see the Kevin Lynch-inspired sociological study *Obraz Mostu: Výzkum hmotné a prostorové struktury města / The Image of the Town of Most: Research into the Tangible and Spatial Structure of the City*, Jiří Ševčík and Jana and Jiří Benda, 1976–1977),<sup>37</sup> Zdeněk Hölzel and Jan Kerel decided to focus at the general level not on the form of individual buildings, but primarily on the urban spaces that the buildings define. By pushing private cars to the perimeters, they created a tightly packed complex with a curved pedestrian axis, the parameters of which resemble the wide, green streets of Prague's suburbs in the early 20th century. The prefabricated buildings were given semi-private front gardens to generate a stronger sense of attachment to the place and care for its inhabitants, while the centre of the boulevard was occupied by seating areas, children's playgrounds, and, most notably, a series of thematic works of art based on a master plan for the visual appearance and artwork. At both ends, the axis opens into squares, designed to be kept lively by the presence of schools, while at the centre of the complex the architects situated a square with shops and services as the focal point of social life. The main shift in thinking is thus primarily found in the emphasis on the human scale of the physical landscape and on identity, a focus on the daily activities of the inhabitants and the way things look



**SCRAP DEALING CENTRE,  
SOUTHWEST CITY HOUSING  
ESTATE IN PRAGUE, TOMÁŠ BRIX,  
1978–1984**

VÝKUPNA SBĚRNÝCH SUROVIN NA  
SÍDLIŠTI JIHOZÁPADNÍ MĚSTO  
V PRAZE, TOMÁŠ BRIX, 1978–1984

**Source** Zdroj: personal archive  
of Ivo Oberstein



**STODŮLKA GAZEBO, SOUTHWEST  
CITY HOUSING ESTATE IN PRAGUE,  
JIŘÍ MOJŽIŠ, 1986**

ALTÁN STODŮLKA NA SÍDLIŠTI  
JIHOZÁPADNÍ MĚSTO V PRAZE,  
JIŘÍ MOJŽIŠ, 1986

**Source** Zdroj: personal archive  
of Jiří Mojžíš

from the pedestrian's point of view. Despite the standard prefabricated buildings, the design managed to reach beyond the outworn modernist urban layout dominated by the perspective of public health, bird's-eye-view planning, and the 'industrial' character of prefabricated buildings.

Similar efforts to revise the modern diluted spatial layout or attempts to work with 'blocks' can be found in many other projects from the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>38</sup> The Southwest City in Prague (Ivo Oberstein, Milan Klíma, Ivan Hořejší, Martin Kotík, Václav Valtr, Evžen Stein, etc., 1967–1991)<sup>39</sup> was described by the main architect himself as a 'third-generation housing estate'<sup>40</sup> created in the form of gigantic polygonal blocks. "There was a lot of talk back then about the loss of the feeling of a city. By designing corner sections and pushing the contractors to produce them, we created the preconditions here for distinguishing between spaces – an interior courtyard and a street space that would have a name." The design, where the basic axis was formed by the metro line, originally envisaged building urban hubs above the metro stations that would have all the contours of real centres of public life including squares and urban boulevards lined with trees and important (partly postmodern) public buildings. However, as with other large areas of residential development at the time, there was little will to build central public spaces (statistical emphasis was on the number of completed dwellings). Ivo Oberstein and his colleagues (Milan Klíma, Ivan Hořejší, Martin Kotík, Václav Valtr, Evžen Stein) at least managed to make the inner courtyards habitable with pleasant landscaping. Additionally, there was even postmodern roofing over the entrances to the apartment blocks, as well as recesses, gazebos, low walls, wooden fences, adventure playgrounds, and, of course, a park. When actually built, the structures for civic amenities were designed by architects from the younger and middle generations. Their carefully moderated forms were a kind of critique of the loose, technocratic, and ungraspable scale of the prefabricated buildings, and also became valuable social elements of the Southwest City. As such, the shopping centres Luka (Tomáš Brix, Václav Králíček, Martin Kotík, 1977–1987) and Lužiny (Alena Šrámková, Ladislav Lábus, 1977–1991) are intersected by attractive passageways linking the metro to the main axes of the housing estate. Other small-scale public buildings brought to the modernist (albeit revised) urban design an overtly provocative architectural language, based varyingly on a synthesis of postmodernism and functionalism (Stodůlky Post Office, Tomáš Brix, 1979–1986), an absurdist visual combination of panels and pseudo-historical portals (Výkupna sběrných surovin / Scrap Dealing Centre, Tomáš Brix, 1978–1984), a classical materiality and geometry (Stodůlka Gazebo, Jiří Mojžíš, 1986), or a rural atmosphere harkening back to the vanished history of the place (Na Brance Restaurant, Václav Králíček, Tomáš Brix, 1976–1984).<sup>41</sup>

Construction of the South City housing estate in Prague turned into a battle lost in advance, waged against the contractors and the crushing sense of resignation that characterised the

**NA BRANCE RESTAURANT,  
SOUTHWEST CITY HOUSING  
ESTATE IN PRAGUE, VÁCLAV  
KRÁLÍČEK, TOMÁŠ BRIX, 1976–1984**

RESTAURACE NA BRANCE NA  
SÍDLIŠTI JIHOZÁPADNÍ MĚSTO  
V PRAZE, VÁCLAV KRÁLÍČEK,  
TOMÁŠ BRIX, 1976–1984

Source Zdroj: personal archive  
of Tomáš Brix



normalisation period. Originally a highly modernist design featuring a wide range of apartment buildings clustered around urban centres, it quickly decayed under the influence of familiar pressures, and dismal results already appeared in the project's first stage. In response, the authors of South City II (Vítězslava Rothbauerová, Jan Zelený, Jitka Thomasová, Vladimír Ježek, Pavel Rittenauer, Jiří Rathouský, 1978–1989) attempted to design a revised and fragmented social-urban structure with an emphasis on identity and divided up into sections: 'We marked the buildings with symbols of the basic conditions for human life: sun, water, earth, air, flora, fauna (...). The effort in the 1980s to create a piece of the city might from today's perspective seem both imperfect and ridiculous.'<sup>42</sup> The architects solved another familiar problem – the unfinished public space – by creating a design that combined prefabricated reinforced concrete parts with wooden elements, so that neighbourhood seating areas, garbage bin shelters, outdoor carpet frames, etc., were already in place for the occupants to use when they moved in (Vítězslava Rothbauerová, Jan Zelený, Josef Klika, Jaroslav Jordán, 1981–1989). On the outskirts of South City II, the architects designed lower-rise prefabricated buildings with pitched roofs in what was referred to as the 'Fauna Zone' (Vítězslava Rothbauerová, Petr Brzobohatý, 1986–1988),<sup>43</sup> which together formed narrow tree-lined streets, shops on the ground floors, underground parking, and residential courtyards (the architects also participated in the design of the aforementioned P2.11 system). These designs were of course never realised.

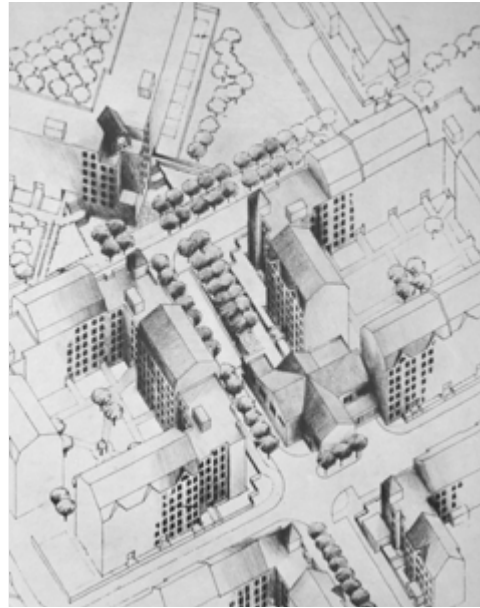
Hence, the innovation of housing estates from the normalisation period usually consisted of attempts to force the human parameters of a traditional urban form onto the extant public space. Only in rare cases did it prove possible to add less common but desired atypical and usually cooperative tenement buildings to the normal set of prefabricated buildings constructed on the outskirts of cities. Designs for smaller residential complexes with very different parameters were tested in research (e.g. Kladno-Ostrovec, Michal Flašar, Aleš Vyjídák, 1979; Slaný-Kvíček, Architektonický



**MODULAR PANEL SYSTEM P2.11 WITH VARIANT WAYS OF CREATING A COMMERCIAL GROUND FLOOR, GARAGES, PITCHED ROOFS, BALCONIES, AND CORNERS, PROJEKTOVÝ ÚSTAV VÝSTAVBY HLAVNÍHO MĚSTA PRAHY, PRAŽSKÝ PROJEKTOVÝ ÚSTAV, 1984–1985**

MODULÁRNÍ PANELOVÝ SYSTÉM P2.11 S VARIANTNÍMI ZPŮSOBY OSAZENÍ OBCHODNÍHO PARTERU, GARÁŽÍ, ŠIKMÝCH STŘECH, BALKONŮ A NÁROŽÍ, PROJEKTOVÝ ÚSTAV VÝSTAVBY HLAVNÍHO MĚSTA PRAHY, PRAŽSKÝ PROJEKTOVÝ ÚSTAV, 1984–1985

**Source** Zdroj: Architektura ČSR, 1986, 45(1), p. 13



**UNBUILT BLOCK OF PANEL APARTMENTS IN THE FAUNA ZONE, SOUTH CITY HOUSING ESTATE IN PRAGUE, VÍTĚZSLAVA ROTHBAUEROVÁ, PETR BRZBOHATÝ, 1986–1988**

NEREALIZOVANÝ BLOK PANELOVÝCH DOMŮ V RÁMCI ZÓNY FAUNA NA SÍDLIŠTI JIŽNÍ MĚSTO V PRAZE, VÍTĚZSLAVA ROTHBAUEROVÁ, PETR BRZBOHATÝ, 1986–1988

**Source** Zdroj: personal archive of Vítězslava Rothbauerová

ateliér experimentálního projektování / Architectural Studio of Experimental Design, 1982–1984) but were never built.<sup>44</sup> Particularly remarkable in this respect is the extraordinary Dašická complex of apartment buildings in Pardubice (Pavel Maleš, 1978–1990), in which the architect managed to create an expressively articulated silhouette, apply a bright colour range, and employ an overtly postmodern language.<sup>45</sup>

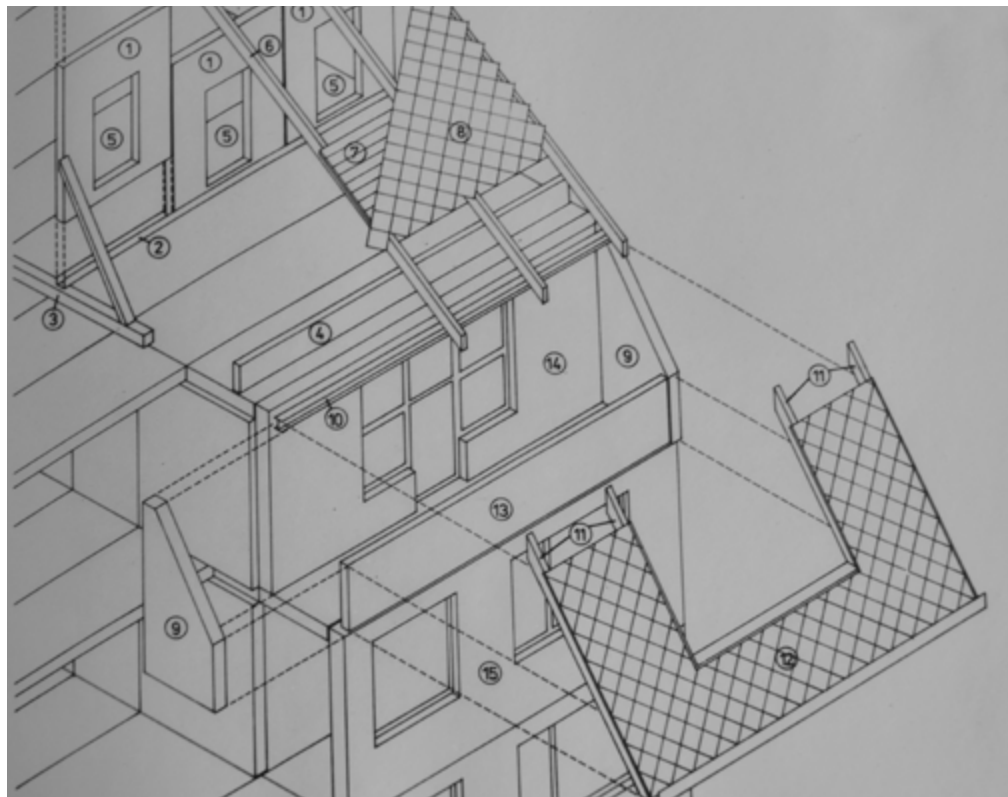
When postmodern overtones were discernible in the visual expression of housing estate buildings, it was mostly in the public space, which clearly had the greatest capacity to alter the technicist abstractness of the industrialised building production: "(...) the civic buildings and green areas essentially represent the final opportunity to dispel any sense of mental emptiness and hopelessness among the inhabitants of our housing estates".<sup>46</sup> The most feasible approach was to add animating features and colours to the otherwise mundane prefabricated systems (e.g. the school and gymnasium V Remízku in the Nový Barrandov housing estate, Zdeněk Hölzel, Jan Kerel, 1985–1991) or small, atypical buildings to introduce a deliberately contrasting and often poetic atmosphere into a neighbourhood of prefabricated buildings (e.g. the school training pool in Benešov, Tomáš Turek, 1985–1986), or even children's playgrounds, the character of which, with the active involvement of the creators-artists themselves, was leaning increasingly towards the adventure playground concept, figurative aspects, and the use of more user-friendly materials (Minikrajina / the Mini-Landscape at the Fifejdy housing estate in Ostrava or Obludy / Monsters at the Dědina housing estate in Prague, Kurt Gebauer, 1976–1985 and 1981, respectively).<sup>47</sup>

In this context, a genuinely extraordinary undertaking was that of the seniors' homes built in Bohnice, Háje, Malešice, and Chodov in Prague (Jan Líněk and Vlado Milunić, 1972–1981, 1976–1994, 1979–1987, 1983–1989), which use both approaches – urban and architectural design – and cleverly combine them. Despite the presence of standard prefabricated elements (though animated with colours) and steel profiles, the architects worked consistently with a hierarchy of intimacy, the

**DESIGN OF THE MANSARD ROOF  
FOR PANEL APARTMENTS IN  
THE FAUNA ZONE, SOUTH CITY  
HOUSING ESTATE IN PRAGUE,  
VÍTĚZSLAVA ROTHBAUEROVÁ,  
PETR BRZOBOHATÝ, 1986–1988**

NÁVRH MANSARDOVÝCH STŘECH  
PANELOVÝCH DOMŮ V RÁMCI  
ZÓNY FAUNA NA SÍDLIŠTI JIŽNÍ  
MĚSTO V PRAZE,  
VÍTĚZSLAVA ROTHBAUEROVÁ,  
PETR BRZOBOHATÝ, 1986–1988

Source Zdroj: personal archive  
of Vítězslava Rothbauerová



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**PROF. ING. ARCH. PETR  
VORLÍK, PH.D.**

DEPARTMENT OF THEORY AND  
HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE  
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE CZECH  
TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE

Thákurova 9  
166 34 Praha 6 – Dejvice  
Czech Republic  
vorlik@fa.cvut.cz

topography of the site, and the complex's integration into the life of the housing estate. Yet in addition, they also played with the formal elements on the façade, which the architects themselves considered an extension of functionalism and an elaboration of it, though we can also observe clear signs of the influence of postmodernism and the need for an archetypal legibility (the tower, clocks, portal).<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

In Czech architecture, postmodernism signified primarily a welcome revolt and a rejection of technocratic design. One legendary protest was the young architects' group Golden Eagles (Zlatí orli) bringing a cemetery wreath to an exhibition of works by Karel Prager, expressing the wish that he stop making his projects, now regarded as devoid of any compassion for the city.<sup>49</sup> Another form lay in the performances of the groups D.N.A. (Dílna nejmodernější architektury / Workshop of the Most Modern Architecture) and V.E.S.P.A., including the burning of a model of the Žižkov TV tower at the opening of an exhibition in the Youth Gallery in 1989 to protest the redevelopment of the historic Žižkov district. Such attitudes and revolts were not, as a rule, premised on the use of an ironic, playful, frivolous, or historicising language, defining itself against the cold abstraction of late modernism, as was often the case in the West, but were above all based on respect for the historical environment and inspired by its scale and articulation, its city-shaping elements, intelligibility, and layered character. Defiance was paradoxically represented by unostentatious ordinariness, eloquently declared in the name of the group Middle Pressure (Středotlačí). The end of normalisation and the 1990s thus essentially ushered in both the unrestrained, anti-normative creativity of postmodernism and the moderate features that were characteristic of the emerging ethos of critical regionalism – a synthetic mentality that is still the standard of Czech architecture.

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