

East West Central

**East West Central
Re-Building Europe, 1950–1990**

**Edited by Ákos Moravánszky, Torsten Lange,
Judith Hopfengärtner, Karl R. Kegler**

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Re-Framing Identities

Architecture's Turn to History, 1970–1990

East West Central
Re-Building Europe
1950–1990
Vol. 3

Birkhäuser
Basel

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Editors' proofreading: Alan Lockwood, PL-Warsaw
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Project and production management: Angelika Heller, Birkhäuser Verlag, A-Vienna
Layout and typography: Ekke Wolf, typic.at, A-Vienna
Cover design: Martin Gaal, A-Vienna
Printing and binding: Holzhausen Druck GmbH, A-Wolkersdorf

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data
A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the German National Library
The German National Library lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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This publication is also available as an e-book (ISBN PDF 978-3-0356-0815-1).

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P.O. Box 44, 4009 Basel, Switzerland
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Printed in Austria

ISBN 978-3-0356-1015-4 Volume 1
ISBN 978-3-0356-1016-1 Volume 2
ISBN 978-3-0356-1017-8 Volume 3
ISBN 978-3-0356-1014-7 Set Volume 1–3

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Maroš Krivý

Quality of Life or Life-in-Truth? A Late-Socialist Critique of Housing Estates in Czechoslovakia

What is architecture's relation to life? Foucault's conceptualization of the biopolitics concept relied on a close reading of architectural, urbanistic and territorial practices.¹ Recent studies have foregrounded architecture's spatial and scalar role in distributing and managing population in the welfare state.² While biopolitics attends to bodily aspects of life, what would it mean to consider life incorporeally, as a noopolitics concerned with life's psychological meaning, its quality and authenticity?³ What is architecture's noopolitical role?

I will address these questions in the case of late socialist Czechoslovakia, considering the architecture of housing estates (*sídlišťe*). Central to my interpretation will be the critique to which Czechoslovak estates were subjected during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴ Such diverse actors as the Communist Party, architecture unions, architects, historians and dissidents held that life in a *sídlišťe* needs to be critically judged in psychological terms, but they also construed *sídlišťe* as a living environment. At the heart of such an environmental-psychological critique was the ostensible lack of meaning. The critique prompted the project of humanization aimed at improving the psychological effects of the *sídlišťe* environment, but also occasioned an interpretation that this environment is intrinsically "inhuman."⁵ The underlying theme of the humanization project – addressing the flaws of socialist urban planning rather than the contradictions of capitalist urbanization, as in the 1950s – was a turn

to historicity, either as a turn to architectural archetypes in *sídlišťe* design or as a retreat from *sídlišťe* due to its incompatibility with history construed in terms of organic evolution (*sídlišťe* as a historical aberration).

The Meaningful Environment

Architectural historians perused the centrality of cultural meaning to Western postmodernism. Manfredo Tafuri noted that “wherever [...] architecture ostensibly poses the problem of its own meaning, we can discern the glimmering of a regressive utopia.”⁶ According to Tahl Kaminer, “the rise of ‘meaning’ as a central topic in architectural discourse in the late 1960s [...] demonstrat[ed] the manner in which ‘culture’ had replaced ‘society’ as the new horizon of post-industrial society.”⁷ This concern with meaning was expressed in two overlapping registers: communication and experience. Between Robert Venturi and Christian Norberg-Schulz, there was a slippage from semiotic to phenomenological meaning, from the “decoding of diverse levels of communication to an emphasis on the experiential and subjective aspects of architecture.”⁸

Such a slippage was also manifested in the parallel process of rethinking space as a place and environment. Kevin Lynch construed city as a Gestalt-like perceptual environment and the Heideggerian influence in architecture transpired as a concern for the (in)authenticity of places. These bypassed the determining role of society by legitimizing place-making and subjective poetics. The semiotic-phenomenological turn to meaning was also a turn to historicity. It manifested as a repertoire of archetypal spatial forms and as a mythology of timelessness, rootedness and organic belonging.

Was there a similar turn to meaning in the East? Philosopher Boris Buden identified the substitution of society by cultural memory with post-communism.⁹ But the seeds of the post-communist loss of society were already sown within late socialism. Anna Paretskaya argued that, in the Soviet Union, the Party became “the promoter of new lifestyles, and [...] sowed the kernels of more differentiated, privatized, and commodified dispositions” by the 1970s.¹⁰ A similar inadvertent role was played by the Party in Czechoslovakia, where quality-of-life policies were implemented as a way of depoliticizing social conflict after the Soviet invasion in 1968. While critical of these policies, Czechoslovak dissent articulated the critique in terms of life’s (in)authenticity, thus cementing meaning (rather than society) as the terrain of struggle.

In architecture, the two registers of meaning – symbolic communication and existential experience – defined the boundaries within which the critique of *sídlišťe* was articulated in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. The Czechoslovak *sídlišťe* model dates back to the postwar socialization of

architecture by the Communist government, but also to prewar capitalist experiments with architectural industrialization. After the socialist-realist period (1949–1956) that favored modularity and historicist expressiveness, the authorities opted for standardizing entire building units and intensifying the development of housing estates.¹¹ By the mid-1970s, when the pace of construction peaked, a widespread dissatisfaction with the ostensible monotony and homogeneity of *sídlišť* was firmly in place.¹² While the plan (in terms of quantity, speed and densities) continued to define the housing policy throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the considerations of meaning came forward with increasing force in the debates of architects, architectural unions, and the Communist Party.

Semiotic and phenomenological interest in meaning transpired primarily as a critique of the lack thereof and correlated, respectively, with perceiving the *sídlišť* environment as being of low quality and inauthentic. Critique of the *sídlišť* was inconclusive, legitimizing the improvements of state socialism but also prefiguring its collapse. Architects designed housing estates influenced by archetypal urban forms, researched novel construction systems conducive to historical “iconography” and contexts, and construed meaningful environment as central to socialist personality. They also contrasted the *sídlišť* to archetypal forms, deplored its monotony and argued that it is a psychologically harmful environment.

Phenomenology and Postmodernism

Let me begin by invoking a remark by Václav Havel, the well-known dissident and first president of post-socialist Czechoslovakia, who said in 1984 that “postmodernist architecture is a signal [...] that man begins to sense [...] that he cannot understand nor plan everything [...] that he is a part of a mysterious order – the natural world.”¹³ For Havel, postmodernism was a name for architecture attuned to the natural world (*přirozený svět*), a concept indebted to Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, which is itself indebted to Edmund Husserl’s concept of lifeworld.¹⁴ For Patočka, the meaning of life was immanent to the natural world and its loss was brought about by techno-scientific reason.¹⁵ In Havel’s reading, the loss of the natural world coincided with the development of industrial society and with the industrialized architecture of the *sídlišť*. Whereas the dissident imagined the natural world – and postmodernism as its architectural manifestation – as a preindustrial pastoral, he conceived the *sídlišť* as an unnatural and abnormal “contaminated moral environment.”¹⁶

Through a series of conceptual slippages, the phenomenological project, which began for Husserl as an attempt to bracket metaphysics and the “natu-

ralness” of the external world, legitimized in Havel a metaphysics of the natural world ostensibly free from ideology. Conceptual shades of the term “natural” in Patočka were lost in Havel’s understanding, which implied a renewed metaphysics of human nature. Resisting post-totalitarian society, but extending his critique to bourgeois-industrial society as such, Havel clung to the metaphysics of life-in-truth untainted by history and ideology.¹⁷

While Havel knew little about architecture, his association of phenomenology and postmodernism and the idea of an ideology-free architecture concurred with the attentive reception of Western postmodernism in the architectural community. Havel stated the above after a private lecture by Jiří Ševčík in the former’s home. While lecturing in “apartment seminars” and publishing in samizdat publications, Ševčík, an architectural historian and a local “operative critic” of postmodernism, was employed as a researcher at the Czech Technical University and was a regular contributor to *Architektura ČSR*, the official journal of the Union of Czech Architects.

Drawing on Kevin Lynch’s environmental psychology and Norberg-Schulz’s concepts of existential space and genius loci, Ševčík undertook studies of Most (1977) and Prague-Vinohrady (1982).¹⁸ He relied on historic morphological research and made use of residents’ mental maps. While the research on the mining town Most – where a *Zeilenbau*-configured *sídlště* was being built while the demolition of the medieval town was ongoing – suggested that the *sídlště* lacked urbanity and was not therefore an authentic city, the latter postulated nineteenth-century block/street configuration as an essence of urbanity. Wandering in Most, a disappearing town doomed to give way to an open-pit coal mine, Ševčík struggled to fuse the scientific and the affective, juxtaposing the mental-map methodology and existential language.¹⁹ Contrasting with the tactical efficacy of the research was Ševčík’s conceptual disregard for how power determined the old and traditional. Such mystification of organic urbanism also carved a space for architecture’s retreat to the meaning and reframing of history as historicism.

In the face of the *sídlště*, Ševčík reinvented architecture as imagination. Rather than a concrete history, Ševčík was interested in the organic morphological continuity of a concrete place. His understanding of architecture as attending to *genii loci* was predicated on a dilution of concrete history into the abstract historicism of archetypes and timelessness. For Ševčík, postmodernism “does not need a unified linguistic order or a special program [...] because it is firmly grounded in a collective memory, which supplies ever-meaningful formal archetypes warranting architectural permanence and continuity,”²⁰ and opens a “space for imagination [...] where the world broken into fragments can be united and identity secured even for the price of

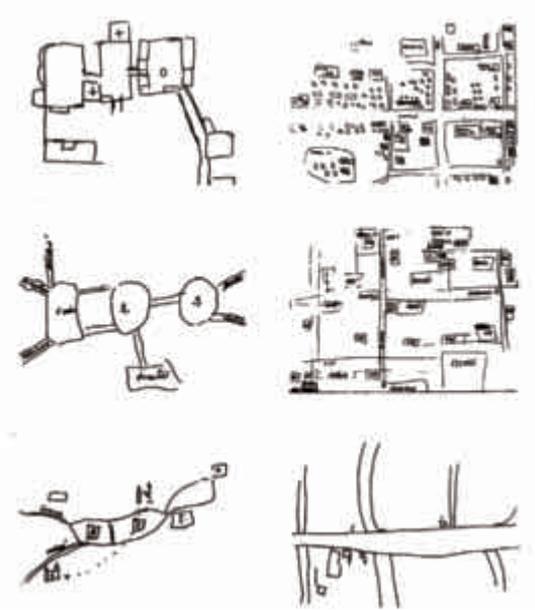


fig. 1 Mental maps drawn by the inhabitants of Most, from the study by Jiří Ševčík, 1977. The old city center is represented in the left column, the new housing estate in the right column. Source: Jiří Ševčík, Ivana Bendová and Jan Benda, "Město Most v obraze svých obyvatelů: Metoda výzkumu obrazu města a její využití," *Acta Polytechnica-Práce ČVUT v Praze* 1, no. 3 (1978), 20.

illusion."²¹ Such an illusory reworking of timeless archetypes, Ševčík stressed, was guided by an interest in human scale (fig. 1).

Ševčík's study of Most was influential among younger architects, who grappled in the late 1970s and early 1980s to reconcile *sídlště* architecture and postmodernism. Architect Zdeněk Hölzel, while working on the design of the Barrandov housing estate in Prague (1977–1988),²² translated and published in samizdat Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* and Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, and, together with Ševčík, organized Jencks's visit to Prague in 1979. In the Barrandov project, Hölzel's efforts went primarily into the design of the central pedestrian promenade, conceived as the symbolic heart of the estate. Rather than conceiving sociability in terms of functional concentration, Hölzel defined it through spontaneous circulation. The pedestrian promenade was construed as a timeless urban archetype and a locus of conviviality, where residents find meaning qua human beings, ostensibly outside of any political ideology. It was dotted with primitive brick and metal pavilions and other variations on the primitive hut, signifying an affinity to this timeless archetype but also enacting a minimal gesture of transcendental musing (figs. 2, 3).

Barrandov marked a decisive period in Hölzel's career. After graduating in 1972, he researched modular-construction systems, leading to a publication in 1976 influenced by Metabolist aesthetics.²³ In its wake, Imrich Jankovich, the senior member of the Union of Slovak Architects, prompted Hölzel to rethink residential construction systems.²⁴ Three strategies suggested by Hölzel were

fig. 2 Zdeněk Hölzel and Jan Kerel, Barrandov housing estate, Prague, promenade, perspective drawing, 1987. The water cascade is titled “Obelisk of The Motion”. Source: Zdeněk Hölzel and Jan Kerel, *Nový Barrandov: Výtvarný generel* (Prague: Pražský Projektový Ústav, 1987), 18.

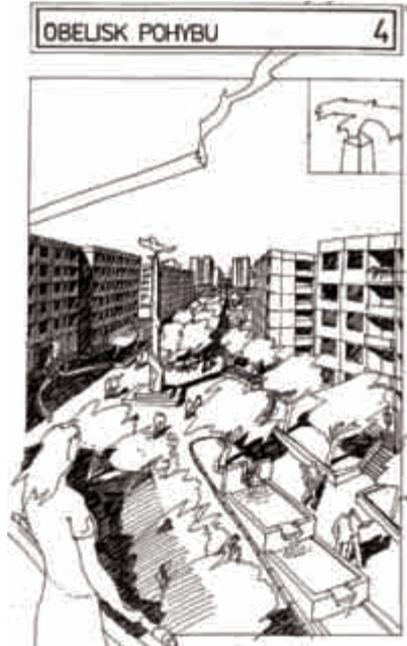


fig. 3 A pavilion at the Barrandov promenade. Photo: author, 2015.



distinguished by the degree of intervention in construction industry they would entail: modifying non-load-bearing elements (windowsills, railings, doorways, etc.), attaching additional structures (loggias, rooftop gardens, ground-floor skeleton constructions, etc.), and “modularizing” the standard types (adding the possibility to recede and protrude individual “cells” while respecting the basic grid).²⁵ Jankovich stated that the last intervention would be implemented after 1990 (fig. 4).

The encounter with Ševčík and the work on Barrandov redirected Hölzel’s interest from modularity to meaning. In 1983, Hölzel commented acerbically on the alleged impasse of industrialized architecture. An ironic accordion book introduced JOTRS, an anagrammatic architectural construction trailer

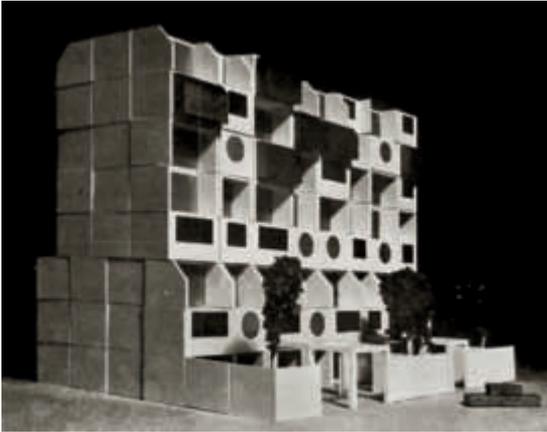


fig. 4 Zdeněk Hölzel and Jan Kerel, modular construction system, conceptual study, c. 1979. Source: Imrich Jankovich, *Výhledy nášho bývania* (Bratislava: ALFA, 1980), 103.

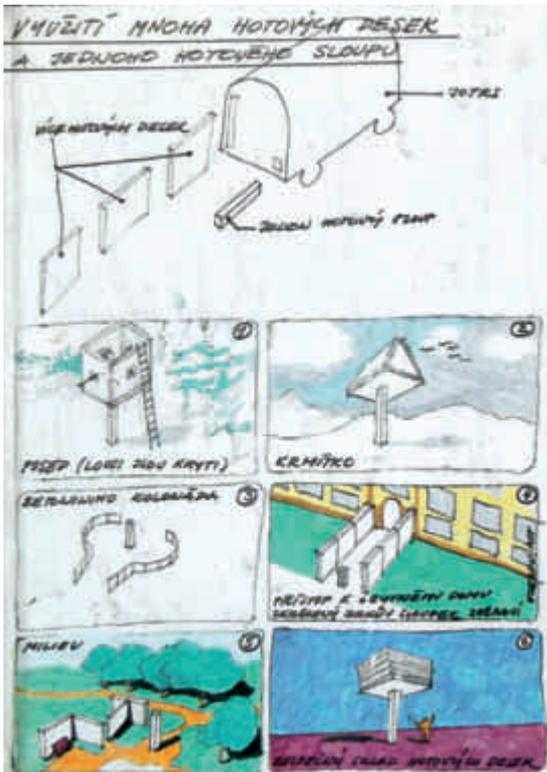
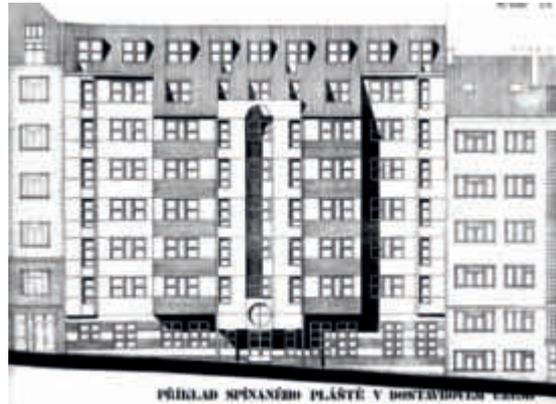


fig. 5 Zdeněk Hölzel and Jan Kerel, JOTRS, 1983. St. Peter's Square is represented as the number three. Source: Zdeněk Hölzel's private archive.

(the title is an anagram of *stroj*, a Czech word for machine). Churning out identical concrete panels and pillars, the architectural capacity of JOTRS was unlimited. It was devised to build roads, walls, milestones, sheds, railway sleepers, fireplaces, victory columns, triumphal arches and prisons; it could also replicate Bernini's Vatican colonnade and put together an "environmen-

fig. 6 Miloš Pavlík, construction system for infill development, experimental building, elevation, 1986. Source: Miloslav Pavlík, *Konstrukce a technologie pro komplexní bytovou výstavbu po roce 1995* (Prague: PÚ VHMP, 1987), 68.



tal milieu.” If meaning and historicity entered into Hölzel’s perspectives in the 1970s as communicability, they changed into expressions of inauthenticity by the mid-1980s. At first, the pedestrian street archetype informed Hölzel’s design strategy; later, the juxtaposition of St. Peter’s Square and crude Czechoslovak construction elements informed his retreat strategy (fig. 5).

Postmodernism and Socialist Realism

But modularity and meaning (or industrialization and ideology) were not as incompatible as JOTRS suggested. In the research projects and experimental prototypes of the late 1980s, a new generation of open-construction systems combining the advantages of standardization with historical expressiveness was studied. Miloš Pavlík, the lead author of one such research project, argued that architects should seriously consider that “socialist citizens [...] are attracted towards older neighborhoods that [...] offer more attractive, cultural and stimulating environment, even if technical and hygienic standards are lower.”²⁶ The project – which architects worked on together with engineers, investors and suppliers – introduced a construction system to be implemented by 1995, considering its diverse aspects: technical (compatibility between construction elements from different suppliers, building structure organized according to the lifespan of elements, all while respecting the standard grid), aesthetic (context sensitivity, historical language including facade cladding, entrance canopies, avant-corps, faux pediments, mansard roofs), functional (ground-floor commercial use, rooftop gardens) and urbanistic (atypical plans, infill developments).²⁷ All in all, the project was guided by a shared conception of the future *sídlště* as a “living street.” Pavlík also studied how to regenerate the housing estates of earlier decades, suggesting that an array of historicist vocabulary could be achieved by providing buildings with “second” composite facades²⁸ (figs. 6, 7).

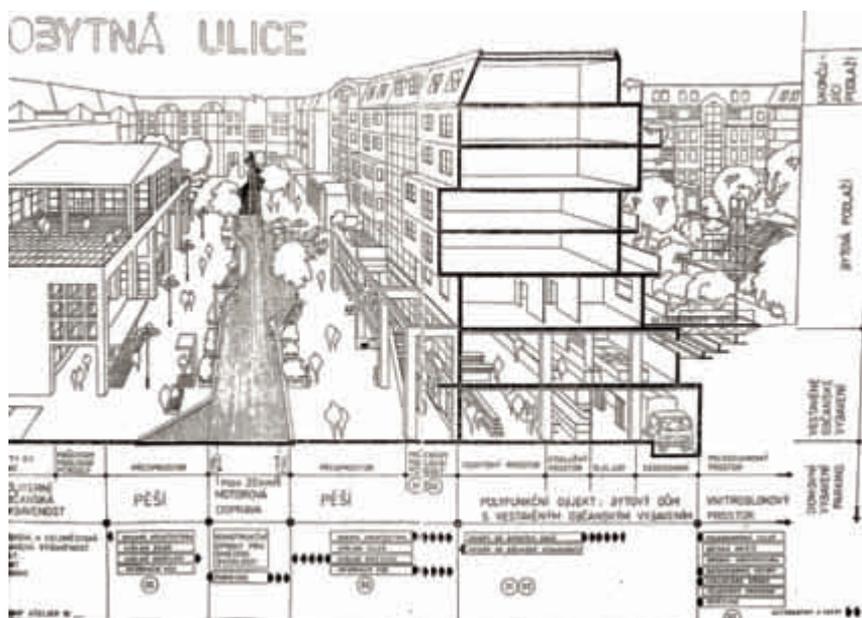


fig. 7 Miloš Pavlík, construction system for infill development, urban concept, perspective drawing, 1986. The drawing is titled "The Living Street". Source: Miloslav Pavlík, et al., *Konstrukce a technologie pro komplexní bytovou výstavbu po roce 1995* (Prague: PÚ VHMP, 1987), 7.

The encounter between postmodernist historicism and *sídlišťe* was not exactly a dissonant one, complicating the narrative of postmodernism as a harbinger of the natural world distorted by ideology. I will proceed from here not by showing how such a narrative is itself ideological, but by illustrating the uncanny proximity of postmodernist historicism to what its proponents would consider as exterior to it: socialist realism. I will rely on the work of architectural historian and curator Radomíra Sedláková, a PhD graduate of the Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture in Moscow (supervised by Alexander Riabushin, the eminent Soviet theorist and interpreter of postmodernism) and head of the National Gallery in Prague's architecture collection. Like Ševčík and Hölzel, Sedláková was receptive to postmodernism and critical of the late socialist *sídlišťe*. Like them, she lamented the loss of meaning and historicity, but framed it as a loss of socialist realism: "a sense of urbanity disappeared with the end of socialist realism," she argued.²⁹ Sedláková spoke against this disappearance at the international conference "Socialist Realism Reassessed," organized in Poland in 1985, contrasting the *sídlišťe* of the 1980s and that of the 1950s, contending that the latter had a "sense of scale for human beings [...] who expect that the urban environment will provide enough stimuli for psychological self-development."³⁰

Revising post-Stalinist criticism of socialist realism, a critical revival of socialist realism emerged in the 1980s from within the critique of the *sídlště*. What exactly was to be revived from socialist realism? Two competing notions of socialist-realist architecture were a particular style associated in Czechoslovakia with the years 1949–1956 and an architectural method understood as a dialectical synthesis of quantitative and qualitative factors (industrialization and ideology).

In contrast to the Soviet Union, where socialist realism was used in the latter sense in the 1970s and 1980s,³¹ in Czechoslovakia, where the term had been introduced only after the war, the meaning was ambiguous. High union representatives who championed the revival of socialist realism had to qualify their agenda. When Zdeněk Strnadel, the outgoing head of the Union of Czech Architects, expressed reservations in 1982 about the late-1950s critique of socialist realism, he was compelled to clarify that the reference was to the method, “pre-empting the fear that we want to return to formalist decorativism.”³² Others in a similar position spoke about the proverbial throwing out of the baby with the bathwater, wherein the baby stood for the socialist-realist method and the bathwater for decorative superfluity.³³

Yet, in the context of *sídlště* urbanism, the method-style distinction was not very tangible. The late socialist critique of the *sídlště* was inspired by established urbanistic solutions of the 1950s *sídlště*: streets, squares and courtyards. At a 1983 conference dedicated to the work of Jiří Kroha, the most prominent Czechoslovak architect of socialist realism and designer of the town of Nová Dubnica, Ivan Michalec, member of Kroha’s studio in the 1950s and head of the Slovak Architecture Union in the 1970s, argued that Kroha’s street was already fully socialist. It had a “multifunctional character and pedestrian-level services, [...] was well composed and well proportioned” and it “had a human scale and a quality living environment” that made it a desirable blueprint for contemporaneous housing estates, according to Michalec (fig. 8).³⁴

In a report on the Polish conference, Sedláková expressed disappointment that Soviet delegates had discussed socialist realism only as method, forgoing the way it transpired as a particular historical style that contrasted with the “style” of 1970s architecture.³⁵ This contrast was precisely in the human-scale environment that defined the former but was missing in the latter: “thirty years ago houses *made* space, today houses are situated *in* space,” Sedláková argued.³⁶ In her essays, reviews and conference talks written during the 1980s, she repeatedly foregrounded parallels between socialist realism and postmodernism, dissociating their “vulgar” aspects (decorativism, commercial kitsch) from the commendable revival of historical archetypes, classical typomorphology and human-scale urbanism.³⁷



fig. 8 Jiří Kroha, Nová Dubnica, perspective drawing (detail), c. 1951. Source: Museum of the City of Brno.

Sedláková was concurrently interested in the sense of place, ostensibly lost by the 1980s but present in the 1950s. Her attentiveness to regional, national and vernacular architectures related to her support of more flexible construction systems. Echoing Pavlík’s research, Sedláková called for modular industrialization conducive to historical language, but legitimized this call by citing Kroha’s early 1950s critique: “the standardization of entire building volumes [is...] mechanic and vulgar [...and] leads to industrialized anesthetization of the artistic element of architecture.”³⁸ Kroha’s pre-emptive critique of “volumetric” industrialization was speaking to late socialist critics of such industrialization and of its ramifications in the *sídlišť* environment.

The Spirit of Late Socialism

The attunement of the living environment to residents’ psychological life was a regulating idea in the architectural discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. The critique of the *sídlišť* stemmed from the ideal of human-scale environment suffused with historically articulated meaning. An apparent paradox is that the same ideal was articulated by those drawing on phenomenology and postmodernism, who wanted to “de-ideologize” architecture, recovering its allegedly natural condition, and those faithful to the dialectic conception of architecture, who wanted to ideologize it, making it properly socialist. Historians of socialist architecture have paid little attention to the ambiguous centrality of the concepts of living environment and psychological meaning in the discipline’s challenge to functionalist principles.

In the remaining pages, I will contextualize the architectural turn towards meaning within the broader political and intellectual context of late socialist Czechoslovakia. I want to introduce a hypothesis that this turn was fuelled by a failure to rethink and revive Marxism as a living philosophy and an instrument of concrete political practice in the wake of the 1960s. There are two

aspects to this failure: recuperating Marxism as a normative worldview, and ceding the terrain of resistance to phenomenology.

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello identified two critiques of Western capitalism in the 1960s: the social critique of inequality, economic distribution and political control, and the artistic critique of disciplinary regulation as being against the ideals of creativity, self-fulfillment and the authenticity of personal life.³⁹ By way of integrating the latter critique and sidelining the former, Boltanski and Chiapello argued, the “new spirit of capitalism,” developed between the 1970s and the 1990s, legitimized the neoliberal ethos of the entrepreneurial self while undoing welfare-state bureaucratic institutions. A parallel reading can be developed of the new spirit of socialism in Czechoslovakia.

Following the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, sweeping institutional changes were implemented by the reinstated orthodox wing of the Communist Party in 1969 and 1970. In architecture, this included closing down independent studios (such as the SIAL group in Liberec) and the institutional and personal reorganization of the Union of Czech Architects. Historians frequently interpreted these changes through the prism of totalitarianism theory, relying on an ambiguous epistemology of propaganda and indoctrination and a conceptual dualism of opening and closing.⁴⁰ The historical dynamics of the critique of the *sídlišťe* suggest, however, that the relationship between architecture and population cannot be explained in such crude terms.

In Eastern Europe, Marxist revisionism of the 1960s challenged ossification and oligarchic tendencies within the Communist parties. In 1956, Czech philosopher Jiří Cvekl had reintroduced into dialectical materialism the concept of the negation of negation, which had been eliminated in Stalin’s version of dialectics. According to sociologist Miloslav Petrusek, “the return of the ‘negation of negation’ into dialectics heralded a new era.”⁴¹ The resurrection of dialectics as a critical method offered new hope for Marxism and socialism. In *Dialectics of Concrete* (1963) and *Our Current Crisis* (1968), Czech philosopher Karel Kosík placed Hegel and Marx in a dialogue with phenomenology, articulating the question of meaning and authenticity of human life as inseparable from concrete political-economic processes – such as the problem of the de-politicization of the working class.⁴² Against the unholy marriage of positive dialectical materialism and techno-scientific reason, Kosík called for a rethinking of historical reason in terms of everyday political praxis. He contrasted the system built upon historicist metaphysics and techno-science to the world where political praxis and individual meaning are inseparable.

Revisionist Marxism of the 1960s strived to think of social organization and cultural meaning integrally. But the former was sacrificed to the latter during the early 1970s normalization of revisions. The rise of the critique of

the *sídlíště* belonged to this process: architecture, reframed in terms of meaning, supplanted society as the object of critique. The normalization process was not simply about repressing the critique,⁴³ as historians contend, but also about channeling social critique into the domain of private meanings. Although ostensibly antithetical with each other, the Communist Party and dissent concurrently foregrounded the problem of meaning.

The orthodox wing of the Communist Party, reinstated after 1968, curbed demands for political change but gave grounds to the critique of meaning. The historian Paulina Bren argued that normalization policies introduced during the 1970s aimed to depoliticize the 1960s revisions by placating self-realization in the private sphere and associating meaningful life with domesticity. According to Bren, “the message was that a socialist way of life was potentially able to challenge and even surpass capitalism [...] by offering an unmatched ‘quality of life.’”⁴⁴ Life, measured in terms of quality and quietude, was the life of a private citizen. If it was an attempt to circumvent the “ideology,” the “turn toward the domestic,” Bren argued, was also “an expression of the quiet life [...] as a cornerstone of party policy [...] Traditional roles became a model of resistance [...] but they were simultaneously reinforced and encouraged by the state.”⁴⁵

Dissent embraced the phenomenological liberal themes of life’s authenticity and freedom of expression. Charter 77, the most prominent dissent platform in Czechoslovakia, was originally a demand to the party to respect human rights, to which it had subscribed at the Helsinki Accords in 1975. Havel, a founding Charter member, divorced the question of dissensus from left-right politics, arguing that “the problem has no longer resided in a political line or program: it is a problem of life itself.”⁴⁶ Unlike Kosík, Havel criticized the party in the name of abstract life and humanity: from socialism with a human face to simply a human face. Patočka, another founding Charter member, made meaning the driving force of history: “history differs from prehistoric humanity by the shaking of accepted meaning.”⁴⁷ For dissent and its phenomenological worldview, meaning determined history rather than history meaning. That dissent largely embraced the idea of apolitical politics (per Havel) testifies to the validity of applying Boltanski and Chiapello’s thesis – that the critique of meaning, disconnected from social critique, pioneered the new spirit of capitalism – to state socialism.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The more or less forceful disappearance of social critique in late socialism corresponded to the rise of an artistic critique of *sídlíště*. The failure to revise and revive Marxism after the 1960s manifested as a double embrace of the ideal of meaningful life by the Party and the dissent. Terms such as environment,

life and meaning supplanted the political critique of society during the 1970s. I suggested that the two critiques of the *sídlišťe*, judged as offering an insufficient quality of life and being incompatible with life-in-truth, cannot be neatly separated. Both critiques – exemplified, respectively, in the Party chairman’s call to architects (in 1982) “to create a living environment conducive to happy family life [...] where people would feel at home”⁴⁹ and in Havel’s mention (in 1984) of housing estates, prisons and concentration camps in one breath and in contrast to the natural world as a transcendental home⁵⁰ – were construed upon the premise that the *sídlišťe* is a locus in which life is questioned.

Quality of life and life-in-truth were two poles within which architectural practice and discourse oscillated in late socialist Czechoslovakia. Whether architects revisited socialist realism or embraced historicist postmodernism, the noopolitical instrumentarium of phenomenology, semiotics and environmental psychology attuned architecture to the questions of life’s quality and meaning and manifested itself in the ideal of the pedestrian street as a locus of urbanity. Nonetheless, this ideal remained restricted to conviviality, culture and consumption. Boltanski and Chiapello suggested that “the artistic critique should [...] reformulate the issues of liberation and authenticity, starting from the new forms of oppression it unwittingly helped to make possible.”⁵¹ How the late-socialist critique of *sídlišťe* played out in the neoliberal urbanization of the post-socialist decades, including the “pacification by cappuccino” of the pedestrian street, is a story that remains to be written.⁵²

Endnotes

- 1 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- 2 See Łukasz Stanek, “Biopolitics of Scale: Architecture, Urbanism, the Welfare State and After,” in *The Politics of Life: Michel Foucault and the Biopolitics of Modernity*, ed. Sven-Olov Wallenstein and Jakob Nilsson (Stockholm: Iaspis, 2013).
- 3 The term is from Maurizio Lazzarato, “The Concepts of Life and the Living in the Societies of Control,” in *Deleuze and the Social*, ed. Martin Fuglsang and Bent Meier Sorensen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 171–190.
- 4 I focus on the Czech part of the Republic.
- 5 See the debate in Jiří Hruža, “Humanizace sídlišť,” *Architektura ČSR*, 47:6 (1988), 24–27, 30–32.
- 6 Manfredo Tafuri, “L’architecture dans le Boudoir: The Language of Criticism and the Criticism of Language,” in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 149.
- 7 Tahl Kaminer, *Architecture, Crisis and Resuscitation: The Reproduction of Post-Fordism in Late-Twentieth-Century Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011), 43.

- 8 Ibid., 45.
- 9 Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs: vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009).
- 10 Anna Paretzkaya, “The Soviet Communist Party and the Other Spirit of Capitalism,” *Sociological Theory*, 28:4 (2010), 394.
- 11 For a history of Czechoslovak housing industrialization see Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).
- 12 Such qualities were seen as incompatible with the human psyche. See Michal Beneš, *Monotónie nových obytných souborů* (Prague: VÚVA, 1989).
- 13 Václav Havel, cited in Jiří Ševčík, “Postmodernismus v architektuře,” in *Texty*, Jana Ševčíková and Ševčík, ed. Terezie Nekvindová (Prague: Tranzit.cz and VVP AVU, 2010), 151.
- 14 Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
- 15 Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 95–118.
- 16 Václav Havel, “New Year’s Address to the Nation” (1990), http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1990/0101_uk.html.
- 17 Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens and the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1985).
- 18 Jiří Ševčík, Ivana Bendová, and Jan Benda, “Obraz města Mostu,” *Architektúra a urbanizmus*, 12:3 (1978), 165–178; Jiří Ševčík et al., *Vinohrady. Obraz města 19. století* (Prague: ČVUT FA, 1982).
- 19 Ševčík stressed the affective side of the fieldwork during an interview with the author, January 14, 2016, Prague.
- 20 Jana Ševčíková and Jiří Ševčík, “Postmodernismus bez pověr, ale s iluzí,” in *Texty*, 82.
- 21 Ibid., 84.
- 22 Hölzel collaborated on most projects with architect Jan Kerel. Further references are to collaborative projects.
- 23 Zdeněk Hölzel, Jan Kerel, *Ocelové prostorové jednotky*, (Prague: GR ZLP, 1976).
- 24 According to Hölzel, personal communication with the author, December 14, 2015.
- 25 Imrich Jankovich, *Výhlady nášho bývania* (Bratislava: ALFA, 1980), 98–103.
- 26 Vlastimil Kolář, Miloš Pavlík, “Nová stavební soustava pro Prahu,” *Architektura ČSR*, 45:1 (1986), 13.
- 27 Miloslav Pavlík, et al., *Konstrukce a technologie pro komplexní bytovou výstavbu po roce 1995* (Prague: PÚ VHMP, 1987).
- 28 Miloslav Pavlík, interview with the author, January 11, 2016. See also Miloslav Pavlík, et al., *Regenerace panelových objektů z 50. a 60.-tých let* (Prague: PÚ VHMP, 1987).
- 29 Radomíra Sedláková, “Socialistický realismus včera a dnes,” unpublished manuscript, 1. This is the original manuscript of the conference talk, obtained from the personal archive of Sedláková.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 See Anatoly Polyansky, “Problemy tvorcheskogo soiuza,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 50:5 (1982), 1–9. I would like to thank Richard Anderson for this reference.

- 32 Zdeněk Strnadel, "Za socialistickou architekturu," *Architektura ČSR*, 42:5 (1983), 200.
- 33 Rudolf Štejs, "Urbanistická tvorba," *Projekt* 25, 2 (1983), 12; Radomíra Sedláková, interview with the author, January 11, 2016, Prague.
- 34 Ivan Michalec, cited in Eva Hejdová, "Architekt Jiří Kroha a současnost," *Československý architekt*, 30:4 (1984), 4.
- 35 Radomíra Sedláková, "Socialistický realismus po létech," *Československý architekt*, 32:1 (1986), 1.
- 36 Radomíra Sedláková, "Socialistický realismus včera a dnes," 3 (my italics).
- 37 Radomíra Sedláková, "Urbanista bytostně socialistický," *Rudé právo*, 65:256 (1984), 5; Radomíra Sedláková, "Semínář kritiků, tentokrát bez kritiků," unpublished manuscript (c. 1984); Radomíra Valterová, "Postmodernismus-klasicismus-a co dál?," *Výtvarná kultura*, 8:2 (1984), 20–26; Radomíra Sedláková, "Postmodernismus," unpublished manuscript (c. 1984).
- 38 Jiří Kroha, cited in Hejdová, "Architekt Jiří Kroha a současnost," 4.
- 39 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).
- 40 See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), for a critique of applying the prism of totalitarianism to late socialism.
- 41 Miloslav Petrušek, "Úvahy o dialektice v sociálních vědách," *Teorie vědy*, 33:3 (2011), 402.
- 42 Karel Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete: A Study on Problems of Man and World* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1976); Karel Kosík, "Our Current Crisis," in *The Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Observations from the 1968 Era*, Karel Kosík, ed. James H. Satterwhite (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 17–51.
- 43 In 1968, Karel Kosík became a member of the reformed Central Committee of the Communist Party and a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague. In 1970, he was expelled from the Communist Party and from his teaching post.
- 44 Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 185.
- 45 Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*, 174.
- 46 Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 40. In the same essay, Havel talks about "pseudo-reality" (*pseudoskutečnost*), contrasting it with Kosík's term "pseudo-concrete."
- 47 Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 62.
- 48 Václav Havel, "Politics and Conscience," *The Salisbury Review*, 3:2 (1985), 31–38. This notion cannot be straightforwardly associated with neoliberalism. The problem is rather that Havel identifies political crisis as primarily a "spiritual, moral, and existential" crisis. Cited in Miloš Havelka, "Nepolitická politika: kontexty a tradice," *Sociologický časopis*, 34:4 (1998), 464.
- 49 Miloš Jakeš to the 2nd Assembly of the Union of Czechoslovak Architects, in 1982. Miloš Jakeš, [untitled], *Architektura ČSR*, 42:6 (1983), 253.
- 50 Havel, in Ševčík, "Postmodernismus v architektuře," 150–151.
- 51 Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 468.
- 52 Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Malden, Blackwell: 2000), 28.