

# A UTOPIA OF MODERNITY : ZLÍN REVISITING BAŤA'S FUNCTIONAL CITY

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# AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF BAŤA AND ZLÍN IN DATES

Zdeněk Pokluda

- 1876** Tomáš Baťa is born in Zlín into a family of local craftsmen, which had long been settled in the town. One of Tomáš's direct forbears, Lukáš Baťa, is recorded as being a shoemaker here in 1667.
- 1894** The siblings Antonín, Anna, and Tomáš Baťa establish a shoemaking business in Zlín, at the time a small rural town. In 1890, the population is 2,834.
- 1899** Tomáš Baťa returns from a trip to Frankfurt am Main, Germany, with simple machines to improve production.
- 1900** Tomáš Baťa heads the family company registered as 'T. A. Baťa', which employs about 120 people. Manufacturing is moved into a new factory building built next to the Zlín railway station. Over the next decades, large factory grounds develop near this building. From 1900 to 1907, Baťa's colleague František Štěpánek takes part in the organization of the company.
- 1903** Apart from shoemaking, the Baťa company establishes a shop for metal-working, which constitutes the basis for its future machine manufacturing. The brothers Tomáš and Antonín Baťa, co-owners of the family firm, take part in a meeting at which the Zlín organization of the Social Democrat trade unions is founded.
- 1905** Tomáš Baťa and three of his employees spend three months in the United States, working and gaining experience in shoe factories in Lynn, Massachusetts. Baťa then spends time in shoe factories in Leeds and Leicester, England, and in Pirmasens, Germany.

# NOT A STEP WITHOUT BAŤA

For Egon Erwin Kisch  
Mariusz Szczygieł

## 1882: A STINK

'Why does it smell so bad in here?' six-year-old Tomáš Baťa asks his father Antonín. This is the first manifestation of his desire to put reality straight. We do not know how his father responds. He is probably quite reticent on the whole.

## TWELVE YEARS LATER, 1894: DEMANDS

The three children from his first marriage, Anna, Antonín and 18-year-old Tomáš, are standing in front of their 50-year-old father. They are demanding their inheritance from their mother. They are also suggesting that he should immediately give them whatever they are going to inherit after his death. They haven't time to wait all those years, and anyway it is becoming crowded at home. They receive 800 zlotys in silver coins, and they hire four workers to produce shoes in Zlín.

## ONE YEAR LATER, 1895: THE PRINCIPLE

They have debts of 8,000 zlotys. They cannot afford new leather hides and they have no money to pay for the old ones. Antonín is called up for the army, and Anna goes to work in Vienna as a domestic servant. Tomáš stares at the remaining leather, and in his despair he hits upon the most important principle of his life: always turn failure into advantage. As they cannot afford leather, they will have to make shoes out of what is available: canvas. Canvas does not cost much, and the rest of the leather can be used to make soles. This is how Baťa devises one of the great successes of the new century: canvas shoes with leather soles.

## 1905: TIME

Tomáš learns more and more English and hears something of Henry Ford. This employer, as E.L. Doctorow wrote about him, has long been convinced

# CONTENTS

- 6 Hortensia Völckers  
Foreword
- 8 Katrin Klingan and Kerstin Gust  
Preface
- 15 Bas Princen  
Zlín 2009
- 18 Zdeněk Pokluda  
An Outline of the History of Baťa and Zlín in Dates
- 19 Mariusz Szczygieł  
Not a Step Without Baťa
- 23 Martina Kudláček  
Zlín Views, 2009
- 40 **A FACTORY IN GARDENS**
- 41 Dagmar Nová  
They Were Ahead of Their Time
- 53 Vladimír Šlapeta  
The Baťa Legacy: The Realization of a Utopia
- 68 Ivan Bergmann and Ladislav Pastrnek  
Building No 21: Redeveloping and Revitalizing an Icon
- 75 Rostislav Švácha  
Tomáš Baťa and the Destruction of Old Zlín
- 90 Ladislava Horňáková, Zdeněk Chládek  
The Urban Development of Zlín and Urban Planning, 1918-2009
- 104 **LIFE IN A UTOPIA**
- 105 Annett Steinführer  
Uncharted Zlín: The Forgotten Lifeworlds of the Baťa City
- 117 Ladislava Horňáková  
Baťa Satellite Towns Around the World
- 137 Jaroslav Rudiš in conversation with Svatopluk Jabůrek  
It Was Extremely Modern and Nice
- 142 Joan James  
Memories of Life at British Bata
- 146 Nina Pope  
Bata-ville: We Are not Afraid of the Future
- 156 **OBSOLESCENCE AND ORDER**
- 157 Daniel M. Abramson  
Obsolescence and the Fate of Zlín

172	Petr Všeťka Baťa's Grid between Restoration and Transformation
188	<b>MODERNISM IS HEALTHY</b>
189	Petr Hlaváček Shoe Fetishism: From Baťa's Optimization of Shoe Production to Orthopaedics
192	Miroslava Štýbrová Shoe Collection from Baťa and Svit
196	Andrea Scholtz Industrial Design from the Spirit of Sculpture
202	<b>A COMPANY TOWN ORGANIZED BY MEDIA</b>
203	Petr Szczepanik The Aesthetics of Rationalization: The Media Network in the Baťa Company and the Town of Zlín
216	Jiří Novotný From Commercials to Children's Animation: A Glimpse into the History of the Zlín Film Studios
224	<b>REVISITING THE FUNCTIONAL CITY</b>
225	Karin Wilhelm 'The Earth, a Good Domicile': Ambivalences of the Modern City
238	Jitka Rössová Materialized Utopia: Domestic Living Culture in Zlín
243	Lucie Galčanová and Barbora Vacková Changes in Housing Culture in Zlín
248	Regina Bittner Elevator Effect Urbanity
260	Adam Gebrian and Igor Kovačević A Future Zlín
274	Ladislava Horňáková Afterword: A Utopia Made Real
277	Rostislav Koryčánek Afterword: Challenge as Remedy
282	Documentation from the Symposium 'A Utopia of Modernity : Zlín', 19-23 May 2009
292	Short Biographies
298	Acknowledgements
300	Picture Credits
303	Imprint







Centre of Zlín, c.1960.

The location of the city centre was fixed definitively in Gahura's 'Basic Improvement Scheme for the Municipality of Greater Zlín' from 1934. It sketched out the future expansion of the city – which at that time had some 30,000 inhabitants – for 100,000 inhabitants into the Dřevnice Valley. He also proportioned Labour Square (náměstí Práce) for this number of inhabitants (see image above). The initial development of the square proceeded according to plan and clear zones were gradually created. In the years 1935-42, the square was redesigned by Gahura several times; it was perceived as being unfinished. Under Jan A. Bata, the square was supposed to become a monumental gathering place, symbolizing the success of the company. It was to be surrounded by more public buildings and offices. None of the designs, however, were implemented. Over the next few decades, a

number of competitions were held for designs to complete the square. All of the subsequent zoning plans, land-use plans, and competitions for the completion of Labour Square, respected Gahura's town planning of the centre, with its brilliantly-designed green vista, bordered by hostels, at the summit of which rose the Tomáš Baťa Memorial, reconstructed after the war as the House of Arts (Dům umění). These plans included Le Corbusier's 'Zoning Design for Greater Zlín' from 1935 (see Wilhelm, this volume), Fuchs's designs for the completion of Labour Square from 1940, the zoning plan from 1947 on which the architects Gahura, Voženílek, Karfík, Kubečka, Slezák and Vitek collaborated, the 'Overall Development Plan for Zlín' from 1959 by architect Staša *et al.*, and the 'Overall Development Plan for the Zlín Conurbation' from 1975 by architect Dohnal *et al.* Likewise, the 1998 land-use plan, which is still in effect, fixes Zlín's town planning and its important structures from the pre- and post-war periods within the boundaries of the MMZ (see Horňáková and Chládek, this volume). As yet, of course, there is no sufficiently detailed document on the basis of which building activity in the centre of the city could be regulated unequivocally. Only the zoning plan that is currently being drawn up could fulfil this function. It is based on the architectural and town-planning competition that was held in 2005 for the city centre. The competition unambiguously confirmed the correctness of the intention to preserve and sensitively complete the centre of one of the most extensive and intact industrial garden cities in the world.

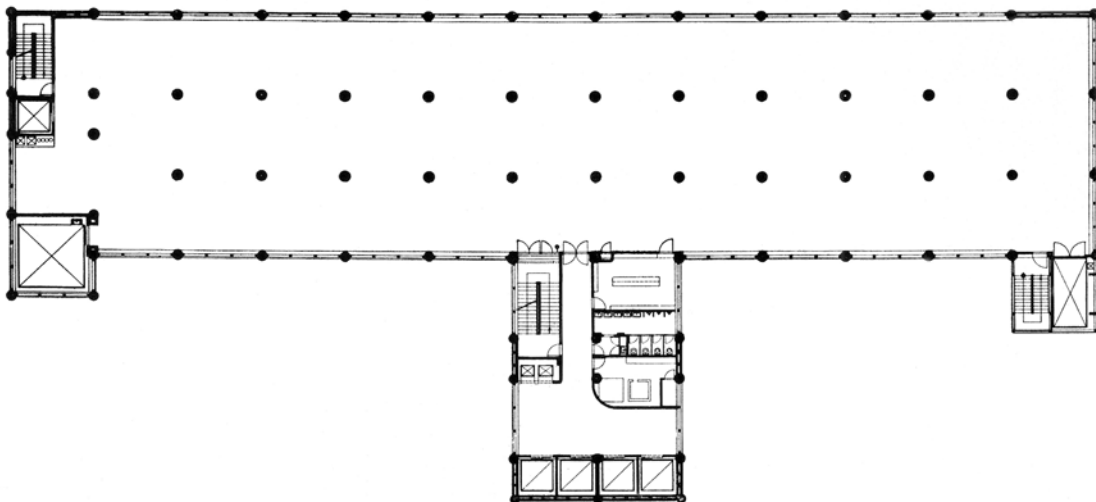


Statue of J.A. Baťa with Building No 21 in the background, Zlín, 2007.

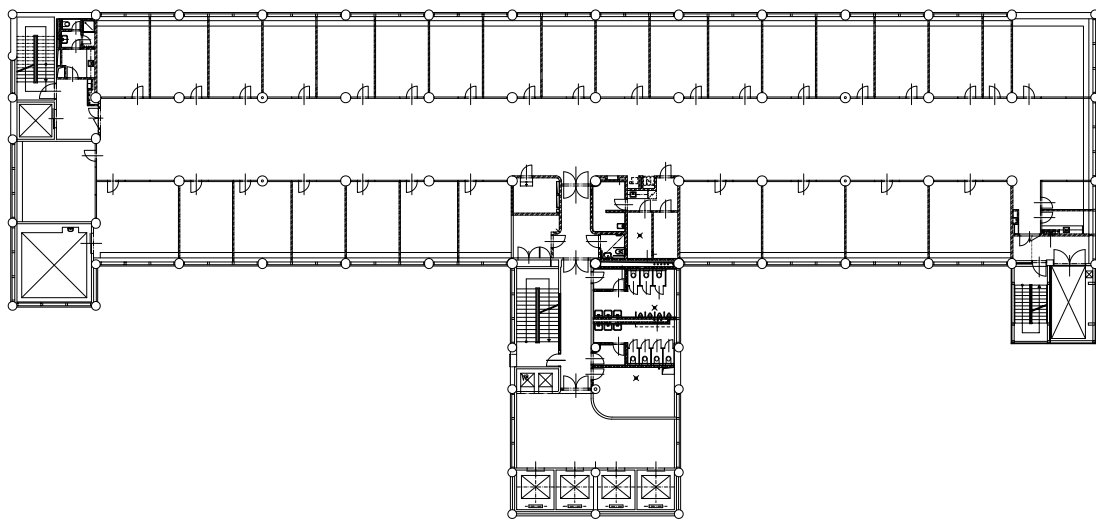
## THE BAŤA SPIRIT LIVES ON

After 1932, Gahura served as the city's chief architect. Another important figure, Vladimír Karfík, rose to a leading position in the company's design department. He completed the Community House (Společenský dům, today Hotel Moskva), the Commercial and Community House (Obchodní a společenský dům, today the Malá Scéna Theatre) in Díly, the evangelical church, the atypical villas of the company directors, the sports grounds and film studios, and his key work in Zlín from 1939 – Building No 21, the skyscraper (see Bergmann and Pastrnek, this volume).

After the nationalization of the company in the post-war period, these important architects were forced to leave Zlín for good, and the architect Jiří Voženílek, another significant figure in the architecture and town planning of Zlín, became the head of design. He also became the chief architect of the new conurbation of Gottwaldov, as Zlín was then called. The city was renamed at the beginning of 1949; at the same time, the now state-owned Baťa company was renamed Svit.



The office as 'open space', floor plan of a typical floor in Building No 21, by Vladimír Karfík, 1938.



Floor plan of a typical floor in Building No 21 after reconstruction, by Ivan Bergmann and Ladislav Pastrnek, 2004.



Roof garden on the 16th floor by Vladimír Karfik, 1940.



Roof garden after reconstruction, with a popular café.

The original Slavík facing bricks have been cleaned and supplemented with replicas. The worn plaster on the southern, eastern, and western faces has been removed and replaced with new plaster; on the northern face, the damaged areas have been injected, repaired, and retouched.

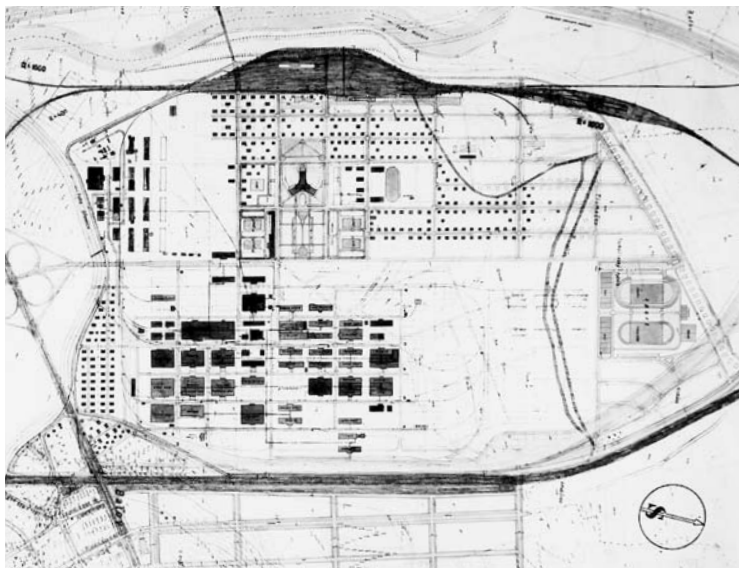
The steel windows on the 8th floor have been refurbished; on other floors they have been retained in the technical and communications areas. Most of the office areas have new windows produced from atypical A1 profiles. In the space between the double-glazed glass panels, electrically-driven screen-type blinds have been installed. On the southern, eastern, and western sides the blinds are controlled by sensors, on the northern side they are controlled manually.

The building's window ledges had originally been lined with two indented partitions 15 cm in thickness, made of solid brick covered under the window by a concrete ring. The external face of the window ledge was lined with brick strips, with plaster on the internal side. Additional insulation was provided from the interior using 5 cm anchored polystyrene with subsequent application of vapour-tight rubber. This configuration is hidden beneath the newly-fitted cover of the window ledge distribution systems and refurbished marble window ledge plates.

Cleaning of the exterior windows was secured by a mobile catwalk – known by the inhabitants of Zlín as the 'cat' – which was suspended on a trolley track from the building's main cornice 67 m above the sidewalk. The lift has been completely refurbished, including its guide system. To stabilize the catwalk, two series of anchor points were added at various heights along the entire perimeter of the building, restricting its movement to up, down, left, and right: diagonal movement was eliminated.



Baťa Community House, Baťov, Otrokovice, by Vladimír Karfík, 1936, aerial view.



Baťov, Otrokovice, general development plan, by František Lydie Gahura, 1930, plan view.

## BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA

### BAŤOV, OTROKOVICE (EST. 1930)

**Company:** Baťa a.s., Zlín; BAPOZ – Baťovy pomocné závody, s.r.o. Zlín (originally)

**Urban plan:** František Lydie Gahura

Bahňak (meaning 'marshland') was the site selected for a future plant and residential quarter that was renamed Baťov. It is situated some twelve kilometres from Zlín, near the Morava River and the main railway line between Přerov and Břeclav. Based on the architect F.L. Gahura's land-use plan, construction of the Baťa subsidiary complex at the Bahňak site began in September 1930. Otrokovice became a place of ancillary preparatory facilities that depended on process water, of which there was little in Zlín. These included tanneries and facilities for drying, dyeing, and finishing leather, as well as paper mills and factories for glue and soap. The company planned to transform Otrokovice gradually into a modern railway and highway junction and a waterway and air transport hub. Roads and railways were to be considerably expanded, but all planning came to a halt with the outbreak of war, and development was not resumed along the original guidelines afterwards, when the Baťa company was nationalized by presidential decree. With the end of the Communist regime in late 1989, another milestone in the history of the company was its privatization in 1993. A good part of its activities now involves providing services to other companies operating in its industrial complex: about 130 companies there employ some 2,000 people. In recent years, major redevelopment work has been undertaken in connection with cleaning up after the 1997 floods.



Napajedla, satellite housing estate and the Bata factory, 1936, aerial view.



Production of rubber balls, Fatra company, Napajedla, 1943.

## NAPAJEDLA (EST. 1935)

**Company:** Fatra a.s., Napajedla

**Urban plan:** František Lydie Gahura

This chemical plant for the production of gas masks, technical rubber, toys, and plastic raincoats was founded in 1935 near Zlín, on the left bank of the Morava, close to the main road artery. With increasing production and a growing workforce, a residential estate was constructed, providing housing for about a third of the plant's employees. In later years, most of the residential area was demolished to make way for the expanding industrial facilities and new roads. A community zone had not been designed – the plant was built near the historic quarter of Zlín, mostly situated on the left bank. Under its current ownership, the company manufactures a variety of products including flooring, packaging materials, plastic sheeting, tubes, boxes, barrels, adhesives, inflatable boats, physiotherapy balls, and toys. The residential district, which was reduced shortly after its completion, now comprises only a few houses near the factory.

## TŘEBÍČ (EST. 1933)

**Company:** Baťa a.s., Zlín (closed in 2000), T. A. Baťa (originally)

**Urban plan:** Robert H. Podzemný

In 1931, Tomáš Baťa purchased a plot with a tannery from Baron Carl Budischowsky on the edge of the historic town of Třebíč, near the Jihlava River in southern Moravia. The main entrance to the tannery was preserved in the Bata shoe and hosiery factory. Based on land-use plans by R.H. Podzemný, the industrial complex, the Community House, and the residential quarter near the plant were built in 1935-40. The project was only partly carried out.

## Obsolescence and Order

Tomáš Baťa's managers, town planners, architects, and engineers saw 'Baťa's grid' as the birth of a new type of city. It originated in the need to give an organized structure to the rapidly-growing factory which the Baťa family had been building in Zlín since 1900. Over twenty years, the production site was transformed into a 'factory in gardens', with a fixed module of buildings set in a right-angled network of streets and green spaces. As one observer wrote about Zlín: 'Here is order.'

At the same time, however, the Baťa company was an extremely dynamic enterprise. Tomáš Baťa himself expressed the belief that his factory buildings would become obsolete after twenty years and be replaced by better ones, incorporating the newest technologies. The Baťa architecture's look of permanence thus expresses the contradiction between dynamic capitalism and dreams of discipline and harmony. Baťa's modernistic utopia can be defined as the conceptual illusion that his enterprise could actually manage the future.

The factory has experienced Allied bombardment, nationalization, and privatization. In the 1990s, life vanished from much of the complex. Today, city planners face the problem of regulating a patchwork of buildings owned by many parties. A sustainable plan has been put into action, which aims at reversing the process of devaluation and decline. In 2006, the City of Zlín renovated Building No 23, with funding from the European Union, as an 'entrepreneurial incubator'. In 2009, the Zlín Regional Government acquired Building Nos 14 and 15 for its cultural institutions and is planning to renovate them. But perhaps something more is needed, besides the impulse to preserve some of the old buildings: a willingness to let go of the past.

# OBSOLESCENCE AND THE FATE OF ZLÍN

Daniel M. Abramson

For much of the twentieth century, architectural change was imagined as the process of obsolescence, new superseding old, devalued and made expendable. Architects and others both embraced and recoiled from shared perceptions that obsolescence characterized modernity, imagining short-life buildings on the one hand, insisting upon permanence on the other. A history of obsolescence is sketched here and the theme's relevance is explored in relation to Zlín's past, present, and future. 'Look upon Zlín as a growing town, where even tomorrow you will no longer find what was considered good enough today,' the company's official 1936 guidebook states (Cekota 1936: 6).

It was around 1910 that the term obsolescence was first applied in English to architecture, to help explain the unusually short lives of structures like the 92 m Gillender Building in New York City's financial district, only thirteen years old upon demolition. It had reached the 'limit of its commercial life', explained one real estate executive, 'no longer able to earn a proper return on the land it stands on' (Evers 1914: 58). This phenomenon of 'financial decay' was explored by the engineer Reginald Pelham Bolton in his 1911 book *Building for Profit: Principles Governing the Economic Improvement of Real Estate*. Bolton listed obsolescence's basic causes, all extrinsic to the building itself: 'the influence of fashion', what we might call style obsolescence, as well as 'change of habit, competition, development of new territory, and shifting of the centres of population and business' (1911: 75.). Bolton also hypothesized that different functional types of buildings obsolesced at different rates. His table, the 'Economic Existence of Buildings', assigned the longest-life banks lives of 44-50 years, down through offices and hotels, to the shortest-life 'tax payers' – small structures erected to cover tax payments on a valuable site until a more lucrative building could be constructed – 12-15 years (ibid. 76).



## BUILDING NO 21

**Can a daring building that dominates the horizon be a source of self-confidence for the inhabitants of a city or region? Like the Pirelli Tower, for example, by the architect Gio Ponti, it was with this ambition that Building No 21 became the headquarters of the Regional Government.**

Building No 21, by Vladimír Karfík, Zlín (1936-9), view from the northwest, 2006.

'Bata's skyscraper', an icon of modern Czechoslovak architecture, was built in the years 1936-9 as the headquarters of Bata's international organization. The work of the young architect Vladimír Karfík, who had been influenced by his training in Paris and the United States, it was probably the second-tallest civic building in Europe at that time. The renovation, carried out in the years 2003-4 by the Zlín Regional Government, set itself the daunting task of being the flagship of the transformation of the factory complex and the symbol of the newly-established region and its government. There are several key deviations in the layout from the original concept of the building, in particular the decision to abandon the large open workspaces in favour of separate offices. Nonetheless, it provides a welcome example of the rigorous rehabilitation of a large building. A number of methods and technologies employed during the renovation were and are still unique on that scale in the Czech Republic. From the perspective of the factory as a whole, one should mention the pious restoration of the architecturally sophisticated outer shell of the building, and the matter of leaving the factory patina on the northern façade of the building as a contextual reference or commemoration of industry (see Bergmann and Pastrnek, this volume).

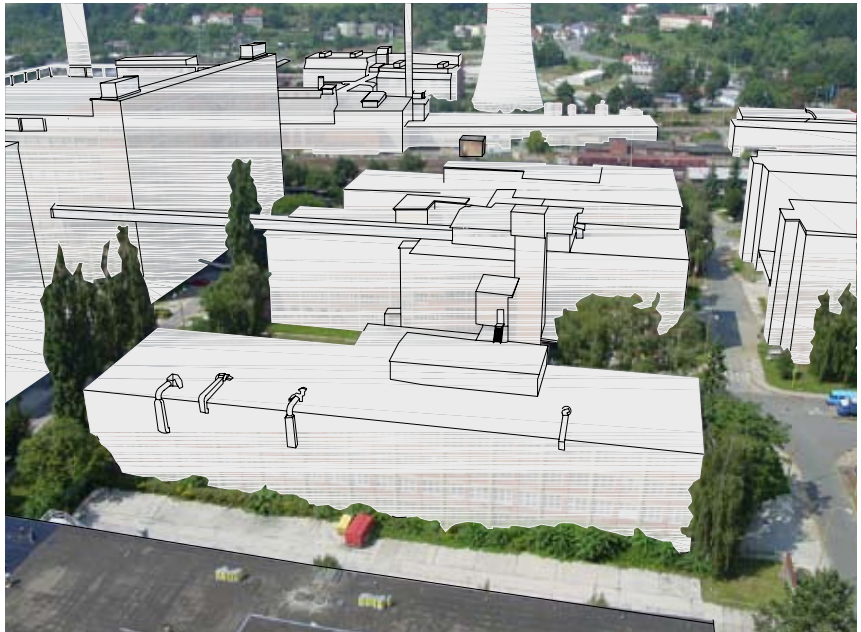


Replacement of Building No 11 with a parking garage, by Ivan Bergman, Zlín (2004), 2005.

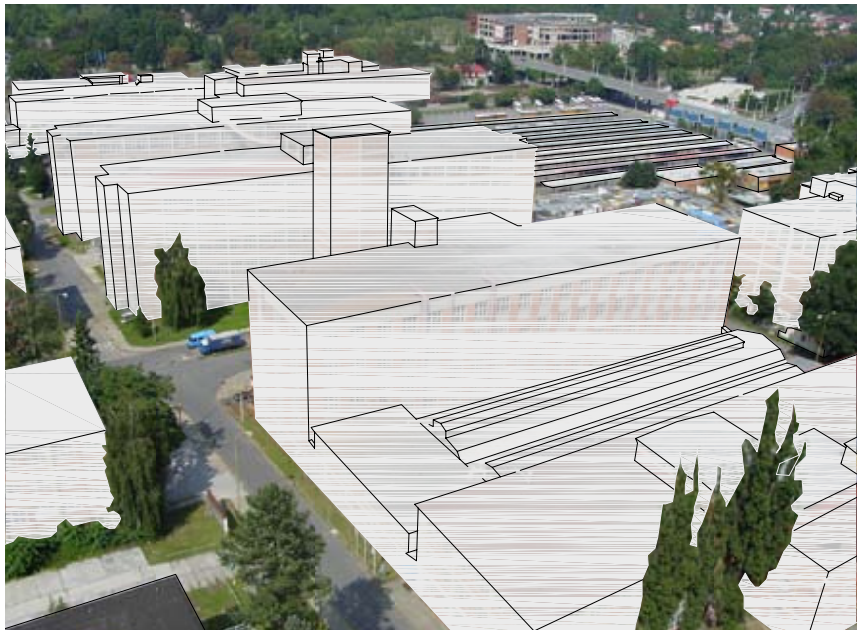
## **BUILDING NO 11**

**Does a parking garage have a dynamic or deadening function in relation to the city? Should one insist on the use of a 'stylish' construction and materials, that is, by establishing seemingly contextual rules?**

This replacement of the original standard Baťa building with the successful new structure by architect Ivan Bergman is connected with the neighbouring Building No 21. As it was impossible to include the necessary parking spaces in the renovated skyscraper, they were to be placed in this new structure. The location of the parking garage between the skyscraper and the city raised certain questions. The city's long-term plan is to create an attractive parterre, hence the directive for multifunctional buildings. But as the Zlín Regional Government was unable to create commercial parterre areas in this investment project, a provision (in the form of vacant bays in the skeleton) was made in the new structure for the insertion of two-storey commercial units. Another controversial limitation had to do with the preservation of monuments: the structure was supposed to have a reinforced-concrete skeletal construction with ceramic infill, like the original buildings. Fortunately, the final work recast these inputs into an exciting synthesis: a horizontal structure was constructed, which highlights the vertical line of the dominant neighbouring building.



The quality of the factory lies in its entirety, in its homogeneity. The structures in it need to be connected with a quality public space. The factory is the only part of Zlín where one feels like one is in a city – normal streets, tall buildings on both sides... Why don't we make it into a city?





One can't argue that public space is unused. But what is it used for?  
Much of it is used for cars.





Alexandr Hackenschmied (just left of the camera) with Herbert Kline (behind the camera) making *Crisis*, 1939; Ladislav Kolda and Alexandr Hackenschmied, New York, 1966; a set by František Tröster for *Rhythm* (1941), director Jiří Lehovec and cameraman Josef Míček, 1941.



Hermína Týrlová and Pavel Hrdlička making *Ferda the Ant*, 1941; making *Christmas Dream* (left to right: Josef Míček, Hermína Týrlová, Pavel Hrdlička, František Paták; above, Karel Zeman; below, Bořivoj Zeman), 1943; the Grand Cinema after bombardment, November 1944.



Film labs: after 1945, edifice remodelled by Karfík (labs by Jan Plesník and Rajmund Sysala), his last Zlín project, 1950; the labs became the sole maker of 16 mm prints in Czechoslovakia, 1960; composer Zdeněk Liška and director Hermína Týrlová, 1950.



Zeman's *Journey to the Beginning of Time* (1954), with mixed special effects, an international success; here, he's teaching an astronaut to walk in a diver's suit for *Baron Munchausen* (1962); Týrlová's own work began with her acclaimed *Revolt of the Toys* (1946).



Jiří Lehevec making an ad, 1943; making *The Model Salesman*: editor Zdeněk Stehlík (with clapperboard), the actors František Konečný and Jarmila Švábíková, 1942; director Jaroslav Novotný (left), co-founder of the studios, with cameraman Josef Míček, 1938.



First two photos: Baťa factory after bombardment on 20 November 1944; Soviet documentary-maker Ilya Kopalín (in uniform) looking for stock footage, with composer Jiří Šust, directors Elmar Klos and Vladimír Vlček, and Professor Jaroslav Bouček, May 1945.



After the war, Zeman was very successful – here making his autobiographical *For Children, from Karel Zeman* (1980); his highly popular character Pan Prokouk (Mr Seethroughit); *Inspiration* (1949), with animated glass figures, his first colour film and world-wide success.



Týrlová's big success: *A Knot in the Handkerchief* (1958); hardworking well into old age – here at 85, while making Hana Pinkavová's film about her, *Come Here, So I Turn Young Again* (1985); filmmaker Jaroslav Novotný between his pupils, the legendary travellers Hanzelka and Zikmund.