

## NO CHOICE BUT TO PRACTICE UTOPIA

### The Story of SIAL as told through two archival objects: an Image and a Letter\*

*“We will begin to discover, indeed we are already doing so, that people formed in a nonmarket non-consumer-consumptive society do not think like we do. Indeed, if we resist the temptation (now everywhere resurgent) to attribute such differences to the old stereotypes of nationalism and ethnic peculiarity – here the differences in some properly Slavic weltanschauung – we may well even discover the rudiments and the nascent forms of a new form of socialist culture that is utterly unlike “socialist realism” and intimates some far future of human history the rest of us are not in a position to anticipate.”*

Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, p 74.

It is often hard to see what is unique about our own way of doing things, or our own set of values. This is especially true of events that have occurred during an era that at least half the world wants to forget, and the other half did not know ever happened. While immersed in the logic of doing, exhilarated by their hopes about things that their own architectural products might mean or effect, SIAL architects (together with other Czech architects and historians of the Cold War period) tended to understand those products via references to objects and practices that seemed analogous or formally similar. The importance of SIAL's work, together with the logic of signification of that work, refracts when viewed across contexts, ultimately requiring a specific viewpoint at the intersection of entire cultural and historical frames of reference to focus it for another round of considerations. This essay indeed takes up the issue of SIAL's importance not only within its own context, but also for the larger context of discourse on the postwar, or Cold War architectural production in Europe. Even more importantly perhaps, it is this essay's ambition to glimpse through SIAL the hopes, or at least the ghost of hopes, we harbor for architecture as a discipline today on both sides of the scar that once was "the Wall."

## THE SECOND WORLD

SIAL (Sdružení inženýrů a architektů Liberec – The Liberec collective of engineers and architects) together with its incubator offshoot Školka (Kindergarten) is one of the few architecture groups from socialist Czechoslovakia to become internationally known over the course of its lifetime as a group. Already by the late 1960s, while still part of the Liberec Stavoprojekt, the group emerged in the Czech architectural publications with a coherent profile, having both a compelling body of work and a group dynamic that was recognized as "special" in the field. In nearly any other context this set of statements would seem entirely mundane, but SIAL's "specialty" is set against and in part provided by the background of Czechoslovakia's completely nationalized profession of architecture. Only several months after the communist regime came to power in Czechoslovakia in 1948, Czechoslovakia nationalized its economy, including all architecture and engineering offices. From that point on, all practicing architects became employed by the Czechoslovak Building Works and its design arm Stavoprojekt.<sup>1</sup> The regional network of Stavoprojekt ateliers (including regional architecture and engineering offices and research centers in Prague) grew almost tenfold within the first five years of its existence.<sup>2</sup> Although the name of the local offices of Stavoprojekt changed to "design institutes" in 1954 and the body in charge of them also changed a number of times over the years, the imperative for central planning and the mandate for an industrially-minded and economically socialist organization, in principle, remained the same throughout the period from 1948 to the 1970s.

By considering two very specific archival objects: an image and a letter – each with an important programmatic dimension – this essay will concentrate on the issues that surrounded SIAL’s formation and production in the period from its prehistory in Stavoprojekt Liberec, to the moment of its return back to Stavoprojekt. Although this era accounts only for a portion of the work that has been later attributed to SIAL and Školka, it is an era of particular interest not only because it has been understudied, but also because it is the era that for a variety of political and historical reasons harbored a special species of optimism. Captured between the early hard-core Stalinist tactics that effected the nationalization of the architectural profession on one end, and the era of Normalization that followed after the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia on the other end, I propose that we ought to see this middle period (between 1956 and 1972) as the period defined by a genuine effort to *practice utopia*. Practicing utopia has a two-fold meaning here. On the one hand, it refers to the rhetorical and ideological structure of the postwar Eastern Europe in general, or as I will henceforth call it: the Second World.<sup>3</sup> The basic conditions of possibility of any type of aesthetic practice under socialism, in the Second World, were circumscribed by the rhetorical arrival to the previously “utopian“ destination: socialism. This arrival – more or less precisely logged as occurring in 1948 in Czechoslovakia – made utopia the *medium* within which everything else was to take place, changing the emphasis away from utopia as a destination, to the process of making that utopia of socialism optimized for life and sustainable for the future. Within this Second World context, a particularly architectural version of practicing utopia was no longer synonymous with the production of fantastical images of a perfect world sometime and somewhere else – but has to be seen as the very attempt to work out an effective role for architecture and architects within the confines of the basic requirements of the socialist system. The emergence of SIAL, the interests cultivated by its key members, and the instigation of SIAL’s Školka were all circumscribed by the conditions of practicing architecture in the sense of practicing utopia described above. By the time an interesting group of architects began to gather around Karel Hubáček in Stavoprojekt Liberec, certain ideological goals that had been defined in the fifties by the key architectural ideologues had become common place (and common sense) in the Czech architectural context. Issues such as technological innovation, teamwork, and even a type of humanized mass subject were some of the key concerns across that context and (partly because of that) they directly became the topic of investigation and self-description of the architectural project of the group.

## THE GROUP: FROM STAVOPROJEKT TO SIAL

The architectural office of Stavoprojekt opened in Liberec in 1949. It was – like most regional outposts – relatively small and occupied mostly by local projects. Karel Hubáček, who would later become one of the office leaders as well as the epicenter of the SIAL group of architects, arrived to the office in 1951 and quickly became the lead architect on several projects. The year of Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, Hubáček became the head of Atelier 2 of the Liberec Stavoprojekt. Soon after his own appointment, Hubáček’s friend architect Václav Bouček became the lead of the entire office of the Liberec Stavoprojekt. With this alliance and Hubáček’s reported élan, Atelier 2 was on its way to producing interesting work and, more importantly at this time, a culture that fostered critical thinking, accountability for design, and teamwork. In 1958, the Atelier was joined by Pavel Švancer, Otakar Binar, and a year later by Miroslav Masák. In his recent autobiography of the period, Miroslav Masák described the studio as a typical provincial architecture office of the early fifties, but one that – through strong leadership and thanks to a group of talented graduates, eventually set a high standard for the quality and the importance of their architecture: “*We approached every commission as an opportunity for discoveries.*”<sup>4</sup> This attitude towards architectural work in principle sponsored testing and experimentation in specifically architectural terms and within the confines of the period definition of architecture’s role in the larger picture of the Czechoslovak socialist society.

During the 1960s, Stavoprojekt Atelier 2 produced a series of important designs for the Liberec Fair. Most significantly, its team (including Otakar Binar, Karel Hubáček, Miroslav Masák, and Pavel Švancer) won the competition for the plan of the new fair ground. Competitions – internal and external – were the most important mechanism for landing commissions in this era, and often more than one team would participate in them, not only from Stavoprojekt Liberec but also from within the Atelier 2. These were important both for the energy of the atelier and for the organization of the larger field. Competitions had a broadcasting aspect, which helped to highlight designer teams and their ideas in the field of architectural discourse.<sup>5</sup> They were a mechanism that participated directly in differentiating architectural production in the nationalized offices. Several competitions that took place in 1963 significantly impacted the development of the atelier.

In 1963, Miroslav Masák entered and won a competition for a dwelling *ensemble* in Teplice-Šanov. Another important competition took place in 1963 within the framework of KPÚ Liberec: the Ještěd television tower and hotel, on the top of the Ještěd mountain that overlooks the city of Liberec. Karel Hubáček's project won. This would become the commission that absolutely catapulted the group out into the international spotlight, securing the Auguste Perret Award for Hubáček, presented to him in 1969 by the International Union of Architects.

In order to complete the Ještěd project, Hubáček collected several of the architects he needed for the production and split from his atelier (in Stavoprojekt) in 1965, starting a group called S12. The S12 group had a separate office and enjoyed special help from the mayor of Liberec, Jiří Moulis. During the period it survived as an independent group its members produced several other important projects as well, of which the housing unit in Wolkerova Street in Liberec represented a real departure from related period typologies in Czechoslovakia. S12 also worked on a building for Strojintex in the downtown of Liberec and a television transmitter on the Buková Hora. Drawings for the Strojintex building, the extremely graphically effective collages produced for this project (later becoming part of the graphic palette of SIAL and Školka), were reproduced in a number of journals at the time.<sup>6</sup>

While Hubáček and his team (in the S12 atelier) were busy with Ještěd, Hubáček's former Stavoprojekt atelier was involved in a separate series of important projects. Along with the Teplice-Šanov housing ensemble, which included schools, a spa and other facilities, the atelier worked on the Liberec fair preparations, urban plan, and pavilions. It also led the preparation of a 1966 international symposium on free time and architecture.

The second half of the sixties is often described, both in art historical accounts and colloquially, as the era when the cultural production of Czechoslovakia began to diverge from the official party line, in all spheres of its production. This included the organization of small artistic groups, micro theaters, the emergence of Czech New Wave cinema, and new ideas in economics and Marxism. According to Miroslav Masák, Václav Havel referred to this period as "*neither an idyllic time nor the continuation of terror; it was the era of discrete, polite, sometimes also declamatory testing, stretching of the limits of what was possible.*"<sup>7</sup> It is in this context of the late sixties "testing" that SIAL was formed.

Karel Hubáček joined forces with Miroslav Masák and Otakar Binar and formed SIAL in 1968. Although it was not a nationalized company, its autonomy was secured through its status as an independent cooperation; it was still legally the architectural company of the town of Liberec. That is, SIAL was started under the auspices of the municipal committee of Liberec in July of 1968, and was defined as an economically independent unit, accountable to the Municipal Office of the town of Liberec. SIAL was led by Karel Hubáček (as the chief director of the office) and Miroslav Masák (as the second in charge). The studio's top four architects who had been collaborating on a variety of projects over the years in Stavoprojekt, also included Otakar Binar, and Jiří Špikla

#### STROJINTEX COLLAGE: THE IMAGE OF THE SECOND WORLD UTOPIA

While the Ještěd tower and the great coordination of architects, engineers, designers, and fabrication that made it possible have to be seen as the single most heroic of SIAL's achievements, I want to consider a particular drawing made for a much smaller Liberec project: the rendering for the Strojintex building, which helps distil something very important about the attitude of the SIAL work toward its context and its users. Although the project is presented in a series of technical drawings as well, the Strojintex collage was special. It produced, more convincingly than other collages made by Hubáček and his team (which were often stunningly realistic), an image of life around this distinctly modern proposal – modern here meaning contemporary, or at the edge of acceptable by the contemporary standards. Although sharply contrasting the surrounding architecture of the downtown Liberec, Strojintex also seemed to “fit perfectly.” It seemed to ask the question that Hubáček had asked his Liberec audience (trying to convince them earlier about the merits of the Ještěd tower): *Which building would you chose? They all fit in terms of their proportions, but Strojintex is as fresh and new as the hat you desire (as opposed to last season's hat).*

The structure of this building was innovative – it relied completely on the two load bearing walls and two large concrete cores, both hollow and programmed – but, in this case, the visual outcome was more important than its technological novelty. The collage was most often presented in such a way as to double the symmetry of the façade on the scale of its entire composition, but the cropping of the collage varied between multiple presentations of the image, adding an extra air of life to an already moody atmosphere. Ten large windows were

organized symmetrically across the concrete core (as the axis of symmetry). Each window in the image showed a slightly different set of circumstances, curtains pulled, or not, closer to the surface of the window, or further in the background.

The production of the Strojintex image entailed a precise montage of the background photograph, the building's rendering, and people – its final outcome thus was a synthetic image. Most importantly it was a seamless image presenting a synthetic, total environment for visual consumption. This was the image of novelty accepted. Viewed as a programmatic image, the world it proposed involved a juxtaposition of old and new that allowed both enough distinction to be unique; it embraced innovation over a radical remaking, and it similarly catered to a mixture of older and younger city dwellers waiting for a tram, hurriedly taking their groceries home or pushing their precious stroller. We could see the Strojintex collage as related – through the nature of its image construction itself and its resulting programmatic nature – to Teige's architectural collages and to Archigram's contemporaneous drawings.<sup>8</sup> This type of comparison – based on a shared imagistic impulse that we find in the work of the above listed characters between SIAL (S12, in this case) and its heritage on one side and its contemporary western model on the other – vividly highlights the differences. While Teige attached his ludic (and heroic) interventions onto built modern architecture, unfolding a story of a psychic life from it, and Archigram produced worlds populated with electronic tomatoes, cushicles, hot chicks and superheroes, Hubáček's image (to attribute it even more precisely) produced an entirely plausible world. His novel architecture did not insist on releasing hallucinations in its users, nor did it strive to completely transform their daily lives. Hubáček's group of architects accepted the socialist subject in principle and in reality. By this time, the Marxist humanist subject – presumably equal with others in socioeconomic terms, but uniquely individual in every other sense – had emerged in a number of reformist texts. In reality, this subject was still open to small pleasures of everyday life, in spite of the burdens of that same everyday life (including the absurd circumstances that were part of daily life in socialist Czechoslovakia – as a direct result of its “road to socialism”). The Strojintex collage suggests that Hubáček's group of architects was interested in evolving that subject's environment through innovation in architecture – one building at a time.

#### A MANIFESTO: ŠKOLKA'S INAUGURAL LETTER

After the Soviet military intervention in August 1968, the “third way,” as the promise of the reforms has often been referred to, was not only interrupted, but

its very credibility as a project was undermined. Utopia of the socialist democracy, in the sense that the Czechoslovak reformers throughout the 1960s had argued for it, turned nearly overnight – through a series of firings, restructuring, and ground shifts – into its own ghost, as unreal and impossible as the “walking cities” and the other fantastical projects that were presented in architectural journals in the years before 1968. *Democratization* morphed into its de facto opposite project *normalization*. The sinister tautology of these terms (democratization and normalization) next to one another intimates the extent to which both were argued for as *optimum* paths to socialism’s optimized society. Unlike the normalizers (Gustav Husák’s party leadership) after them, the 1960s Czechoslovak reformers had imagined and described what would constitute an optimized world in their case. The “third way” was distinctly neither the hard-core top-down socialism, nor was it capitalism. It was both top down and bottom up: the best of both worlds imagined as a representative democracy and as a government that had the capacity (and the earnest support) to care for everyone’s best interest. Normalization’s project was a retrograde one – as the term perfectly captures once it is placed after *democratization* and as its corrective; it was intended to return Czechoslovak society to an older version of *normal*: socialism unruffled by democratic ideas.

SIAL’s Školka was established in 1969, soon after the process of *normalization* had begun, but before its full impact had reached architecture, as it would by 1972. A document drafted (by Školka’s future leader Miroslav Masák) at the time of its inception is an exceptional encapsulation of the future concerns of both SIAL and Školka, as well as of the unique Second World *determinants* (to use a term from Karel Honzík’s architectural imagination) that had shaped the architectural discipline up to that point.

The opening three sentences of the text that articulated the impetus behind the making of Školka described a type of dissatisfaction with the profession that would be unimaginable in any other context outside of the Second World. I say this not because dissatisfaction is not a common trope in architectural mission statements, but to call attention to its particularity here.

*“We are not happy with the contemporary state of our society, we are not satisfied, like many others, with the conditions and products of our work, we would like to have a greater impact on lifestyle in general. The structure of architectural offices and their established regulations do not support that kind of work. Professions that produce the culture of the material environment are separated from one another; in the swirl of instant solutions architects lose*



*their ability for creative work. They are not responsible for what and why they are producing, but only for how they do it.*"<sup>9</sup>

As yet untouched by normalization and still on the reformist track, but clearly affected by the August 1968 invasion, the hopeful tone of the Školka mission statement registers linguistically as well as materially (through its very existence) the time lag in the adjustment of the architectural field to the new set of political directives. The *pas de deux* of ideology with a capital "I" produced by party and state officials and ideology as the constellation of narratives that the Czech architectural profession relied on to propel its daily activities was a peculiar Second World dance, unlike anything that the postwar First World architects experienced.

Characteristically uninterested in the vagaries of the consumer society that in large part circumscribed the architectural profession on the other side of the iron curtain, this new type of practice proposed by Školka (and represented in part by its mother studio, SIAL) differentiates itself from the world of large state companies, wishing to bring the definition of the role of architecture closer to them. The desire to do so is signaled in the "what" and the "why" that Školka was interested in, but also importantly in the desire to have a greater impact on lifestyle in general. While "what" and "why" are charged with the mission to take back to the architectural studio the definition of and the ability to imagine their own role as architects, the reference to lifestyle is in direct alignment with the most consistent articulation of the socialist architect's task produced in the Czech architectural context from the late 1940s onward (through a chorus of voices more and less official).

Although of the moment, in the sense that it was still riding the wave of the sixties reform spirit, this statement is absolutely circumscribed by the conditions of practicing architecture in a generally nationalized field. It protests against architecture occupied with "rear-guard tasks," to use Manfredo Tafuri's term, but with a sense of entitlement about architecture's crucial role *vis-a-vis* the production of lifestyle that was precisely granted by the conditions of practicing architecture in Czechoslovakia, insofar as ideology itself has to be seen as one of those conditions.

Even though dissatisfied with society, most likely in direct response to the 1968 Soviet invasion, Miroslav Masák proposed (in the name of Školka) that a solution to addressing society's problems might be located in the structure and regulations of the architectural profession. "Society" was not seen as the

source of architecture's problems, but architecture was still imagined as a possible means to intervene positively in that society, if only there were more room for creative (bottom up) thinking in the field. On the one hand, the form of the complaint was defined by being uttered from within the system that was the single uniform model of architectural practice available in the Czech context, in which all conditions of architectural work were systemically supplied. On the other hand, the same three lines of text suggested that the change in the conditions of practice may have immediate repercussions for society. This sense of entitlement was only to a certain extent a return of the ghost of the avant-garde *engagé* attitude in form, as it had been mediated by twenty years of rhetoric on the architects' participation in the production of the socialist lifestyle.

The Školka mission further states: "*Our entire recent past is a testament to the fact that we are preparing our future at every moment. We certainly cannot do everything, but we are not completely helpless, we have the authority of our profession, the power of ideas, and the hunger for human identity.*"<sup>10</sup> A particular alliance with time forged by socialism and expressed in the architectural profession's interest in evolution (over radical novelty) is here fused together with the reformist élan, to the point of being nearly indistinguishable from it. Similarly, while the "hunger for human identity" was specific to the moment of the writing of this Školka document – at the beginning of the end of socialism with a human face – the idea that the profession of architecture had authority (to reform the social) has to be seen as the result of the very persistence of the notion that architecture was crucially involved in shaping the socialist world.

Školka was imagined as a pedagogical project that would inevitably benefit the SIAL studio, not financially but culturally. It was intended to bring together nonconformist graduates of architecture schools, and impact the profession in general. Školka's invention was unique in the Czech context; its pedagogical methods were anticipated to evolve and adjust to the general needs of the profession, but it was essential for it to "*offer a certain freedom for ideas and work, a space and time for the total understanding of problems, and most importantly to allow play.*" Play was described in the mission statement as "the condition of creation." In effect, the studio's involvement in the local public life, in the invention of problems outside of the realm of architectural commissions, and in a vital and playful exchange of ideas were all reasons why it managed to extend well into the process of normalization, and even in spite of it. However, I want to concentrate here on Školka's interdisciplinary definition; its "participation in permanent social reform" and its demand for

architects to have an “impact on lifestyle,” because these aspirations rise like ideological tentacles from the context itself to meet Školka’s earnest programmatic goals halfway.

The sincerity of Školka’s request for a possibility to engage with and shape lifestyle, measured against the most consistent task of architecture and all aesthetic practices in the socialist world – “to give shape to and enable the specifically socialist lifestyle“ (repeated ad infinitum in meetings and journals) – suggests unmistakably the logic of the Ideology with a capital “I”, translating, with enough distance, into a utopian text. Or to say this differently, the texts that are ideological in the Second World (and I mean texts as a broad category of content inscribed with meaning) often signal utopia for those who read them from outside of this context, frequently producing an impression of simplicity nearly “indistinguishable from naive sentimentalism.”<sup>11</sup> The earnest formulations of architecture’s *essential* role in the non-consumer-non-commodity atmosphere of the Second World may indeed seem naively romantic viewed from a world that has lost its own naiveté (and with it its capacity to imagine alternative worlds) to the cynicism of obese consumption. More importantly however, the mission statement we are examining suggests that the transformation from utopia to ideology and back again, occurred in the late sixties within the context of Czech architecture itself. The humanist subject available in the earlier formulations of socialist architecture as an abstraction or a placeholder, emerged as a “concrete” and participatory subject of the late sixties reform. If it had not been for the Soviet invasion, perhaps this (concrete socialist) subject’s own socialist *lifestyle* would have been *that* (now unimaginable) alternative promised by the “third way.” However, the de facto loss of the project of socialism with a *human face*, promptly pushed the humanist subject into the ideological background of the Czech architectural discipline, where this humanist element continued to live in ideological hibernation well into the 1980s as a “simply obvious” measure of all things “truly socialist.”

Školka’s interdisciplinary group, its desire “to prepare the future,” and its demand for a role in the production of lifestyle all correspond to key tropes in Czech architectural discourse: expert teamwork, planned progress, and lifestyle, respectively. Together these three tropes register Czech discourse’s most persistent ideology: the possibility and necessity of finding a way to produce a world optimized for all. The objective of the optimum world was completely prefigured by the Second World’s chief myth: class struggle coming to an end in socialism. We can trace Czech architecture’s particular alliance

with time as that evolutionary, constantly optimizing version of planned progress to this ur-myth. The only way to figure utopian aspirations at the moment of the loss of utopia's image – from within it both spatially and temporally – was still through a spatial concept, a total environment, whose future was for the most part glimpsed through the logic of Five-Year-Plan increments. With the inclusion of the elements of life and culture, the total environment transformed *naturally* into (or sometimes simply represented): (socialist) lifestyle. The totality of *lifestyle* has to be seen as allegorically corresponding to a harmonious class-less society, while its specifically socialist content imagined that class-less society's beneficial aspects: a satisfied, cultured mass of subjects with only a “reasonable” need to consume. The impossibility thus of imagining utopia as a radical alternative outside of the socialist reality transferred it (utopia) onto an image of lifestyle. The fact that lifestyle seemed topical on both sides of the wall in this period, only further legitimized the issues in the eyes of the young architects who were part of SIAL's radical pedagogical experiment on Jedlová street. Thus, in the context of postwar Czechoslovakia, *utopia optimized* equaled *lifestyle*, and *optimized lifestyle* equaled *utopia*.

SIAL's re-attachment to the Liberec Stavoprojekt was traumatic on many accounts – most of them political – and was in alignment with the end of the practice of utopia (as I have referred to it) that August 1968 unmistakably signaled. The real problems for SIAL and, by extension, for Školka were financial, in direct response to the collapse of their safety net in the Liberec city government, and political, with the restructuring of the Union of Architects that left both Hubáček and Masák outside of the new “normalized” architectural leadership. However, during the period we examined and even into the era of normalization, the particular collective organizations of both Školka and SIAL – and of all its forms before and after SIAL's official unmaking – could be seen in partial alignment with older versions of avant-garde organization as well as in alignment with a number of first-world experimental practices of the sixties. Describing SIAL's mode of operating Miroslav Masák listed several aspects as vital: “1) a trust in everyone as an individual, 2) personal and collective responsibility, 3) a respect for individual opinions, 4) work was treated as an experiment, as a game, as a proof of individual gift and ability, 5) an influence and spirit of our common every-day (and night) life at Jedlová.”<sup>12</sup>

The historical conditions that participated in producing the possibility of SIAL (and the group that prefigured it and inherited it) existence and operation as a group recognized in the Czech architectural discourse both for its interior dynamic and for the quality of their work, included a process of differentiation

of the field, a broad articulation of reform, a vibrant city, and an extremely supportive Mayor, as well as a series of systemic elements that were only available in the context of a socialist country like Czechoslovakia. The emergence of this coherent group from within the nationalized field, its thriving within that field and even upon the re-absorption of SIAL by Stavoprojekt point to the need to qualify SIAL's working as a type of an avant-garde operation that was not executed according to the classical blueprint of the historic avant-garde. To the extent that we can base a definition of the Second World version of a neo-avant-garde on SIAL's operation, it entailed a forward looking group noticed for the quality of its projects, with a particular interest in collaboration, and working not in direct opposition to, but within the system (semi-autonomously) and thus benefiting from some of the safety nets provided by the system. Even though architecture was not perceived here as having the mandate to completely overturn the social conditions, it was perceived as involved in bettering them and in ensuring its own advancement in relation to the social conditions and technological possibilities of the moment.

The name of the company is a hybrid of two Czech words, the verb construction: *stavít*, and *projekt* which can stand both for a project or design, and is the first part of the verb signifying design especially in architectural sense, *projektovat*. When describing the name of Stavoprojekt, one of its founders Otakar Nový presented it as an especially ingenious Czech invention, but in fact, national architecture firms across the Eastern block, from Yugoslavia to Poland, including even the Soviet Union before them, were produced in a similar manner by hybridizing terms that designate design, construction, with a special expertise in the realm of construction or the name of the city they are based in, etc. Kimberly Elman-Zarecor's Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia University, focuses on the establishment, program and structure of the Stavoprojekt organization, and especially on the period between 1948 and 1956. Kimberly Elman-Zarecor, "Modernist Dreams: Architecture, Politics and the Housing Question in Czechoslovakia, 1945-60", Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2008.

The first institution in charge of Stavoprojekt was the Czechoslovak Building Works, which changed to the Ministry of Communal Enterprise, to the Central Administration for Residential and Civic Building, to the Ministry of Construction that would in the end be renamed into The Ministry of Building. The basic history of the Stavoprojekt organization as well as a timeline of

various architectural institutions are described in Josef Pechar, *Československá architektura 1945-1977* (Prague: Odeon, 1979).

3 In *The Seeds of Time*, Fredric Jameson opens his chapter “Utopia, Modernism, and Death” with a shorthand analysis of the significance of the geo-political map constituted out of the colloquial designations of the third world, the admittance of the logical existence of the first world, and the strangely ignored (and repudiated) position of the second world. It is my assumption from the outset that a culture of the Second World, despite often being ignored even by its own inheritors, exists beyond the mere structural position reserved for it in a world conceived in terms of the First and the Third.

4 See, Miroslav Masák, *Tak nějak to bylo* (Prague: Kant Publishers, 2006), p. 24.

5 Marie Benešová, one the former editors of *Architektura ČSR* discussed the vital importance of competitions in the 1960s. See, Marie Benešová, Interview, conducted by Oldřich Ševčík and Petr Vorlík, Noveber 2002, *Šedesátá léta v architektuře očima pamětníků* (Prague: nakladatelství ČVUT, 2006).

6 See, “2 x z Liberce” *Československý Architekt*, XII (1966), n. 25-26, and “Liberecké projekty pod lupou,” *Československý Architekt*, XIII (1967), n. 17, as well as in Vítězslav Procházka in his text “Úsilí Libereckých Architektů o Zlidštění Architektury,” *Architektura ČSSR*, XXVII (1968), n. 8, p. 496.

7 Václav Havel, quoted in Miroslav Masák, *Tak nějak to bylo* (Prague: Kant Publishers, 2006), p. 25.

8 This abrupt invocation of Archigram may seem strange, but SIAL and especially Školka members later were very much intrigued by Archigram on one end, and two I am really drawing here on Reyner Banham’s theorization of their image making as fundamentally part of their programmatic activity, image making (he admired in Alison and Peter Smithson). Although according to Masák, Školka was also aware of the Smithsons’ work, the images produced by them present less synthetic worlds that Archigram’s. I am relying here on Tony Vidler’s recent rereading of Banahm. Partly against the grain of Banham’s own texts, but plausibly relying on them, Vidler connected Banham’s congratulation on Archigram’s image making to his earlier theory of Alison and Peter Smithson’s version imaging. This re-linking, or cross-linking of Banham’s texts produced a reading of Archigram’s images as “program” drawings *par excellence*. See, Anthony Vidler, “Toward a Theory of the Architectural Program,” *October* 106, Fall 2003, pp. 50-74.

9 Miroslav Masák, “Námět činnosti ‘školky’ architektů při SIAL,” (September 10, 1969), p. 1, in Miroslav Masák’s personal archive, given to me by Rostislav Švácha.

10 Miroslav Masák, “Námět činnosti ‘školky’ architektů při SIAL,” p. 1.

11 Fredric Jameson described soviet Science Fiction in these terms in Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future. The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York and London: Verso, 2005), pp. 290-294.

12 Miroslav Masák carefully prepared a series of answers on the topics of the special aspects of SIAL’s mode of work and gave them to me in the spring of 2004.

\* An earlier and slightly different version of this article was published in Czech under the title “Na cestě k utopii” in *Architekti SIAL* (Prague: Kant Publishers, 2008).