VITKOVICE IRONWORKS

PHOTOGRAPHIC REPORT

A JOURNEY INTO THE STEEL HEART OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC / ANTHONY VIOLA / LUCAS SHOONER

Professor Jeffrey Huang
Professor Stefana Parascho
Academic Tutor Georg-Christoph Holz

© Anthony Viola and Lucas Shooner. Vítkovice Ironworks:
A Journey into the Steel Heart of the Czech Republic, 2023.

This is an open-access document distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License. Content from external sources is not subject to the CC BY License and their use requires the permission of their authors. To view a copy of this license, visit:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

EPFL ARCHITECTURE

VITKOVICE IRONWORKS

27 NOVEMBER 2023.
18:30
OSTRAVA, CZECH REPUBLIC

We arrive in Ostrava after a long day's drive across the vast expanses of Czech snow-covered plains, shrouded in thick mist. Here, night has fallen, the streets are empty and the chimneys that rise up all over the city are hard to make out. The next day, at Dolní Vítkovice, we discover an industrial cathedral. A symbol of a bygone era, like a reminder of a country's productive strength.

This morning, a thin layer of snow has fallen on Vítkovice, making it difficult to get around. The air is cold and damp. A light breeze pierces our clothes and cools our bodies, and a thick fog still hides parts of the factory.

The streets are empty, we are frozen and tired, and yet we are fascinated, mesmerized by the giant silhouettes that surround us. Like a reflex, we take out our cameras and gradually discover the extent of what we have in front of us.

The days passed and with them the weather only got better. The clouds give way to the sun, revealing all the details of the structures, thanks to the contrast between the bricks, the rust, the snow and the sun. And, each time, we return from this place even more enchanted than the last. As time goes by, the site comes alive. We realise that the various projects that have come to life here are having a real impact, whether by night or day, this place seems to have a unifying role and is perhaps almost becoming the new nerve centre of the city of Ostrava.

As the fog begins to dissipate, the large structures become more and more apparent, and we gradually become aware of the monumental scale of the furnaces and their extensions.

The Bolt Tower is a project overlooking the whole site of Dolní Vítkovice, crowning the top of the blast furnace No.1

The constructivist extention, offers a view point to the visitors, where they can have a drink while getting a true feel of the size of the site.

Blast furnace No.4 and No.6 were repectivly renovated and built between 1962 and 1971 and operated until 1998 when the site permenantly closed.

16

Large lifting platforms were used to carry the charge (coke and iron ore) to the top of the blast furnaces. Today, the platform on blast furnace No.1 serves as a lift for visitors.

The Koppers type oven, was dedicated to transform the excavated coal into coke.

The production beeing stopped. some elements have been detached from their original chain of production and seem as some parts were missing to fully understand their purpose.

FORUM
NOVÁ KAROLINA
FASHION GASTRO ZÁBAVA

The tall furnaces turns one's look towards the sky and give a hint about the power needed to run such infrastructures.

Blast furnace gas cleaner.

Blast furnace gas cleaner seen from above.

The small town of Vítkovice, which at the time was home only to its mines and steelworks, grew at such a rate, with its large number of employees and growing infrastructure, that it eventually merged with Ostrava, which is now the third largest city in the Czech Republic.

Railways run through the city to connect Ostrava's various industrial sites.

HOTEL VP1

Today, the colonies are still inhabited and a new public transport network is emphasising the new era. It connects the old Vítkovice city center to Ostrava.

12
1325
MÍROVÉ NÁMĚSTÍ

The pipes bear witness to the industrial nature of the city, forming a technical network that blends into the residential areas of Ostrava.

The urban fabric is pierced as,
technical ducts span on an city scale.

The homes are now visually segmented by the colour of the bricks. Some of them have been carefully maintained whereas others still bear the marks of time.

The colonies were built to provide workers with housing, shops, leisure centres, hospitals and schools so that they could build a real family life. This is what led Vítkovice to expand in such a way.

RESTAURANT
VINÁRNA
P

RESTA
VIN

The church in the colonies also served as a water tank in the bell tower. historically, the two buildings were owned by the clergy and the company respectively. This division remains today, only it is the state that owns the tower, showing the impact the company had at every levels.

Similarly, managers of the company were also holding political positions in the city council, until Vítkovice merged with Ostrava in 1924.

RADNICE
ÚŘEDNÍ DESKA

The Dolní Vítkovice site has undergone profound changes over time. Today, after nearly 200 years in operation, it is a patchwork of gigantic machines, buildings with very different architectural styles, oversized pipes and renovations that stand in stark contrast to the surrounding brick and rust. Yet somehow the whole looks harmonious.

Today, certain parts of the factory, and in particular certain pipes, have been cut away to make it safe and usable for visitors.

INFOCENTRUM
DOLNÍCH VÍTKOVIC

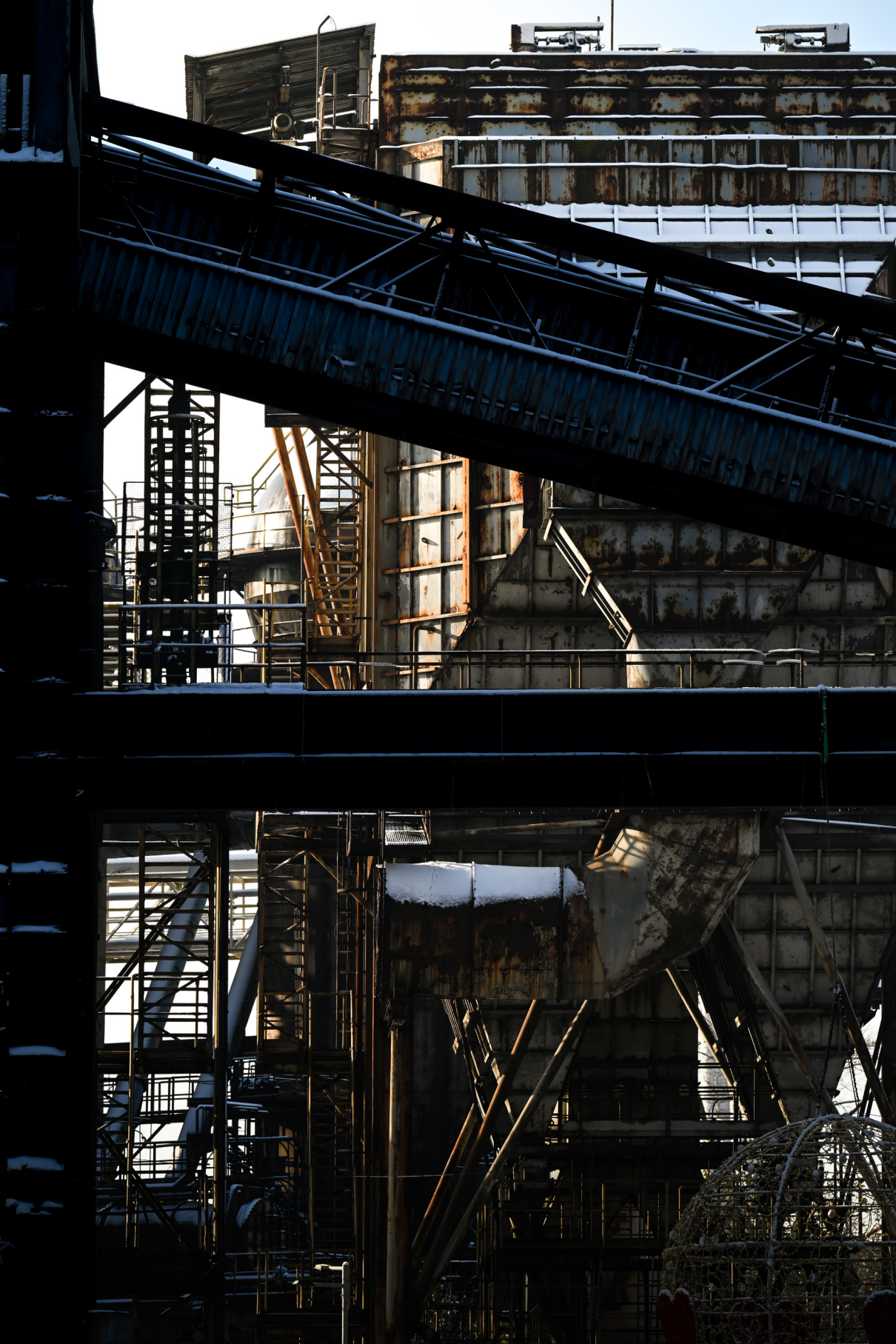
HOTEL VP1
< 100 m
HOTEL VP1

The hanging network of rusty pipes, connecting all the different parts of the factory, tells us about the succesive steps of steel production.

The glass roof houses «the pump house», the energy centre designed by architect Josef Pleskot during the renovation of the site.

Blast furnace No.6 was the last to be built on site in 1962.

Although highly functional, the site remains enigmatic due to its technical complexity, which in places visibly confuses us.

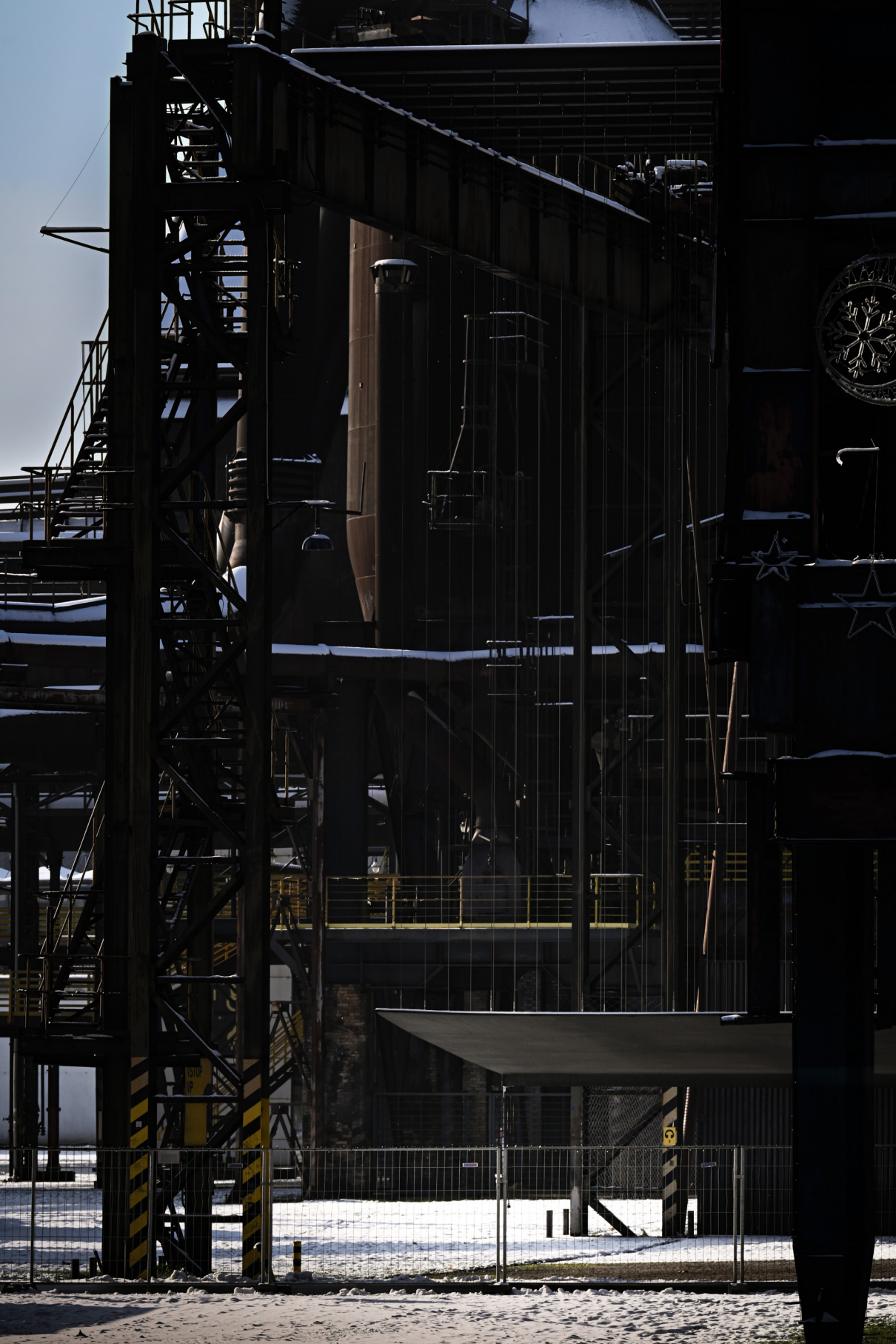


In other places, the high density of surrounding technical installations creates a visual framework that highlights certain objects.

rivitas
rexroth

Cowper stoves are blast preheaters.

During the renovations, the industrial language was reused for poetic and scenic purposes, as here under this monumental steel plate where visitors wait to discover the lifting platform that will take them to the top of the Bolt tower.



kofola

The U6 power station is the archetypal example of industrial architecture of the late 19th century, reminiscent of the buildings in the colonies, which combine brick and steel structures. Although this one is much younger, dating back to the 1930s. This architecture is nowadays literally reflected in the newly built science and technology centre and its mirror facade.

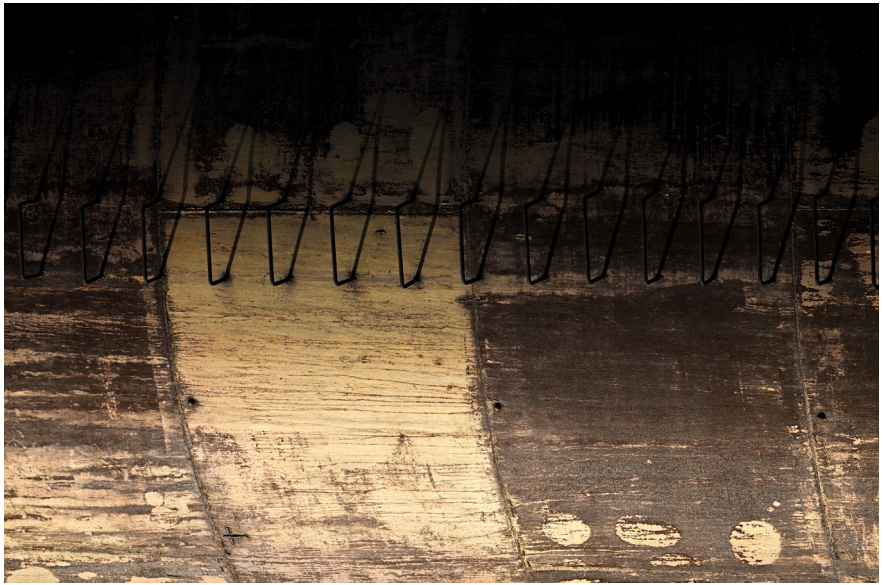
Today, this 61-metre-long hall is home to a museum that proudly displays the two monumental air compressors it houses.

ROUTE
66

Coal loading station for the sorting process.

It's no coincidence that Ostrava is the birthplace of such an industrial spread. At the time the factory was founded, coal was harvested just about everywhere at the foot of the hills surrounding the town. But it was for the sake of proximity and to save time that the Hlubina colliery was built.

The constant evolution of the site offers a mixture of architectural periods and styles, as seen here against a backdrop of functional architecture from the colliery, an «industrial secession» style of workers' bathhouses and ventilation ducts from the recent revitalisation of the latter.



The Hlubina mine, literally *the deep one*, descended into the mine at a depth of 1300m.

The tower is built of steel using rivets, which were one of the factory's most important products at the time.

14

The coal sorting plant buildings are linked by connecting bridges.

The gas holder was built in 1924.
Today it has been renovated into a
multifunction auditorium, nicknamed
the Gong.

The gas holder was used both to store the purified gas from the blast furnaces and to maintain pressure in the pipeline system.

HOTEL VP1
< 100 m

The amount of gas remaining in the tank could be visually assessed. The tank consisted of two parts, one filled with water and the other with gas. The lower the gas level, the lower the height of the silo.

INFOCENTRUM
DOLNÍCH VÍTKOVIC

After the ironworks were shut down, the bell fell on the ground and stayed there until the renovation of Josef Pleskot. When he wanted to reuse the space to create an auditorium, he decided to reuse the bell as a roof.

The auditorium, is pierced in three strategic places. the entrance is large enough to accommodate the site machinery during construction. The roof provides zenithal light and the back of the stage offers a view of the factory.

The old steel plates and the 554,000 rivets that join them together still make up the structure of the Gong today.

guest
list
press

A new structure has been erected inside the tank. It leaves the original parts practically intact.

1

vlevo
left

vpravo
right
3

The auditorium now seats more than 1,500 people. To free up enough space, the bell had to be raised back to it's original height of 32 metres, and an elaborate hydraulic system had to be installed to raise the bell of 15 meters up.

At night, the factory is transformed.
The whole context disappears and
large spotlights focus all our attention
on these monumental structures.
Most of the machines disappear to
highlight the most important ones, and
our minds are finally able to read the
context more easily.

HOTEL VP1
< 100 m

BANKOMAT

2994
18
JOSEFA PLEKOTA

From a distance, the multitude of lights gives the illusion that the factory is still in operation

The darker it gets, the more fascinating
and enigmatic the silhouettes become.

kofola
HITRÁDIO
TECHNOTRASA
DOUBLEDECKERY Scania CNG
Pogrevě v ČR!

TECNOSTASIA

Despite the obscure industrial and cold setting, it is clear that the site is inhabited; volleyball tournaments, festivals and several events are hosted in this premises.

VOLLEYBALL WORLD
BEACH
PRO TOUR
OSTRAVA
LIBERTY
FRYDEK MISTEK
ŠKODA
RODEGOT
HYUNDAI
brose
kofola
tieto
EVRY
FORUM
RIDERA

Cylinders Holding
Moravskoslezský kraj
OSTRAVA!!!
Bohumín
FRÝDEK MÍSTEK
HAVÍŘOV
HYUNDAI
DOPRAVNÍ PODNIK OSTRAVA
kofola
Raiffeisen BANK
tieto EVRY
RÁDIO BLANÍK
Česká průmyslová zdravotní pojišťovna
LANDEK
OSTRAVA!!!
VÍTKOVICE

Some lights feel rather technical.

And… some are less authentic.

As we move deeper into the site, the lighting is gone, and the abstract silhouettes mystify the experience.