Introduction

Crystallizing the Social Condenser

Michał Murawski

Why have we witnessed, and will continue to witness, the distortion of constructivism in one way or another? Because there are architects, working under the name of constructivism, who are not dialectical Marxists.

Nikolai S. Kuzmin, 1928[1]

The social condenser is – as much of the content in this special issue makes plain – riven with paradoxes and contradictions: between collectivist and individualist understandings of social relations; centripetal and centrifugal motions and spatialities; determinism and indeterminacy; small and large scales; vertical and horizontal forms; mundaneness and extraordinariness; expropriatory and appropriatory economic and social logics; success and failure. The purpose of the typology provided in the second appendix to this special issue is to attempt a 'crystallization' (to use a term beloved of the constructivists) of some of these contradictions. The categories crystallized in this typology are far from comprehensive, and many of them overlap with each other.

This introduction is intended to do two things: firstly, to provide a brief overview of some of these contradictions and paradoxes, as they have manifested themselves in the thought and work of the constructivists themselves; as well as in the work of the later interpreters and appropriators of the social condenser. Secondly, to attempt to compile – following the exhortation of Tomsk constructivist Nikolai Kuzmin – something like a dialectical history of the social condenser. To loosely

paraphrase Kuzmin, we have continued to witness – especially during the past several decades – the distortion of the social condenser. This is because there are architects and theorists, working under the name of the social condenser, who have continued to interpret the social condenser primarily in terms of form, rather than in terms of political economy. A materialist perspective on the social condenser, might, then, help to make sense – if not to resolve – a few of these paradoxes and contradictions.

Genesis: Tenth Anniversary

The social condenser was the primary, most extensively theorized concept of the Soviet architectural avant-garde during the 1920s. The primacy of this term, and its centrality to the architectural theory and practice of the constructivists, is repeatedly proclaimed in their own writings; as well as in the work of the late twentieth-century scholars and re-discoverers of constructivism in both West and East, chief among them Catherine Cooke, Selim Khan-Magomedov, Rem Koolhaas and Anatole Kopp.

As *Sovremmenaia Arkhitektura* (SA)'s 1927 editorial, 'On the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution' suggests, the social condenser was in itself a concept formulated to mark the completion of the Soviet Union's first, tumultuous decade in existence. The Constructivists needed a concept, which would recoup the 'constructive' radical energy of the October revolution, in the face of the myriad 'negative' developments in 'post-October' culture: whether 'ingrained inertia and atavism', 'unprincipled eclecticism', naïve dilettantism' or 'ignorance' with regards to the 'social and artistic quality of architecture.' [2] The 'social condenser' – encompassing critique, scientific and artistic method, ideology, psychology and the entire gamut of concerns pertaining to architectural theory as well as practice – was

thus the most important architectural concept to emerge in response to the revolution of October 1917.

The first paradox of the social condenser consists in the fact, that although no other post-October architectural concept could compete with in terms of sophistication and significance, its primacy was initially extremely short-lived. The social condenser was articulated and discussed in seven articles published in SA during 1926 and 1927: three authored by Moisei Ginzburg, one by Ivan Leonidov, one by Tomsk architect Nikolai Kuzmin, and two unsigned pieces (one Resolution and one Editorial). Its use appears to have faded out as many of the Constructivists, among them Ginzburg – arguably their most prolific ideologue – shifted towards an interest in the centrifugal, diluting (rather than centripetal, condensatory) notion of 'disurbanism' during 1929 and 1930; and as eclecticism, historicism and monumentality made a comeback with the consolidation of Stalinist Socialist Realism in Soviet architecture during the 1930s.

Rebirth: Mid-Centenary

Following Khrushchev's rejection of Stalin-era 'architectural excess' in 1954, numerous concepts dating from the 1920s and 1930s – such as the idea of the multi-functional residential or planning district, the 'mikro-raion', in many ways reminiscent of the social condenser – were given a second lease of life. The social condenser was not among them. The second paradox of primacy, then, is that its rebirth happened not in the Soviet Union, but in capitalist France, as a result of the scrupulous, extensive (and ideologically-inflected) scholarship of the Russian-born, French communist architect Anatole Kopp. Kopp's writings led to the concept being picked up and re-thought by Henri Lefebvre, Catherine Cooke and through them by

the towering architectural theorist-practitioner of the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries, Rem Koolhaas (although it was largely ignored by the other leading French re-discoverer of the Soviet avant-garde, Jean Louis Cohen).

Kopp's seminal study *Ville et Révolution*,[3] in which the social condenser was a guiding concept, was published, it is significant to note, in 1967 – in the 50th anniversary year of the October Revolution, and in the run-up to the tumultuous, quasi-Revolutionary, epoch-shifting events of 1968. As historian Olga Yakushenko points out, Kopp's intention was to forge a 'direct link between past and present architectural practice', to re-deploy Constructivism to 'resolve the social and professional crisis of French architecture of the 1960s'.[4] The timing and effects of Kopp's manifesto, written in order to revive the spirit of the Soviet October 1917 in the French 1967 – are laden, too, with ironies, paradoxes and contradictions. As Yakushenko points out, there is no evidence that Kopp – in most respects the very model of a radical 'engaged intellectual', committed in equal terms to theory, political and architectural practice – himself participated in the Paris events of May 1968, wrapped up as he was in his design projects in post-colonial Algeria. Soviet Communism was also hardly a dominant rallying cry for participants in the May 1968 events, among whom there were many more anarchists, Trotskyists and Maoists.

Kopp's friend and intellectual partner Henri Lefebvre – no doubt under the former's influence – in fact picked up the concept of the social condenser in his analysis of the events of May 1968, when radical students from the freshly-completed modernist suburban campus of Nanterre descended – centripetally – on the heart of Paris. But Lefebvre's understanding of the social condenser was rather different, not merely from that of the Constructivists, but also from Kopp's rendering of the concept. For Lefebvre, 'social condensation' happened not as a determined,

engineered effect of 'scientific' architectural practice but as an aleatory occurrence, an 'explosion', which occurs due to the 'condensation' (Lefebvre used this term also in relation to Freud's theory of dreams) of a number of external factors at an unexpected site. Lefebvre referred to Nanterre as having '*become* a "social condenser" … the focus of a whole range of prevalent questions and problems. The Faculty has become such a focus not for reasons of architecture or urbanism but, on the contrary, because it is a negatively privileged place.'[5] As Łukasz Stanek puts it, 'the concept of a social condenser, with its suggestion of spatial determinism, might be misleading', because it is 'at odds with Lefebvre's emphasis on the lived experience with Nanterre, which is not pre-defined by the material layout of space'.[6]

Koolhaas' False Condenser:

Perversion, Appropriation and Artistic Critique

Another, quite extraordinary paradox, is the manner in which Kopp's translation of the social condenser into the intellectual and political discourse of the West on the eve of May 1968 – and Lefebvre's subsequent appropriation and reinterpretation of the term – was, in all probability, to some extent responsible for the social condenser's fate today: as an idea associated, to a large extent, not with Ginzburg, Leonidov or even the Soviet Constructivists in general, but with the Dutch ironist, theorist and global starchitect, Rem Koolhaas. The social condenser is today referenced in an vast array of projects and dissertations by undergraduate or graduate architecture students, the majority of whom appear to believe – or may have been led to believe by their tutors – that it was Koolhaas himself who was responsible for coming up with the idea of the social condenser in the first place![7]

Koolhaas appears to have been acquainted with the social condenser in the late 1970s and 1980s – possibly via Kopp or Lefebvre – during his work on the two competitions for *Parc de la Villette* in Paris (1976 and 1982), ultimately won and executed by Bernard Tschumi.[8] In the park project – inspired, according to Alla Vronskaya, by Ginzburg and Mikhail Barshch's (also unsuccessful) 'disurbanist' entry for the 1930 competition for the Moscow Central Park of Culture and Leisure (later named Gorky Park) – Koolhaas defines the 'social condenser' as a 'programmatic layering upon vacant terrain to encourage dynamic co-existence of activities and to generate through their interface, unprecedented events'.[9] It is this, rather ungainly definition of Koolhaas' – rather than any of the numerous expressive, polemical and pathos-laden characterizations given to the term on the pages of SA in 1927 and 1928 (all of them collected in this special issue, each translated in its entirety for the first time) – that has become the most cited definition of the social condenser in the student projects and design blog posts of today.

The irony is compounded by the fact that this definition was formulated by Koolhaas not in the initial documents connected to the park competition, but in a 'Patent for "Social Condenser", mocked up in his *Content: Perverted Architecture* book, published in 2004. By claiming the social condenser as his own 'intellectual property', Koolhaas – satirically or not, knowingly or not – carries out a multiple perversion of the social condenser. Not only does he literally *steal* the social condenser from Ginzburg and the Constructivists, he also explicitly claims ownership of it in perpetuity ('for eternity', in his own words).[10] Moreover, on the level of political economy – and most perversely – through this act (or performance) of patenting, Koolhaas *privatizes* the social condenser, a notion whose *publicness* – as

the constructivists themselves and their ideologically faithful re-discoverers, such as Kopp and Lefebvre relentlessly emphasized – constitutes its very kernel.

In *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas also refers to the Manhattan Downtown Athletic Club, opened in 1931 as 'a Skyscraper used as a Constructivist Social Condenser: a machine to generate to and intensify desirable forms of human intercourse'.[11] In Koolhaas' assessment, the Athletic Club – an elite, all-male, multi-level private members' gymnasium – 'represents the complete conquest – floor by floor – of the Skyscraper by social activity: with the Downtown Athletic Club the American way of life, know-how and initiative definitively overtake the theoretical lifestyle modifications that the various twentieth-century European avant-gardes have been insistently proposing, without ever managing to impose them'. The secret of the Athletic Club's success, according to Koolhaas, lies in its embrace of the congested, random and unpredictable character of metropolitan life. 'Such an architecture is an aleatory form of "planning" life itself … an infinitely unpredictable intrigue that extols the complete surrender of life to the definitive instability of life in the metropolis.'[12]

Through Koolhaas' perverted 'privative appropriation' – for which the work and conceptualizations of Kopp and Lefebvre are, perhaps, unwittingly responsible – the social condenser becomes a paradigmatic exemplar of the phenomenon of 'artistic critique', identified by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (and which Lukasz Stanek has previously associated with the establishment appropriation of Lefebvre's ideas after 1968).[13] For Boltanski and Chiapello, one of the effects of May 1968 was an institutionalized harvesting of critical, anti-establishment concepts, which retained their 'artistic' *form*, but excised their 'social' (or economic) *content*. Beyond being shorn of political economy, concepts associated with 'artistic critique' are often linked

with particular values (or aesthetics), Boltanski and Chiapello point out, among these creativity, individualism, autonomy, affectivity, novelty, flexibility, innovation, openness, de-centredness and indeterminacy – a set of concepts, many among which are replicated or feature strong elective affinities with those positively valorized in Koolhaas' definition of the social condenser – 'layering', 'dynamic coexistence', 'unprecedented', 'aleatory', 'unpredictable', 'instability'.

In this sense, it becomes clear that the modus operandi of artistic critique is about more than merely the retention of form and the exorcism of political economy. Certain sorts of form, scale and systemic dynamic – certain morphological characteristics – are better suited to certain types of political project than others.[14] As Mary MacLeod pointed out in 1989, the deconstructivism of Hadid, Koolhaas, Tschumi and others placed a great emphasis on 'Fragmentation, dispersion, decentering, schizophrenia, disturbance' – formal 'objectives or 'qualities', which would allow architecture to regain its 'critical' edge, by unsettling the illusory completeness and consistency of the everyday. Yet, as MacLeod observes, few among the deconstructivists expressed a substantive interest in unsettling the political or economic (rather than psychical, affective or aesthetic) parameters of the everyday. 'It is ironic', MacLeod writes, given deconstructivism's apolitical emphasis on the formal properties of architecture, 'that Russian constructivism, with its political and social programs, is considered the primary source.'[15]

The Constructivists of OSA themselves were, in fact, repeatedly accused of 'formalism', and of other ideological deviations, such as 'Westernism' and 'mechanism'.[16] These attacks eventually became the province of the young, proto-Stalinist ideologues of VOPRA (The All-Union Association of Proletarian Architects, founded in 1929); and later of the implementers of full-fledged Stalinist Socialist

Realism. But they were first leveled against the Constructivists by figures associated with the ASNOVA group of 'rationalist' architects, most prominent among whom was Nikolai Ladovsky. An insight into the aggressive terms, on which the OSA-ASNOVA debate was conducted is provided in Leonidov's 'Criticism of Constructivism' (this volume), penned in response to the attacks of ASNOVA-affiliated architects F. Shalavin and Ivan Lamtsov, published in the leading Soviet literary journal *Krasnaya Nov*.[17]

Life Construction: The (in)deterministic condenser

Although the Constructivists of OSA defined their work, to some extent, in opposition to that of the rationalists of ASNOVA – let alone to the work of architects, who persisted in their attachment to historical styles – the morphological characteristics, that were associated with the social condenser – as well as the precise manner of its relationship to the task of life-construction, or the creation of the new socialist way of life (or *byt*), were by no means monolithic.

At the heart of the issue of 'life-construction' lies the question of determinism. The pronouncements of the constructivists leave little doubt that the social condenser was intended, directly and unambiguously, to inculcate a new mode of life – a new *byt* – into its users; one that would reflect and consolidate the new existence coming into being following the October Revolution. The social condenser in its Soviet formulation – as 'conductor and condenser of socialist culture' [18] – was an unmistakably deterministic concept. Although the rationalists of ASNOVA attacked the Constructivists for their alleged indifference to the 'perceptual' characteristics of architecture, the pronouncements and practice of the Constructivists make it clear that their social condensers were to be deterministic even on the level of their impact on

conditioning the human psyche and perceptual apparatus. In Ginzburg's words, 'this task of life-construction, the task of creating social condensers for our epoch, receives its completion only in being crystallized in particular material forms, vestured in flesh and blood; and by embodying a new set of architectural features impacting on human psychology and sensually perceived by it'.[19] As Ginzburg was at pains to point out, the social condenser was to exert its impact on the human psyche in dialogue with its social-engineering, 'life-constructing' role. One of the key objectives of the Constructivist method was thus to 'seek the most rational organization of perception in relation to these processes, in other words – the hygiene of perception.' The social condenser was also, therefore, a *psycho*-social condenser. As Alla Vronskaya points out, Ginzburg's work on the use of colour in urban and domestic architecture was keenly informed by his understanding of the operation of unconsciousness or 'half-consciousness' – although this was a de-sexed notion of the psyche, informed less by Freud than by Wilhelm Wundt.[20]

What was – at least in theory – not determined in advance, however, were the formal characteristics that the social condenser would embody. The morphology of the 'new form' was, thus, in theory, indeterminate. In the words of SA's Ten Anniversary Editorial, 'The new form – which lies ahead – is not yet known. It is sought through purposeful work on the new social object.'[21] Further, 'Constructivism … examines the principal elements of architecture as continuously changing, in relation to the variable conditions, according to which form is generated … Form is an unknown x, always discovered anew by the architect.'[22] The characteristics of this new form, would emerge from a method of 'laboratory dissection', encompassing the study of the 'social-byt' and 'production' processes pertaining to a building's or space's function; and the development of 'flow diagrams' and 'schemes of

equipment', in the manner of a quasi-Taylorist analysis of scientific management. The 'artistic expression' or 'tangible form of the social condenser'[23] would emerge, in Ginzburg's words, on the basis of the above studies, 'only in concrete terms and with regard to specific objectives'.[24]

The 'unknown' of the constructivists' was thus very different to Koolhaas' notion of the 'aleatory' or 'unpredictable'. The indeterminacy of Ginzburg or Leonidov's 'new form' was a starting point for a 'scientific' quest for form, rather than an end in itself. Unlike the postmodern fetishism of chance and accident practised by the deconstructivists (whose attempt to engender indeterminacy may in itself be considered a disavowed form of determinism), the constructivists' indeterminacy was intensely methodical – it was precisely a way of insuring that as little is left to chance as possible. All of this is hardly surprising, given the utterly politicized character of the constructivists' thinking, their repeated revocations of the idea of 'art for art's sake' (and use of this formulation as a stick with which to beat their ideological rivals), their constant insistence on the dependency between form and social, political and economic content. This is what Ginzburg and Leonidov mean when they emphasize the 'monist' character of constructivism.[25]

It is clear that the social condenser, as envisioned and implemented in the work of the Constructivists themselves, did manifest itself in a number of different, even disparate aesthetic languages – from the expressive monumentality of the Vesnins' Rusakov Club to the austere, piloti-laden simplicity of Ginzburg's Narkomfin. Moreover, it was executed at innumerable different scales and typologies – from the domestic interior, to the residential block, to the workers' club, Palace of Culture, administrative building and factory, even on the level of the entire city. The citations grouped in our typology, categorized according to their emphasis on scale,

density (centripetal versus centrifugal dynamics), and aesthetic characteristics, give some indication of the many, diverse morphologies attached to the social condenser – by the constructivists themselves, as well as by the concept's later interpreters and appropriators.

Among the later interpreters and appropriators – including those contributing to this special issue – it is worth delineating two distinct categories of condenser: planned condensers, which are designed to perform life-constructing functions; and accidental condensers. Planned condensers – not all of which were explicitly intended as social condensers, but are considered by their interpreters to have been designed according to an equivalent set of architectural and social principles, include: Manhattan's Downtown Athletic Club (according to Koolhaas' presentation in *Delirious New York*)[26] and Koolhaas' own unbuilt competition entry for Paris's Parc de la Villette; London's Finsbury Health Centre (designed by Berthold Lubetkin), as described by Adrian Forty;[27] Vilnius' post-war civic centre and the communal eating facilities, networks of public libraries, sanatorium complexes found throughout the state socialist countries and even late socialist Polish churches, as discussed by Owen Hatherley.[28] A number of buildings planned to function as something like 'social condensers' (even if their designers did not always use this term) appear in this special issue too, among them Warsaw's Stalin-era Palace of Culture and Science, in my contribution; Andrea Phillipp's memories of Britain's post-war Community Arts Centres; Jane Rendell's mention of London's Aylesbury Estate; and in the interview with Alexey Ginzburg, his references to Moscow's Stalin-era 'high buildings' or *vysotki*. But accidental condensers also appear, including the campus of Nanterre – and later the entirety of Paris – in May 1968, as referred to by Łukasz Stanek through his reflections on Lefebvre's work;[29] London's Partisan Coffee House and

Kennington's Secondary Modern school, which Nick Beech writes of as incubators of the British New Left during the 1960s and 1970s; and finally 'Arry's Bar in the stadium of Millwall football club, as suggested by Rendell. An anomalous case, which fits into neither category but encompasses characteristics from both of them, are those communal living experiments, embarked on by activists, students and radicals during the Soviet Union's early years, studied by Andrew Willimott. These experiments in communal living, which harked back explicitly to the heritage of the Paris Commune – were engaged in repurposing pre-existing spaces, but they were not architecture or design-focused. They remind us, as Willimott points out, that the social condenser did not emerge from a vacuum. The social condenser provided an 'architectural language to that which already existed – a grand architectural variation on a theme'.

Ostranenie 1917-2017

The concept of the social condenser was, without a doubt, a de-familiarizing one. It was an idea, which – as observers, most forcefully Catherine Cooke and Katerina Clark, make plain – exists at the boundary between the everyday or mundane (in other words, *byt*) and the extraordinary, utopian and otherworldly (the 'new culture', 'new society').[30] Despite – or perhaps, because of – all of its scientific framing, the social condenser was, like myth, magic, psychoanalysis, electricity or the Marxist critique of political economy – a mechanism for bridging the gap between the contemporary and the not-yet existing. This is what makes its 'scientific' character all the more, rather than less, powerful: the social condenser was an architectural method for harnessing, or 'crystallizing' the extraordinary or not-yet-formed, for bringing it down to earth and deploying it to create a new society.

The magical-electrifying capacity of the social condenser is amply evident from the content of the constructivists' proclamations. Social condensers were to be the 'crystallized' material forms of the new society and culture, 'new organisms, which would not only crystallize new industrial and *byt* relations, the new socialist *byt,* but would also maximally facilitate this crystallization, this advancement towards a new *byt*'.[31] Social condensers were to render the old forms of architecture and social co-existence obsolete: 'We need not merely new clubs – inventions, insofar as these are not clubs for playing whist and dancing the quadrille, but clubs, designed for brand new, previously-unheard of human relations, new "social condensers" of our time'.[32] And, as Anya Bokov points out, these strategies and intentions were put into effect *successfully*: 'Judging from period photographs, these multifunctional condensers were in striking contrast relative to their urban context.' This was especially true, Bokov argues of the workers' clubs: 'Unlike housing or infrastructure projects, whose formal solutions are traditionally largely determined by their function, these buildings were actively in search of a new form – breaking from the past and making a giant leap forward.'[33]

The notion of *ostranenie* (ordinarily translated as 'estrangement' or 'defamiliarization') is most often identified with the work of the Russian formalist semioticians, especially Viktor Shlovsky. Scholarly understandings of formalism tend to highlight its focus on the purist analysis of text, in abstraction from social or economic context. Yet, as has been pointed out, the idea that *ostranenie* is an 'apolitical' concept was itself something of a canard, formulated by Trotsky in *Literature and Revolution* and later intensified during the Stalinist 'anti-formalist' campaign of the late 1940s.[34] I would like to suggest, that – both after October 1917 and in 2017 – social condensers have functioned and do function as mechanisms of

ostranenie. In the early Soviet Union, social condensers would have hardly been able to carry out their very politicized *ostranenie* of the old architecture (and the corresponding social and economic relations), had the political-economic foundation on which this de-familiarization was to be conducted not been transformed, had the October Revolution not 'eradicated the fetters of private property ownership' and 'opened up the perspectives new perspectives for Soviet architecture: of grand planning works, of the development of new types of architecture, of new architectural organisms, and of new complexes and ensembles in place of the narrowly-individualistic parameters dictated by pre-revolutionary clients.'[35]

Today, however – throughout the former Soviet block – these fetters have been put back into place. Many of the social condensers of old are no longer socially-condensing. It is not only the idea of the social condenser that has been privatized, but so have many of the 'actually-existing', as Hatherley calls them, social condensers themselves. If 1917's instantiation of a new *byt* (way of life) failed, can the same be said of the social condenser? And what – if any – sort of de-familiarizing work can the idea of the social condenser – and the still-existing social condensers – do today?

In Victor Buchli's rendition, the most famous of the allegedly failed social condensers – Narkomfin – constitutes an illustrative example of a condenser, which, even if it is not, at present, condensing, is still de-familiarizing. 'Under the conditions of Putinist capitalist neo-nationalism', says Buchli, 'the Narkomfin "social condenser" represents a dystopian rejection' of its political and economic context. In late Putinist Russia, the 'Narkomfin social condenser takes on new productive powers, hitherto unimaginable' – in the manner of the 'previously unheard-of social relations', which Leonidov's social condenser was intended to engender. Hitherto unimaginable, continues Buchli, 'but nonetheless well in keeping with its original

social mission for enabling a world that is "otherwise"'. Such a 'failure', Buchli remarks, is quite a remarkable one, 'whose productive capacities are … proven and enduring – a successful "social condenser" of the highest order'.

Narkomfin today – with its ruined appearance and uncertain future – invokes, Buchli suggests, a radical time when things were done differently.   In the context of 21st century Moscow, Narkomfin carries out its *ostranenie* by invoking a progressive past in a reactionary present (a much more disconcerting, pessimistic presentation of Narkomfin's encounter with 'the real estate man' is provided in Jonathan Charley's text in this issue). What could be more de-familiarizing and strange, in other words, than a body of *concrete* proof that that the more-or-less mainstream aspirations of the Soviet Union one hundred years ago really were more 'advanced', more equitable, more sensitive to social asymmetries – especially those of class and gender[36] – than those of the late capitalist present (whether of the Putinist, Orbanist, Modist, Kaczyńskist, Durtertist, Brexitist, Trumpist or 'late liberal' variety)?

Warsaw's Palace of Culture functions in a commensurable way in the context of post-socialist Warsaw, although it – unlike Narkomfin – is still prospering, still radiating waves of ideological and affective electricity all over its host city, still-condensing. It is a building, which resists the 'wild capitalist' chaos – of property restitution, 20-storey billboards, inner-city poverty and rampant gentrification – which surround it. The Palace, in other words, is not so much a 'post-socialist' building as a 'still-socialist' one. A building, which – thanks to the 'economic aesthetic' and 'public spirit' built into it by its designers – is able to endure as an enclave of a 'noncapitalist' aesthetic, spatial and social world at the heart of a late capitalist city. Yet, it is only able to function as a still-socialist still-condenser, to de-familiarize and de-naturalize the privative understanding of the city and social relations, which run

riot around it, because it itself – and the land on which it stands – is still publically owned. In sharp contrast to much of the rest of Warsaw, which has been returned and restituted to the descendants of pre-war bourgeois or feudal landowners (or, more often, to property speculators who bought or stole their property claims), the Palace is still a condenser, because it has put up a fight against the forces of commodity capital, which have otherwise swept viciously over post-1989 Warsaw's architectural and social fabric.[37]

'Arry's Bar in Millwall Stadium – itself a former supporters' pub turned VIP members' only venue – temporarily *becomes* – in Lefebvrean fashion – a condenser of another, much larger, still-existing but endangered social condenser, South London's Aylesbury Estate, from which Southwark Council wants to evict the residents, before selling the building to a developer. Southwark Council has attempted to displace leaseholders from the Aylesbury Estate by means of a Compulsory Purchase Order (having already displaced council tenants by means of a much simpler procedure) – an expropriation mechanism available for public bodies only when proved to be in the 'public interest'. A juxtaposition of the Aylesbury with a still-socialist exemplar, such as the Palace of Culture – whose publicness was enabled by the expropriation of land from private owners, and which is now under threat from the spectre of property restitution (an expropriation from the public for the private) – helps highlight, as Rendell points out, the utterly 'perverse narrative' and 'contorted and obfuscating logic of the CPO', which must invoke public interest against private loss for its act to be justified. In this analysis – and in her work as expert witness on the public inquiry into the Aylesbury CPO – Rendell puts into practice an exhortation she made in a 2011 essay (my reading of which had re-activated my interest in the idea of the social condenser). 'On the brink of the collapse of the public sphere',

Rendell suggested, the social condenser can function as 'architecture's political unconscious, an aspect, in Jameson's terms, of the "repressed and buried history" of class struggle.'[38]

With reference to the Partisan café and the Kennington Secondary Modern School in 1960s London, Nick Beech (this volume) points out that – like Rendell's 'Arry's Bar or Lefebvre's Paris – neither of these sites were social condensers in the 'vanguardist sense' of a 'spatial technology to institute or catalyse a new way of life'. According to Beech, the social condenser is a term – applicable as much to 'designed' as well as to 'accidental' places – which functions as a 'prompt to reconsider architecture as active (as socially active, if not determining) and social action as spatial (as spatially effective)'. The social condenser is thus, for Beech, a 'critical spatial practice immanent to social transformation'.

Andrea Phillips proposes a 're-appropriation of arts institutions for use as social condensers within contemporary civic life'. With reference to management, financing as well as architectural aesthetics of contemporary arts centres in the UK, Phillips suggests that smaller centres – such as Liverpool's Black-E (formerly the Blackie) and Deptford's Albany Empire – have been much better at 'retaining the values of social condensation epitomized by early arts centre experimentality. They are spaces in which community accessibility … holds place over novel architectural sophistication.' By contrast, two much larger centres – the Midlands Art Centre in Birmingham and Contemporary Arts Centre (formerly The Third Eye) in Glasgow – re-designed in an iconic, bombastic style and in receipt of large lottery or government grants, 'have had difficulties holding on to those core values – or, in a more complex way, have become examples of how those social values have become programmatised in a way that produces subjective and political alienation.' Community arts centres

throughout the United Kingdom – 'once vital, cheap and convivial', formerly run by activists and enthusiasts and today in the hands of 'CEOs' fluent in neoliberal jargon, 'are currently almost lost to the kinds of use that could be formed through the idea of the social condenser… in which forms of living can be rehearsed and experienced differently to those shaped by contemporary capitalism'. In response to this situation, Phillips argues 'in favour of smaller, more diverse and more participant-run arts centres modeled on a previous, part-state, part-organic form'.

In a previously-published text (critically revisited in his contribution to this volume) Owen Hatherley makes a similar comparison to Phillips', with reference to the contemporary functioning of former workers' clubs and constructivist buildings in Moscow. The cheap and cheerful Azerbaijani Restaurant in Melnikov's Rusakov Club 'fulfils the original programme much more than it would if turned into an oligarch-owned centre of contemporary art'. The latter reference is to a bus garage in the north of Moscow, also by Melnikov, where The Garage Arts Centre – a project launched by oligarch Dasha Zhukova – was located for several years. The Rusakov's Azerbaijani Restaurant is indifferent to the aesthetic and form, which Melnikov intended for the building, whereas the garage's external facades are reproduced in as faithful a constructivist manner as possible. 'It is impeccably restored, for sure', writes Hatherley, 'but a worse insult to the building's original ideas is hard to imagine. Better karaoke than oligarchy'.[39] Today, The Garage Arts Museum is no longer located inside the former Melnikov Bus Garage. It moved in 2015 into a 1960s modernist building, formerly the site of the famoed *Vremena Goda* (Four Seasons) restaurant. The spectacular metamorphosis of the Soviet eatery into the oligarch-funded art centre was overseen, of course, by Rem Koolhaas.

A particular source of discomfort for us, as we attempted to pull together our research for this special issue, was the attitude towards the form-function contradiction – and its mapping onto political economy – held by Moisei Ginzburg's grandson, Alexey. Jane Rendell expands on this question in the Conclusion to this special issue, but I would like to highlight two particular points of contention here. Our spirited but good-humored exchange with Alexey, an edited transcript of which is included as an appendix to this issue, touched upon many of the points raised above. As we sat in the café of the Sadlers Wells Theatre, in between several Constructivist-influenced council housing estates designed by unrepentant Soviet-born communist (and Vkhutemas alumnus) Berthold Lubetkin's Tecton practice, Ginzburg remained tireless in his insistence that his grandfather was 'not a Marxist'; and that the 'social condenser' had nothing to do with communalization but was merely a response to the increasing density of cities caused by industrial capitalism.

Alexey Ginzburg, together with architect Natalya Shilova, is currently carrying out an extremely sensitive, complex renovation of Narkomfin, which is archaeological in its insistence on retaining (or, rather, reconstructing) as many of the building's original features as possible – not merely aesthetic ones, such as wall colorings, but also technical features, such as electrical or ventilation equipment. The reconstruction – which has been suspended in uncertainty for many years, but is finally going ahead, thanks to the consolidation of the building's owners (dominant among which is *Vneshecomonbank*, a Russian state-owned development corporation) – will return the building to its original use. Narkomfin will, once again, be a fully-functioning residential building. The fact that it will not be turned into a luxury hotel is, without a doubt, to a large extent, the effect of Ginzburg's tireless lobbying. The apartments, however, will be sold on the open market, and will almost certainly be

beyond the reach of any ordinary or even middle-class Muscovites. Formerly communal parts of the building, such as the laundry, will – says Ginzburg – retain a sort of condensatory function, but a new one: 'the idea to make a bookstore connected to this café on the ground floor, which introduces both a cultural and a consumerist side in this one building, that is also a way to interpret it as a social condenser, but in today's circumstances.'

Conclusion: The Perils and Potentials of Unanchoring

Anthropologist Douglas Rogers has argued that, rather than 'explaining' Eastern Europe or the former socialist world through the lens of apparently 'universal' analytical categories – like globalization or transnationalism – scholars ought to experiment with doing things the other way around: with 'reversing the arrows', pointing to 'complex circulations, staging 'situated comparisons and new juxtapositions', and, thereby forging new tools for the 'critique of western knowledge and power'. [40] Such a de-familiarizing 'unbinding' of socialist and post-socialist categories and ideas, and the corresponding 'provincializing' of hegemonic or western ones, is akin to the sort of 'unanchoring' we are proposing to carry out in this special issue (of course, *ostranenie* itself is a powerful example of such an unbound category).

A previous attempt to unanchor or unbind the social condenser and re-deploy it in a different historical, political and economic context – Anatole Kopp's – was carried out on the mid-centenary of the October Revolution, and on the eve of the massive, worldwide political upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s (many of which – such as the May 1968 protests in Nanterre and Paris and the October 1968 protests and massacre of students in Mario Pani's Tlatelolco housing project in

Mexico City – irrupted from or crystallized on then recently-completed sites, which had been designed as something like massive-scale, late modernist social condensers). The subsequent consolidation of the post-1968, late capitalist political and economic order, and its privative appropriation of the social condenser (as 'artistic critique') is a reminder that architectural *ostranenie* – if it is to be more than an exercise in irony – cannot confine itself to experiments with form, aesthetics, affect or 'the hygiene of perception' alone. *Ostranenie* must focus – as both Kopp and the Constructivists insisted – on the critique of architecture's embeddedness in the political economy. Fifty years after Kopp and 1968, on the centenary of the October Revolution, it is, of course, far from clear in which direction the political and economic upheavals of 2017 are heading, and how lasting they will be.

This special issue intends to re-deploy the 'social condenser' beyond the geographical, political and historical context within which it originated; and to reclaim it from the anodyne and sarcastic meanings and significations, which it has been made to adopt by its late capitalist appropriators. As the contours of the post-2017 world settle into place, the social condenser, we hope, can function as a tool for the de-familiarization of actually-existing architectural and urban theory and practice; as a device for the laying bare of its contingent and regressive character.

In the twenty-first century, the reigning spatial-economic ideology holds that human beings should physically separate themselves from each other and from their social and material surroundings; and that they should only come together on sites, which are owned by somebody else (or – pushing further and further beyond the barriers of the absurd – that not only should neighbours be divided from each other by walls, but that the poor should be made to pay for walls erected by the rich). We propose to exhume and re-activate the social condenser – a century-old, relentlessly

misappropriated but (somehow) still-electric concept – as a tool for making manifest the extent to which this reigning ideology is no less bizarre and bankrupt today than it was one hundred years ago, on the brink (and in the aftermath) of the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy.

[1] Vladimir Kuzmin, 'Constructivism and Constructivists at the Local Level. A Letter from Tomsk'. SA, 1928, Nos. 3-4 [update as per eventual format in special issue]

[2] Resolution 1928 [update as per eventual format of translation in special issue]

[3] Anatole Kopp, *Ville et révolution : architecture et urbanisme soviétiques des années vingt,* Paris, Éditions Anthropos, 1967*;* Anatole Kopp, Town and Revolution: Soviet architecture and city planning, 1917-1935. New York: G. Brazilier, 1970.

[4] Olga Yakushenko, 'Anatole Kopp's *Town and Revolution* as history and manifesto: a reactualization of Russian Constructivism in the West in the 1960s'. *Journal of Art Historiography* 14 (June 2016): 1-14.

[5] Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969: 109.

[6] Łukasz Stanek, *Lefebvre on Space*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011: 190.

[7] A Google search reveals the following, rather striking results: "Social Condenser" (29,600 hits); "Social Condenser" Koolhaas (10,300); "Social Condenser" Soviet (6,530); "Social Condenser" Constructivists (6,490); "Social Condenser" Ginzburg (2,230); "Social Condenser" Leonidov (1,650). On Google Scholar, the proportions are a slightly more titled towards historical accuracy, although, even here, Koolhaas is associated with this term in a greater number of scholarly outputs than Ginzburg: "Social Condenser" (336 hits); "Social Condenser" Koolhaas (107); "Social Condenser" Soviet (174); "Social Condenser" Constructivists (124); "Social Condenser" Ginzburg (74); "Social Condenser" Leonidov (19).[7]

[8] For background on the Parc de la Villette competition, see Dagenhart, Richard. "Urban Architectural Theory and the Contemporary City: Tschumi and Koolhaas at the Parc De La Villette." *Ekistics* 56, no. 334/335 (1989): 84-92.

[9] Rem Koolhaas et al., "Social Condenser: Universal Modernization Patent", *Content: Perverted Architecture,* Köln: Taschen, 2004, p. 9.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 152.

[12] Ibid., p. 156.

[13] The term 'privative appropriation' was coined in Lefebvre's *The Production of Space,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974], p. 350. 'Artistic critique' is a central concept

in Boltanski and Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1999. For Lefebvre and artistic critique, see Stanek, 2011, pp. 74-75.

[14] I refer here to the concept of 'political morphology', which I formulate in Michał Murawski, 'Radical Centres: The Political Morphology of Monumentality in Warsaw and Johannesburg'. *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture,* 2017, forthcoming. See also Mary MacLeod's commentary on 'deconstructivist' appropriations of constructivist architecture in 'Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism'. *Assemblage* 8, 1989: pp. 22-59.

[15] MacLeod, 'Architecture and Politics', p. 45.

[16] Although his account is somewhat skewed towards a presentation of Ginzburg and the core Constructivists as 'individualistic' and themselves innocent of political entanglements, Hugh Hudson provides an extensive and useful account of the attacks leveled against the Constructivists by their ideological opponents during the 1920s and 1930s. See Hugh Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015 [1993], especially pp. 52-84.

[17] According to Hugh Hudson, Shalavin and Lamtsov's attacks helped paved the way for a violent repression of Constructivism, which culminated with the death of the disurbanist Mikhail Okhitovich in a labour camp in 1937. The terms of the debate between ASNOVA and OSA, says Hudson, echoed those of the struggle between Stalin and Bukharin. ASNOVA 'sought and obtained allies among Stalinist in their effort to purge their rivals'. Hudson, 'Terror in Soviet Architecture: The Murder of Mikhail Okhitovich', *Slavic Review,* 51 (3): 1992: 448-467.

[18] Resolution 1928 [to update]

[19] Ginzburg, 'Constructivism as Method' [to update]

[20] Alla Vronskaya, *The Productive Unconscious: Architecture, Experimental Psychology and the Techniques of Subjectivity in Soviet Russia, 1919-1935.* PhD thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, September 2014.
 PhD Thesis, pp. 236-239.

[21] Editorial, Tenth Anniversary, SA [to update]

[22] Ginzburg, The Objectives of Contemporary Architecture, SA [to update]

[23] Ginzburg, 'Constructivism as Method', SA [to update]

[24] Ibid.

[25] See for example Ginzburg, 'Constructivism as a Method of Laboratory and Teaching Work' and Kuzmin, 'Constructivism and constructivists at the local level: A letter from Tomsk'. XX page numbers, SA [to update].

[26] Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 152-161.

[27] Adrian Forty, 'Being or Nothingness: Private Experience and Public Architecture in Post-War Britain'. *Architectural History*, Vol. 38 (1995), pp. 32.

[28] See Owen Hatherley, this volume; and *Landscapes of Communism.* London: Penguin, pp. 148-201.

[29] See Stanek's contribution to this issue, but also Stanek, Łukasz. "Lessons from Nanterre." *Log*, no. 13/14 (2008): 59-67; Lefebvre, Henri. *The Explosion; Marxism and the French Revolution.* New York: [Monthly Review Press], 1969.

[30] See Cooke, Catherine, 1983. 'Form is a Function X' in Catherine Cooke (ed.), *Russian Avant-Garde and Architecture*, Academy Editions/Architectural Design, p.

42; and Clark, Caterina, 1995. *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 251.

[31] Leonidov, 'Criticism of Constructivism' pp. XX [to update].

[32] Ibid.

[33] Bokov, this volume.

[34] See for example, Cristina Vatulescu, 'The Politics of Estrangement: Tracking Shklovsky's Device through Literary and Policing Practices'. *Poetics Today* 27:1, 2006, pp. 35-66.

[35] Tenth Anniversary Editorial, 1927, p. XX, SA [to update]

[36] See, for example, Ginzburg, 'Results and Prospects', SA [to update]; Buchli, Victor, *An Archaeology of Socialism,* London: Berg, 1999, pp. 159-185.

[37] Interestingly, in our interview with him (this issue), Alexey Ginzburg also characterized the Stalinist highrises (*Stalinskie vysotki*) as 'empire versions of the social condenser' (referring here to the commonplace Russian-language word for Stalinist Socialist Realist architecture, *Stalinski ampir* (the Stalinist Empire style). I provide an extensive formulation of the idea of 'still-socialism', and of the Palace's social life in contemporary Warsaw, in Michał Murawski, *Palace Complex*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming, 2018.

[38] Jane Rendell, 'May Mourn: A Site-Writing' in Nadir Lahiji (ed.), *The Political Unconscious of Architecture*, London: Ashgate, 2011, p. 131.

[39] Hatherley, *Landscapes of Communism*, p. 160.

[40] Rogers, Douglas. "Postsocialisms Unbound: Connections, Critiques, Comparisons." *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 1–15.