



18 May 2015, 9.30 – 18.30

Masaryk Senior Common Room,
4th Floor, UCL School of Slavonic
and Eastern European Studies,
16 Taviton Street, WC1H 0BW

All staff and students welcome

For more information see:
snurl.com/condenser

Confirmed Participants:

- Nick Beech on social condensations in 1960s London
- Jonathan Charley, a Молодой человек at the ruins of Narkomfin
- Udo Grashoff on 'Schwarzwohnen' in East Germany
- Owen Hatherley on 'actually-existing' social condensers
- Michael Marriott on the 'laundry room'
- Michał Murawski on Stalinist social condensers
- Andrea Phillips on housing, art and activism
- Oleksy Radinski on friendship, annexation and the Crimean resort
- Jane Rendell on the Moscow Children's Home Laboratory
- Dubravka Sekulić on Yugoslav Self-Management
- Łukasz Stanek on Lefebvre and 'collective luxury'
- Andy Willimott on everyday life in Soviet house communes
- Victor Buchli Discussant
- Caroline Humphrey Discussant

REACTIVATING THE SOCIAL CONDENSER!

ARCHITECTURE AGAINST PRIVATION



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“The new type of communal dwelling, the new type of club, Palace of Labour, Executive Committee building, factory ... are to become the conductors and condensers of socialist culture ...”

Soviet Organisation of Contemporary Architects Resolution, 1928.

1. We live in a time of privation, crisis and stratification, in housing as well as in public space. Space has become a commodity, and apathy is rife.
2. For nearly a century, architects, artists and thinkers have been inspired by and toyed with the grand old Soviet idea of the **social condenser**. Most, however, have attempted to tame this idea, or have done little other than to pay lip service to it.
3. It is high time, then, to reactivate the **social condenser!** We want to subject this electrifying idea to serious and systematic re-examination, to re-charge the **social condenser** as a vector for radical architectural thought and practice.

All staff and students welcome.

For more information see: snurl.com/condenser

To register: socialcondenser.eventbrite.co.uk

Dr Nick Beech (Oxford Brookes/CCA)

Social Condensation in the Metropole: Locating the First New Left

From 1956 to 1961 a group of intellectuals from across the United Kingdom – the First New Left - developed a platform for deep critical intervention in debates on the nature and status of the British Welfare State and post-war ‘settlement’ ...

The editorial office of the *New Left Review* and the *Partisan Coffee Shop* (housed at 7 Carlisle Street, Soho); the Notting Hill Left Club; the various sites of extra-mural education near London; the Secondary Modern in Kennington where Stuart Hall taught as a temping English teacher: I will argue that these and other locations provide details not only of particular kinds of architecture and urbanism that the First New Left sought to utilize and critique, but also sites which were productive of First New Left problematics.

Dr Jonathan Charley (University of Strathclyde)

“Molodoi Chelovek ... my origins lie in the past, but I am from the future”

In 1984, intoxicated by hope and idealism and armed with a few grainy images and an architectural map, I made my inaugural trip to Moscow. For the first time I stood in front of the crumbling ruins of the Dom Narkomfina and gazed in astonishment at the Club Russakova that I imagined landing like spaceships as if they had stepped out of the pages of Bogdanov’s utopian novel *Red Star*. Like visiting terminally ill relatives, regularly checking up on the state of health of these two ‘memories of the future’ has long since become an obligatory ritual. In 1988 not for the last time I took another series of photographs. An old war veteran was sitting on a bench in the slush amongst the bare trees that stood in front. Confused he asked me,

“Young man, why are you taking photographs of this ruin?”

“Because”, I replied, “It is possibly the most important building of the twentieth century.”

Composed as a dialogue with a building, this sketch reflects upon the origins and continued importance of the social condenser as an idea whose time has yet to come.

Dr Udo Grashoff (UCL-SSEES)

Schwarzwohnen

At first view, *Schwarzwohnen* was rather the opposite of a social condenser.

Several thousand inhabitants of the German Democratic Republic undermined the state allocation of housing in the by illegal occupation. *Schwarzwohnen* emerged at about the same time as squatting in Western Europe but was different. It was not carried out as a collective but an individual action in most cases. The main concern was to live in one’s own four walls. *Schwarzwohnen* was a tacit practice. As long as

the dictatorship was intact, there were no public campaigns, no squatter organisations, at the utmost informal networks. Most of the ‘*Schwarzwohner*’ were not politically motivated either ... Nevertheless, *Schwarzwohnen* provided a niche for cultural opposition.

Dr Owen Hatherley (London)

Actually-Existing Social Condensers

Habitually, the ‘social condensers’ built in the 1920s across the Soviet Union have been treated almost as if they closed or disappeared after 1932, and as if they had no successors as soon as architectural and social norms took a turn towards the reactionary and retrograde. This paper will try to discover whether or not the ideas and functions original social condensers – the workers clubs, factory kitchens and communal houses of the NEP era and the first Five Year Plan – managed to survive beyond their original historical moment in any meaningful way. First, in terms of the contemporary uses of those buildings. In what way have they continued in use as ‘social’ buildings? ... And second, did they have any successors after the 1930s, particularly after the war in the annexed or ‘satellite’ countries? Does anything survive of these ideas in these large-scale building projects embarked upon after 1945? In short, does the social condenser still exist?

Michael Marriott (artist)

The Laundry Room

Michael Marriott describes a project utilising a disused laundry room as an arts project space.

Dr Michał Murawski (UCL-SSEES)

Dear Distributor of Architectural Power: Letters to a Stalinist Social Condenser

“As a retired physicist ... I would like to begin recording lighting strikes on the Palace of Culture ... Please allow me to install an [observatory] on the spire.” Letter to the Palace, 1974

The Constructivists of the Soviet 1920s desired to suffuse architecture with revolutionary electricity. They dreamt of creating radical, new types of buildings, which would function as ‘power sources for the new order’ and ‘conductors and condensers of socialist culture’. But did the Stalinists, in fact, build more successful Social Condensers than their avant-garde predecessors ever managed to? This paper answers this question with reference to the case of the Palace of Culture and Science, a Stalinist skyscraper ‘gifted’ to Warsaw by the Soviet Union in 1955.

9.30–10: Introduction:

The Permanent Condenser

Opening comments:

Jane Rendell, Michał Murawski

Opening discussion:

Victor Buchli

10–11.30: The Theory and

Practice of the Condenser

(chair: Michał Murawski)

Dubravka Sekulić

Self-Management and the Social Condenser

Oleksiy Radinski

Annexed Architecture: Friendship of Nations in the Crimean Resort

Łukasz Stanek

Collective Luxury

11.30–12: Coffee Break

12–1.30: Social Condensation

in Non-Designed Settings

(chair: Victor Buchli)

Jane Rendell

‘Arry’s Bar

Nick Beech

Social Condensation in the Metropole:

Locating the First New Left

Andrew Willimott

Everyday Life and the Soviet Urban Communes

1.30–2.30: Lunch

Professor Andrea Phillips (Goldsmiths)

Community Arts Centres and the Privatisation of the Social Condenser

Over the course of the last two decades state-funded community arts centres have changed dramatically, some scaling up to become beacons of cultural industrial success, rebuilding and rebranding, leading the way for local and national regeneration schemes; others fading slowly or trying to maintain small amounts of cultural provision on much smaller budgets, often closing as their buildings are brought by property speculators or more ambitious administrators ... This has occurred during the same period in which a newly proprietary ‘social turn’ in the arts has begun to focus – and attempt to provide, however temporarily - models of social condensation in galleries and museums. My talk will examine this contradiction in an attempt to argue for the reappropriation of arts centres for non-privatised, egalitarian use.

Professor Jane Rendell (UCL-Bartlett)

‘Arry’s Bar

Based on my experience as an expert academic witness at The Public Inquiry into the Aylesbury Compulsory Purchase Order held at Arry’s Bar, the Den (Millwall Football Ground), South London, April-May 2015, this talk will present an argument for why the Compulsory Purchase Order of leaseholder properties on the Aylesbury, required for the demolition and regeneration of this social housing estate, is not in the public interest ... This particular Public Inquiry, is set out in ‘Arry’s Bar in spatial opposition: on one side, directly facing those entering to the room, sit the state, Southwark Council, with a full team of employees fronted by a Barrister, and on the other, their backs to the door, an unlikely alliance of opponents are gathered, who have the potential to socially condense.

Dr Łukasz Stanek (Manchester School of Architecture)

Collective Luxury

In *Luxury and Capitalism* (1913) Werner Sombart argued that the restructuring of urban space in late 18th century Europe made available to broad population groups a new type of collective enjoyment, which until then had been the privilege of the ruling court. Before and after Sombart, many heterodox socialist thinkers considered such urban experience to be emancipatory, and this includes Henri Lefebvre’s discourse on “collective luxury” ... By reclaiming the discourse on collective luxury, Lefebvre pointed at possibilities of new use economies of urban spaces: possibilities which he urged to explore by means of architectural projects.

2.30–4: The Economy and

Aesthetics of the Condenser

(chair: Jane Rendell)

Udo Grashoff

Schwarzwohnen

Michał Murawski

Dear Distributor of Architectural Power:

Letters to a Stalinist Social Condenser

Andrea Phillips

Community Arts Centres and the Privatisation of the Social Condenser

4–4.30: Coffee Break

4.30–6: The Fall and Rise of the

Condenser (Beyond Ruin Value)

(chair: Caroline Humphrey)

Owen Hatherley

Actually-Existing Social Condensers

Michael Marriott

The Laundry Room

Jonathan Charley

“*Molodoi Chelovek ... my origins lie in the past, but I am from the future*”

6–6.30: Final Responses

Led by Caroline Humphrey

Dubravka Sekulic (ETH Zurich)

Self-Management and the Social Condenser

The theoretical framework of Yugoslav socialist self-management was more promising than how it was realized in practice ... Regardless of its questionable performance, in the context of rethinking housing and the social condenser, some of the principles of Yugoslav socialist self-management are worth revisiting. Together with right to housing, one of the fundamental bases of Yugoslav workers self-management was a project of the radical reinvention of the property relationship, with the introduction of the concept of “societal property” as a category outside of private/public dialectics.

Oleksiy Radinskiy (Visual Culture Research Centre, Kiev) **Annexed Architecture: Friendship of Nations in the Crimean Resort**

If there ever was a place where Soviet internationalism and the idea of ‘friendship of nations’ could be realized as a practice beyond empty ideological slogans, this place was Crimea ... There, in the subtropical climate of Crimean southern coast, the Soviet people were surrounded by the finest neomodernist architecture of sanatoriums, hotels and resorts – like for example the famous Artek. This architecture was supposed to represent the realized utopia of Soviet internationalism. Not occasionally, the neomodernist architecture in the USSR had triumphed in its recreational function – as opposed to the grim everyday life of the Soviet worker that took place amongst the dystopian factory blocks. But this neomodernist paradise came at a price ...

Dr Andy Willimott (UCL-SSEES)

Everyday Life and the Soviet Urban Communes

In October 1918, just shy of one year since the Bolsheviks seized power in the name of the proletariat, the Soviet press stumbled across one of the first self-proclaimed spontaneous, ‘domestic communes’ of the new revolutionary state. This was a cohabiting alliance of young activists and workers who had taken up residence in one of the apartment blocks near Preobrazhenskaia Gate (Vorota) in Moscow. Despite poor conditions and a lack of running water, this small band of revolutionary enthusiasts sought to turn their humble residence into a bastion of socialism ...

This paper will assess the rise of the urban commune phenomena among early Soviet activists. It will trace their active engagement with dominant Soviet discursive themes, including collectivism and social reformation.

Dr Victor Buchli (UCL Anthropology) **Discussant**

Professor Caroline Humphrey (University of Cambridge, Anthropology) **Discussant**