**Transitional Spaces in Architecture and Psychoanalysis: The Setting and the Social Condenser**

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My talk today focuses on ‘transitional’ objects and spaces – those located in the overlap between inside and outside/private and public. I position next to one another textual accounts of two specific kinds of transitional objects and spaces, the setting of psychoanalysis and the social condenser of architecture, these are taken from my recent book on the subject; Transitional Spaces: The Architecture of Psychoanalysis.

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\* The Narkomfin Communal House, [Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow) (1928-1929)

\* The concept of the social condenser, developed through the theoretical and then practical work of the Russian constructivists in the 1920s, had to be actively ‘revolutionary’, and according to its subsequent development by architect and theorist Moisei Ginzburg must ‘work’ materially.[[2]](#endnote-1) This constructivist design methodology was realized in six schemes, including the Narkomfin Communal House in [Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow), designed by [Ginzburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moisei_Ginzburg) with Milinis in 1928-1929.[[3]](#endnote-2)

The Narkomfin included four separate buildings: a living block with three types of living unit following the STROIKOM guidelines, the communal block (with a kitchen, dining room, gymnasium and library), a mechanical laundry building, and a communal crèche, which was never built. This accommodation allowed for both preexisting bourgeois living patterns (K and 2-F units) and fully communist F units.[[4]](#endnote-3) The main distinction between the two was that the former included kitchens and a family hearth, while the latter was primarily a sleeping unit with minimal facilities for preparing food, since cooking and eating were to take place in the communal block. The role of spaces that were not simply private interiors or exterior to the buildings, but rather shared and transitional such as corridors, were key to the design. OSA believed that architecture had a transformative power, capable of ‘induc[ing] a particular form of social organization’, and that a building such as Narkomfin would help ease those following bourgeois living patterns into adopting socialist ones.[[5]](#endnote-4) The Narkomfin Communal House was as a ‘social condenser’ of the transitional type.[[6]](#endnote-5)

\* The Transitional Object or Object of the First Relationship (1951)

\* The focus of the theory of object relations created and developed by the Independent British Analysts is the unconscious relationship that exists between a subject and his/her objects, both internal and external.[[7]](#endnote-6) Psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott introduced the idea of a transitional object, related to, but distinct from, both the external object, the mother’s breast, and the internal object, the introjected breast. For Winnicott, the transitional object or what he called the original ‘not-me’ possession stands for the breast or first object, but the use of symbolism implies the child’s ability to make a distinction between fantasy and fact, between internal and external objects.[[8]](#endnote-7) This ability to keep inner and outer realities separate yet inter-related results in an intermediate area of experience, the ‘potential space’, between ‘the individual and the environment (originally the object)’, which Winnicott claimed is retained and later in life contributes to the intensity of cultural experiences around art and religion.[[9]](#endnote-8)

\* *Unité d’Habitation*, Marseilles, (1947-1953)

\* The ‘slab block’ of the [*Unité d'Habitation*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unit%C3%A9_d%27Habitation) was designed by Le Corbusier and built between 1947-1953 in Marseilles. The *Unité* is 17 stories high, housing 1600 people in 23 different flat types and includined 23 communal facilities including an internal street of shops, a health centre, and a kindergarden and nursery, roof garden, with a swimming pool for children and a gymnasium.[[10]](#endnote-9) It’s most striking architectural feature is an intricate section which interlocks two-storey apartments with double height living spaces to incorporate a *rue intérieure* every three floors. The *Unité* draws on many aspects of Le Corbusier’s earlier research and work, built and unbuilt, and in the mid to late 1920s Le Corbusier also made visits to the Soviet Union to study the architecture,[[11]](#endnote-10) and was inspired by a number of aspects of the Narkomfindesign: including its innovative section*,* the variable range in possible apartment types, including one with double height living space, and the provision of communal facilities. At the same time, Ginzburg and other Soviet constructivists in the early 1920s had read articles by Le Corbusier,[[12]](#endnote-11) and references to Le Corbusier’s five-point plan are evident in the design of Narkomfin.[[13]](#endnote-12)

\* A Generalised Triangular Structure with Variable Thirds

\* André Green considers the analytic setting a ‘homologue’ for what he calls the third element in analysis, the ‘analytic object’, which in his view ‘corresponds precisely to Winnicott’s definition of the transitional object’,[[14]](#endnote-13) and is formed through the analytic association between analyst and analysand.[[15]](#endnote-14) Green notes that the transitional space of the setting has a ‘specificity of its own’, which differs from both outside and inner space.[[16]](#endnote-15)

For Green the position of the consulting room between inside and outside, relates to its function as a transitional space between analyst and analysand, as does its typology as a closed space different from both inner and outer worlds.

The analytic object is neither internal (to the analysand or to the analyst), nor external (to either the one or the other), but is situated between the two. So it corresponds precisely to Winnicott’s definition of the transitional object and to its location in the intermediate area of potential space, the space of ‘overlap’ demarcated by the analytic setting.[[17]](#endnote-16)

Green understands this spatial construction, as a ‘generalised triangular structure with variable third’.[[18]](#endnote-17)

\* Alton West Estate, Roehampton, London SW15 (1954-1958)

Alton West comprises around 1867 dwellings located in around 100 acres of parkland. Originally, the dwellings were grouped into 12-storey point-blocks of flats, 11-storey slab-blocks of maisonettes, 4-storey slab-blocks of maisonettes and terraces of single-storey housing for old people. [[19]](#endnote-18) Community facilities were provided in the form of schools – nursery, primary and comprehensive – a surgery, shops and a library.[[20]](#endnote-19) Architectural historian Nicholas Bullock has outlined how Corbusier’s *Unité* was a point of reference for the architects of the London County Council in the 1950s, and that while, for example, the architects of Alton East at Roehampton were advocates of New Humanism, those of Alton West were ‘pro-Corbu’.[[21]](#endnote-20) Bullock refers to the ‘hot debates’ held in London pubs over the adoption of the principles of the *Unité*, and how these were linked to divergent socialist views and attitudes to Soviet communism. Bullock notes that in the translation from the *Unité* to Alton West certain key design features were lost including the communal spaces, double height living rooms, and the traditional English access balcony replaced the *rue intérieure*. [[22]](#endnote-21)

\* The Berlin Poliklinik

\* Over his life, Freud practised psychoanalysis between two settings, in bourgeois houses in which he both lived and worked: first at Berggasse 19 in Vienna, from 1891 to 1938, and later, after fleeing Austria, at 20 Maresfield Gardens, Hampstead, north London, from his arrival in England in 1938 until his death in 1939.[[23]](#endnote-22) Yet despite the elite and restricted location of the settings in which he lived and worked, according to cultural historian Elizabeth Danto, Freud raised the issue of the availability of psychoanalysis in terms of price and accessibility a number of times, but most notably in a speech in Budapest on the eve of the Hungarian Revolution of 1918, where he argued for the need to provide therapy to the masses, who he said suffered no less from neuroses than their social ‘betters’.[[24]](#endnote-23) Freud stated that ‘neuroses threaten public health no less than tuberculosis’, and proposed ‘that the poor man should have just as much right to assistance to his mind as he now has to the life-saving help offered by surgery’.[[25]](#endnote-24)

In Berlin and Vienna, free clinics were established in the period after the First World War, as part of a shift in the Weimar Republic from a hospital-based system focused on acute care to a preventative approach based on an outpatient clinic system. The Berlin Poliklinik opened in 1920, and the Vienna Ambulatorium, in 1922,[[26]](#endnote-25) as well as one set up in Budapest at the university by Sandor Ferenczi in 1919 and which was revived ten years later.[[27]](#endnote-26) The first psychoanalytic outpatient services to specifically be identified as a free clinic were officially inaugurated on 16 February 1920 by the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society, at 29 W. Potsdamer Strasse, where the innovations included free treatment, length-of-treatment guidelines, fractionary or time-limited analysis, child analysis and the formalisation of psychoanalytic training.[[28]](#endnote-27) The Berlin Poliklinik was located in rented space on the fourth floor of an apartment house, and that the interiors, designed by Freud’s architect and engineer son Ernst, included a suite of five rooms for treatment or consultation, soundproofed with double doors, the largest of which was also used for conferences, lectures and meetings.

\* 71 Crossmount House

\* I wrote the final part of this book in from a tower block in south London, where from my flat on the eighteenth floor I could see the history of London’s social housing lying at my feet. Many of the post-war social housing schemes inspired by communal elements contained in the social condenser of the transitional are currently judged to have failed in their intentions or to be structurally unsound, but the problem is more often the lack of investment in the communal spaces and infrastructure, rather than the original aspirations or engineering design. The years of neglect were visible in my own point-block, where the social condensers – laundries, one on each floor – all lay empty, the doors recently padlocked by Southwark Council, because of the ‘health and safety’ threat they pose. Yet the one act of repair Southwark Council have invested in, smacks of aesthetic vandalism and will stop residents ever accessing their balconies again.

As spring turned to summer, the beautiful Crittall windows, which framed my view over Burgess Park were removed. The configuration of Southwark Council’s new double-glazed units completely ignored the 1960’s design: three picture windows were replaced by six narrow ones, whose plastic frames are double the width of the originals, and the sills so high that I could no longer step out onto my balcony, to the edge of the building-line as my lease showed, and perform my duty of repairing and maintaining my property. Arguing that *they* owned the balcony – but with no evidence to support their claim – I asked Southwark Council how they would keep to their part of the contract, and repair and maintain the balcony in the future? Silence. So this transitional space of my balcony remains between owner of free and leasehold.

\* The Children’s Home Laboratory

\* In Moscow, between 1902 and 1906, the architect Fyodor Shekhtel designed and constructed a private home for Stepan Pavlovich Ryabushinsky, a member of a wealthy banking family.[[29]](#endnote-28) After the Revolution, from 1921, the villa housed a psychoanalytic nursery and children’s home. Headed by Vera Schmidt, and first named the Children’s Home Laboratory and later, from 1922, International Solidarity, the home was not only for orphans but also for children of such state and party leaders as Joseph Stalin and Mikhail Frunze.[[30]](#endnote-29) The live-in nursery began with 30 children, ranging in ages from one to five years, who came from a variety of social backgrounds: some were from working-class or peasant families, some had parents who were intellectuals or leading party activists.[[31]](#endnote-30) The State Psychoanalytic Institute, whose activities included an outpatient department, lectures, workshops and publications, was also located in the house, from its founding in 1923 by psychoanalysts Otto Schmidt, Ivan Ermakov and Alexander Luria, until it was closed by Stalin in August 1925.[[32]](#endnote-31)

According to the secretary of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society, ‘Our psychoanalytic society was on the mansion’s ground floor and its first floor housed the “psychoanalytic nursery school”.’[[33]](#endnote-32) \* Another ex-occupant recalls: ‘At the beginning, the nursery was a day-and-night residency, but in the autumn of 1926 a plywood partition was installed across the stairway, and children started to come just during the day and only to the first floor.’[[34]](#endnote-33) The dining room with a long table and benches is recollected as having been on the first floor and the room near the balcony housing the medical aid point,[[35]](#endnote-34) while ‘Artyom Fyodorovich remembers Annushka Albuhina – a cook – treating children with milk in a big kitchen in the basement’.[[36]](#endnote-35) Could this Children’s Home Laboratory, a transitional space between inside and outside defined in the psychoanalytic terms of D. W. Winnicott or André Green, be described as a setting?

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And so to conclude. The design of Moisei Ginzburg and Ignatii Milinis’s Narkomfin Communal House (1928–9) in [Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow), a social condenser of a transitional type, was influenced by Le Corbusier’s early work, but in turn inspired aspects of his [*Unité d'Habitation*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unit%C3%A9_d%27Habitation) (1947–52) constructed in Marseilles thirty years later, specifically with reference to the interlocking section and design of transitional spaces between inside and outside. Certain principles of the *Unité* were then adopted and adapted in some of the public housing schemes built, following the Second World War, by the Welfare State in the United Kingdom, specifically the Alton West Estate in Roehampton, London (1954­–8) designed by the London County Council. The transitional status of the Narkomfin came from its role in helping a bourgeois society transform into a revolutionary one, but possibly the key innovation in its design was the focus on the transitional spaces of corridors not only as linking elements but places in their own right. Historically, the *Unité* and many other of Curb’s housing design develop variations on interlocking sections and interior streets, andoccupy a transitional space in the transformation of the social condenser from its invention in Moscow to its later reworking in London. Returning to Moscow, to an Art Nouveau villa occupied in the early phase of the Soviet revolution by the Children’s Home Laboratory, we find in a place of experimental pedagogy, closed down by Stalin in 1924, when the transitional concept of the social condenser, which inspired the Narkomfin, was still in its infancy. In the short time that the nursery occupied this building its presence suggested a version of the setting that was socially radical, and which takes the relation between architecture and psychoanalysis out of the context of the private dyad between analyst and analysand. It allows for a rethinking of the architectural history of the social condenser from a psychoanalytic perspective, as a transitional space in terms of change over time, but also as overlap between interior and exterior,

1. ‘This material has been extracted and reworked from Jane Rendell, *The Architecture of Psychoanalysis*(London: IB Tauris, 2017).’ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Catherine Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde: Theories of Art, Architecture and the City* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), p. 118. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde*, pp. 44–5. See also Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism*. Oxford, 1999). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. Buchli notes that the original design was the A-1 *Don Kommuna* entered in a competition and exhibition of *Don Kommuny* organized by OSA in Moscow in 1927*.* Buchli, ‘Moisei Ginzburg’s Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow’, p. 179, note 13. According to Gary Berkovich, the architects of this 1927 design were Anatolii Ladinskii and Konstantin Ivanov, under direction of their professor Andrey Ol’. See Gary Berkovich, ‘My Constructivism’, translated from Russian, by Gary Berkovich and David Gurevich, extracted from the book of memoirs *Human Subjects*. Excerpts from ‘My Constructivism’ were first published in the *Inland Architect* magazine, v. 25, n. 8 (1981) pp. 8-19. *See* <http://www.e-noosphere.com/Noosphere/En/Magazine/Default.asp?File=20080108_Berkovich.htm> (accessed 12 April 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. Buchli, ‘Moisei Ginzburg’s Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow’, p. 162. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. Buchli, ‘Moisei Ginzburg’s Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow’, p. 162. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. Gregorio Kohon (ed.) *The British School of Psychoanalysis: The Independent Tradition* (London: Free Association Books, 1986) p. 20. The British School of Psychoanalysis consists of psychoanalysts belonging to the British Psycho-Analytical Society, within this society are three groups, the Kleinian Group, the ‘B’ Group (followers of Anna Freud) and the Independent Group. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. Winnicott, ‘Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena’, see in particular pp. 89 and 94. See also D. W. Winnicott, ‘The Use of an Object’, *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, v. 50 (1969) pp. 711–716. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. See D. W. Winnicott, ‘The Location of Cultural Experience’, *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, v. 48 (1967) pp. 368–372, p. 371. See also D. W. *Winnicott: Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
10. For the initial designs see, Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complete 1938–1946* (Zurich: publié par Willy Boesiger, architecte, Zurich, Les Editions d’Architecture Erlenbach-Zurich, 1946), pp. 172–187. See also Alban Janson and Carsten Krohn, *Le Corbusier, Unité d’habitation, Marseilles*, (London and Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
11. Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the USSR: Theories and Projects for Moscow 1928–1936,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
12. Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde*, pp. 38-9 and Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde,* p. 122. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
13. For example the debt Le Corbusier’s Unité owes the Narkomfin is noted by numerous critics and historians. See also ‘An interview with Richard Pare, photographer and expert on Soviet Modernist architecture’, by Tim Tower  13 November 2010. See <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/nov2010/pare-n13.shtml> (accessed 12 April 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
14. André Green, ‘Potential Space in Psychoanalysis: The Object in the Setting’, Simon A. Grolnick and Leonard Barkin (eds) *Between Reality and Fantasy: Transitional Objects and Phenomena* (New York and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1978) pp. 169–189, p. 180. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
15. André Green, ‘The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting (On Changes in Analytic Practice and Analytic Experience) – In Memory of D. W. Winnicott’, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* v. 56 (1975) pp. 1–22, p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
16. André Green and Gregorio Kohon ‘The Greening of Psychoanalysis: André Green in Dialogues with Gregorio Kohon’, Gregorio Kohon (ed.) *The Dead Mother: The Work of André Green* (London: Routledge, published in association with the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1999) pp. 10–58, p. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
17. André Green, ‘Potential Space in Psychoanalysis: The Object in the Setting’, S. A. Grolnick and L. Barkin (eds), *Between Reality and Fantasy: Transitional Objects and Phenomena* edited by (New York and London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 169–189, p. 180. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
18. Green and Kohon, ‘The Greening of Psychoanalysis’, p. 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
19. ‘Alton Estate (W) Roehampton Lane, London, SW15’, *The Architect’s Journal* (5 November, 1959) pp. 461-478. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
20. ‘Housing at Priory Lane, Roehampton, SW15’, *Architectural Design* (January 1959), pp. 7-21. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
21. Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 102–107. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
22. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block,* p. 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
23. See for example, Nixon, ‘On the Couch’, p. 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
24. See Danto, *Freud’s Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice 1916–38*, p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
25. Freud, ‘Lines of Advance in Psycho-Analytic Therapy’, p. 167. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
26. Danto, ‘The Ambulatorium’, p. 287. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
27. Danto, *Freud’s Free Clinics*, p. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
28. Danto, ‘The Berlin Poliklinik’, pp. 1271–3 for a description of the opening of the premises. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
29. Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde*, pp. 10–11. Here Cooke discusses *Moderne* as a democratic approach. For a more detailed discussion of the work of Shekhtel see Cooke, ‘Fedor Osipvich Shekhtel. See the research of W. C. Brumfield: for example Brumfield, ‘Architectural Design in Moscow, 1890–1917’, for a discussion of the rationalist aspect of Shekhtel’s public works; and Brumfield*, A History of Russian Architecture*, p. 437, figs 575–6, for a discussion of the design of a range of private houses designed by Shekhtel. See also Brumfield*,* ‘Building for the Bourgeoisie, and Brumfield, ‘The Decorative Arts in Russian Architecture: 1900–1907’. Brumfield refers to Evgeniia I. Kirichenko as ‘[t]he leading Soviet authority on the work of Shekhtel’. See Brumfield, ‘The Decorative Arts in Russian Architecture: 1900–1907’, p. 23, note 4. See also Kirichenko, *Fedor Shekhtel*, pp. 61–70. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
30. Anisimov, *Architectural Guide to Moscow*, p. 72. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
31. Brenner, ‘Intrepid Thought’. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
32. Kadyrov, ‘Analytical Space and Work in Russia’, p. 475. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
33. Penezhko et al., *Schechtel, Ryabushinskiy, Gorky*, p. 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
34. Penezhko et al., *Schechtel, Ryabushinskiy, Gorky*, p. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
35. Penezhko et al., *Schechtel, Ryabushinskiy, Gorky*, p. 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
36. Penezhko et al., *Schechtel, Ryabushinskiy, Gorky*, p. 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)