This issue arose out of a series of reflections on the contemporary meaning of realism in the representational strategies of the design disciplines. Realism, in this context, departs from the nineteenth-century preoccupation with presenting environments and subjects typically excluded from pictorial representation. Today, while the “realistic” is favoured and celebrated in student and professional renditions, it seems closer to a contemporary naturalism, at times veering on mannerism; for instance, impossibly lit buildings at dusk, exaggerated perspectives which amplify the space toward a nonexistent point, or, at its most intense, landscapes populated by ghostly figures simultaneously performing every possible cliché of “history.” While the “realistic” is a recasting theme within both design education and professions, there seems to be a lack of realism. This issue attempts to set up a conversation between both forms by bringing together a series of reflections and practices hinged on both contemporary and historical usages of realism, situating conflicting accounts of its meaning side by side. As professions that create alternative realities, architecture and landscape architecture consistently adopt mixed and ambivalent relations to the everyday as we see them become the object of early twentieth-century critiques of ideology, which located the real in a critical reappraisal, not of the world of things, but of our beliefs and commitments. In the 1930s, the real was theorized as paradoxically material and immaterial within both psychoanalysis and philosophy: on the one hand as the absent yet visceral substrate of our psychic drive, and on the other as a circuit of becoming, in which the potentiality of memory is as real as the world of matter. These complex formulations persist as points for extension and critique within recent arguments in philosophy that have pushed against the legacy of structuralism (in its various structuralist and post-structuralist formulations) in order to posit the necessity of thinking the real outside or beyond the human. These discourses are beginning to have an impact in architecture and landscape, and this issue of Scapegoat constitutes one of their key arguments in order to put them in a more direct confrontation with those of the disciplines. Our goal here is not to codify practices and arguments, but to modestly begin a catalogue of precedents, which can only ever be repeated through differentiation. Realism, most certainly, is one thing: falsification, or, as Zdeněk Vrabcik puts it, falsism. Realism has become an ungentle matter for Scapegoat because we hear all around us schemes spun in the name of a false measure of reality. In the twilight of neoliberalism we are witness to the apologetics of an economic logic that batter us with numbers rather than words. We are disciplined by an economy that asks us to face the “reality” of overseeing on social programs, education, healthcare, and accept the austerity measures that define contemporary class relations. For four decades, neoliberal policies have foreclosed the future in the name of a puritan “realism” of the market. Today, as people around the world clamour for a new reality, we hear politicians rail against the idealism of socialism in favour of the tough “realism” of billionaires. In the face of these falsisms, this issue presents a sequence of arguments in favor of a paradoxical and situational realism. Learning from these rich contributions, we formulate realism as follows:

1. Realism is logically paradoxical. This does not mean that realism is illogical, but that it functions according to a logic that is dialectical in form. Its function is always to dismantle the unreal, to illustrate its internal contradictions: what realism hails is the formal logic of sophistry.

2. Realism affirms subjectively produced objective truths. If realism is a war against lies, then the universal truths it produces are generated and verified through specific situations. This means that the truth is both an event of disclosure, a moment when someone or something says something real, and a question of positionality: only those who are in a position to experience the truth can speak it.

3. Realism enters the flow of history in order to act on the future. Realism is concerned with history, because realities are interested in making it. This is a question of both stepping out of time by refusing the pseudo-cyclical speed of the present, and of violently disrupting it.

4. Realism thinks about a world beyond thought. It begins from the premise that there is a universe outside of human agency and develops its ethics and politics from this starting point. Suddenly, the world forces us to think outside our human subsistence, and thought itself is brought to life through this challenge.

5. Realism sees images for what they are, not for what they represent. The problem is not the fact that there are pictures, but that they are seen primarily as representations, rather than as productions of labour and thought. It is not images that are unreal, but their apparent transparency.

6. Realism understands the world without objects. Realists are interested in a world that does not respect the rigid separations and hierarchies that we impose on objects or images, in order to pull them out of the complex simultaneity of time. In place of object fetishism, realists try to see the relations between things.