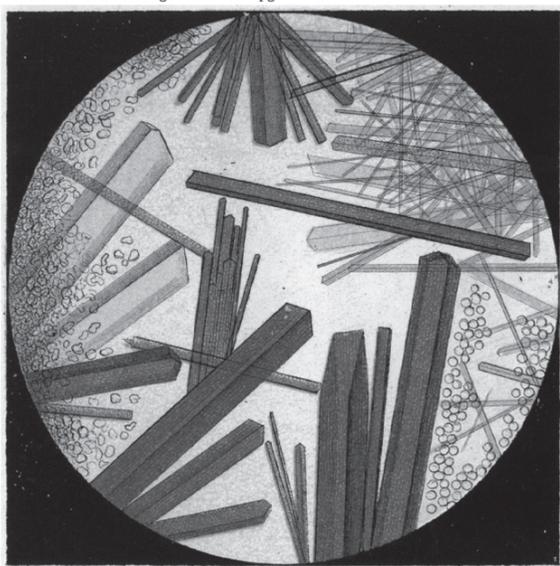


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Editorial Note

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 renderings, it seems closer to a contemporary naturalism, at times verging on mannerism: for instance, impossibly lit buildings at dusk, exaggerated perspectives which amplify the speed toward a vanishing point, or, at its most intense, landscapes populated by ghostly figures simultaneously performing every possible cliché of "leisure." While the "realistic" is a recurring 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 terms 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 real. Every architectural projection is realist in that it relies at base on an understanding of the real in relation to what is possible. There is no way to dissociate the architectural intervention from this inherent realism, but as a practice of changing things, architecture could do well with a more robust investigation of the relationships between its projections and the conditions it both emerges from and enters into. Understanding the differences between these could change the nature of architectural practice. The kinds of questions to keep in mind while doing so are: what reduces reality and what expands it, and what forms of practice are correlated with each of these valences?

If nineteenth-century realism was concerned with the presentation of the everyday conditions of life under early capitalism, this naïve return to things as we see them became 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 1950s, 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.¹ These complex formulations persist as points for extension and critique within recent arguments in philosophy that have pushed against the legacy of constructivism (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* constellates some 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 opposed to one thing: falsification, or, as Krzysztof Wodiczko puts it, *falsism*. Realism has become an urgent 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 apotheosis of an economic logic that batters us with numbers rather than words. We are disciplined by an economy that asks us to face the "reality" of overspending on social programs, education, healthcare, and accept the austerity measures that defend contemporary class relations. For four decades, neoliberal policies have foreclosed the future in the name of a punitive "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 favour 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 realists hate is the formal logic of sophistry.²
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
3. **Realism enters the flow of history in order to act on the future.** Realism is concerned with history, because realists 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

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 solipsism, and thought itself is brought to life through this challenge.⁵
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 products of labour and thought. It is not images that are unreal, but their apparent transparency.⁶
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.⁷

Notes

1. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York/London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1991), and Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson, 1859-1941," and "Bergson's Conception of Difference" in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade (Los Angeles/New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 22-51. These last two were workshoped as talks as early as 1954, and published in 1956.
2. See Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript* (London/
3. See our conversation with Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Realism as a Course of Life," on page 8 in this issue.
4. For a discussion of the relation between realism and time, see Jason E. Smith, "Occupy, the Time of Riots, and the Real Movement of History," on page 20, and Erik Bordeleau, "Jia Zhangke's Still Life: Destruction as Intercession," on pages 26-29 in this issue.
5. See Thomas Nail's review of *The Speculative Turn*, and Mary Lou Lobsinger, "The Antinomies of Realism: Postwar Italian Housing Projects," pages 36-39 in this issue.
6. See our conversation with Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Manet: Images for a World Without People," on pages 10-11, and our conversation with Jesse Boon, "Echos, Mirrors, and Ghosts," on page 12 in this issue.
7. See our conversation with Elitza Dulguerova, "Objectless in Vitebsk: Reflections on Kazimir Malevich, Architecture, and Representation," on pages 24-25 in this issue.