

Editorial

Matthew Hanson

We often have in mind the example that Brecht uses to describe the interval, the suspended time where in the middle of a play on stage the actors aren't playing – so they are no longer actors – and the spectators don't have anything to watch – so they are no longer spectators, it is a very beautiful picture of a moment of de-subjectivization, a small human strike.¹

Originating in Viktor Shklovsky's analysis of Russian formalism, *ostranenie* describes the strategy of estrangement - the moment in an artwork that briefly overturns the sense that things have always been as they seem. The interval and its analogous terms - estrangement, alienation, defamiliarisation - became central tenants of Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht's literary partnership in their development of shock theory and epic theatre.

In the excerpt from 'Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike' Claire Fontaine contextualise Brecht's interval with an emancipatory potential. As it adjusts our perception of social relations, it makes possible a brief acknowledgment that 'the boss is not the boss'². The implication is that such negation might inspire our resistance to, or withdrawal from given relations.

However beautiful the picture, the device has proven inadequate to the capital's indiscriminate power of recuperation. Today's estrangement is a fully incorporated component of the modern experience, a stimulant for 'surplus alienation', Anke Hennig concludes³. Therefore, this issue asks what artistic, architectural and curatorial approaches to estrangement offer current discourse in organisation, aesthetics and activism. The articles unpack estrangement for the political, social and cultural sprint of our time.

The publication is interspersed with artistic projects by Ken Gonzales-Day, Jack Schneider, and Josephine Baker-Heaslip. It was conceived during the Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art, 2015, a programme developed by Warren Neidich and Barry Schwabsky. The 20 day intensive comprised lectures seminars and workshops with artists, curators and theoreticians developed around the theme of 'art and politics of estrangement in contemporary discourses from cognitive capitalism to *ostranenie*'. ([http://saasfeesummerinstituteofart.com/.](http://saasfeesummerinstituteofart.com/)) The editors of this issue have aimed to elaborate and analyze contemporary understandings of estrangement in collaboration with select academics, artists, curators and architects.

Benjamin T. Busch, a graduate student in spatial strategies (*Raumstrategien*) at the Weissensee School of Art, has invited the contribution of Anke Hennig and organised an interview between Alison Hugill and Carson Chan. Hennig unpacks the etymology and mythology of estrangement, from the birth of Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, through to a proposed 'retro-vision' for 2016. Hugill and Chan discuss how curated architecture integrates, occupies, and transforms public infrastructure to re-examine the space of perception in our lived and built environment.

Paul Stewart, an artist, writer and curator and PhD candidate at the University of Teesside, presents an email exchange with Alistair Hudson, Jeni Fulton and Sam Thorne, addressing the recuperation of activism into art history and the gentrification of (art)-activist practices. Stewart has also organised 'Five Propositions' on the production of learning, pedagogical norms and participation strategies, offered by Suzana Milevska, Lilian Cameron, Adrian Shaw, and Jared Pappas-Kelley.

With Claire Ruud, Director of Convergent Programming at the MCA Chicago, and members of conceptual collectives Los Angeles College and The Best Friends Learning Gang, artist Jonas Becker discusses recent experiments in artist-initiated education and public engagement programming

In her essay *Vampires: From Aesthetics to Ethics, 1922-Present*, artist and writer Penny Rafferty maps the trend of horror genre films as an allegory for socio-political malaise. In discussion with Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, the two examine the movements and motivations of contemporary artists that operate between designer-entrepreneurs and potential insurgents.

Notes

- 1 Realism Working Group, *Historical Fiction as Realism* – Interview with Claire Fontaine <https://realismworkinggroup.org/interview-with-claire-fontaine/>
- 2 Claire Fontaine *Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike: A few Clarifications*, 2005; p13
- 3 Anke Henning, "Estrangement. A Retro-Vision for 2016" *On Curating* 31, 2016 p. 6

Editorial by

Matthew Hanson is an independent curator based in Zürich. Recent exhibitions include *The Buttocks of a Steelmill*, Hohlstrasse 541, Zürich, *i) duplex cling mob*, Michael Lett, Auckland; *Home is Where One Starts From*, Yuill Crowley, Sydney and Heirs, 55 Sydenham Rd, Sydney. Matthew graduated with from the University of Auckland 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in political science and philosophy and is currently studying (MAS Curating) at Zürcher Hochschule der Künste.

co editors

Jonas Becker is an interdisciplinary visual artist whose photography and video installations explore how desire and belief are formed around specific sites and geography. Recent projects focus on the relationship between humans, technology, and the environment, questioning the concept of what is "natural". He is based in Los Angeles and has recently exhibited in solo shows at the Lancaster Museum of Art & History, the Craft & Folk Art Museum, and Shulamit Nazarian Gallery. His work has been featured in *Art Ltd.*, *Artillery*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Weekly*.

Benjamin T. Busch was internationally trained as an architect at the University of Kansas, Potsdam University of Applied Sciences and the University of Stuttgart. He has lived and worked in Berlin since 2011, where he leads Studio Busch, a platform for spatial practice operating between the disciplines of photography and design. As a graduate student of *Raumstrategien* (spatial strategies) at Weissensee School of Art, he is currently researching critical modes of architectural production within the field of spatial practice. Treating

architecture as a symptom of abstract processes, his artwork and writing investigate complex fields of relations within the built environment.

Penny Rafferty is a writer and visual theorist based in Berlin. She is heavily involved with the artist collective group Omsk Social Club featuring PUNK IS DADA and pioneered the spectacle Ying Colosseum. She is working heavily with the concept of Cosmic Depression—The theory of depression caused by digital utopia (Paradise without Ecology).

Paul Stewart is an artist, curator and writer based in the UK, currently a PhD by practice researcher at the University of Teesside, focusing on the role of the gallery as a site for learning. His work has been shown recently as part of the Edinburgh Artist Moving Image Festival 2015, and at Bank Street Arts Gallery. Stewart was the curator of the 'Situation Unit' commission series at mima (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art), 2015. His next book chapter, *Art and Commitment: Galleries Without Walls*, will be published this year in a book collection on Adult Education by Sense Publishing.

This Issue is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague, Chandra Pok.

*A dreaded sunny day
So I meet you at the cemetery gates
Keats and Yeats are on your side
While Wilde is on mine.
(The Smiths, Cemetery Gates)*