View, issue 12: Capitalist Realism

Deadline: Jan 15, 2016
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Magda Szczesniak, Warsaw

"View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture", issue 12:

Capitalist Realism: Transformations of Eastern European Visual Culture in the 1980's and 1990's

Managing editor: Magda Szczesniak

In May 1989, Polish poet and writer Agnieszka Osiecka wrote a scathing satirical article about the new social class that had emerged as a result of the introduction of the free market in Poland. In her piece, Osiecka derisively dubbed this developing class “wydeo,” a play on “wideo,”—the polonized version of the English word “video”—where Osiecka purposely replaced the “i” with a “y” meant to mark the group’splebeian character, as well as its lack of knowledge about the western culture it tended to embrace. Contrary to the intelligentsia, whose ethos was expressed through language and literature, wydeo was “a colorful and ubiquitous pack, […] made up of the first owners—and compulsive consumers—of VCRs,” Osiecka wrote. The new class, consisting mainly of small business owners, was ironically described by Osiecka as a group of people whose lives revolved around images. Members of wydeo consumed visual representations, carefully studied and imitated Western popular images, and—being a “colorful pack”—were a picturesque sight themselves. In Osiecka's opinion, the low quality of the images the group consumed—“the head of the family is watching a spy movie, his wife—an Australian melodrama, the offspring—Rambo”—-didn’t bode well for their future group identity.

Osiecka's classist and iconoclastic account was published a couple of weeks before the first partially free elections in Poland. However, images like the ones described by the poet had been circulating since the mid 1980s at least. VCRs, satellite dishes, VHS tapes with Western films and TV shows, and illustrated magazines had found their way into Eastern European households thanks to the relaxation of custom and border laws, which allowed for both people and images to travel. Both in the 1980s and 1990s, images and visual media were not merely symptoms of change, but active agents in and of themselves. In the context of Eastern Europe, these visual agents of change can be defined as “capitalist realism,” a predominantly visual style visible in vernacular and artistic representations, mainstream media, popular culture, and public spaces, and one which shapes, projects, naturalizes and justifies neoliberal practices and values wherever such images circulate.

In the twelfth issue of "View," we'd like to invite contributions devoted to the images and narratives of “capitalist realism.” What were the mechanisms of their functioning, their circulation and

assimilation in Eastern Europe before and after 1989? What were the differences between local and global “caprealist” images? What were the differences in the transformation of visual culture across the Eastern bloc? How were images employed to produce economic value? What kind of values and models of subjectivity were promoted and what were the mechanisms of representing and producing an ideal neoliberal subject through visual means? What tactics were employed by artists and other subjects in order to oppose the commodification of visual culture? Is it possible to reconstruct a history of countervisual practices in the transitioning Eastern bloc?

Deadline for submitted articles: January 15th, 2016.

We invite you to consult the topic of your article with the editor of the issue (redakcja@widok.i-bl.waw.pl).

For editorial and technical requirements, go to: http://widok.ibl.waw.pl/index.php/one/about/submissions.

Reference:

CFP: View, issue 12: Capitalist Realism. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 27, 2015 (accessed Nov 10, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/11079>.