

## Notes Inside a White Cube

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# Notes Inside a White Cube

**ISOBEL PALMER**

**CLEMENS POOLE**

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## ABSTRACT

The photographs in this essay document temporary “exhibitions” curated by members of the public in cities across Ukraine as part of the “Gurtobus” project, a mobile cultural center converted from a standard coach bus. In 2019 the project visited 25 cities in 14 regions of the country with cultural and educational events. The aim of the project is to support cultural decentralization, community networking and interaction of creative industries and local communities (for more information, see: <https://izolyatsia.org/en/project/community-culture-bus>). The essay reflects on this project and related discussions at “Slavic Studies Goes Public,” a workshop on Slavic Studies and Public Humanities held at the University of St. Andrews in January 2019.

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# NOTES INSIDE A WHITE CUBE

ISOBEL PALMER AND CLEMENS POOLE

<sup>1</sup>WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
SEEING AND LOOKING?

<sup>1</sup>NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS SOMETIMES  
CONFUSE THESE TWO VERBS.

<sup>2</sup>THE DICTIONARY TELLS US THAT  
SEEING IS THE MORE PASSIVE OF THE  
TWO: "TO PERCEIVE WITH THE EYES";  
WHEREAS WHEN YOU LOOK AT SOMETHING  
YOU "DIRECT [YOUR] SIGHT"—YOU "USE  
[YOUR] ABILITY TO SEE".

<sup>4</sup>BUT WHAT ABOUT THE THINGS YOU  
DON'T SEE UNTIL AFTER YOU'VE SPENT  
TIME LOOKING? OR THE THINGS YOU  
CAN'T SEE, PRECISELY BECAUSE YOU'VE  
BEEN LOOKING AT THEM FOR SO LONG?



<sup>3</sup>FOR VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY, THE GOAL OF ART IS TO RESTORE OUR SIGHT: TO HELP US SEE THINGS AGAIN, AS IF FOR THE FIRST TIME. TO MAKE US NEWCOMERS TO OUR OWN EYES.

<sup>4</sup>BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE REALLY ARE SEEING THINGS FOR THE FIRST TIME? WHEN WE ARE TRUE NEWCOMERS, AND THIS TIME THE SPACE IS NOT "OURS"? HOW DO NON-NATIVE EYES KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR? HOW DO NON-NATIVE EYES DECIDE WHAT'S WORTH LOOKING AT?

<sup>5</sup>CAN WE EVER SEE WITH COMPLETELY NEW EYES?

<sup>6</sup>DOESN'T EVERYBODY ALWAYS ALREADY HAVE A POINT OF VIEW?



<sup>7</sup>IS A POINT OF VIEW PORTABLE? IS IT IMMOVABLE? HOW DOES IT TRANSLATE?

<sup>8</sup>DOES TAKING A PROJECT SOMEWHERE ALREADY IMPLY PERCEIVED HIERARCHIES OF CULTURAL SPACE?



"HOW CAN WE AVOID "POINT OF VIEW"  
BECOMING "COLONIAL GAZE"?

"AND EVEN IF OUR AIM IS  
TO OPEN UP NEW, SHARED  
ANGLES OF VISION, WILL  
THESE INEVITABLY BE  
SKEWED TOWARDS OUR OWN  
TASTES AND VALUES?"



"WHAT IF WE LOOKED WITHOUT  
TRYING TO SEE?"

"WHAT IF WE BYPASSED LOOKING  
ENTIRELY?"

"WHAT IF INSTEAD WE ASKED:  
"HOW DID THIS OBJECT COME TO  
BE?"

"HOW DID THIS OBJECT COME TO  
BE HERE? WHO MADE IT? WHAT  
FOR? WHO RAN OUT OF USES  
FOR IT, AND WHO FOUND NEW  
ONES? WHO REMEMBERS? WHO  
CARES?"

"HOW CAN WE ACCESS THESE  
STORIES? WHAT WILL WE LEARN  
IF WE DO?"

"IS AN OBJECT WHAT IT HAS  
BEEN? OR WHAT IT COULD  
BECOME?"





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