

PIS ALLER

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Cucina x Vermland (basement) Vermlandsgade 61 kld, 2300 København S

About five years ago, as I happened to pass through a small mining city in the north of Scandinavia, I took the opportunity to visit the nearby privately funded space center ESRANGE. Back then, the talk of the town was space tourism, how people would be launched into suborbital zero-gravity flights and land a few hours later in Texas. Today, the activities at ESRANGE are mainly oriented towards research, especially in the field of solar geoengineering. Last thing I heard, a science team from Harvard were testing whether large balloons could carry micro particles into the stratosphere where they might one day be released in order to deflect sunlight in a final attempt at lowering the temperature on Earth.

Regardless of what actually goes on at ESRANGE, what really struck me—and this is perhaps a banal or even inappropriate observation given the gravitude of current research—was the DIY, almost cartoonish aesthetics of the center. The launch tower was constructed from locally sourced pine timber that would burn and fold like matches during takeoff. The actual mission control room looked like something out of a 90's "Houston we have a problem" movie or the original footage from the Voyager launches. I swear they were still using MS-DOS, and the control panel itself was just a few blinking lamps set in grey plastic alongside one gigantic, red button. Perhaps I'm exaggerating and this environment was the direct consequence of one strictly scientific process but I could hardly believe my eyes until I realized that big decisions must be anchored in small physical acts that are not entirely symbolic.

As if the exteriority of the design wasn't peculiar enough, the oddness of the locale was amplified through the actual name of the center that I could not stop reading nor hearing as "ESTRANGED." It was by far the weirdest place in which I have ever spontaneously come to think of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* that here seemed to reside in the curious relation between function and appearance. Isn't it often the encounter with the shell, the barrier or "touchpoint" rather than the more hidden structural elements of our reality that prompts the most sudden onset of alienation? While everyone knows that a big red button is not causally imperative to the physics of launching rockets or dropping nukes, a button nevertheless *has* to be pressed. Or should I say, repressed. In the threshold area between concrete and abstract, here and elsewhere, real and imagined—demarcated in time and space by the melodramatic act of touching a device—there is room for fantasies of partial escape: the world is at my fingertips *and* it doesn't mean anything at all.

Erika Landström

la cucina