François Piron

Rousing the dead

Prototipos (2004). Seven models of strange tanks in whitened cardboard stand on a long metal table that is bending, manifestly not from their weight, but perhaps from the burden of melancholy. These rather unreal objects, these replicas of replicas, come to us from a fleeting image of the past. They are taken from photographs of demonstrations by the CNT-FAI (Confederacion nacional del trabajo-Federación anarquista ibérica), held in 1936 in Barcelona, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Homemade war machines in carnival armour, made by cladding requisitioned vehicles with metal shells, they are like those insects whose gladiatorial carapace serves to frighten their predators, and are more defensive than offensive. Flimsy pasteboard weapons against the very real threat of the incipient backlash, these vehicles hardly existed. Period photographs show them being displayed in parades, proudly presented to a crowd convinced that victory will be swift and easy. In the end, they were never used.

Some seventy years later, they have gone back to being prototypes, ideal objects born of fear and revolutionary hopes that were dashed against the wall of History. The bright overhead light under which Jordi Colomer *re-presents* these vehicles, in the form of plaster and cardboard ghosts, casts no shadow on them. It is the light of the construction workshops from which they emerged, but also of popular festivities (the lights have the shape of the ones used in Spanish ferias), and evokes that unique moment when they played a political role in the midst of a public performance, a joyous yet desperate attempt to propitiate a destiny already being played out.

Other times, other places: the utopian promises of the modern machine, as a vehicle of emancipation, have, through the history of the avant-gardes, fragmented into paradoxical, contradictory and increasingly morbid ideologies, taking on Mussolinian accents in the case of the Futurists, or withdrawing into an onanistic, "bachelor" autarky with Duchamp and Picabia.

At the turn of the 1920s Kasimir Malevich started applying the Suprematist theories that he had previously developed in painting to architectonic forms, projecting his cosmic dreams in the form of the immaculate models of the *Architectons* and the drawings of the *Planits*. The *Planits* are the animated equivalent of the floating cities with the names of Greek letters that Malevich called *Architectons*; they are sorts of space ships whose plans he set out in great detail (with no scale, like the models of the *Architectons*), vehicles of utopia, *Anywhere out of the world*. For, unlike the Constructivists, Malevich did not insist that his models should be made. He rejected utilitarianism, the temporal, and aimed at the absolute, free of context. Perhaps he foresaw the imminent end of the synchrony of art and politics witnessed in the nascent Soviet Union, the end of the Revolution as a way out of History, and the return of History and its "human misfortune."

In other words, with the *Architectons* and the *Planits*, before he overturned his own artistic chronology and, in the end, integrated his own finitude into the Suprematist project, organising his own funeral as a celebration of the *Black Square*, Malevich sought radical, *dogmatic* escape

from the fact that, as Russian philosopher Boris Groys put it (precisely when taking the transition from the October Revolution to Stalinism as an example): "Every political dictatorship is ultimately founded on a dictatorship over time. The impossibility of escaping our own time, of emigrating from our own present, is an ontological slavery which is the basis of all political or economic slavery. That is the unmistakeable sign of any modern totalitarian ideology: the fact that it denies the possibility of the supratemporal." And Groys continues: "Dogmatism is thus the source of any kind of resistance against the totalitarian power of time, because someone who maintains that certain ideas or things are supratemporal —even without being able to give evidence of that—is dogmatic. [...] This decision is not in and for time, it is against time."

In the 1990s Jordi Colomer started creating works built around theatrical situations and set-ups in which the dramatisation of the installations and the artificiality of the cardboard sets served as a backdrop to enclosed sketches that seemed to take place in suspended time, as with the eternal repetition of the first bars of *L'Apprenti sorcier* by Paul Dukas in *Pianito* (1999), and the young blind man walking round in circles in a flat in *Eldorado* (1998). But architecture has always been instrumentalised in his pieces—penetrated, traversed or overflown—and it was a scale model of a pale imitation of the *Cité radieuse* ² that was destroyed in the video *Simo* (1997) in one final enraged, destructive act by the main character.

This iconoclastic action involving a great modernist symbol, in a film which is in many ways about the alienating effect of architectural functionalism on people who are normalised and ultimately treated as consumers, is a precursor to one of the more ambitious projects that Colomer worked on between 2002 and 2004, *Anarchitekton*. Even its title, which combines Malevich's terminology with an expression coined by American artist Gordon Matta-Clark, "Anarchitecture," conveys fairly clearly the dim view taken of architecture as an eternal ornament of power and a monumental sign of the times, a hefty hand on the clock face of History. Behind the apparent paradox of bringing together Malevich and, at the other end of the century, Matta-Clark, a former architecture student who rebelled against a waning Cartesianism, the two figures invoked by Colomer here both represent an *escape from time*.

"Anarchitecture" was first the name of a collective that Matta-Clark joined in 1973, then the name of a show that they organised in 1974. In an illustrated letter written to the other members on 10 December 1973, Matta-Clark lists a series of "anarchitectural" projects, the first being: "A reaction to the prime-crime axiom of modern design fighters. Just a blank board with NOTHING WORKS written as shown. Form fallows function. A photo of dogs sniffing each other's ass holes."

"NOTHING WORKS": these two words sum up Matta-Clark's attack on the cosmetic functionalism of modern architecture, against the arrogance of those who organise abstract urban grids. Rather than build, Matta-Clark argued for "completion through removal," advocating entropy and chaos as forms of life that struggle against—and survive—architecture. Matta-Clark's 1973 "Nothing Works" was a forerunner of 1977's "No Future," which Greil Marcus in his Secret History of the Twentieth Century ⁴ analyses as a resurgence of the anti-architectural strategies of Situationism.

Jordi Colomer's Anarchitekton is based on a series of photographs edited into a film and brought together in an installation. They were taken in four cities renowned for the resonance of their architecture: Barcelona, Brasilia, Bucharest and Osaka. We see the same solitary figure moving through the space of these urban landscapes, brandishing, banner-like, the maquettes of the buildings he is running around like some indefatigable athlete, a marathon runner without a number, or a demonstrator gone astray. But if he has strayed, then he has done so less in space than in time, by entering a counter-time, or an anachronism: what he is demonstrating for lies behind him, not ahead. He is calling not for a better future but for the reduction of these imposing constructions to the scale of models; he is trying to reverse the flow of time by laying claim to Suprematist prototypes. The process of the Anarchitekton is thus contrary to that of the Prototipos, in which objects were reconstructed on the basis of an image; here, architectural structures become models in a city-wide puppet show before finally becoming images.

The Anarchitekton films are in fact made by editing together photographs, and the jerky succession of still shots counters the illusory fluidity of the film. In his text "Desert Stars" William Jeffett notes that, "Colomer's archaic use of the technology served his comic, even dystopian view that the human use of buildings undermines grand architectural schemes."

With *Anarchitekton*, Colomer leaves the closed, symbolic space of the stage to confront the theatre of urban operations. It is interesting to note that his relation to time grows more complex in the process, going from circularity to a series of back-and-forth movements between past, present and future, replayed in random order: a present (that of the action and the architecture evoked in the images) which summons up a past (resurgences of modernism in these postmodern constructions) in which the invocation of the future as a promise of emancipation fails. In a sense, the sequenced images of the four *Anarchitekton* pieces bring to mind Walter Benjamin's definition of the image (*Bild* in German), as described by Giorgio Agamben: "For Benjamin, a *Bild* is anything (object, artwork, text, memory or document) in which a past moment and a present moment come together in a constellation within which the present must acknowledge the scrutiny of the past, and conversely, the past must find its meaning and its accomplishment in the present."

As Jeffett points out, Colomer's photonovel has elements of slapstick, the mechanics of which tend towards anarchy and destruction, whereas architecture embodies normativity—see *Big Business* (1929) with Laurel and Hardy and *One Week* (1920) by Buster Keaton. It also invokes the most emblematic of all the films made using still images, *La Jetée* (1962) by Chris Marker, another film featuring somnambulistic wandering in which movement has become impossible in the folds of a present that is forever out of reach. In Marker's melancholy cine-novel, the hero experiences a Bergsonian principle: Space ceases to exist, only Time remains, as the sole, illusory way of escaping a dead-end world. In Colomer, the

perpetual and discontinuous movement of the man constitutes the unit of measure of the landscape, but also turns out to be a temporal cursor that crosses the frame and perturbs its fixity, causing a split in the image, as if he did not belong to that space nor that time, and was in a hurry to break it up.

In Barcelona, Brasilia, Bucharest and Osaka, the four towns of Anarchitekton, Colomer carefully chose his sites, taking care not to create a one-dimensional moral or meaning. The Ubuesque parody that is the Ceaucescu palace in Bucharest, embodying the most authoritarian form of political control, hardly fits with Kubitschek's social utopia in Brasilia, and the composite anarchy of Osaka has little in common with Jean Nouvel's ornamental Torre Agbar in Barcelona, the architecture of which, with its purely formal reference to the Modernismo of Gaudi, is the sign of institutional and commercial surplus value. But between the rationalised organisation of the territory (Brasilia), the representation of totalitarian terror (Bucharest) and the omnipotence of the circulation of commodities at its most fluid (Osaka or Barcelona), all of which are constructed efforts to adhere to the present, there moves this elusive troublemaker, half-critic and half-celebrant, who is not part of their world.

After this investigation in the capitals of the twentieth century, no doubt there was a need to find a place that escapes the dialectic of modernity and its relies. This was probably one of the reasons why Colomer shot Arabian Stars (2005) in Yemen, a country that, according to the artist, has gone straight "from the Middle Ages to post-modernity" and where, in many respects, these two temporalities coexist-witness the promiscuous juxtaposition of traditional sand architecture and buildings in reinforced concrete imported from China that form the backdrop of this road movie (in the literal sense of that term). In front of them children and adults parade past the camera laughing and carrying cardboard placards bearing the names of such icons of globalised popular culture as Michael Jackson, Superman, Homer Simpson, Che Guevara and Zinedine Zidane, all written in Arabic. Here reality mixes confusedly with fiction. Added to these is the sense of relativism that comes from seeing these names in this context: who are the famous and who are the unknowns in these parts? How do these names resonate? Or perhaps they don't and are stained with infamy? In this interplay of visions, between actors and spectators, Arabian Stars questions not only creeping cultural colonisation, but also the process whereby the Other is domesticated in exoticism. Then, conversely, it brings out the way in which a society lets itself be colonised by desiring a system of values while sensing that this hierarchy will ensure that it remains in the minority.

But by virtue of this carnivalesque procession, this demonstration without an object, the tension is suspended in the joyful absurdity of the situation, just as the popular celebrations described by Mikhaïl Bakhtin temporarily stopped the flow of time when hierachies were overturned.⁷

Jordi Colomer's works are constantly effecting such reversals, inverting and taking time backwards. They thus undermine any attempt to project

an unequivocal meaning and convey their critical burden only through the reflection of strange celebratory rituals. In Fuegogratis (2002), a whole suite of furniture leaps out of a fire to the delight of a couple who load it into their van in readiness for a new life: edited backwards, the film reverses the carnival sque ritual of the destruction of possessions, the dizzy pleasure of loss and destruction, an economy of excess turned into the joy of dilapidation and expenditure. The figure in Père Coco (2002), a cross between a heavenly tramp and a Brechtian beggar, takes to collecting abandoned objects and putting them back into circulation, finds uses for them, scatters them again, then finds and loses them again in a process of perpetual motion. The protagonist of the film No Future (2006)—the punctuation of the "slogan" suspends the negative sense of the words—is another of these ghostly Colomerian characters who seem to exist in a world parallel to our own. Appearing at the end of the night in a car that seems to have escaped from some fairground attraction, toting a huge luminous sign whose slogan gives its title to the film, a young woman wanders through the grid-patterned, deserted streets of the town of Le Havre. Gallantly playing the snare drum below the still closed shutters in the street, she rings on all the bells she can reach in a gratuitous expenditure of jubilant and mocking energy. Hers is an "aimless wandering," to quote Guy Debord's definition of those "psychogeographical dérives" that might take the form, say, of "hitchhiking non-stop and without destination through Paris during a transportation strike in the name of adding to the confusion."8

Another sentence from Debord's "Theory of the Dérive" appears in one of the four sequences of Colomer's most recent film, En la pampa (2008). A couple of young people are wandering through the arid Chilean pampas, carrying an incongruous plastic fir tree that is gradually torn apart and carried away by gusts of wind. Apparently indifferent to the inhospitality of the place, they try to recall the words that Debord, in other times and places, wrote to mock the use of chance in Surrealist poetry: "Wandering in open country is naturally depressing, and the interventions of chance are poorer than anywhere else."9 Here, the irony is turned against both of them and the Beckettian situation in which they find themselves, while their determination to keep walking against the wind underscores the fact that the romantic end of the earth setting masks the hard reality of a forsaken place. 10 Chilean sociologist Sergio González in fact emphasises the difference between "pampas" and "desert" the desert is a silent place where there is nothing; the pampas is the inhabited desert, where people talk. To anyone who will listen.

- Boris Groys, "Dans la prison du temps," Politique de l'immortalité, Paris, Maren Sell, 2005, p. 118.
- 2 In fact, it is a model of the Hilton Hotel in Istanbul, built by the American firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (www.som.com). Thus the International Style has become the Continental Style.
- 3 Among the many instances of wordplay in this text, note the deliberate deformation of "Form follows function," the famous words of Louis Sullivan, which became a modernist slogan, here denouncing the sterile effect of formalism.
- 4 Greil Marcus, Lipstick Traces, a Secret History of the Twentieth Century, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1989.
- 5 William Jeffett, "Desert Stars," in Arabian Stars, ex. eat., St. Petersburg (USA), Salvador Dalí Museum / Madrid, Museo nacional Centro de Arte Reina Soffa, 2005.
- Giorgio Agamben, Le Temps qui reste, Paris, Rivages, 2000, p. 221.
- 7 Mikhaïl Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, Minneapolis, * Indiana University Press, 1984.
- 8 Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," in Ken Knabb (ed.), Situationist International Anthology, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007. "Théorie de la dérive" originally published in Les Lèvres nues, No. 9, December 1956 and Internationale Situationniste, No. 2, December 1958.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 The only economic activity of the Chilean pampas is the mining of sodium nitrate, or saltpetre. And it was precisely saltpetre workers, most of them Peruvian immigrants, who bore the brunt of the oppression experienced by the Chilean workers' movement, in 1907.
- 11 Sergio González, "Habitar la pampa en la palabra: la creación poética del salitre," in Revista de Ciencias Sociales, No. 13, Iquique, Arturo Prat University (Chile), 2003.

conversation between Marta Gili & Jordi Colomer

Living in the set

Marta Gili: When I'm getting ready for an interview, I always think of the distance, the autonomy of a work vis-à-vis its creator. I remember, in some animated films taken from tales or traditional narratives, the objects rebel: they think for themselves, do things their own way, go beyond the initial function that their human creators intended. At night, they come out, cups meet spoons, lame toy soldiers fall in love with princesses without castles, etc. Can an artist's own work rebel against him or her in a similar way?

Jordi Colomer: That's fascinating, yes, toys coming alive at night, museum statues descending from their pedestals, or objects becoming human and starting to speak..., like Pinocchio or the Golem. This revolt against a supposedly all-powerful master or creator is obviously seductive, although also a little hypocritical. It's generally just at night: in the morning, all order is re-established... Inanimate objects coming to life, this is related to the idea of "disturbing strangeness." It's entirely different from that Pirandello-like concept of characters determining to live their own destinies. It seems to me that one wields a great deal of power from one's position of hidden author... I remember a sort of nightmare in a text by Jacinto Benavente: one night while at home, he hears voices in the room next door; he gets up and discovers all of his characters in full discussion...

MG: Yes, I think that it's in El príncipe que todo lo aprendió en los libros¹ ["The Prince who Learnt Everything by Reading"]. Can you imagine your characters talking amongst themselves! What would they talk about? About you? Themselves?

JC: I think that all my characters are linked to a specific situation, place and/or action. They aren't "psychological" characters, even if they are very defined characters. In fact, for years, lavoided making my characters talk, or in any case, I wanted them to express themselves in ways other than words. And even when very recently, in En la pampa, I suggested that the actors improvise their dialogues, I still gave them a concrete action to do each time; for example, washing a car in a cemetery in the middle of the desert, while talking.

MG: To be sure, in that last piece, words don't figure as a central element, or even as accompanying the action. They are almost like any other prop on the set—like the sponge, the soap or the car.

JC: The dialogued text comes almost naturally out of the situation. We're in a desert land, in the north of Chile, where it's nearly fifty degrees Celsius. Imagine a boy and a girl, each walking from opposite directions,

meeting at an intersection, the only one for 500 kilometres around. Obviously, they'd talk to each other: "What school did you go to?" etc. The pampa then acts as a grand stage, where the text becomes matter for experimentation, improvisation, play... I had already worked on this question of dialogue, but in a very different way, in *Babelkamer*.

MG: In Babelkamer, the dialogue is undeniably constructed by means of a complex system of "intermediation," interpretation and multiple translations...

JC: It takes place in Brussels, in a shopping centre inside of a small caravan/cabin. Two people sit facing each other, each one below a screen showing Sunrise by Murnau, the last major silent film production. It's a situation conceived of to encourage dialogue (the sub-title is "Babble Room"). The two people—one a Francophone, the other a native Dutch speaker-who don't know each other, engage in the discussion game, without any pre-established scenario, while watching the film, which is the common theme for discussion. One essential detail, they speak in signs, not the "universal" sign language -which is practiced as little as Esperanto-but each in his or her own language. Yet, through signs, the dialogue unfolds from the fiction's silent images. Simultaneously, by means of speech, interpreters translate, translators transcribe. The result is a written text, a film sub-titled with the dialogue, shown on the screens at the shopping centre-it's also a form of improvised exeges s of Murnau's film. What I found most interesting was the idea of experimenting with live television in a very open way. Once again, considering speech as extendible matter that can be transformed by various filters. Each unique gesture of the speakers'-as the entire body entered into play-turned out to be, in this ultra-artificial setting, the most powerful thing.

MG: One finds this extendible quality in the narration of *Un crime*. Here, the narrative of a news story is embodied by a group of characters who each carry a piece of the story, each thus participating in its construction, in its enactment.

JC: It always follows a pattern of displacement and chain transformations. These are the facts: at the beginning of the 20th century, near Cherbourg, a couple commits a very violent crime, cracking their victim's skull with blows from an axe. To get rid of the body, they put it in a trunk at the baggage checkroom, intending to then throw it into the sea. A journalist gives his version of the story in *Le Petit Journal*—a paper chronicling daily news, which is in itself a literary genre. In *Un crime*, this is the text I rework *literally*: the letters made

enlarged are distributed to a group of anonymous residents, a sort of Brechtian chorus, who restore the sequence of words in several areas in the town that are related to the crime (the train station, a boat in the ocean, etc.). The chorus does not do any acting, nor does it reconstitute the actions. It simply holds the words transformed into objects, physically carrying the scenario. Yet, through this alteration into three dimensions, the words return to the scene of the crime.

MG: This circulating of people, words and landscapes, is it just a matter of physical displacement, or also, in a larger way, cultural, social and political?

JC: First, it's a matter of displacement in time. The medium used for a one-hundred-year-old text is altered. I update it just by adding a short epilogue, a sort of moral to the story; the famous sentence that you hear in train stations and in airports: "Unattended baggage will be removed and may be destroyed..." This is really another way for me to talk about found objects. In the post-9-11 world, the object without owner is a potential threat, a disturbing reality. It has a new status: it is no longer the object put aside to await identification in the Lost-and-found Office ["objetos perdidos" in Spanish); nor the found object described in Art History; that is to say, it's an object that is, finally, transformable. From now on, this found, or lost, object, becomes just a danger that must immediately be destroyed, even without looking at what's inside... I've also always been enthralled by that almost mythical, primitive moment when object becomes word, to eventually result in the invention of writing. Rendering text into the form of object also allowed me to find another space for the text, beyond the image printed on a page, in the tradition of Mallarmé, Broodthaers or Brossa... Here, it is inscribed in the city and in movement.

MG: In many of your works, emblems or signs occupy a significant position; these objects look like travelling or wandering sculptures. I'm thinking of *Un crime*, but also *Anarchitekton*, *No Future*, *Arabian Stars*, *En la pampa*...

JC: My impression is that the objects, despite constant attempts at dematerialisation, are multiplying more and more. The "all-for-a-euro" stores say a lot about this trend. The character in Simo illustrates this almost unhealthy relationship with the object very well. She has to physically struggle to try and put order into the things she has accumulated. In a similar way, in Père Coco, his drifting is linked to the succession of objects that he finds in the city, and in En la pampa, María is constantly hanging onto a pink handbag. Generally speaking,

there is always a performative element in my work, often linked to the object. But after Le Dortoir, where the accumulation of objects is voluntarily excessive, where the actors themselves are immobile, I wanted to open up the doors of the set-the air was becoming almost stifling-and go out into the street. You could say that after that, my characters started taking fragments of the set outside as they wandered, to see how it transformed the perception of the city..., or of the desert. The text, having become a portable object, functions in exactly the same way, like a collage on the city: enlarged letters in Un crime, the neon sign in No Future, or the painted cardboard signs in Arabian Stars.

MG: Objects seem to express an identity more than serving a purpose. Even if you say that your characters aren't "psychological," that they don't verbalise their emotions, the fact of "needing" these objects, of hanging onto them, in a way, creates a space for exchange in the symbolic universe. Is the difficulty in constructing oneself as subject a question present in your work?

JC: One character who I find fascinating is Simon in the desert, who Buñuel made an extraordinary film about. Simon is a recluse who has lived on a column in the desert for thirty years. The column helps him in his aspiration to be closer to the skies, to cease contact with the material world, reject earthly things. But paradoxically, in this territory where there is nothing, the column takes on enormous importance. This sole object conditions all of Simon's existence and sums up the conflict he is going through, taken as he is between his asceticism (he doesn't move, almost doesn't drink or eat) and the temptation to abandon his mystical path [he wants to come down, run, kiss his mother...]. One can see the character of Simo as the antithesis of Simon: she binges, amidst the objects that she compulsively accumulates. Later, she also tries to leave the set, which has become hostile, slipped out of control...

MG: The sets your characters live on seem circular and never-ending, although they do produce a feeling of being locked in, for the audience, like in *Simo*, or of emptiness, like in *En la pampa*.

JC: The characters we're discussing have a hard time living in the spaces where they are, seem destined to allow themselves to be carried by the object. But some characters also suggest a transformation of these spaces, and thus of their perception, through image: there's a critical demonstration like Idroj in Anarchitekton, or an attempt to awaken consciousness, like the heroine in No Future. The Merz-Bau by Kurt Schwitters impresses

me: what is at first a simple object leads to a model of transformation of space, clearly expandable to infinity, This space is a private space, but one with no borders. Schwitters is a true character for me, more than the artist belonging to art history. In his case, the distinction between art and life no longer seems relevant. What is important, from my point of view, is the gesture, the gesture over time, Schwitters's private performance of constructing. I see Anarchitekton in a similar way, like an attitude, a general model for apprehending the city. A model that can be applied "internationally," and yet one that's adaptable, very localised, attentive to detail, but mainly a gesture. The psychological side of it isn't really what I'm interested in. My characters are simply obsessive, they run around cities carrying models or beating on drums, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

MG: So, there are some characters that adapt to their environment and others that resist it, not politically, but physically, even organically. In that sense, the environment becomes a set, a stage. How do you perceive this space of fiction and its critical transformation? What are its articulations in its space of reception?

JC: In the first videos, the objects and the spaces aren't constructions that hide their fictional aspect. On the contrary, they accentuate it. For example, in Les Villes, a young woman in pyjamas is hanging from a fake building front and in the background there is an urban landscape that is in constant transformation. In the past, I have said that in this video, the actress is the documentary aspect of the story, that this entails a true physical effort, a real confrontation between actor and set props. The obvious fictional aspect is reinforced by the simultaneous projection of two versions of the scene: in one, the young woman succeeds in climbing over the window ledge and getting into the house; in the other, she doesn't succeed and falls. In terms of a work like Les Villes, one might feel what I call the "paradox of incredulousness." On the one hand, one is mesmerized by what is happening, by virtue of this suspension of incredulousness automatically instigated by all fiction: we like being told stories, we like believing ("Once upon a time, there was a young woman in her pyjamas hanging from the front of a building ... "]. And yet, in certain conditions, we are bound to take distance, to try and grasp the functioning, to glimpse what lurks behind the scene, its skeletal structure... The tension of this situation, which is my ideal state of reception, is also inscribed in the physical space where images are shown, a space we share with other spectators. From an idea of Benjamin, according to which cinema and architecture are paradigms of modern

perception, which he qualifies as "distracted," one can imagine that the ideal spectator would be both distracted and conscious, someone who could dream while simultaneously being able to analyse what he or she is dreaming about.

MG: The concept of distracted perception is, I think, linked to what Freud called "free-floating attention," which he opposes to "evenly-suspended attention." Floating attention leaves us in an expectant state, but also in expectation of possible associations, of meaning to come. I am thinking of María, in En la pampa, when she goes into the desert, looking for who knows what. There is a sort of meaningful floating that is made possible by the nothingness, the absence of meaning...

JC: María-like Viviana, the actress-was born in María Elena, a mining town of about 15,000 inhabitants in the middle of the desert, a town baked by the sun. The women bidding her farewell, waving handkerchiefs, are the inhabitants who were there one Sunday at noon, in front of the theatre, on the main square. María leaves the city-like Viviana did in real life ten years ago-to go into the desert. She effectively transforms it into a scene space. For En la pampa, I needed to place the actors, who are in fact non-actors, in a form of narrative logic that followed a linear development. There are beginnings, the place where they meet, and a drift; all of this is inscribed in a precise geography, associated with the journey. I kept five situations, which don't necessarily maintain their original narrative aspect and which must stand as autonomous situations. These fragments are presented simultaneously on several screens. The farewell scene, which could be the beginning of María's journey, is projected above the doors of the exhibit space; the farewell is also addressed to the spectators. .

MG: Would you say that 2 Av. is also inscribed in a narrative logic?

JC: Here, the architect has the main part once again: the 2nd street in a workers' township, beneath the thick smoke of a chemical plant. The systematic repetition of the same dwellings, modest homes with small gardens in a track shot of two kilometres. I was thinking of Homes for America by Dan Graham; 2 Av. would be the French version, but revisited, full of all of today's connotations of image in movement: an initial shot, panoramic, showing an idyllic neighbourhood, the place where the action is going to happen, where something will surely invade to trouble the established order. One sees the real inhabitants, the banal gestures, and the small, insignificant differences that define each individual personality. In this case, the real work is done during editing:

reconstituting the track shot in its initial time frame from still shots taken from this camera movement. I think it's the saddest video I ever made. Far removed from the series of photos of the cemetery in Pozo Almonte. There, each construction, despite the similarities, shows invention, surprising creativity-whereas before there had been nothing, no tradition. Each house of the dead reflects a unique imagination, despite the precariousness of resources. The cemetery forms a sort of parallel city, completely alive, peopled with very earthly little homes. It is a space shared by the living and the dead, the latter of whom seem simply to have gone on holiday. But these family architectures also look like sets from another world.

MG: Perhaps they are the sets for another world, linked to the human desire for immortality. It's funny, but the accumulation of images in Pozo Almonte made me think of those westerns where the cowboys discover a sacred Indian cemetery, untouchable, because its profanation would only result in awakening the wrath of the spirits... Can we also consider the series of photographs in Papamóvil as a form of profanation?

JC: The Popemobile is the protective coach for the Pope when on display, an icon known around the world. I wanted to replace this image in the street, in three dimensions, keeping all its significance but free of the pomp of the Vatican, naked like a prototype, in order to record the reactions of passers-by. The sacred dimension inscribed in the Popemobile is already quite scant; the coach itself had to be profaned, its spectacular aspect, leaving just the skeletal structure. It was first and foremost an excuse to make a portrait of a heterogeneous group, found portraits, like the people who walk in front of the camera in the Osaka chapter of Anarchitekton. Providing a framework, creating a situation and letting things happen... What did the people look like passing by one day at noon, in a neighbourhood in full transition in Barcelona, la Diagonal in Poble Nou, in the summer of 2005? I remember being very impressed by a work by Ana Mendieta: in a banal street, from under a door, what seems to be blood trailing out, and slides showing the people walking by at just that moment ...

MG: About 2Av., you spoke about a strategy of inventory, accumulation. Can the same thing be said about *Cinecito* and *Papamóvil*?

JC: The devices used in the Cinecito slideshow are similar to those in Papamóvil. What happens in front of a movie theatre in Havana on an ordinary spring day in 2006 at noon? Iimposed one rule on myself: taking "volleys" of photos, at regular intervals, during four

hours, without participating in the action. Just as in *Papamóvil*, one sees people and cars passing—a few elements for a possible portrait of the city on that day. But in *Cinecito*, one unexpected event occurs: a person comes up, stands in front of the camera and starts telling his story, does a card trick and leaves. It turns out to be a radio spokesman. He speaks in front of an entertainment palace—the movie theatres of Havana, impressive buildings, a bit run-down nowadays, symbols of the golden age of cinema—but there's no sound. In the exhibit, this expressive and silent spokesman receives the visitors, welcoming them in.

MG: Several of your pieces seem melancholy to me, in varying degrees. One controversial author, but one whom I very much admire, Miguel de Unamuno, writes at the end of one of his novels: "I know that nothing happens in what is told in this story; but I hope that this is because everything stays inside of him [...]." Would you agree when I say that your work revolves around this tragic sense about life, this melancholy space where things that stay and go, happen and don't happen, move and don't move coexist?

JC: Poor Unamuno, lover of paradoxes, who had to submit to Millán Astray's horrifying "¡Viva la muerte! ¡Muera la inteligencia!"3... Concerning melancholy, I would rather not have answered... Making pictures or films: cameras are machines to produce melancholy, a confirmation of the phantom character of reality. I don't mean in the possible symbolism of the images, nor of the story told, but the fact of necessarily working from fragments of reality, transitional situations. This fragmented reality is clearly more and more contaminated by the transmission of many other phantom images... In the end, it becomes a gigantic melancholy production, directly proportional to the distance there is with the direct experience. I like the idea of using fragments of filmed situations to create others of another intensity, in real time, in the demonstration space. This allows all means to come into play-ephemeral architecture, pathway, sound, actions of the spectators—and through these devices, producing strong doses of the unexpected. To film Fuegogratis, we burned all the sets from the preceding video, Le Dortoir. I've always been fascinated by this idea of flaming sets; like in the Nibelungen diptych by Fritz Lang, in Kriemhild's Revenge, you see all the sets of the first part burning. All exhibits are somewhat related to a "free fire." In the end, it's all about organising a huge party, and parties, like trips, always have an end.

- Jacinto Benavente, El príncipe que todo lo aprendió en los libros (1909), Barcelona, Editorial Juventud, 1949.
- Miguel de Unamuno, San Manuel Bueno, mártir (1930), Madrid, Cátedra, 1993.
- In October 1936, Miguel de Unamo, while Dean of the University of Salamanca, gave a speech defending the humanist values of culture, in front of fascist dignitaries. He was violently interrupted by General Millán Astray, leader of the phalanx, who proclaimed "Long live death! Death to intelligence!". Unamuno resisted and was assailed by the audience. Forced to resign, he died a few months after. (NDE.)

José Luis Barrios

Jordi Colomer in the Land of Gulliver

Scale, Dream and Nature

"In the city which is being demolished or rebuilt, neo-realism makes any-space-whatevers proliferate, urban cancer, undifferentiated fabrics, pieces of waste ground, which are opposed to the determined spaces of the old realism."

Gilles Deleuze¹

Jordi Colomer's work enters the realm of the burlesque, at once farcical and enigmatic. His videos and video-installations are caricatures that set in motion a complex network of visual structures, narrative strategies, word plays and changes of scale, figuration and symbols, with hyperbole being perhaps what best defines them. This hyperbole, however, is somewhat more than a mere resource; it is a device that appropriates one of the most exploited figures in the history of art—the body of the dwarf—, to use it or turn it into a giant and vice-versa, making the "deformed" body a poetic principle and an analogy of all dimensions—or perhaps more appropriately, of (dis)proportion—of space, objects and signifiers.

In this relation between the small and the large, Jordi Colomer's production uses ambiguity as both vertex and concept. The vertex upon which space unfolds and his representations hinge. The concept he uses to criticise or reflect on the landscape and scale and their discursive implications. In this dialectic between dwarfism and gigantism, the artist construes an aesthetic in which the boundaries between subjectivity and modern or contemporary urban space are explored. Colomer works on "obscenity" of scale for its formal and symbolic as well as narrative and cinematic potential. His work is an exploration—but also a constant return trip-between cinematic styles and dramatic strategies that implement dislocation between affection, narration and meaning. In the cinematic sense, his videos can be explained as a drift from the vital, everyday moment of the event towards the symbolic oneirism of its significance. But in his dramaturgy, going against Aristotelian tradition, his works are the mise en "scene" of aimless actions where the actor/character serves as a deactivator of context and a mechanism for self-representation of the situation; as in Brecht, the actor is more important than the character he or she plays.

If there is anything unsettling about Colomer's videos, it is the strategies with which the artist deconstructs the forms of the contemporary urban landscape. In principle, this deconstruction most certainly has to do with the relations between scale and body; more specifically, with the recasting of scale in relation to the grotesque body as a symbolic-aesthetic strategy with which to show the other side of the urban imaginary: its monstrosity. Going beyond the grotesque as an element of nature, Colomer plays, like a court jester—introducing the deformed in order to ridicule and criticise power—with the imaginaries of modernity to show their obscene facet: that of exceeding bounds. He plays with the dwarf and the monster, and with the giant and the monster. Hence perhaps it would be appropriate to speak of an aesthetic naturalism that reinstates the carnal and vital order of the body in

the public space and thus, releases impulse as a factor of subversion and criticism. Colomer's video-installations are interruptions of the public space and its function of lending significance and meaning. On the basis of an aesthetic construction built upon an aesthetic of the take, stylistics of scale, a symbolism of the body and a Brechtian dramaturgy, his production combines cinema, sculpture and iconography to configure a strategy of interpreting the landscape that goes beyond utopia and the ruin of modernity. He invites the viewer to approach the site of the vital impulses underlying life in modern cities. He does this using a certain aesthetic register of the grotesque, where the body and objects interrupt, or at least interfere for a moment in modern urban and architectural utopias. In sum, in Colomer's work, they operate via a dual artistic mechanism: the visual moment of transition from one cinematic shot to another and the actor's performance moment, which disalienates the situation.

If anything defines Jordi Colomer's work, it is his clear relationship with cinema as an aesthetic strategy. Built upon the dialectic between takes and montage, and upon the relationship between shot and reverse shot, his work could be considered a twist on neorealism. Whereas realism sought a landscape epic based on the correspondence between the idea of progress, urban space and open form, neorealism heightens these elements to call one's attention to the "any space whatever," where the open form shows the ruin or failure of modernity. In addition, upon this background, it inscribes the accident, failure and malaise of a society in deep crisis, namely, the Italian post-war society; a disruption of reverse shot over shot that deconstructs the utopian nature that early cinema conceived itself as having.

In complexity and depth, Jordi Colomer's videos can be said to go beyond the qualities that Gilles Deleuze attributes to Italian neorealism. Of the five characteristics that the philosopher lists,² all of them, except the "condemnation of the plot," are fully present in the videoinstallations of the Anarchitekton series (2002-2004): "the dispersive situation, deliberately weak links, a voyage form, consciousness of clichés." But Colomer achieves these elements through a shift in the plane of reality in which these kinds of takes are supposedly functioning. In Anarchitekton, the relationship between shot, action and the performance intervention(s) of the actor(s), combined with a dislocation and visual and semantic disruption of the scale done through the models of emblematic buildings of Osaka and Brasilia, for instance, produce a disruption of the plane of reality. Something that not only allows the deconstruction, in the neorealist manner, of the fallacy of architectural modernity, but also shifts it towards a certain aesthetic of the impulsive that lies somewhere between the monster or the deformed that defines naturalism and the oneiric world of surrealism.

I've insisted on the concept of a *shift* between realism and neorealism, naturalism and surrealism that is present in Colomer's work. I understand *shift* as the step from an "objective" condition of the take, generally related to the social in cinema, to the image's change of "plane of reality," that is, to the forms of crystallization by which the

signifier's significance is transmuted. The shot transitions from the real to oneiric plane of figuration entail this shift from the real to the surreal. Nonetheless, when this transition uses the material nature of impulse, not only is an oneiric figuration produced, but also a vital deformation, a corporeal disruption. Hence, precisely, the ideas of the dwarf and the monster: they are bodies half-way between objective data on situation and the symbolic figuration of the oneiric; they are a boundary where impulse is associated with the body to produce a change in both plane of reality and in "matter."

If the coincidence between long shot and urban landscape in neorealism appears as ruin, and the medium shot as a space where the ethical demand of subjectivity is enacted, Colomer seems to take this resource further, not only through the interplay of takes, but also by adding elements of a sculptural and iconographic order to his cinematic strategy. In Barcelona (2002) and Brasilia (2003), from the Anarchitekton series, the artist ironically appropriates himself of emblematic buildings. He does this via shift in scale as a condition of architectural dimension. This is an aesthetic-political shift in scale signifier and a topographical dislocation of the architecture of an urban landscape. These shifts/ dislocations entail an aesthetic-political deterritorialisation of the urban imaginary, and therefore a criticism of the relations between form, function and context of that emblematic architecture. Plays on iconography, symbols, cinematography and performance function as a parody or caricature, as an ironic trope of the architectural and urban social imaginary.

In this context, it is interesting to note the aesthetic and conceptual differential that can be observed in the video Osaka (2004), belonging to Anarchitekton. In contrast to the movement towards the urban outskirts of the other videos of the series, the path of the actor/model through a street of Osaka is elliptical. The repetition of the action and the take as a narrative strategy is, here, a mechanism of irony on the forms of the display and the simulacrum typical of the scenic aesthetic of late modernity, as well as on the sense of phantasmagorical displacement of the inhabitants of high-tech cities. The important factor here is to emphasise the social and political differentials that Colomer contributes to the moment of visibility. In this piece, the elliptical resource of the take is his strategy for presenting the narrative and visual differential. While in Brasilia and Barcelona, the camera's movement is directed towards the blurred bounds of urban space, in Osaka, the take moves back on itself, defining a distinct emotional and symbolic mindset.

The Anarchitekton series is a point of synthesis that allows the "narrative" structures of Colomer's videos and video-installations to be recognized. As I have attempted to demonstrate above, in his work, the relationship between long and medium shot, together with the actor's performance and the plastic, symbolic resource of the architectural models, produces a system of imaginary and semantic shifts, in which the dreams of modernity are deconstructed by the subjectivation of the affect through action seen as a dispersive situation. Perhaps for this reason, the interplay of scales is not only a formal register of his work,

but also an iconographic and symbolic one, as well as and above all an impulsive register. Perhaps for this reason as well, the body appears as a boundary, at once figurative and formal, in which the differentiation of the signifier is effected. The scale relationships between landscape, model and body function as an interplay of bilocations and replicas, where a shift is produced between the real and the surreal, but without abandoning the impulsive moment of action, that is, without relegating the physicality or corporeality that is trapped within its original, natural and vital impulses. In an initial approach, Colomer's work can be explained on a structural level through the relations among scale, figure, time and narration, like a poetry of superposition and displacement.

On the basis of this strategy, we can undertake a reading of other pieces in which Jordi Colomer explores different registers of the image's impulse as an aesthetic distension. There are four recognizable types of filmic-aesthetic configurations. First, those relating to the continuous travelling technique in which the artist establishes an interstitial zone between the descriptive aspect of the image and its transferral into the oneiric realm.

In Le Dortoir (2002), in contrast to the sleeping figures, the chaos where they live, the façade of a modern building in the background and the continuous movement of the camera from one side to the other and upwards, instead of producing a story, cause a pure distension of the time-image. Secondly, those that, through editing and montage, intervene in the space of the presence of the frame using texts and picture in motion effects, in order to delay perception and convert the text into a semantic choreography of repetition. The real aspect of the image —a landscape, for instance—nearly becomes the blank paper within which a statement is framed (Un crime, 2004); or where the action is narrated against the flow of linear time to transport the narration to an oneiric space. So, in Fuegogratis (2002), the backward editing of the recording dislocates the image referents, creating contraction/ distension of objects and narrative. A third aesthetic register can also be recognized, in which the continuum of the take, whether static (Pianito, 1999) or in lateral travelling shots using pendular movement (Simo, 1997), functions due to the disproportion of art design and set with scale and space. In contrast to the art design and set, in the latter, it is the objects or characters that introduce formal and symbolic dislocation. In Simo, the dwarf marks the boundary between what functions as a space she inhabits and the urban ruin as a metaphor of the contemporary landscape; the transferral of what seems enormous on her—the shoes—diminishes towards the end of the video, at the point when a model appears in the pile of boxes: once more, the dissolution of scale as distension and transition between reality and dream. Finally, the video En la pampa (2008), where, in the manner of a road movie, the unexpected dialogue and the presence of oneiric elements-an artificial Christmas tree that gradually falls apart as the figures walk through the desert—act upon the path and landscape until the place becomes a vague area where the limits between the purely material aspects of the objects and their purely fantastic nature become blurred.

En la pampa is probably the work that most deviates stylistically and conceptually from a certain constant that can be followed in his art. This distancing allows us to delve into the form and meaning of shift and transfer in his videos.

Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that in En la pampa, Colomer explores the sequence shot as a field creating tension and force of image. An exploration which also involves a displacement of the image as impulse by the affectional/affective aspects of image. As opposed to the Anarchitekton series and Simo or Pianito, the major sequence shot, together with the two characters' wandering along the road and the desert, produces a pure distension of the duration of the action, where the dialogues or few actions carried out by the actors function more as affective tension than as a change in the plane of reality; that is, as an event that has no causal explanation and therefore liberates the pure stream of consciousness of relations between context, dialogue and action. The act of washing a car covered with sand knowing that it will just get covered again, for instance, or the reiteration of the phrase "because wandering in open country is naturally depressing, and the interventions of chance are poorer there,"3 function in a context of emptying of meaning in exchange for distended action: landscape, dialogue and action together do not tell a story, but create affective tension as pure temporality of the image.

In sum, if the works of Jordi Colomer have a constant, it certainly has to do with a dialectical system of proportions and statements that, based on a certain pretension to reality of the image, gradually shift the meaning through an interplay of filmic transitions, formal, figurative and semantic, where large and small, inside and outside, proportion and scale are dislocated. A shift, moreover, that cannot be understood without the idea of the grotesque body as an impregnable place where the dislocation of referents is effected.

The discovery of the relationship between instinct and modernity can be attributed to Luis Buñuel. His naturalism reinserted life in the filmic image as a factor of the ontological violence of urban space. In any case, the type of life that was expelled from modernity, the instinctive body of Los Olvidados (1950) that appears in close-up as being in radical contrast to the utopia of architectural progress, is his best work. There, in that liminal space, Buñuel placed the grotesque body. A body converted by Jordi Colomer into an interplay of scales where the monstrous arises as the absurd. An absurd based on simultaneity and exchange of the body's size with that of the "sculptures" and other objects. The scale is used as a mechanism of figurative and semantic instability through which to subvert the dreams of contemporary urban planning and, at the same time, restore vital impulse as a political form of interruption of the hegemonic discourse of monumental urban landscape.

This paradox is taken to an extreme in *Anarchitekton, Bucarest*, not only due to the reversion of scale and proportion done by Colomer. In this video, the artist does not rely on the inverted scale of the model and its relationship with the body and landscape, but rather uses a bottle of Coca-Cola that the actor takes through the city as a symbol

of simulation. The aimless wandering here is through the centre of Bucharest, where the buildings are simulacra of the post-modern, purely decorative façades so typical of the eighties and their appropriation by Ceaucescu. Here, Colomer criticises the relationship between ornament and power, a critique of the pastiche forms inherent to the monumentalist rhetoric of the dictatorship. A paradox that, in principle, as Colomer himself indicates, refers to the fact that these buildings were supposed to demonstrate the grandeur of those in power, whereas they only managed to reveal a "skeletal framework of concrete;" a paradox that, though it can be ascribed to the aesthetic register of the post-modern, simply shows the aberrant side of modernity with respect to the political sphere, where postmodern architecture appears as the hyperbole of the forms of power insofar as they are simulation and fantasy, the latter certainly being a product of modernity whose original forms are merchandise in capitalism and propaganda in communism.

Though in principle it functions as an ironic trope, the contradiction between gigantism and dwarfism in Colomer's art, insofar as it is deployed in the movement-image, results in liberation from the aberrations of modernity. In this respect, from the perspective of cinematic theory (narration), the relationship between dwarfism and gigantism of the objects and bodies could be considered as the conceptual aesthetic device through which the artist deconstructs the ideological function of the urban landscape. From the perspective of representation and figuration, the disproportion and scale interchange can be considered an aesthetic strategy that activates the monstrous, grotesque form of the body and objects. And finally, from the perspective of the "stories" and the characters/actors, the distension of the action can be considered pure affective time and moment of self-representation or recognition.

Simo is perhaps the best example of this. The relationships produced by the camera between inner and outer are equivalent to what happens at the figurative level between gigantism and dwarfism of the body and objects. As I stated above, the blurring of the boundaries of objects' significance and proportions is accompanied by an aesthetic and conceptual deformation; hence the grotesque. At what point do the pair of shoes become too large for the dwarf? When the boxes stop being boxes to become urban landscape in ruins? "Deformation" activates the symbolic and narrative strategy of this video at the point where the interchange of scales and referents functions as a caricature. At that point, the grotesque can be found not only in the body, but also in the disproportion and deformation of objects and signifiers.

Therefore, speaking of "Colomer in the land of Gulliver" above all means understanding his work as an aesthetic device that triggers an inverse dream: a dream where life reinhabits the oneiric and the body along with it. Hence the body and its disproportions. And hence the fact that scale and bodies interchange and shift their signifiers to give rise to the vital and oneiric space of the urban monster. Perhaps the best way to express this transition has to do with the body, simultaneously gigantic and dwarfish, with the framing of the boundaries between large and small as a device through which to liberate the other side of the

city: the one that has to do with the impulse that connects the origin with the history and evolution of the present. Perhaps this is why the trip to Gulliver's world on which Colomer's videos invite us to embark can be understood as a network of invisible lines extending between the landscapes that simultaneously "represent" the contemporary urban landscape and the landscape that emerges as an impulse previous to the subconscious, and which breaks the bounds of "representation" when it emerges, making the large and small a symptom so strong that it goes beyond bounds and, in doing so, becomes distorted.

- Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 1: The Movement-Image, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, London, The Athlone Press, 1986, p. 212.
- 2 Gilles Deleuze, ibid., p. 210. In my terms, it expresses the dislocation of the body in the spatial and symbolic horizon, while freeing up the emotional space as a form of ethical and political condemnation. The juxtaposition of the long and medium shots in neorealism, as opposed to realism's classical contrast of long and close-up shots, allows the former to interrupt the utopian function of landscape by means of the social and political functions of bodies, objects and actions, characteristics of the medium distance shot.
- 3 This phrase is a reference to Guy Debord's "Theory of the Dérive," in Internationale Situationniste, No. 2, 1958. Translation by Ken Knabb, 1977.