

JORDI COLOMER

The scenography of everyday life

By François Aubart //////////////////////////////////////

Everything is fake. The building’s facade is obviously a set. Looming behind it, as far as the eye can see, a city in movement, conjured by stacks of cardboard. A background that doesn’t hide its artificiality, spliced in during post-production. The action takes place between these two mock-ups. A woman in pyjamas clings to a cornice and attempts to climb in through one of the windows. This sequence, entitled *Les Villes*, is projected onto two screens, each with a different ending. In one, the woman succeeds in entering the building; in the other, she fails and drops into the void. Even if we know that her fall is probably cushioned by a mattress, our habits as spectators allow us to appreciate the event. And, in the end, it’s really all about action. Action is the only thing in Jordi Colomer’s video that is real: the woman’s ascent, palpable in her movements and groans.

at a crossroads, crossing an arid plain. The site, virgin and wild, assumes the appearance of a stage. Once again, this perception arises out of our expectations as spectators; when they are transmitted to us through a medium that we identify as belonging to the realm of fiction, we encounter every dialogue as a series of lines, every movement as a scripted action, every environment as a set.

their most rudimentary state. The actors aren’t really actors and it is difficult to determine to what extent they are actually acting. The décor isn’t really a décor, but becomes one through its representation. The script is open-ended and seems to construct itself. Colomer’s dissection of a universal language reveals that language’s modalities of construction and exorcises its irresistible hold.



And we can feel it: our investment in fiction, our capacity to believe in it, has nothing to do with its objective reality, and everything to do with ensemble of elements that compose it, that structure its internal coherence. Everything that we are able to read as a narrative, we can also deconstruct as a montage. In its fusion of real and representation, Jordi Colomer’s work attempts to pin down the moment where our credulity solidifies. He does this using the vocabulary of a set designer, who arranges the elements in a scene, who constructs its architecture—one destined, not to house, but to mesmerize.

In their internal logic, the five episodes of *En la pampa* and *Les villes* appear to be polar opposites. A man and a woman in the Atacama desert in northern Chile improvise dialogues to accompany a series of simple actions: washing the car, meeting

These scenarios, which involve inserting an individual in an environment and observing him respond to it without recourse to a fixed plan of action, are often compared to Guy Debord’s notion of the *dérive*, which disrupts the standardization of movement in favor of random wandering. “The difficulties of the *dérive* are the difficulties of freedom,” Debord claims.¹ In advocating an aleatory itinerary through urban space, Debord collapses the rationalism of Le Corbusier’s “machine to live in.” With Colomer, however, this freedom is reduced to its own retransmission. The watchword for individual development transforms into a spectacle—one with the particularity of offering a view onto its own, internal composition, its components reduced to

Such is certainly the case with the project *Anarchitekton*, where a man, brandishing an architectural model on a signpost, parades around outside the building it replicates as well as through other neighborhoods in the city. In confronting the city’s architecture with its cardboard representation, he restores the former to its role as décor and image. This transposition of reality into image unsettles the values that reality incarnates: the ideological power of the Ceaucescu Palace in Bucarest, the coolheaded rationalization of life in a Barcelona apartment building, or the symbolism of the Osaka economy. As he casts their inalterability into question, the man parading with his models might be perceived as someone who commandeers quotidian language in order to modify its



syntax, who re-appropriates the codes that structure his quotidian and subjects them to his own subjective reading, overturning the notion of individuality that resides at the core of the architectural machine. We begin to understand the fascination Colomer must have felt upon discovering a cemetery in the Chilean desert. A constellation of tablets of heterogeneous cut and color, joyful compositions of detritus and raw materials, more like a garden shed, a beach cabin, or a greenhouse than a mausoleum. The miscellanea of colorful tombs recalls the decorative aesthetic so often exploited by Colomer. *Bricolage*, in the truest sense of the word, but also in Lévi-Strauss' understanding of the term; these primitive, chaotic arrangements belie a coherent system whose modalities of association are infinite, but hidden to us.² This notion has been described by Terence Hawkes as a "science of the concrete" [...] which far from lacking logic, in fact carefully and precisely orders, classifies and arranges into structures the *minutiae* of the physical world in all their profusion by means of a 'logic' which is not our own."³ The photographs in Colomer's *Pozo Almonte* series drive home this alterity. In the Chilean desert, isolated from the social codes and rituals of the West, a funerary culture has come into being, fashioning itself from the environment at its disposal. Uprooted from its geographical source, it

throws our cultural expectations off balance. We bear witness to a reconfiguration of our own social norms, for they have been transformed into empty symbols, translated into an unknown language. The possibilities of appropriation through translation constitute the structural foundation of *Babbelkamer* (*Chambre bavarde*). Inside a trailer, Friedrich-Wilhelm Murnau's silent film *Sunrise* is projected on television screens while two people, themselves filmed, sit facing one another. They begin to converse in sign language, but each in his own native tongue—the one communicates in French, the other, Dutch. Each is accompanied by a translator, also a typist, who transcribes their utterances in both languages. This second text provides the subtitles for their filmed conversation. What results is far removed from what we might expect from a transcription of *Sunrise* itself; the performers' fragmented exchanges are distorted once again by their translators. On screen, a palimpsest takes shape and erases itself, produced by the interlacing of different subjectivities transmitted through diverse media. We recall Marshall McLuhan's statement that the medium is the message, and Umberto Eco's reply: "the person who receives the message lays claim to an absolute freedom, that of reading it in a *different way*."⁴ Jordi Colomer restores the cultural consumer to his position as a subjective user, armed

with the capacity to read according to his individual point of view.

As we make our way through Jordi Colomer's exhibitions, we begin to rediscover this position for ourselves. All around us, an eclectic scattering of chairs presents us with choices, possible physical and cognitive stances. The film *Simo* is projected inside a structure that we enter from behind the screen. This entryway reveals who we are: the faces of other spectators. The set Jordi Colomer has constructed for us illuminates the nature of our activity, and that of its site; we are at once its spectators and its actors.

(1) Guy Debord, « Théorie de la dérive, » *Les Lèvres nues* n° 9, December 1956 and *Internationale Situationniste* n° 2, December 1958.

(2) Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage*, Paris: Plon, 1962.

(3) Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, London: Methuen, 1977. Cited in Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Methuen, 1979.

(4) Umberto Eco, « Pour une guérilla sémiotique » *La Guerre du faux*, Paris: Grasset, 1985, p.129.

>> Jordi Colomer at the Jeu de Paume, Paris, from 21/10/08 to 04/01/09 (catalogue, Paris: Point du jour, 2008).

>> In 2009, exhibitions at the Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico, DF and at the La Panera Center of Art, Lleida, Espagne.

from left to right
Jordi Colomer
Vue de l'exposition au Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2008. Courtesy Maravalls & CO. Producciones, Barcelone. Photo Lisbeth Salas.

En la pampa, 2007. Lightjet print. © ADAGP, Paris, 2008.