

Anarchy-architecton

Marie-Ange Brayer

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A man holding a cardboard model runs through the city. He is first in Barcelona, then Bucharest, Brasilia and Osaka. His urban journey is endless and seemingly without purpose. A solitary figure, his conquest of the world consists only in this “grotesque” journey. A production of utopia.

After studying architecture, with a particular interest in modernism, Jordi Colomer went on to explore the emancipatory potential of architecture and the discrepancy between modern buildings and how they are appropriated by their occupants. At the time, new quarters were being built in Barcelona, contrasting with the blocks of flats and major projects of the 1960s. Anarchitekton started out as a game played between a few friends one summer’s day in Barcelona in 2002: Jordi, Marc and Idroj decided to “visit the physical limits of [their] city.”¹ When they were walking round brandishing their models, someone called out and asked the three friends if they were displaying a construction project for the area or protesting against the towers. This inhabitant appears in the film about Barcelona, putting questions to Idroj and then shaking his hand. This truly “grotesque” ambiguity of the action of brandishing a model was also questioned by children taking part in a workshop with the artist. After seeing Anarchitekton, one of them observed: “In the films, when I saw the models, I thought it was a demonstration against the buildings.”² This opens up multiple paths of exegesis relative to this work that confront us with our own construction of the world as well as our mortality. The figure in this work who never stops running is like the messengers in the Iliad whose fatum condemns them to keep pacing the earth, conscious that conflict can never end; they are carried only by their velocity.

In Barcelona, Idroj runs through three quarters on the periphery of the city: Santa Coloma, an immigrant quarter in the 1960s; Bellvitge, near the airport; and the residential quarter of Diagonal Mar.³ He takes us to those urban fringe areas where individuals are sometimes freer to appropriate space than they are at the centre. Idroj hands the keys of an imaginary flat to a local inhabitant. This action brings to mind medieval religious paintings and the fact that votive models of churches were associated with a symbolic presentation of the keys of the city to its patron saint. Here, however, the fields of the real and representation coexist within the same horizontality. In Bucharest the sequence begins like a parody of the progress of the Olympic flame with a plastic bottle fixed to a wooden handle—no doubt a found object that was immediately integrated into the mise-en-scène. The figure runs alongside a lake, in a no-man’s-land, towards the city.⁴ Idroj then crosses Bucharest with models of the skeleton buildings from the late Ceausescu era, which were left unfinished, and arrives in front of the House of the People, now the Palace of the Parliament.⁵ The vacant, hypertrophied signs of power have taken on the appearance of tawdry old rags. In Brasilia, a new town built by Oscar Niemeyer in the 1960s, Idroj brandishes a maquette of

the National Congress near the building in question,⁶ then carries it to more fragile neighbourhoods that are still under construction,⁷ moving through these with the model of one of their nondescript apartment buildings before going back to his starting point. Rather than the wide alleys that set off the hieratic quality of Niemeyer's buildings, Idroj prefers the byways already laid out by the inhabitants. He comes across a demonstration where the people greet him. He also crosses a motorway interchange, whose knot of roads evokes the many paths he has himself taken. In Osaka, pre-eminently a city of urban nomads, where the movement never stops, he wanders through the "artificial forests"⁸ of signs. Here, the model might even be thought more "real" than the architecture, which disappears behind the images and the palpitation of the lights. Unlike the other films, in which Idroj is the protagonist, here the people of Osaka invade the image, imparting the rhythm of their own incessant flux.

Anarchitekton is a portmanteau word conflating "anarchy" and "Architecton". At its heart is archè, meaning the chief or original instance, the vectorial field between concept and real, self and the world. The Architectons were strictly orthogonal models-cum-sculptures in plaster made by Kasimir Malevich in 1920-25. With no scale or measure, these "spatial constructions" materialise the cosmic trajectory of Suprematism. In contrast, Colomer's maquettes are devoid of transcendence—indeed, they even play on an excessive mimesis, parodying the reality of architecture by copying its traits to the point of caricature, playing the same revelatory role as the mask in theatre. Colomer also refers, more literally, to Russian Constructivism for which, in those same years, models were the theoretical prototype for a "revolutionary reality that remained to be built."⁹ Idroj brandishes a maquette like a marcher in those Soviet parades in which architecture was to serve as the symbol of a new society.¹⁰ Thus, in 1926, Tatlin had the model of his famous Monument for the Third International carried through the streets of Leningrad in a popular parade. With Colomer, however, the sacred dimension of the political or religious procession refers instead to a solitary ambulation.

In the course of his urban peregrinations, Idroj thus exhibits a maquette which, now and again, is fleetingly identifiable with a building in the background, schematically echoing its formal characteristics. This convergence is not systematic, however, for the maquette may also function in a dystopian register, contrasting with the architecture and pointing to another reality, to a precariousness that contaminates the official, public or residential buildings. The maquette instils anarchy into both the order of the real and that of fiction. Embodying architecture as project, it does not project a narrative onto the world it traverses, but instead offers a burlesque parody of it. Usually an instrument of prefiguration, the maquette here post-figures the building, and has no finality, not even an aesthetic one, in that it is not a "handsome" or finished object. It can thus deconstruct the order of representation.

A migratory object, it endlessly displaces and fragments architectonic signs as it moves through urban landscapes. Because of this object, the figure carrying it

constantly inhabits a discursive zone where everything remains in a state of indeterminacy, between construction site, building and waste ground. Everything is trajectories and displacements.

These maquettes are poor objects made of cardboard, covered here and there in paint, like the kind of things clumsily made by children. They seem to have come from behind stage in a theatre where they were used in the set for an urban drama. Some of them are cut and painted on one side only, the unfinished object showing on the other. Idroj exhibits a different maquette for each quarter that he moves through, like a costume or prop made for that particular script. “Grotesque standards, utopian provocations or brilliant banners,” the theatricalised maquettes can be read as the traces of ephemeral events in their urban setting, as traces among a multitude of others. Colomer has a rich and varied experience of theatre, and he is fascinated by the hybrid status of ephemeral structures built for festivals or demonstrations—a mixture of set and reality. Idroj is the “hero of immanence” who inhabits both life and art, carrying a symbolic, almost magical load on his shoulders which at the same time represents a weight and necessitates an effort. For Colomer, his physical engagement has a collective resonance. The maquette brings into play a whole set of scales in which the values of large and small are perceived as relative. For him, the maquettes are “effigies, kinds of sculptures endowed with a symbolic meaning, and the simple fact of carrying them through the street produces an event, a collision between the two orders of reality.” The reduced maquettes are on a human scale and their potentially monumental status is immediately contradicted by their fragility. Set on the end of a wooden rod, they become meaningful only when moved by the person holding them, like puppets. Fascinated by burning stage sets, by objects that are specially conceived and built for fiction, Colomer could not fail to take an interest in “simulacra:” these vectors of utopia that are architectural maquettes. At once they are theoretical and performative models, close in status to those “false cities in the middle of the desert” found in Hollywood movies.

Both figurative and abstract, the architectural maquette evokes the “complex relations between object and word, between narration and set.” Colomer draws on this world of the analogy and taxonomy of the real where “representation—whether celebration or knowledge—is given as repetition.”¹¹ Idroj could be a kind of contemporary Don Quixote wandering through a world where “writing and things no longer resemble each other,” endlessly repeating his action. Thus the maquette can be read as both a “word” and a “thing;” it is up to the viewer to recompose the interlacing tangle of things and their representation. In these scripts, with a multiplicity of simultaneous viewpoints, the actor can embody language, words can be seen as imprints of representation and images as concretions of the real. If the model becomes a tool for scenarising the real, by virtue of its specularity, the passers-by encountered by Idroj are themselves drawn into the fiction.

To better avoid any form of linearity, the film is a sequence of fixed images that reconstitute the idea of movement. This movement is of a dilated kind, since here

a message remains on the screen for nearly a second, as compared to the 24 images a second in a standard film. *Idroj* thus runs with the jerky rhythm of a sequence of still images depicting—paradoxically—endless movement. In each film, the person's movements seem to be repeated, bringing us back or projecting us further forward. It is impossible to inscribe him in a delimited space-time. We are constantly switching from one time to another, with no linearity. Or again, the figure performs an elliptical, slapstick choreography which consummates the loss of all orientation, in the middle of a waste ground or a crossroads.

This mechanical dimension of the moving body, revealed by Marey at the end of the nineteenth century, evokes once again the loss of moorings. As Ramon Tio Bellido has pointed out,¹² what Colomer gives us is not narration but animation. In fact he prefers to disarticulate codes of representation and privileges the iteration of time allowed by animation, in which the temporality of the moment is constantly being played and replayed. In this regard Colomer speaks of “proto-cinema,” which combines economy of means with “minimalism of action.” Procedures are laid out flat. The images follow on from one another, their “suture” visible; the junction between the real and the fictional is deliberately overt. The images, like the maquettes, have no intrinsic value; sometimes they become blurred, accelerate or slow down, following no rational logic. The film has a beginning and an end, but repeats itself. It is up to the spectator to decide when it ends. “I want to propose a tension between immersion in the story that is proposed and the awareness that we are watching something.” And Colomer adds: “In a way [the spectator] inhabits a space of representation.” The silence of the film is reminiscent of silent movies; it heightens the impact of the action it contains and underscores its slapstick quality. *Idroj*, the maquettes, the architecture, the city and the urban setting are all fragments of things and words. Endless movement through indeterminate spaces also evokes the impossibility of “encyclopaedising” the world, and those “meticulous lists drawn up by Perec in *La Vie mode d'emploi* [which] seem quite close to slow camera movements.” In his ambulation *Idroj*, like Flaubert in *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, like Roussel and like Perec, demonstrate the impossibility of inventorying the world, the impossibility of exhausting the real.

Anarchitekton could thus be seen as a kind of oxymoron, travestyng various kinds of walks in art history, from the practices of the Surrealists to those of the Situationists, by drawing its narrative dimension from the utopian discourse of the architectural avant-gardes. The once transcendent order of architecture is now no more than the wild bricolage of space and time. Instruments of measure are reduced to the rank of props in a fiction. Thus, it would seem, there is no “unchanging real,” but only reals. Everything is multiplicity, the coexistence of intelligible and phantasmagoric fields. Colomer makes sculptures, “sculptures dilated in time.” His works embody the logic of transfer that operates in tales, the reversibility of real and imaginary; they take us back to the absence of origin and foundation, to the aporia of instruments of representation.

1 Marc Viaplana, photographer, and Idroj Sanicne (or Jordi Encinas), an artist who does performances.

Unless otherwise stated, the quotations come from the author's interview with Jordi Colomer.

2 This workshop was held at École Maxime Perrard (CM1-CM2) in Orléans in 2003, and organised by FRAC Centre. Here he made I-mmoble, an animation film with maquettes.

3 The Diagonal Mar quarter was built for the 2004 Forum of Cultures 2004. This property and urban scheme was part of a development initiative by the municipality.

4 Idroj walks along a lake edged with housing blocks built in the Ceausescu years. They form the Ansamblul Titan quarter.

5 In terms of area, this is the second biggest building in the world, after the Pentagon. In 2004, a national museum of contemporary art was opened in its west wing, as was the Museum of Totalitarianism and the Socialist Regime.

6 Three Powers Square comprises several buildings, including the National Congress, a skyscraper, with two inverted domes that are the Senate and the House of Deputies.

7 This is Aguas Claras, one of Brasilia's satellite towns.

8 Toyo Ito compared the inhabitants of Tokyo to "nomads wandering through artificial forests." See ArchiLab Japon. Faire son nid dans la ville, Orléans, éditions HYX, 2006.

9 Selim Omarovic Khan-Magomedov, El Lissitzky, 1890-1941, ex. cat. Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, éditions Paris Musées, 1991, p. 37.

10 In young Soviet Russia, maquettes of architecture, especially revolutionary edifices, were carried in processions, as if to replace religious statues.

11 Michel Foucault, Les Mots et les Choses, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 32.

12 Ramon Tio Bellido, "Les Gauloises bleues de Jordi Colomer," in Jordi Colomer. Some Stars, Saint-Nazaire, Le Grand Café / Noisy-le-Sec, La Galerie / Nice, La Villa Arson, 2003.