

# The Coming Citizenry

MANUEL SEGADE

“The essential being of the world lies itself on the Front”.  
— Ernst Bloch<sup>1</sup>

Any given exhibition builds an access situation, aimed at eliciting adherence from its potential publics. In the field of contemporary art, every reading is constituent: a work’s interpretation entails a subjectivizing effect, a possibility for agency, which may cause viewers to become different from what they were before the experience. Thus installations are the unfoldings in space of events yet to come, displays of anticipation, which necessarily involve a shared responsibility on the part of both the artists and the visitors.

*¡Únete! Join Us!* is an “installation of installations”<sup>2</sup> specifically conceived by Catalan artist Jordi Colomer for the Spanish Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennial. When a title is directly addressed to the public a communication channel is thereby opened, awaiting an action as response: The imperative mode in “join us!”, addressed to each individual person, is not simply an appeal but truly expects something from the viewer. This bid for allegiance, in the hope that visitors decide to take part, goes beyond the decision to enter the exhibition hall: It is a relational expectation. The series of videos, the array of architectural structures and the plastic objects within the pavilion are textual mediations through which the social relationships at an international event of this level are partially articulated.

If encounters with strangers<sup>3</sup> normally govern everyday life in public space, and all relationships tend to morph into groups,

<sup>1</sup> *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1959); *The Principle of Hope*, Eng. trans. by N. Plaice, S. Plaice and P. Knight, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996, p.18.

<sup>2</sup> Like the superlative expression “king of kings” (*melek mēlakim* in Hebrew), this term suggests an additional summation, a set of elements comprising a greater work.

<sup>3</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris: Fayard, 1988.

then the possibilities for political articulation lie in gatherings – whether for protest, celebration, solidarity, or common interest – where multitudes constitute themselves into true citizenry. The deixis in *¡Únete! Join Us!* is addressed to the second person singular, in an offering that manages to pierce through the structural impossibility of utopia,<sup>4</sup> so that participants may partake in what is to come. In whatever the future may be.

### Display

“Tout communique!”  
— Mme. Arpel in Tati’s *Mon oncle*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See: Fredric Jameson, *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London: Verso, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> A 1958 French film.

Jordi Colomer belongs to the generation of artists that helped establish the field of contemporary art in Spain. Since the late 1980s his work was mostly focused on sculpture. Like other Spanish artists whose formative years coincided with the early period of the new democratic, post-Franco regime, he constructed a genealogy of his own: At one level he engaged in dialogue with historical precedents such as Italian Arte Povera, Marcel Broodthaers’ Belgian conceptualism, Bruce Nauman’s performances, or Joan Brossa’s visual poetry and theatre; at another level, he also kept track of contemporary developments such as Tony Cragg’s or Bill Woodrow’s new British sculpture, or the work of singular figures such as Franz West or Juan Muñoz. During this period he evolved beyond object-oriented sculpture by gradually shifting to architectural scales, with inhabitable constructions that included references to the world of the theatre and its concomitant apparatuses. In the critical vocabularies flourishing in Spain in the 1990s, the hangover from the democratic success unleashed by trans-avant-garde painting’s market boom generated a kind of self-referential art, where theatricality became the key notion in a strategy aimed at restoring complexity to the relationship between social groups and the cultural sphere: to turn audiences into actors or participants that might amplify art’s impact upon the real.

In recent years – in collaborative projects where different groups feature in his works as non-professional actors or occasional performers – the above-mentioned approach has allowed Colomer to probe the boundaries of urban public space as fiction or representation. The recurring question shaping his engagement

with the issue of citizenry was: “Can we inhabit a stage set?”<sup>6</sup> In his own words: “there’s a certain meaning of the term *stage scenery* as a provisional architecture that is portable, of open-use, capable of being interacted with. My characters act within the city in that sense”.<sup>7</sup> This is no merely formal approach, but an ethical statement: “When architecture is aligned with a form of encroaching power, one must act as the architect of one’s life”.<sup>8</sup> Colomer’s focus on the condition of viewers as actors within the exhibition space, and the theatrical potential arising from the blurring of the boundaries between reality and representation, are the most salient features of his current work. Through the use of video as a medium, Colomer explores a twofold space where the actions of characters and viewers run parallel to one another. Besides this, the screening of the videos within the exhibition space is systematically juxtaposed with the filmed actions themselves, as they unfold in specific contexts, within another stage set.

In *¡Únete! Join Us!*, the installation is arranged around a central space with natural light that operates as entry and exit point and as public square, somehow encapsulating the pavilion’s contents and scenography. This access space – much in the same way as a watercolour by Joseph Gandy at Sir John Soane’s Museum in London depicts the architect’s work as just another version of the representations inside his house<sup>9</sup> – signals a willed entry into the domain of representation: The stage scenery is *real*, but it is also a narrative element that helps structure space and also features in the cinematic works contained therein.

Within this access hub serving as representational bridge, the main object is a clunky piece of hardware halfway between a mobile pavilion and a caravan. Its weirdness and singularity are matched by its familiarity: it is part a wagon, part border post, part moveable stage set, part street vending stall. Its language evokes temporary constructions, or the immediacy in the vocabulary of reforms and extensions. The fact that it is presided by a flag as a kind of geopolitical prosthesis is the first hint of the movement the public is being invited to join. Beyond a sort of self-referential *mise-en-abyme*, right from the start this pan-national or state-less pavilion within a State Pavilion signals the importance of issuing doppelgangers for what exists – something that is *nearly* identical, yet with a highly significant displacement. The clunky vehicle’s domestic scale

<sup>6</sup> Conversation between Marta Gili and Jordi Colomer in *fuegogratis*. Le Point du Jour, Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Interviewed by Bea Espejo for *El Cultural* (the culture supplement of Madrid newspaper *El Mundo*) on 18/9/2009.

<sup>8</sup> Jordi Colomer in text presenting the piece *Avenida Ixapaluca (Houses for Mexico)*, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> “Public and Private Buildings Executed by Sir John Soane between 1780 and 1815” (1818).

and the traces of its having been lived in, broken-in, used, are intimations of the need to inhabit the uninhabitable, beginning with the Pavilion itself.

Next to this object are piled up a number of scale models, prototypes, and reproductions of vernacular architectures evoking marginal spatialities, the imaginaries of city-outskirts: parking lots in shopping malls, transition spaces, or housing blocks, which are also modernity's genetic reservoir stored in popular architecture in cities throughout the world. The human scale characterizing Colomer's work thus introduces a fictional experience, since scale shifts pave the way for speculation. The purpose of the installation, however, is not to offer formal solutions, modes of spatial organisation, or detailed urban planning conceptions, but to radically showcase displacement in an accretion of potential forms as opposed to a kind of architecture implicitly conveying the idea of stability. Scale models are piled up suggesting potential uses, as if they were ready to be displaced, translocated, utilised. This underscores their nature as *semes*, units of meaning within a broader semantic field: As was also the case with the moveable structure, the means of production are shown to be part of the work's narrative. As Jameson wrote: "Our imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production,"<sup>10</sup> that is, fantasy is circumscribed by historical conditions of possibility.

The terraced seats around this installation highlight the layout of the access space as a site for political gatherings without an obvious result, as though lying in wait for potential ceremonies yet to come. The seats allow for the possibility of sitting down to watch, of becoming participants or participating by watching others act. Just as an illusionist reveals the trick behind the magic, Colomer suspends the public's disbelief and simultaneously breaks the fourth wall, in a typical move that critic Manel Clot defined as "a struggle to create an atmosphere brimming with life".<sup>11</sup>

The rooms around the perimeter are arranged in an itinerary that spectators can traverse in either direction, but indeed choices have to be made: Whether to open and walk across doors, crossing the thresholds connecting the central plaza with other areas. This spatial layout demands decisions that lead to responsibility or commitment: spectatorship as a form of awareness, rather than a naturalized automatism. At the Pavilion, doors and thresholds become objects of spatial interpretation.

10 Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. XIII.

11 Manel Clot: "Schaffende: La palabra no dicha (el hombre de los lobos)" in *Acción Paralela*, núm. 2, 1996.

These spaces are organized into a series of sequences on the basis of two elements: video screens and an array of terraced seats for viewers. The basic structure – a hybrid mixing monumental sculpture, street furniture and architectural fragment – is a terrace divided into serial configurations that create changing environments. Above these terraced seats, the screens look like banners or billboards in suburban spaces. Their different configurations allow for a range of possibilities: from nearly individualized viewing, to a large room with multiple screens in different sizes and modular seating at different heights affording variable points of view.

The whole spatial layout is based on this attempt to multiply a profusion of different positions for viewers, who are also in movement, with optional stops here and there. This pattern enables crossings, encounters, and multiplied access. The opposite rows of terraced seats replicate the very logic of present day cities: the requirement to face the alien and the stranger as the basis of everyday urban experience. Their design revisits the approach to space adopted by numerous utopian theatre projects – the optic box, the Meyerhold theatre, Bel Geddes' intimate theatre, Archizoom's impossible theatre, Sottsass' planet as festival, etc – following the organisational modules of a pattern-based urbanism coping with human sociality in order to incite encounters, deliberate pauses as well as continuous wandering, a thorough organicity. As is typical of Colomer's work, attention is paid to interstitial spaces, hallways, marginal places, locations where visitors may simply settle down to watch other viewers. As Clot explains: "As reality's paraphrase, sculpture becomes stage scenery, scenography stretches into video post-production, characters are mapped onto people in the audience, in a reality that is exponentially multiplied towards a collective dimension of the gaze and the collective work that the artist's labour in itself entails, in the exhibition hall commons."<sup>12</sup>

Staging materials comprise an anonymous language that nevertheless functions as an archetype, as in some of Colomer's prior installations, where props seem to fade into everyday austerity even as they structure space. Their distinctive presence is simultaneously a perpetual variation: their repetition alters the representational awareness of the subject using them.<sup>13</sup> As Deleuze argued in *Difference and Repetition*,<sup>14</sup> the repetition of speech patterns serves the same purpose as stuttering: to

12 *Ibid.*

13 This is traditional at international cultural events. In Edward S. Martin's "A Short Sermon for Sight-Seers" (from the Official "Pan-American Art Hand-Book", 1901) visitors to the 1901 Pan-American Exposition were advised to "please remember that when you get inside the gates you are part of the show and should take due pride in doing it credit".

14 See Gilles Deleuze: *Différence et Répétition*, Paris: PUF, 1968; Eng. trans. by P. Patton, *Difference and Repetition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

elicit phonological, and not merely semantic awareness, in order to reinforce syntactic comprehension of utterances, and the unfolding of discourse in a not necessarily linear fashion. This dimension of the theatrical posits an unprecedented connection between object and subject: a re-arranged relationship is being staged.<sup>15</sup> Or better yet, a relationship in the course of being rearranged, and thus, with as yet unforeseen effects.

<sup>15</sup> Markus Miessen: *Crossbenching: Toward Participation as Critical Spatial Practice*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, p. 45.

### Cinematic fictions

“What does it mean to act together when the conditions for acting together are devastated or falling away?”  
— Judith Butler<sup>16</sup>

“Ha! ha! les groupes, c’est un sujet plaisant que les groupes : ça doit être amusant les groupes!”

— Charles Fourier<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Fourier: *Le Nouveau Monde Industriel*, Brussels: Librairie Belge-Française, 1840, p. 96.

Beginning with the piece titled *Simo* (1997), Colomer’s work shifted to audiovisual formats that reflected on the space of representation and the creation of fictional characters, in a hybrid type of installation he described as “a sculpture stretched across time”. Four years later he produced *Le Dortoir* (2001), which depicts – in a sequence shot that takes us from night-time to daytime across a complex stage set and through hand-made objects – a twelve-storey building where the characters, on the day after a party, sleep among the leftovers. Ever since then, Colomer decided to leave behind homely indoor settings to open the gates of the set where he filmed his works: His characters leave the closed stage set, hit the streets, and face the real city. And they are not alone in their sortie: they carry along their fictional world, in the form of objects, scale models, slogans, or letterings, as tokens of a language shaping the possibility of a new storytelling, turning their videos into narrative machines that open opportunities for dwelling poetically in the city.

In *¡Únete! Join Us!*, the array of videos disseminated across the installations conveys micro-narratives sequentially joined into a sort of continuous summation taking place in different geographical locations. Every video presents a series of poetic gestures constituting an urban movement, an essentially collective exchange, a utopian fiction capable of affecting reality. Distributed across both circulation spaces and stopping points,

they are organised into sequences depicting group actions led by women.<sup>18</sup> As is common in Colomer’s prior works, the performances depicted in the videos are carried out by non-actors, playing themselves on screen. The sequences have been directed by actress Laura Weissmahr, writer and singer Lydia Lunch, and dancer and bank clerk Anita Deb – all of whose gestures are forms of resistance to the inertia of the everyday. The videos’ travelling, migrating, wandering, hustling narratology emerges from disparate production contexts: Nashville, Tennessee in the USA, Athens in Greece, and Barcelona and other areas in Catalonia. This anchoring in local vernacular traditions as well as in the displacements within them mirrors the same patterns of difference and repetition structuring the Pavilion’s spaces.

### Laura

The first video begins with Laura Weissmahr on a donkey, being led by a guide, alongside a group of people riding different vehicles on wheels: carts, bicycles, caravans, etc. This whirlpool of bodies and moving hardware is visually orchestrated into a readable chromatic pattern by means of a series of green uniforms with stripes of unidentifiable colours, somehow reminiscent of Pierre Cardin’s 1980s futuristic geometric designs, to which are added a series of plastic objects in colourful tones, a heap of containers, and storage materials, all comprising a singular palette. All the various objects, containers, and mobile contraptions signal displacements, tropes of continuous movement, and the possibility of being anywhere. Although the filming took place in the Ampurdán region in Catalonia, the scene’s singularity lies in its ordinariness.

The fact that the protagonist is riding a donkey is highly iconic: Like a sort of migrant Virgin Mary, she is endowed with a weird mythical authority amidst the vulgarity of the scene. Two actions capture our attention in this sequence where the narrative is focalised through Laura. Firstly, the mobile pavilion contraption becomes an improvised stage where she relates the first part of Kafka’s “Das Stadtwappen” – a story on the construction of the Tower of Babel<sup>19</sup> – before a gathering of attentive, expectant people. In Kafka’s narrative, the building of the Tower involves the construction of a city for the workmen, which in turn requires so much labour that work on the monument stalls for the sake of

<sup>18</sup> “Utopia has been Euclidean, it has been European, and it has been masculine.” Ursula K. Le Guin, “A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be”, in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, London: Gollancz, 1989, p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> In 2009 Jordi Colomer created a blog where he compiled all the different translations of Kafka’s “Das Stadtwappen” (“The City Coat of Arms”) into different languages (and images). <http://fuegogratisjordicolomer.blogspot.com.es/> [26 March 2017, 19:14].

the builders' welfare. Recounting the story of the first generation of engineers, who started work on the Tower and then delayed it, knowing it would never end, Laura addresses the public in German, Swiss-German, Spanish, Catalan, Chinese, English, Italian, and French, enacting Babel itself as an eternal present.

This speech is delivered when the parade of mobile contraptions and dwellings on wheels comes to a halt before a cardboard wall, which is decorated with an endlessly repeated screen-printed motif: balconies and doorways to buildings in the style of the bland modernity characterizing the seaside hotels found everywhere along the Mediterranean coast, occasional destinations for international tourist routes that also encapsulate a kind of modernism with no pedigree, an architectural language of lethargic leisure and the promise of happiness under the sun. A futile, yet protest-like, action takes place at the wall: Laura hands out the plastic containers and a bucket brigade carries water and pours it over the fake façades again and again. This then leads to a rave party, with the whole group absorbed by music and convulsive dancing. The music and the countercultural gathering belong to the domain of anarchy or chaotic models portending alternative forms of collective life.

Another scene featuring the same group of people was shot at the Terramar Autodrome in Sant Pere de Ribes (Barcelona), an old disused racetrack dating back to the golden age of car races in 1923. This concrete speedway meant for motor vehicles is traversed on foot by two characters who chat about the wind's impact on their actions as they walk. They pass by random people holding banners and flags signalling heights and distances from cities in other latitudes, which entails a kind of navigational rupture with what exists: Measurements are control mechanisms based on reference points, normally some trade hub or power axis. Here, by contrast, the frame of reference, the political system's geographical coordinate *par excellence*, becomes deconstructed even as its prime indicator turns out to be a thoroughly singular human action in a science-fictional nowhere space.

In the same racing circuit, monumental cardboard façades propped onto wheeled scaffoldings, from the same family as the above mentioned screen-printed wall, are moved about by assistants, thus becoming mobile auto-buildings. In their surrealism, they remind us of the comic reshuffling of the stage

sets at the Plateau de Gravelle (Vincennes, France) in Tati's 1967 film *Playtime*, but when the wind blows and they move by themselves, they seem to be alluding to Victor Sjöström's *The Wind* (1928), or to other instances of popular culture such as the Minga<sup>20</sup> (*tiradura de casa* or "house pulling") tradition of communal work in Southern Chile, whereby a whole village may help move a stilt house to a new location by placing it on top of logs and having a group of oxen pull the structure uphill, downhill, or across a river.

The last scene renders the immanence of the group's activities even more explicit, revealing a movement's ability to go viral within the social body. The mobile pavilion is standing on an embankment, fully unfurled under the rain, and its flock awaits an event. Once again in many languages, Laura tells them Kafka's story of the second generation of builders of the Tower of Babel. In the narrative, the original plan to build the Tower – which justifies the construction of the city – is gradually forgotten for the sake of coexistence: The succession of periods of calm when the main concern is increasing the citizens' welfare, and periods of conflict when the priority is appeasement, result in the city, rather than the Tower, being the true event. Babel is not a construction but a process of change, a social site whose *raison d'être* is transformation itself, in all its successive mutations, and where collective goals lose their meaning as compared with the need to imagine through what means life in common is going to be made possible.

### Lydia

Lydia Lunch is an American singer, writer, and self-empowerment speaker. A pioneer spoken-word artist, she founded the band Teenage Jesus in New York's 1970s *no wave* scene. Her militant, activist voice adds another dimension to the narrative: countercultural identification. From a stationwagon convertible, Lunch asks people to join her (from whence the title of the piece) for a later visit to the Parthenon. The dissemination of modes of subjectivity is always enmeshed with the existence of a counter-public, a parallel subaltern discourse that a given community or collective develops in order to generate contrary accounts of their needs, their identities, and their interests.<sup>21</sup> Lydia summons pedestrians and motorists – all kinds of citizens – with an explicitly political

20 From *mink'a*, a term found in Quechua, Aymara and Mapundungun, denoting a form of contract to carry out communal work in favour of the group (< Quechua *minccacuni*: "to ask for help in exchange for a promise") [Translator's note].

21 See Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone Books, 2005, pp. 113-118.



22 The song is titled *1000 miles of bad roads*. The lyrics goes: “I’m running to trouble / like people run into their best friends / I know it like the back of my hand / I know I’m ‘bout to see it again / Time ticks away from that clock on the wall / Like a wrist wears a watch I will wear the fall. / So many secrets and so many lies / So many tears and so many eyes / None of them things gunna get you a ride / On a thousand miles of bad road / Bet your life bet and bet your shoes / It’s as easy to win as it is to lose / Sleeping with Jesus and the Devil too / on a thousand miles of bad road. / Some folks think there’s a tongue in my cheek / Honey I’m just telling the truth I say what I mean / Sharp like a razor or Billy Joe Shavers bullet pointed at me / Scarred but smarter and getting hit harder than I ever thought I’d be. / So many secrets and so many lies / So many tears and so many eyes / None of them things gunna get you a ride / On a thousand miles of bad road / Bet your life bet and bet your shoes / It’s as easy to win as it is to lose / Walking with Jesus and the Devil too / On a thousand miles of bad road. / There’s a change come over me / I’m not the one I used to be. / Now people fall apart like grains of sand. / I try to love ‘em the best I can. / So many secrets and so many lies / So many tears and so many eyes / None of them things gunna get you a ride / On a thousand miles of bad road. / You bet your life bet and bet your shoes. / It’s as easy to Win as it is to lose. / Sleeping with Jesus and the Devil too / On a thousand miles of bad road / On a thousand miles of bad road / On a thousand miles of bad road”.

language, crying out for a future beyond “cockcocracy” – the phallocratic oligarchy – a necessary change that cannot wait.

As the narrative unfolds, a displaced duplication takes place: The destination of the road trip is a landmark of Western Culture, the genetic symbol of Athenian democracy, the Parthenon. The Greek “original”, however, which over the centuries has suffered the ravages of civil wars, plundering Europeans, and modern tourists, is here replaced by the American “replica” built in Nashville for Tennessee’s 1897 Centennial Exposition, as an expression of modernity’s allegiance to history at the turn of the 20th century, and also of America being handed over the baton as leader of the free world. This doubling of tradition also has a vernacular meaning: today Nashville is the capital of country music, the centre of a US-specific musical industry, and the park grounds around the Parthenon building are often used as open air venues for country music events. The transition from country to folk as popular expression, and from these to the later actions are nuances in the cinematic language being employed. Like a flag without a country, the variations in languages from outside the system’s core, and their assorted sampling, do not constitute a form of exoticism, but layerings rigorously functioning with ease.

Before the Nashville Parthenon, the movement’s followers put together a ceremonial set up. The entry is adorned with colourful fabrics displayed as canopies and banners. The group awaits Lydia’s arrival, and when she gets there she sings from the car, accompanied by a guitar player. The song is about the windings in the road, and how hard life’s journey is:<sup>22</sup> Any given concert turns individual concerns into collective experience, with subjective affect spilling over every concert-goer. When the singing is over, the movement feels compelled to act again: The fetish containers are handed out to everyone present, who then return to their cars and leave.

### Anita

In Barcelona the narrative first unfolds as yet another instance of a parade or a political demonstration in an everyday environment. A huge doll, dressed in the movement’s uniform, is paraded across town in a convertible accompanied by assorted wheeled

vehicles carrying yet again all the plastic objects, the uniforms, the scale-models... The giant doll somehow functions like an allegiance-eliciting mechanism, in the manner of team mascots for sports fans or the idols in a pagan celebrations. It also reminds us of the Spanish folk tradition of festival masks, specifically *Los Gigantes y Cabezudos*, or giants and big heads,<sup>23</sup> like the figures of the king and the queen that Joan Miró and Joan Baixas turned into gigantic puppets in *Mori el Merma*, a piece of experimental theatre they staged in 1978. Baixas’ and Miro’s work was a reinterpretation of Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* meant as a celebration of Franco’s death and the end of a repressive dictatorship, but here the oversized figure is suspended in sneering ambiguity, even pataphysical, sticking its tongue out in childish gigantism. Its movements and the way it is paraded also remind us of that period, right after the Soviet Revolution, when street parades in Russia mixed the language of the avant-garde with popular referents, one of those periods of hybridisation in cultural production, of precarious balance between high culture and its vernacular translation, so fundamental to Colomer’s aesthetic.

The puppet’s destination is Barcelona’s *Superilla* (“Super-island”), an experiment in urban planning recently launched by the City Council in the post-industrial district of Poble Nou. The plan takes advantage of the fact that blocks of buildings in the Eixample area are arranged into grid patterns in order to merge contiguous areas into super-blocks,<sup>24</sup> creating pedestrian spaces overlaying the pre-existing street grid. The city, as the space of both the “social body” and the individual bodies that add up to form the collectivity, is utopia’s foundational ground. The social choreography in *¡Únete! Join Us! Is* – like all utopias – an aberrant by-product of the real<sup>25</sup> governed by the principles of cognitive estrangement.<sup>26</sup> The empty cityscape, with speculative real-estate development in Barcelona’s post-industrial quarters in the background, functions as a new environment with an enhanced sense of anticipation.

At the Superilla the group stops to carry out a new collective action. Using a space with terraced seats, dancer and bank-clerk Anita Deb launches into a performance before another group of followers sitting opposite her, clad in Athens and Nashville university apparel. She motions from her position, and they mirror her movements as she spins a soundless dance that induces yet another cross-cultural displacement within the

23 Traditional oversized papier maché figures representing visual satires of characters, popular in local festivals throughout Spain [Translator’s note].

24 The plan drew the attention of the *New York Times*: <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/nyregion/what-new-york-can-learn-from-barcelonas-superblocks.html> [Accessed 26 March 2017 21:33]

25 Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

26 Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, Chapter 1.

local: the Bollywood gesticulation, estranged and wrested from its context, becomes a celebratory contrivance, regulated yet festive. Just as in the sequence shot depicting the Nashville country band, the ceremonial here generates a range of variations between the polarities of spontaneous action and cinematic convention: When the choreography ends, the camera movement following Anita down the street literally replicates the way the camera chases after female protagonists in Bollywood cinema. This super-textuality is echoed in the terraced seats: In the installation at the exhibition room, the Indian dance tutorial can be watched from a similar device, as we are beckoned to join the movement as a musical genre. The display's factual function matches the containers, the colours of the uniforms... The guided, controlled motions turn the characters into obsessive subjects, locked onto actions at specific spots, stubborn like objects. Semes are distributed across these actions as a kind of embodiment of this indefinable movement, following a symbolic economy of belonging beyond the economic regimes the city incarnates within society.

Comparative Literature theorist Andrew Hewitt defines social choreography as the “cultural trading post where aesthetic norms [...] are tried out for the social formations they might produce, and at which new types of social interaction are forged into new artistic forms.”<sup>27</sup> In Colomer's work these social formations are a recognizable, paradigmatic contribution, generated by means of ludic forms of an ethical and epic type, through which individual gestures have an impact on collective symbolic production, and each piece is part of a joint polyphony distributed throughout the pavilion. The social choreography conducted by a woman who represents a new citizenry is an infectiously molecular matter of sovereignty: the everyday imagination of the directional vectors of a citizenry yet to come.

27 Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 28.

### Join us!

“We have arrived to a phase in which we, ourselves, are always our own representation.”

— Ettore Sottsass<sup>28</sup>

28 In *Design Quarterly*, 1973.

“Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet.”

— Fredrick Jameson<sup>29</sup>

29 Fredrick Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. XII.

“What a time this is for learning about people, politics and oneself!”

— Michael Taussig<sup>30</sup>

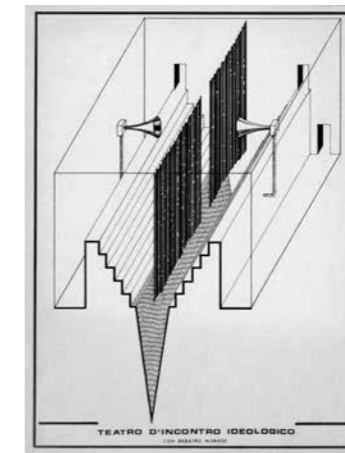
30 Michael Taussig: *Trump Studies*. [https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1046-trump-studies] [Accessed 10 March 2017].

When political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe posited the concept of radical democracy,<sup>31</sup> they underscored the importance of artistic production as the key domain where a society critically renews its modes of representation. For Mouffe and Laclau, public participation unfolds agonistically through the confrontation of disparate positions admitting only punctual, ephemeral, ever-negotiable agreements. According to this approach, social formations are not to be constituted as closed, stable communities but rather as effective support structures aimed at common goals depending on various needs: Communities thus shed their condition as useful fictions where every form of participation is a form of violence, and become instead the end result of a series of processes establishing the commonwealth. The series of support structures allowing for these communal bonds to be made and unmade and remade constitute a chain of specific agreements responding to shared needs and multiple pressing circumstances. A good example<sup>32</sup> would be an ancient façade precariously standing even after the building it belonged to has collapsed. Preserving the façade involves setting up a scaffolding, a propping system, as a temporary, transitional shoring measure, before a definitive solution can be found. Once the scaffolding is in place, the façade and its structural support are linked in form and function: Neither makes sense without the other, each is defined through its connection to the other. The propping structures are defined by their agonistic precariousness and the usefulness of their interstitial spaces. Therein lies the significance of fiction: like a piece of corrugated cardboard with sufficient support, a structure develops the solidity and strength it did not possess before, fold against fold.

31 See Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 2001.

32 See Céline Condorelli, *Support Structures*, Berlin, New York: Sternberg Press, 2009.

The women in this piece teach us to act: their frenzy in front of an expectant public turns vulnerability into actions that make precariousness endurable, in new, happier, and more active forms of life. The gestures of all those who accompany and assist them, their presence holding, looking at, watching over, things, amount to an acceptance of vulnerability whereby rituals and representations, even uniforms and containers, may become a vindication of bodily dependence and the condition of precariousness, a performative potential that may turn politics into liveable life. If they dance or pedal away, or if viewers climb onto the terraced seats to watch, to be watched or maybe also to dance, it is because they are joining a theatre of the real opposed to the world's representational mode as spectacle, and the politics of the everyday as oppression. Framing this work within the science fictional genre of *anticipation*, where existing human institutions have a domestic, homely reflection, it is possible to understand how genre discontinuities reinforce the narrative: Country music, Bollywood films, literary or cinematic references operate in the dimension of retrieved experience. Alternative cultural formations are imagined without being represented as alternatives. And they belong to the time yet to come as much as to the space that is yet to arrive.



Archizoom Associati. *Teatro Impossibile, Teatro d'incontro ideologico*, 1968



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Various designs for Public and Private buildings, 1780-1815



Tati-ville. Set at plateau de Gravelle (Vincennes),  
for the film *Playtime* (1967) by Jacques Tati