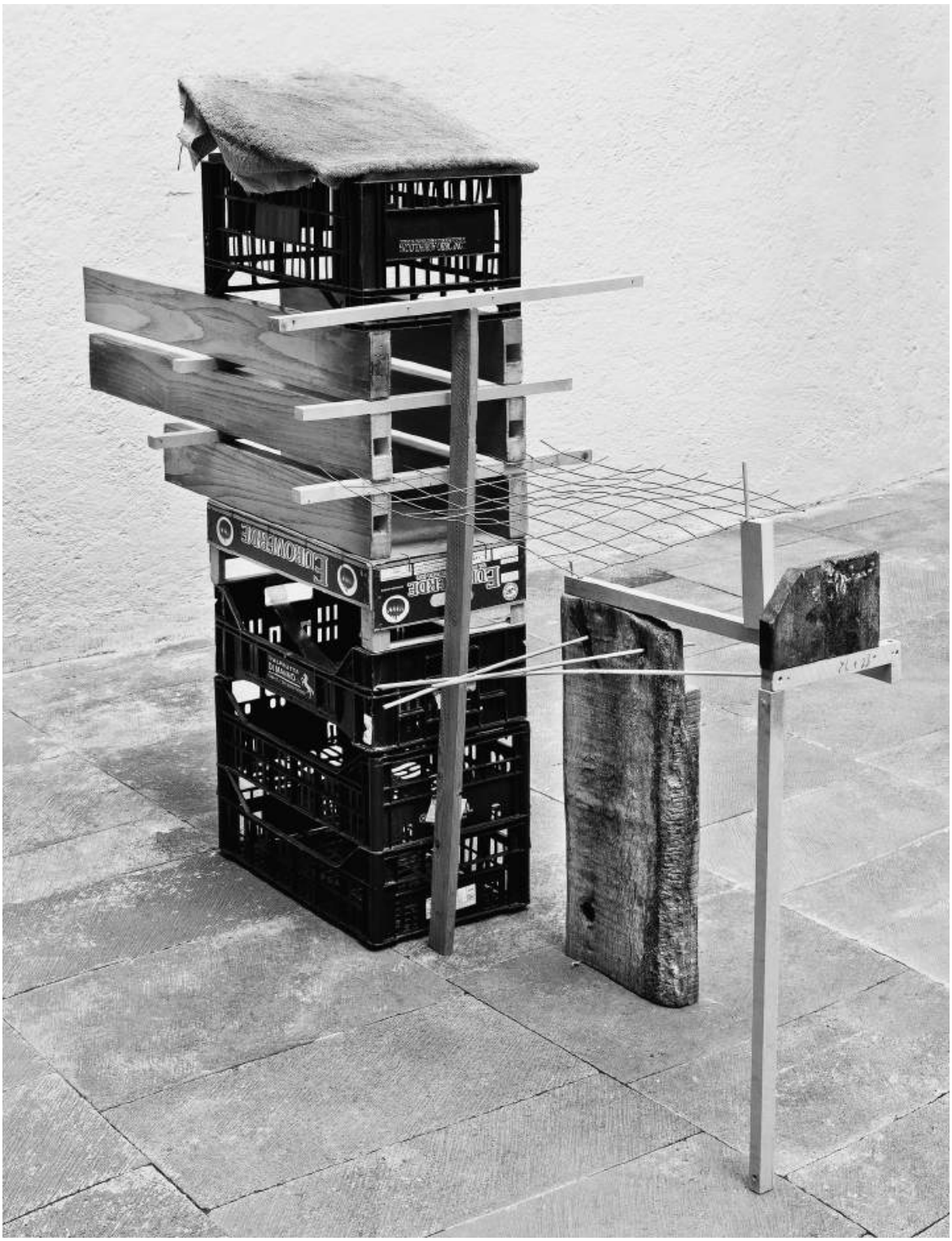

Abraham Cruzvillegas. Autoconstrucción–Underdeveloped Model. *2007.*
All Cruzvillegas images courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

The Logic of Disorder: The Sculptural Materialism of Abraham Cruzvillegas*

ROBIN ADÈLE GREELEY

In 2007, Mexican artist Abraham Cruzvillegas began producing a series of sculptures he categorizes as *autoconstrucción*, a sculptural practice of dynamic contingency derived from the ad hoc building procedures common in squatter settlements on the outskirts of megacities. Consolidating and intensifying a sculptural vocabulary developed over several years, Cruzvillegas works with found materials and commodities—consumerist, organic, or from the construction trade—in a process of inventive appropriation at once postindustrial and artisanal.

A preliminary glance at two works from 2007 gives us a point of entry into this practice. We see a jumble of found plastic and wood crates, Formica, wooden planks and dowels, wire grids, screws, glass, and a towel that, pulled together through seemingly spontaneous experimentation, nevertheless registers a profound sculptural understanding.[1] Deeply attentive to the materiality of the items he uses, Cruzvillegas exhibits an exuberant inventiveness with the sculptural possibilities of cast-off materials. In *Autoconstrucción–Underdeveloped Model,* we confront a contradictory accumulation of surfaces, textures, and substances that defines an equally contradictory set of structures, densities, and spaces. *Autoconstrucción–Subtly Miserable* adheres more strictly to a one-on-one sculptural engagement, but does so to foreground a radical instability—both structural and significative—that registers not as entropy but as dynamic contingency. A series of wood planks salvaged from construction sites and scrap heaps are poised atop a wooden crate in a seemingly impossible vertical configuration; balanced precariously along their thin edges, the planks trigger an intense, even anxious curiosity as to how they

* I borrow my title phrase from Lúcio Kowarick, "The Logic of Disorder: Capitalist Expansion in the Metropolitan Area of Greater São Paulo" (Institute of Development Studies–University of Sussex, 1977). This essay has benefited from more than the usual number of readers. In addition to the editors of *October*, I thank my colleagues and graduate students at Harvard, the University of Connecticut, and MIT, who were truly heroic in their willingness to give this essay repeated critical readings. I also thank Cruzvillegas himself for gracefully tolerating my endless questions.

1. On Cruzvillegas's sculptural thinking in relation to twentieth-century European and US models, see Mark Godfrey, "Instability and Fragmentation/Improvisation and Autoconstrucción: Abraham Cruzvillegas's Sculpture," in *Abraham Cruzvillegas: Autoconstrucción: The Book,* ed. Clara Kim (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts/REDCAT, 2009), pp. 65–73. Cruzvillegas is of course also heir to Mexico's Mesoamerican, colonial, and modern traditions.

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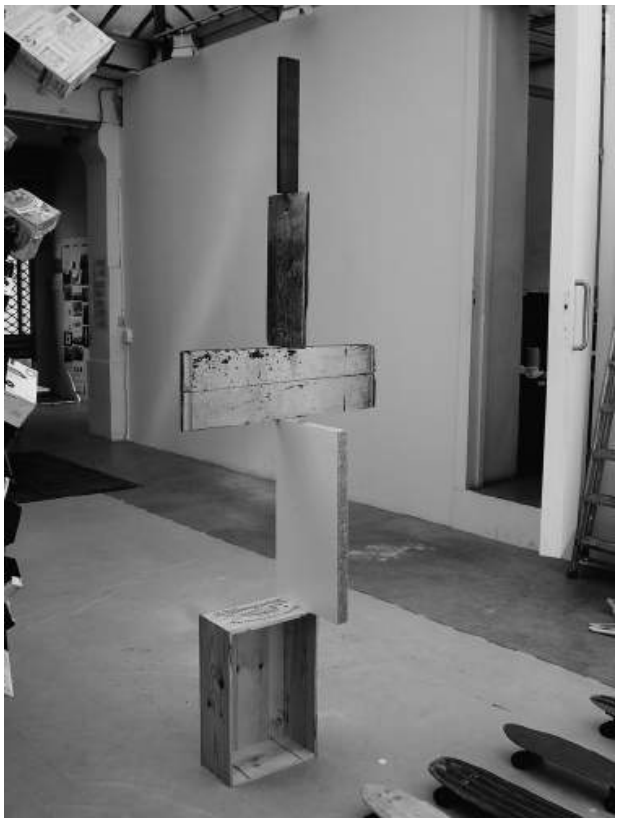


Cruzvillegas. Autoconstrucción–Subtly Miserable. *2007.*

manage to remain standing. Contingency is aimed inward, but is also activated outward, through the viewer's unstable encounter with the work. The work's instability conjures up a potential for chaos, especially if we get too close; there is the risk that things could fall apart at any moment, but also the anticipation that such a destruction or disordering could produce another unexpected dynamic. That is, Cruzvillegas's works elaborate precarity as a productive tension between collapse and vitality, between disorder and systematization, and, as I argue below, between pragmatism and imagination, materialized as both a metaphor and a structural mechanism for object experience.

A singular problem of sculpture today lies in how to confront an era in which our experience of objects is governed ever more strictly by an overproduction of commodities whose compensatory marketing mechanism is the production of the "new" as already obsolete detritus. The increasingly rapid tempo of this compulsory obsolescence spawns an aggressive annihilation of any sustained relations between people and things such that the material conditions of human existence are experienced as ever more abstract, transitory, and fragmentary. In addition, previously substantive economic processes of production and exchange are increasingly dematerialized, abstracted by new communication technologies and financial strategies into information and capital "flows." Technologies of financialization, the accelerating eradication of boundaries

impeding the movement of assets, and the concomitant erosion of the nation-state as the frame for citizen formation have progressively detached these capital flows from traditional forms of production, from the social welfare of workers, and from the political prerequisites for citizen self-determination. These economic and technological changes have prompted profound cultural transformations. Whereas cultural production was formerly seen as the locus of creating meaning, and circulation as merely transmitting that meaning, we are now faced with a situation in which circulation and exchange themselves are increasingly viewed as the framework within which meaning is constituted.[2] This process occurs within what David Harvey calls the "evolving space-time" of today's neoliberal economic strategies of globalization, which creates temporalities, spaces, and spatialities in active and shifting relation to social processes.[3] Despite the optimism of neoliberalism's powerful apologists (as well as certain anomalous panegyrics from leftists such as Hardt and Negri) about the universal benefits of planetary integration, "the general progress of neoliberalization," argues Harvey, "has been increasingly impelled *through* mechanisms of uneven geographical development."[4] From draconian IMF structural-adjustment programs imposed on developing countries to heightened social inequalities exacerbated by the wholesale privatization of public resources to regional economic integrations such as NAFTA that facilitate the flow of consumer goods but impede the flow of workers, these spatialized socioeconomic asymmetries have led to profound restructurings of the nature and experience of time, such that the "absolute" space and time that Marx associated with use value is ever more transformed by the "relative" space-time he associated with exchange value and commodity circulation.[5] The resulting uneven development is expressed both geographically (as "centers" and "peripheries") and temporally (as discontinuous and heterogeneous temporalities, where "many different senses of time get pinned together").[6] It is also expressed materially, as the tangible manifestations and contexts of the tension between the abstractions of capital circulation and concrete social realities.

This situation has generated multiple and competing ways of imagining sculpture's ability to rescue the material artifact from commodification. One tendency is to see commodification as a universally uniform experience of relentless violence that frames all materialities everywhere implacably within the demands

2. See Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002), pp. 191–213.

3. David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's* Capital (London: Verso, 2010), p. 37.

4. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p, 87. Italics in original.

5. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 209. See also David Harvey's now-classic formulation of "space-time compression" as a factor of contemporary life, in Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), pp. 284–307.

6. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 202. See also Claudio Lomnitz, "Time and Dependency in Latin America Today," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (Spring 2012), pp. 347–57.

of the globalized market.[7] Thus one powerful trajectory through modern and contemporary art has been based, as Thomas Crow notes, on an "antagonism to all illusory consolations" offered by the commodity, and is manifested in a deep suspicion of aesthetic gestures towards material pleasure.[8] We have only to recall the wide range of anti-aesthetic operations from Duchamp onward that locate sculptural practice in the deterioration of object experience under consumer culture. By contrast, a second tendency, represented by Arjun Appadurai, argues that the "unruliness of things" can still disrupt the "rule of the commodity," thus opening a "possible space of redemption" that artistic practice can exploit. While Appadurai does not address sculptural practice directly, he nevertheless pointedly establishes the potential for resisting commodification in materialist, object-based artistic operations. Furthermore, his well-known "social objects" model specifically situates the possibility of a critical aesthetic address to this "redemptive" tension between commodities and things *outside* developed economies, "in societies where the rule of the market is as yet incomplete."[9]

The work of Cruzvillegas marks a third position, located in the systemic interconnections between object experience in developing countries (Mexico, in his case) and object experience in the hegemonic "centers" of developed countries and the market-driven international art circuit.[10] Under the rubric of autoconstrucción, which translates roughly as "self-building," Cruzvillegas, I argue, exploits these interconnections, not to claim any utopian redemptive space outside the world market system, nor to insist on a universally uniform experience of commodification within it, but rather to assert the asymmetries of object experience induced by global economic integration. My contention is that Cruzvillegas's approach to materials opens the possibility of a renewed materialist critique of

7. This view is shared by a wide variety of critics and scholars, even as they disagree over its manifestations. Two of the most influential referents remain Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 120–67; and Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994). See also T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes From a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso, 2005); Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Detritus and Decrepitude: The Sculpture of Thomas Hirschhorn," *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (2001), pp. 41–56; and Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

8. Thomas Crow, "Committed to Memory," *Artforum* 39, no. 6 (February 2001).

9. Appadurai writes: "In societies where the rule of the market is as yet incomplete, there is a certain chaotic materiality in the world of things that resists the global tendency to make all things instruments of representation, and thus of abstraction and commodification. The challenge for . . . artists and critics is to find pathways through the global market without losing entirely the magic of materiality and the unruliness of the world of things. . . . This tension between the rule of the commodity and the unruliness of the thing itself marks the space where . . . art and its makers can find a possible space of redemption." Arjun Appadurai, "The Thing Itself," *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006), p. 21.

10. These two centers do not always coincide geographically in terms of nation-states in today's world. As Okwui Enwezor notes, the excesses of the art market can be connected to the "transfer of the illusion of cultural capital . . . in exchange for financial rewards drawn from the newly emergent centers of mega-wealth in those places where the global market economy was churning out new billionaires, namely Russia, China, and the Middle East." Okwui Enwezor, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" *October* 130 (Fall 2009), p. 33.

commodity capitalism that pinpoints fundamental aspects of commodification's global reach that have been ill considered, even misunderstood, by the other two models. Indeed, as I will demonstrate via the works of Cruzvillegas, any critical analysis of current forms of capitalism must come through a materialist assessment that recognizes both capitalism's inherent drive towards a fully global leverage *and* the necessarily uneven object experience produced by this process. In this essay, I first situate the practice of autoconstrucción vis-à-vis the sociological conditions of developing-world megacities, and then examine its stylistic model of "structural juxtaposition" in order to discern how these works might act as a register of specific material, spatial, and temporal asymmetries produced by neoliberal globalization to argue for the critical potential of the materialist aesthetics generated by this paradigm.

Autoconstrucción and the Sociology of Squatter Communities

Like Appadurai, Cruzvillegas locates his aesthetic practice in relation to the effects of market-oriented reforms on so-called marginal economies and cultures. Against aesthetic explorations that focus on the ever more rapid pace at which objects move from production to obsolescence, the work of Cruzvillegas examines social procedures of inventive repurposing to elaborate an aesthetic of vibrant improvisation. In particular, he appropriates the autoconstrucción improvisatory pragmatics of squatter architecture to develop a critical aesthetic engagement with the effects of neoliberalism and globalization.[11] Cruzvillegas's autoconstrucción projects stem from an intimate experience of Mexico City's *colonias paracaidistas* (literally "parachutist colonies," for the way they are occupied)—specifically Ajusco, where he grew up, a neighborhood first squatted by rural migrants in the 1960s on what was thought to be uninhabitable volcanic territory on the then-edge of Mexico City.[12] These settlements have a distinctive history, legal status, spatial identity, and visual aesthetic, which differs significantly from that of inner-city tenement housing (known as *vecindades*).[13] Unlike legally sanctioned

11. The term "autoconstruction" was coined by sociologists studying this phenomenon in squatter communities. See Peter Ward, "Intra-City Migration to Squatter Settlements in Mexico City," *Geoforum* 7 (1976), p. 370. On the ad hoc character of housing construction, see Peter Ward, "La Autoconstrucción: ¿un mito o una solución a los problemas habitacionales?," in *La vivienda popular en la Ciudad de México: Características y políticas de solución a sus problemas* (Mexico City: Instituto de Geografía–UNAM, 1985), p. 82.

12. "Colonia paracaidista" is the term used in Mexico to describe the tactic of sudden (often literally overnight), mass occupation of lands. See Peter Ward, "Una comparación entre colonias paracaidistas y ciudades perdidas de la Ciudad de México. Hacia una nueva política," *Boletín del Instituto de Geografía* 8 (1977), p. 102. It is important to note that, unlike other artists who go *to* marginal communities, Cruzvillegas comes *from* such a community.

13. Within Latin America, Adrián Aguilar and Peter Ward historicize megacity growth, noting significant differences between the 1960s and '70s (during Latin America's import-substitution industrialization [ISI] period), and the 1980s to the new millennium (which witnessed the decline of ISI and the rise of neoliberalism). They also note differences between Latin American megacity growth and urban-periphery squatting patterns and those in Africa and Southeast Asia. Aguilar and Ward, "Globalization, Regional Development, and Megacity Expansion in Latin America: Analyzing Mexico City's Periurban Hinterland," *Cities* 20, no. 1 (2003), pp. 4–5, 10.

Cruzvillegas. Study photographs–Colonia Ajusco. 2008.

vecindades, located in the city center and occupying existing buildings, paracaidista barrios are consistently formed on the edge of the city through illegal occupation of undeveloped lands. And unlike vecindades, paracaidista squatters do not rent housing from landlords, but continually engage in the difficult process of negotiating directly with the government to turn these illegal settlements into legal ownership.[14] As a result, colonias paracaidistas have long histories of sophisticated communal political organizing, which have allowed them to survive, consolidate, and grow, even if within the ultimately limiting framework of Mexico City's private-property structures and unequal resource distribution.[15] They also have a distinct visual aesthetic of imaginative, idiosyncratic play with found materials that stands in contrast to both vecindades and the more regimented architecture induced by urban planning and official building codes. Whereas vecindades are generally tenement housing crowded around a common-use courtyard and marked by cramped, limited adaptations of buildings whose main structures cannot be substantively changed, colonias paracaidistas exhibit a wide variety of highly personalized solutions to the problem of housing.

For Cruzvillegas, the experience of growing up in one such paracaidista neighborhood became the stimulus for incorporating the organic, piecemeal, and

14. Peter Ward, "The Squatter Settlement as Slum or Housing Solution: Evidence from Mexico City," *Land Economics* 52, no. 3 (August 1976), p. 332; Ward, "Una comparación entre colonias paracaidistas y ciudades perdidas," pp. 101–21.

15. Larissa Adler Lomnitz, *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown* (New York: Academic Press, 1977); Emilia Herrasti Aguirre, "Autoconstruction et mouvement urbain populaire à Mexico," in *Habitat créative: Éloge des faiseurs de ville: Habitants et architectes d'Amerique latine et d'Europe*, ed. Yves Pedrazzini, Jean-Claude Bolay, and Michel Bassand (Lausanne: École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, 1996), pp. 155–66; Fernando Díaz Enciso and poblador@s fundador@s, *La mil y una historias del Pedregal de Santo Domingo* (Mexico City, 2002).

collaborative aesthetics of the squatter settlements into his own work. In dramatizing material encounters between people and things in paracaidista situations, autoconstrucción recuperates such encounters as energetically chaotic. Yet rather than claiming any extra-capitalist status for marginality (and the "unruly things" it produces), and therefore unlike the work of Appadurai, autoconstrucción prompts us to recognize that otherness or marginality is in fact *produced by* neoliberalism's globalizing impulse. Indeed, colonias paracaidistas are a specific response to the rapid modernization of Latin American nations in the post–World War II period that transformed overwhelmingly agrarian economies such as Mexico's through import-substitution industrialization (ISI) from the 1940s to the '70s, the failures of ISI economics and subsequent debt crises in the mid-'70s, and the systematic institutionalization of neoliberalism from the early '80s onward.[16] These rapid economic changes sparked massive migration from rural to urban areas (both nationally and transnationally), as displaced rural peoples sought new work in cities.[17] Settling en masse in such colonias paracaidistas, these migratory communities entered into the long process of negotiating with the state to gain basic community services such as water and electricity and to transform their illegal squats into legal land titles—something that marks not isolation or marginality but rather integration into the city's economy, albeit as subaltern.[18]

The distinction between marginality and integration has a number of important consequences for Cruzvillegas's particular form of materialism. It posits, I argue, a model not of revolution but of reform; not a utopian politics of radical opposition but a post-utopian one of negotiation. On the one hand, this model acknowledges the structurally constitutive importance to capitalism of social sectors conventionally categorized as negligible—something that reveals them as a force to be reckoned with. On the other hand, however, it argues that social change will occur at best incrementally, from within the existing system, rather than through some wholesale overturning of extant economic structures.

On a theoretical plane, the reformist view is under no illusions regarding the

16. See José Castillo, "Urbanisms of the Informal: Transformations in the Urban Fringe of Mexico City," *Praxis* 2 (2001), pp. 100–11; and Peter Ward, "Intra-City Migration to Squatter Settlements in Mexico City," pp. 369–82.

17. See Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, ed., *Beyond la Frontera: The History of Mexico–U.S. Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

18. See Peter Ward, "Introduction and Overview: Marginality Then and Now," in "From the Marginality of the 1960s to the 'New Poverty' of Today: A LARR Research Forum," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 1 (2004), p. 183, where he presents data demonstrating that "if people were poor it was by virtue of their integration, not their exclusion from formal economic activities." In the case of Cruzvillegas's family, his father migrated from Nahuatzen, Michoacán, in the early 1960s. His mother was born in Mexico City and grew up in Tacubaya rental housing. She moved to Ajusco after meeting her husband, with the idea of owning rather than renting. Even if having a place of one's own meant hardship, she says, it "meant that we could imagine a future with something to call our own." The community (especially the women) worked together on what they called "Red Sundays" to build community infrastructure. Quoted from Cruzvillegas's 2009 two-channel video, *Autoconstrucción: Un Diálogo entre Angeles Fuentes y Rogelio Cruzvillegas*, translated in Kim, *Autoconstrucción: The Book*, pp. 123–24.

Ignacio Asúnsolo. Triumph. *1935. Photograph by Robin Greeley.*

invasiveness of commodity spectacle. This does not, however, mean that it cannot still be a model of resistance to spectacle culture. Autoconstrucción is not a renunciation of leftist utopianism, but rather a specific response to the historical failure of utopian models of revolution throughout Latin America—Cuba, Nicaragua, or Venezuela, for example—and particularly to the failures of the 1910 Mexican Revolution.[19] From the mid-1920s onward, the Mexican state effectively strove to co-opt the notion of "revolution" through a nationalist tradition of monumental public art based on *indigenismo*, which mythologized the purported "authenticity" of indigenous and popular cultures for most of the twentieth century. For more than six decades, this rhetoric underpinned the *mexicanidad* cultural nationalism of an increasingly authoritarian state.[20] By locating an aesthetics in the chaotic logic of paracaidista settlements, autoconstrucción subverts that moribund triumphalist essentialism, upending it quite literally in *Autoconstrucción—Untitled* (2009) with a whimsical, anti-monumental reversal of sculpture plinth and quintessentially Mexican stone *molcajetes*. Through a double turn of sculptural inversion and the relocation of everyday aesthetics from officially sanctioned indigenous "crafts" to procedures of recycling, Cruzvillegas recasts the trenchant anti-government aesthetic criticism of his family and friends in Ajusco—especially his father's steady stream of voluble diatribes (Cruzvillegas remembers them as peppered with foul language)—against the urban-art catastrophes routinely imposed by the state on Mexico City's public spaces.[21]

19. See Alan Knight, "The Rise and Fall of Cardenismo, c.1930–c.1946," and Peter Smith, "Mexico since 1946: Dynamics of an Authoritarian Regime," in *Mexico since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 241–396. On the failure of the Mexican state to institute political and economic equality, see John Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle' and Its Collapse," and Roderic Ai Camp, "The Time of the Technocrats and Deconstruction of the Revolution," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael Meyer and William Beezley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 575–636.

20. See my essay "Muralism and the State in Post-Revolution Mexico, 1920–1970," in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Robin Adèle Greeley, and Leonard Folgarait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 31–54.

21. Cruzvillegas recounts his father "fum[ing] against *the government*" and its public-art projects in Mexico City in "phrases like 'The people starve to death and these motherfuckers waste the budget on bullshit,' 'Who gave the go-ahead on this piece of shit?,' 'If this is art, then I'm Cuevas,' 'This has to be the gringos' handiwork,' or just plain 'Fuck the PRI!'" (This last refers to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the political party that had, under various names, held power in Mexico since the Revolution.) Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Round de sombra* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2006), p. 26. Translation by Joaquín Terrones; italics in original.

Cruzvillegas.
Autoconstrucción. *2009.*

But autoconstrucción does not simply track the failures of Mexico's postrevolutionary dirigism; it also enacts a canny analysis of the effects of the wholesale institutionalization of neoliberalism in Mexico from the early 1980s onward. Under President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988), the state orchestrated the imposition of neoliberal reforms, abandoning the defensive discourses of nationalism and anti-imperialism, along with ISI developmentalism and trade barriers, in favor of free trade and market reforms.[22] Subsequently, in an effort to win foreign investment, President Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) brokered Mexico's participation in NAFTA and instituted sweeping privatization of state resources including telecommunications, financial institutions, land and oil resources, and the airline industry. Salinas's successor, Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), oversaw the massive social and economic crises sparked by these maneuvers—among them, the unbridled expansion of consumer credit and unregulated lending to the private sector that resulted in the notorious "December mistake" of 1994–95, the currency crises of peso devaluation and the resulting "socialization" to the Mexican taxpayer of billions of dollars in debt. Zedillo's regime also presided over the ensuing unparalleled opening of Mexican banks and markets to foreign ownership, the assassination of national political figures and massive government corruption, and the Zapatista indigenous uprising in Chiapas.

These changes have exacerbated a long-standing crisis of representation conspicuously evident in everything from politics and news media to consumerism, cultural institutions, and public intellectual life. Manifestations of this crisis range from widespread popular suspicion of electoral politics, a widening wealth gap, and epidemic violence unleashed by the narco wars, to the rapid transformation of Mexico City from a national urban hub to a prominent world site of transnational investment and the attendant "privatization" of citizenship.[23] During the 1980s and early '90s, the breakdown of long-established systems of

22. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 92–93; and Sarah Babb, *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 171–98.

23. See Néstor García Canclini, "From National Capital to Global Capital: Urban Change in Mexico City," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000), pp. 207–13. Francisco Valdés Ugalde argues that big businesses in Mexico have developed a "civil strategy" of mass media and cultural campaigns that aim "to convince citizens that by virtue of simply *being* citizens, they belong by definition to the so-called private initiative." Francisco Valdés Ugalde, "Private Sector and Political Regime Change in Mexico," in *Neoliberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future*, ed. Gerardo Otero (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p. 139.

state patronage of the arts ruptured older patterns of artistic legitimacy. As state cultural institutions were defunded, decentralized, and/or privatized, patronage structures changed dramatically, with Mexican financiers beginning to invest heavily in contemporary art. These capitalist investors treated cultural acquisitions not as national patrimony but as one of the most fluid elements of a globalized economy.[24] In tandem, Salinas's 1989 creation of Conaculta (the National Council on Culture and the Arts) instituted an explicit state politics of decentralization and commoditization of culture aimed at promoting young artists by inserting them into globalized market structures.[25]

These conditions have amplified the sense of incoherence regarding cultural and aesthetic representation of everyday life such that previous images of national synthesis no longer hold. Tropes of *mexicanidad* continue to be trotted out on the national and international stage, but they now read as disconnected from quotidian life, mobilized instead to facilitate the transnational economic and political agendas of elites in both Mexico and its more developed trading partners.[26] The status symbols of consumerism provide no viable alternative national discourse. After 1982, the state progressively ceded its role as arbiter of citizenship and modernity to mass consumption and the culture industry; but in a country whose wealth gap is among the widest in the world, the glossy objects and enclave culture

24. Mariana Aguirre, "Interview with Critic, Curator and Art Historian, Cuauhtémoc Medina," *Art21* (August 2012), Part I: http://blog.art21.org/2012/08/03/interview-with-critic-curator-and-art-historian-cuauhtemoc-medina-part-1/#.UoaSko3baE4; Part II: http://blog.art21.org/2012/08/07/interview-with-critic-curator-and-art-historian-cuauhtemoc-medina-part-2/#.UoaSpY3baE4 (accessed September 14, 2012); Eduardo Ramírez, *El Triunfo de la Cultura: Uso político y económico de la cultura en Monterrey* (Nuevo León: Fondo Editorial de Nuevo León, 2009), p. 119; Jodi Kovach, "Remotely Mexican: Recent Work by Gabriel Orozco, Carlos Amorales, and Pedro Reyes" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University–St. Louis, 2013), pp. 76—79. This shift in patronage systems had an anomalous effect on the artists of Cruzvillegas's generation. Until the mid-1990s, when the Salinas presidency definitively broke the old state-culture model, contemporary art not conforming to the *mexicanidad* mold was systematically collected neither by the state nor by private collectors. For a limited but crucial period in the late 1980s and '90s, this situation paradoxically allowed Cruzvillegas and his peers to develop their artistic ideas largely outside of any pressure to conform either to state cultural ideologies or to the market system. New spaces and paths for experimental artistic production opened up outside state institutions and the market, such as the alternative gallery space Temístocles 44 and Orozco's "Friday Workshop," in both of which Cruzvillegas participated for several years. This period of relatively unfettered experimentation ended at the turn of the century with the influential patronage of private collectors such as Jumex billionaire Eugenio López Alonso and with the heightened, if often controversial, presence of "post-Mexican" artists in the international art world. See Olivier Debroise, ed., *La Era de la Discrepancia/The Age of Discrepancies: Arte y Cultura Visual en Mexico/Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968–1997* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2006), pp. 366–439; Néstor García Canclini, *La socieded sin relato: Antropología y estética de la inminencia* (Mexico City: Katz Editores, 2011), pp. 81–96.

25. Eduardo Ramírez has said this process depends on "cultural sweatshops" that mimic the "international division of labor." Ramírez, *El Triunfo de la Cultura,* p. 119. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

26. Blockbuster exhibitions such as the 1990 *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* (timed to coincide with the negotiation of NAFTA) and the 2001 exhibition *Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art* (sponsored by Citigroup to promote its buyout of Mexico's second-largest bank, Banamex) continued to rely heavily on *mexicanidad*. See Shifra Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and Mary Coffey, "Banking on Folk Art; Banamex-Citigroup and Transnational Cultural Citizenship," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29, no. 3 (2010), pp. 296–312.

Top: Teresa Margolles. Entierro (Entombment). *1999. Courtesy of the artist and Galería Labor, Mexico City.*
Bottom: Santiago Sierra. Gallery Burnt with Gasoline. *1997. Courtesy of Galeria Labor. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VEGAP, Madrid.*

of elite shopping malls remain chimerical rather than real for the vast majority.[27] Autoconstrucción's materialist practice, in its close attention to the minutiae of Mexico City culture and street life, helps us conceptually to comprehend this omnipresent crisis of representation, treating it neither as a momentary rupture nor as a purely localized "third world" debacle, but as an accumulation of decades of broken promises regarding Mexico's integration into a global modernity. Quotidian experience in Mexico today, posits autoconstrucción, cannot be represented by shiny cell phones and SUVs, nor by nostalgic images of the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata or the Aztec king Cuauhtémoc defiantly resisting Spanish torture. Rather, everyday experience is most fittingly described by the discarded commodity scraps—from locally produced cement blocks to plastic buckets made in China to cans, bottles, and cardboard fabricated in the US—rescued for reuse from the garbage dump or junkyard.[28]

Yet autoconstrucción also rejects contemporary aesthetics of Mexico-as-apocalypse. The works of artists like Teresa Margolles and Santiago Sierra position

27. Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico; Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 117. In March 2013, Reuters reported that Mexico was home to the world's richest man (telecommunications mogul Carlos Slim) while almost half of Mexico's population lived in poverty. Gabriel Stargardter, "Mexico's wealth gap in spotlight as Slim and miners get richer," *Reuters*, March 4, 2013. http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/04/us-billionaires-list-mexico-idUSBRE9231AT20130304, accessed November 5, 2013.

28. See Sarah Hill, "The Wasted Resources of *Mexicanidad:* Consumption and Disposal on Mexico's Northern Frontier," in *The Social Relations of Mexican Commodities*, ed. Casey Walsh, et al (La Jolla: Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2003), pp. 157–85.

Mexico City–as–catastrophe by exacerbating the tension between neo-avant-garde practices such as minimalism or conceptualism and the violence of urban life in the developing world. In *Entombment* (1999), for example, Margolles enclosed the abandoned body of a stillborn infant, aborted by a destitute mother, in a rough cement block only marginally larger than the dead fetus itself. Isolated on a large, empty gallery floor, the gray block transforms minimalism's phenomenological encounter between viewer and object into a haunting meditation on "a society in which violence is almost a habit."[29] And critics noted that Sierra's 1997 *Gallery Burnt with Gasoline* "translated the latent anger generated by [Mexico's] ongoing social crises into attacks on the institutions of art and property."[30] These and similar works have generated a sharp antihumanist critique of the real human costs of Mexico's insertion into the world market system. Nevertheless, in taking quotidian violence as their central theme, and in projecting it as an elemental reality of Mexican life, they risk substituting one failed image of national synthesis with another. "Mexico," autoconstrucción shows us, cannot be contained by a single national narrative, whether of *mexicanidad* or of endemic violence. Countering the prevalent view of megacities as apocalyptic disasters, autoconstrucción defines an aesthetics of creativity under constraint that illuminates the interplay between the ruinous implosion of Mexico's modernity and the collective ingenuity of Mexico's citizenry in addressing that crisis productively. This aesthetic works to destabilize and revitalize cultural references through what Mark Godfrey calls "structural juxtaposition," a dual strategy of juxtaposing unlike elements and subordinating them to structural criteria.[31]

29. Teresa Margolles, quoted in Kevin Power and Osvaldo Sánchez, eds., *Eco: Arte contemporáneo mexicano* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía/Conaculta, 2005), p. 68.

30. Debroise, *La Era de la Discrepancia*, p. 437.

31. Mark Godfrey, "Instability and Fragmentation/Improvisation and Autoconstrucción," p. 69. On megacities as apocalyptic disasters, see, for instance, Klaus Biesenbach, ed., *Mexico City: An Exhibition about the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values* (New York: Museum of Modern Art/P.S. 1, 2002). Mexican curator Cuauhtémoc Medina has also characterized Mexico City as "nightmarish" and "an apocalyptic failure," but has argued strenuously for the need to historicize both the particular internal and external circumstances of this condition and the alternative art scene's inventiveness in using Mexico City as a "laboratory" for developing an aesthetic out of "the ruins of a modernization deferred, deformed, betrayed and derailed ad infinitum." Medina, "Exhibition guide," *20 Million Mexicans Can't Be Wrong* (London: South London Gallery, 2002), p. 6; Medina, "Notas para una estética del modernizado," in Power and Sánchez, *Eco*, p. 14. Sociologists, by contrast, have often "found no evidence that the urban poor were mired in fatalism. Likewise, inequality . . . was not perceived [by the urban poor] as a structure excluding them or their children from the possibility of obtaining education, employment and shelter." Bryan Roberts, "Moving On and Moving Back: Rethinking Inequality and Migration in the Latin American City," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42 (2010), p. 593. Relevant also to Cruzvillegas's autoconstrucción model of "making" is Roberts's further observation that "a key to understanding why even the poor saw opportunities in their environment is the informality of many of the rapidly growing cities of Latin America. Poor migrants and city-born people could see themselves as 'making' the city because that is what they did, in terms of both work and housing" (p. 594). See also the comments of Cruzvillegas's mother in note 18 above; Janice Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); and Hans Harms, "The Limitations of Self-Help," *Architectural Design* 46 (1976), pp. 230–31.

Structural Juxtapositions

Cruzvillegas is acutely aware of the cultural connotations of the diverse materials he chooses. For example, his *Autoconstrucción* installation of 2009 incorporated items including found packing crates and food-oil cans, maguey and aloe plants, the artist's own hair, and traditional glass balls from the Mexican state of Jalisco. *Constitución* (2003) recalls not only obsidian's symbolism within Aztec and Purépecha religious cultures (and Mexican nationalism's appropriation of such preconquest symbolisms) but also rubber's politically overdetermined symbolism as a commodity within industrial and postindustrial economies.[32] *Constitución*'s rubber bucket, which Cruzvillegas found in a flea market in Morocco, is made from a cast-off truck tire, and marks the seemingly contradictory circuits that take a material from its natural state through industrial production to commodity waste, to creative reuse and exchange in a postindustrial developing economy, to high-priced sculpture in the elite echelons of the developed world. This in turn reflects back on Cruzvillegas's own postindustrial, post-national aleatory circulations, where he consciously heightens what sociologist Néstor García Canclini calls the unresolved dramatic "tension between not being bound by national frameworks and at the same time living in a world where passports continue to hold sway" that marks contemporary existence.[33] Works such as *Constitución* link the movements of industrial and cultural commodities to the ambulation of the sculptor himself, who operates simultaneously as (in this instance) a tourist engaging in typical forms of global consumption; as someone who consistently recognizes patterns of creative repurposing in developing

Cruzvillegas. Top: Autoconstrucción, *installation view. Thomas Dane Gallery, London. 2009. Bottom:* Constitución. *2003.*

32. Obsidian, in ancient Purépecha culture, was used to make knives that were considered gods.
33. García Canclini, *La socieded sin relato,* p. 93.

economies similar to his own; and as a contemporary artist constantly moving through cultural spaces as diverse as Documenta, La Galería de Comercio's street-art projects in Mexico City, and the chaotic spaces of his father's painting workshop in their Ajusco house.[34]

Yet such cultural connotations are deliberately conjured up in order to be destabilized through exuberantly odd juxtapositions that reassert the material enigma of things.[35] Thus, the bucket pulls us away from conventional Mexicanist readings of obsidian, while the individual cultural significances of red glass balls, sculpture plinths, and human hair still register, but are undercut through their unconventional proximity. In this regard, the instability of the symbolic is exposed through "misuse" of objects that dislocates them from their fixed position within commodity circuits, to turn them into critical objects that posit quirky, often funny aesthetic imaginings generated by material experience, against the erosion of experience induced by the commodity.[36] Cruzvillegas also programmatically subjugates cultural connotations to materiality. Obsidian's cultural symbolism is thus counteracted with meticulous attention to qualities of weight, density, and surface luster, to the physical contrast between its razor-sharp facets and the softer malleability of the rubber bucket, to the way in which light reflects off its surface while being absorbed by the bucket's black exterior, and so on. Structurally, the precarious balance of bucket atop stone—it sits there unattached—pulls the viewer away from thinking about any normative cultural symbolism of either element, forcing her to wonder if the whole thing won't simply collapse.

Other works deliberately realize this process of "structural juxtaposition" as a function of site-specificity and embodied practices of viewing. *Autoconstrucción–Tree House* (2007) positions the ubiquitous plastic crates used to transport goods, often recycled as impromptu containers for other, informal-sector goods or as cheap domestic furniture, here tied up with bits of twine as though a monstrous industrial growth off the natural trunk of the tree. An offbeat, unmonumental reworking of minimalism in light of the disorderly object conditions of peripheral economies, this work simultaneously revamps minimalism's aim to dismantle the autonomous object "solely defined by its internal relationships"

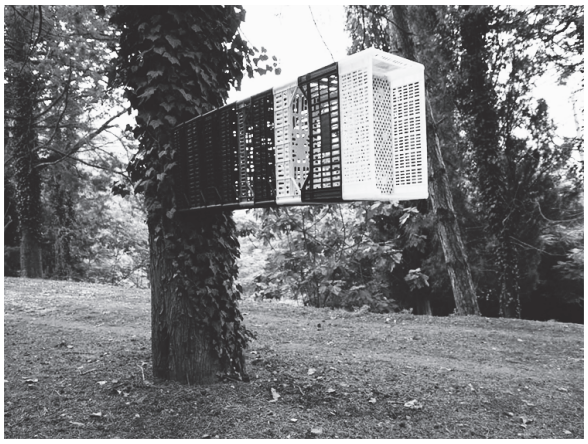
34. Cruzvillegas participated in Documenta in 2012. La Galería de Comercio is a nonprofit "gallery" founded by Cruzvillegas and several of his students in 2010 to showcase "public art projects on the street." Located literally on the pavement of calle Comercio ("Commerce Street") in Mexico City, "the very place of La Galería de Comercio," according to its declaration, "is its space in the street and occasionally includes the walls, furniture, persons, animals, vegetables or any other object that may inhabit it." It "exists only momentarily and produces no leftovers-residues in situ." "Declaration," La Galería de Comercio, online at www.lagaleriadecomercio.org/index.php?/project/declaracion/ (accessed October 21, 2013). Cruzvillegas describes his father turning their entire house into a painting studio whose disordered spaces sheltered the implements of his craft-painting trade mixed in with children, animals, and a startling array of salvaged objects. Kim, *Autoconstrucción: The Book*, pp. 119–20.

35. On the "audacious ambiguity" and "enigma" of "things," see Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001), pp. 4–5.

36. For an investigation in a different context of the dialectics prompted by "misuse," see Bill Brown, "Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things)," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2010), pp. 198–200.

and confounds its efforts to control the environment within which the viewer encounters the object, by insisting on the intrusion of both nature and the social.[37] The viewer may at first be distracted from the immediacy of the encounter with the object by external stimuli—birds chirping, the uneven ground beneath one's feet, and so on. As the encounter continues, however, those stimuli begin to enter into the "object" itself as part of the work. Accordingly, as we move around and under the crates, patterns of light and glimpses of the landscape filter through the plastic grids in a tongue-in-cheek, low-rent revamping of slick modernist kinetic experiments such as those of Julio Le Parc or Jesús Rafael Soto.

Cruzvillegas's misuse of objects calls attention to their material particularity in order to pry open the symbolic character of the commodity and show that its status as such is not absolutely coextensive with its materiality. His misuse does not remain purely at the level of metaphor but structures a system of aesthetic production that enacts specific procedures. First, nothing is viewed as pure detritus; everything has potential for reuse. Autoconstrucción derives from the squatter culture of salvage and hoarding, rather than scavenging—a model that makes a crucial distinction between materials stockpiled for future use (a form of accumulation based on an object's potential use value) and scavenged trash (the aesthetic value of which depends precisely on its obsolescence and lack of either use or exchange value). This distinction, for example, lies at the heart of the differences between Cruzvillegas's aesthetic program and that of his onetime mentor Gabriel Orozco. The latter associates the procedures and products of scavenging with consumer society's abandoned remnants and fragments to elaborate an aesthetic of melancholy centered on the lost promise of consumer objects. Thus *Island Within an Island* (1993), in its sculptural-photographic use of found debris to echo the Manhattan skyline, offers a visual poetics of ruin that carries with it the sense of the inevitable failure of capitalism's ethos of liberating dynamism.[38] And works such as *Roof*



Cruzvillegas. Autoconstrucción–Tree House. *2007.*

37. Richard Serra, quoted in Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 263. I take the term "unmonumental" from the exhibition *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* (New York: the New Museum, 2007–2008), in which Cruzvillegas showed.

38. Hal Foster underscores this in noting the new meanings taken on by Orozco's "(de)compositional strategy" in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 143.

to Roof (1993), *Dog Circle* (1995), and *Pinched Ball* (1993) reiterate Orozco's obsession with the erosion of pristine form under the conditions of contemporary reality. Each registers the entropic disintegration of a perfect geometric shape as that fragile ideal is always already compromised by the circumstances of its enactment in real material terms. Cruzvillegas emphatically rejects Orozco's atrabilious sensibility in favor of hoarding and its correlate, potential construction. If Orozco's emphasis is on perception, Cruzvillegas's, by contrast, is on *making*, which is why *Autoconstrucción–Untitled* (2008) stresses a rapid, haphazard construction, while Orozco's *Pinched Ball* underscores an intimate perceptual encounter with object decay and the iridescent beauty that deterioration generates.

Gabriel Orozco. Top: Island Within an Island. *1993. Bottom:* Pinched Ball. *1993. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.*

The second feature of this system of aesthetic production is an interdependence of elements that is as necessary as it is precarious. Move any of the crates in *Autoconstrucción* (2009) even an inch and the sculpture will topple. In *Autoconstrucción–Underdeveloped Model*, there seems to be real delight in how those horizontal dowels poke through that rough wooden plank or balance pertly atop that short stick of wood. Clearly, interdependence is both a structural term and a metaphor for interactions (both positive and negative) prompted by globalization, whether these are the communal relations of Ajusco understood as a particular set of responses to the conditions of advanced capitalism; the tension between "post-national" forms of commerce and citizenship under neoliberalism and the persistence of the nation-state; or the fact that juxtaposition with other cultures, rather than isolation, is now seen to be what demarcates cultural specificity.[39] Rather than proffering hazy generalizations, however, Cruzvillegas's assertive engagement with materialities commands attentiveness to the specific operations through which these interconnections are concretized, but also and equally to their limitations—to the points at which interconnections (literally) will not hold. Autoconstrucción gives us analytical purchase on processes that are,

39. See Frederick Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100 (2001), p. 196.

in historian Frederick Cooper's words, "large-scale but not universal . . . with linkages that cut across state borders and lines of cultural difference but which nonetheless are based on specific mechanisms within certain boundaries."[40]

Third, Cruzvillegas deliberately stages idiosyncratic juxtapositions that call attention to an object's utility as a structural material in dynamic opposition to its status as a commodity, creating a dialectical encounter between things that critically reflects on use value versus exchange value. We are not presented with massive accumulations of trash, as with Thomas Hirschhorn's *Too Too-Much Much*, for example, but with a sharp attunement to specific materialities derived from the artist's subjective engagement with individual objects. Hirschhorn's conceptual miming of the incessant overproduction and accelerated obsolescence of consumer products gives way, in Cruzvillegas's works, to a deep absorption in the nonconceptual formal properties of the artifacts he uses to construct his sculptures.[41] Whereas Hirschhorn subsumes the individual nature of each tin can into an overwhelming, undifferentiated mass of detritus, Cruzvillegas foregrounds his aesthetic encounter with recalcitrant materialities, a close sensory wrestling with the intractable physical immediacy of things that actively pulls apart an artifact's use value (in this case, sculptural) from its commodity value. Hence, in *Autoconstrucción–Underdeveloped Model,* it is the artist's interaction with particular things that activates and gives substance to abstract parameters of openness and closure, porousness and density, as Cruzvillegas precariously joins the edifice of crates to the fragile geometries of levered dowels, wire grids, and wood struts to enact the tension between sculpture-as-solid-form versus sculpture-as-architectonic-space. Here as elsewhere, the artist submits the pragmatic autoconstrucción tactics of his Ajusco neighbors to a second-level reordering in light of the exigencies of sculpture, thereby raising the repurposing tactics of his paracaidista neighbors to the level of a critical epistemology whose conceptual power derives from the artist's own confrontation with the unresolved tension between intransigent thingness and the social conditions of production and consumption.[42]

Thomas Hirschhorn. Too Too-Much Much. *2010. Photograph by Henk Schoenmakers. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADGAP, Paris.*

40. Ibid., pp. 191–92.

41. This argument regarding Hirschhorn is Benjamin Buchloh's. See Buchloh, "Detritus and Decrepitude," pp. 43, 55.

42. Moreover, Cruzvillegas's foregrounding of this interaction rescues the artwork from simply metaphorizing vernacular autoconstrucción's social conditions, which would risk calcifying the artwork's meaning into a flat-footed productionist heroizing of paracaidista inhabitants.

Crucially at issue, therefore, is the role of the artist in bringing the recalcitrant materiality of things to a level of expressive correlation with social conditions. Each "particular object" reveals its "particular logic" (to quote Marx) only when grasped critically by the artist through the productively unsettling aesthetic confrontation engendered by strategic misuse.[43] This process is directed outward towards the material world, but also aimed inward towards a self-reflexive cognizance of the artist's own subjectivity. In wrestling with the stubborn materiality of things, the artist recognizes himself as a perceiving subject whose confrontation with the otherness of objects is what opens the potential for critical, conceptual thinking.[44] Cruzvillegas underscores that confrontation, without which thought would become merely a reflection of itself, untethered to the experiential world, a fruitless reiteration of what is already known. Autoconstrucción is, therefore, a materialist praxis, in that it treats materiality as that which secures the possibility of dialectical—i.e., self-reflexive, critical—thinking.

Materiality and Modernity's Asymmetries

Autoconstrucción's critical purchase thus emerges from an aesthetic encounter with the commodity object that aims to jar its fetish aura and reveal its role in structuring the mutually imbricated but asymmetrically experienced sites of transnational modernity. What we have here is neither an outmoded model of a dominant modernity imposed on non-modern regions (a model that defines modernity solely as a function of a universalizing center) nor a model of "alternative modernities" that, despite its refreshing anti-Eurocentrism, tends to diffuse any rigorous sense of capitalism's extraordinary ability to reproduce and expand itself, while still presupposing an intrinsically singular modernity merely reshaped by local conditions into diverse cultural forms. Against these models, I argue, autoconstrucción posits a negotiation between the so-called center of the international art circuit and the so-called periphery of urban slums in Latin America. As Cruzvillegas has said, he is not interested in "simply presenting models of poor people's architecture" to the museum or biennial crowd, nor does he want to go back to Ajusco to make art for the local community. Rather, he seeks to place these two systems in confrontation, in order to generate historicized insight into, as he puts it, "how human activity produces form."[45] These are more than just a well-intentioned artist's statements. They describe a deliberate analytical focus on the underlying structural conditions of global finance capitalism that

43. Karl Marx's doctoral dissertation, "The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," quoted in Moishe Postone, "On Nicolaus' Introduction to the *Grundrisse*," *Telos* 22 (Winter 1975–76), p. 132.

44. This resonates with Adorno's comment that "an object can be conceived only by a subject but always remains something other than the subject." Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 183. See also Theodor Adorno, "Lecture Seven: Knowledge as Tautology," in Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 69–80. The "perceiving subject" is, at a first level, the artist who makes the artwork, and at a second level the viewer who is able to reconstruct the artist's aesthetic confrontation through a second-order engagement with the opacity of the artwork.

45. Cruzvillegas, "Autoconstrucción," in Kim, *Autoconstrucción: The Book*, p. 14.

simultaneously produce slums like Ajusco and the international art market with its outlandish excesses of commodity speculation—and produce them not as coincidentally coexisting but rather as constitutively interconnected. It is for this reason that Cruzvillegas determinedly situates his practice at the intersection of the global and the local, rather than fully in one camp or the other, and it is in this global-local negotiation that we can locate a reassessment of standard models of "marginal" and "hegemonic." It is also, I argue, where we must locate the possibility of a conceptual renewal of sculpture's ability to reinvest human relations to the material with meaning, with all the ambivalence such a project necessarily takes on.

Such a negotiation calls to mind what Timothy Mitchell described as "the singularity and universalism of the project of modernity" while attending to the ways in which that universalism remains structurally incomplete. Autoconstrucción elucidates Mitchell's observation that modernity's universalizing logic "can be produced only by displacing and discounting what remains heterogeneous to it," yet this repressed heterogeneity constantly returns both to define and to rupture that logic.[46] There is a fluid address in these works to languages of the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde: The breadth of Cruzvillegas's references is astonishing, from the Constructivists, Duchamp, and Schwitters, through Rauschenberg, Filliou, and the Minimalists, to Oiticica, Jimmie Durham, David Hammons, and many others.[47] In rough wooden constructions sporting woolly "tails," for example, we find ebulliently awkward revisions of Rodchenko's laboratory experiments combined with the quixotic bodily humor of Hammons. Elsewhere, autoconstrucción as a practice invokes John Cage's "model of indeterminacy and chance" meshed with a Rauschenbergian exploration of detritus's ability to evoke memory.[48] It also interrogates the continued viability of Filliou's notion of the unfinished and incomplete as a utopian confrontation with consumer capitalism

Cruzvillegas. Autoconstrucción, *installation view, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow. 2008.*

46. Timothy Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Questions of Modernity,* ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. xii–xiii. Mitchell of course means "modernity" as the rise of commodity capitalism, with its historically specific projection of a totalizing logic that unfolds from the abstract structuring form of the commodity to money and capital.

47. For a more detailed review of Cruzvillegas's assessments of artists from outside Latin America, see Mark Godfrey, "Instability and Fragmentation/Improvisation and Autoconstrucción."

48. Cruzvillegas cites Cage in *Round de sombra,* p. 76. Cruzvillegas mounts precarious towers of different found containers, conjuring up uneven circuits of production and distribution—in which economies do fruits and vegetables come packaged in slatted wood crates? In printed cardboard boxes? In plastic crates?—even as the boxes seem ready to tumble into unknown new configurations.

(and evaluates the current feasibility of Filliou's own appraisal of Duchamp).[49] The artisanal character of works in the *Autoconstrucción* installations of 2008 and 2009 brings to mind the social commitment and intense anti-industrialist materiality of Beuys, while rejecting his utopian view of a natural "other" to our commoditized present.[50] Bold use of saturated color recalls Oiticica's treatment of color as a material force. And so on.

But Cruzvillegas's work also calls to mind a realm of sculptural and architectural aesthetics that has nothing to do with avant-garde legacies, an aesthetics generated by pragmatic solutions to local urban problems. "Local" here means not just "Mexico City" or even the Ajusco neighborhood, but rather *this* street and *this* house, and what materials were immediately on hand to resolve *this* urgent problem. Autoconstrucción therefore marks an intensification of the local that contrasts sharply with the object address of Gabriel Orozco, whose geographically generalized sense of object conditions under the onslaught of commodification sees a similar decrepitude everywhere from São Paulo to New York.

Autoconstrucción thus courts the inefficient, improvised, and unproductive neither as something external to capitalism, nor simply as its unusable detritus, but as the indispensable Janus face of capitalism's official ideology of the productive, efficient, and organized.[51] And against the contention that commodity spectacle produces a universally consistent object experience of accelerated obsolescence, Cruzvillegas's sculptural practice recognizes that this globalizing trajectory of commodification is necessarily experienced unevenly across the world's distinct geopolitical territories. This asymmetrical experience has a spatial character as well, the division of nation-state economies into "developed" versus "developing."

It also, crucially, has a temporal character. Aggressive ideologies of consumerism and spectacle culture were developed in the nineteenth century, as Walter Benjamin has famously analyzed, and expanded exponentially in Europe until their collusion with Fascism in the mid-twentieth century. The 1950s saw a reconstitution of the utopian object, however, under the banner of US-style liberal democracy and consumerism rather than either Fascism or socialism. Temporally, as Tony Judt and others have shown, postwar Europe and the United States experienced the egalitarian promise of consumerism in the 1950s and '60s, prior to experiencing its demise from the mid-'70s onward.[52] In Mexico and throughout Latin America, however,

49. Cruzvillegas, "A Red Sock in a Yellow Box," unpublished manuscript, 2006.

50. Cruzvillegas, *Round de sombra*, pp. 136–37.

51. The terms "inefficient" and "unproductive" might seem to run against my earlier claim regarding the productive social organization of paracaidista settlements. However, that productivity is itself a result of its antithesis, in that paracaidista communities must use less efficient technologies and work harder to survive than their wealthier Mexico City counterparts. Any creative resourcefulness prompted by this situation is generally part of the unpaid labor that underpins socioeconomic relations of unequal exchange and surplus labor embedded in capitalism. Hence, Cruzvillegas's deployment of the binaries productive/unproductive, efficient/inefficient, and organized/improvised alludes to the discrepancy between capitalism's doctrine of ridding economies of technological inefficiencies and its simultaneous reliance on often highly inefficient uses of human energy.

52. Tony Judt, "The Age of Affluence" and "Diminished Expectations," in *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

these phases were not experienced sequentially, as a rise and then a fall, but simultaneously. Even in its heyday, consumer culture, with its basis in modernization policies and economic imperialism, was never viewed uncritically.[53] Latin Americans have been wary of the costs of modernization and consumerism even as their governments have sought to modernize, costs that have come in the form of economic dependency, militarization, social inequality, and political instability.[54] Whereas in Europe and mainstream US society the second phase, of demise, effectively canceled the first, utopian phase, this decisive negation did not occur in Latin America because the sequencing of the equation's terms was not the same.

That distinct spatial-temporal trajectory has meant that aesthetic practices as well as consumer practices have played out differently in Latin America and in the United States and Europe. I want to look at two examples from Mexico that have been important for Cruzvillegas—modernist architecture and debates over the Duchampian anti-aesthetic—in order to track those distinct Latin American trajectories, and to explore how, in addressing this situation, Cruzvillegas operates from a position capable of mining a certain ambivalent duality that figures the consumer object simultaneously as promise and failure.

Let us begin with the example of modernist architecture. Thierry de Duve has argued that "the reduction of the modernist utopia [to] the one-dimensional logic of capital" has produced a "far-reaching crisis" in which "architecture today proves more powerless than ever to politically refashion *social* space."[55] In Mexico,

53. The most potent evidence of this is the widespread adoption in the postwar period of ISI development policies advocated by the Comisión Económica Para América Latina (CEPAL, founded in 1948) and the enthusiasm for dependency theory as a means of reducing dependence on foreign powers and goods. See Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Such economic policies were coupled with a widespread regional rise in anti-imperialist nationalism. On Mexico's conflicted relationship to postwar US consumerism, see Carlos Monsiváis, *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* (Mexico City: Debolsillo, 1981); Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, Eric Zolov, eds., *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home! Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

54. Latin American states in the twentieth century have implemented a wide variety of modernization models, from authoritarian nationalist populism (Vargas, Calles, Perón) to import-substitution industrialization (Alemán, Kubitschek, Allende) to internationally financed authoritarian modernization (Pinochet, Onganía, Médici) to neoliberalism of various political stripes (Salinas, Fujimori, Lula). It is also relevant that Latin America never directly experienced Nazi Fascism, and that the region's encounters with socialism have been as much or more a result of homegrown conditions, especially the effects of colonialism and proximity to the United States, than of ties to the USSR. The literature on the political, social, and economic trajectory of modernization in twentieth-century Latin America is vast. Useful starting points are Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves, eds., *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Victor Bulmer-Thomas, John H. Coatsworth, and Roberto Cortés Conde, eds., *The Economic History of Latin America, vol. II: The Long Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); J. Samuel Valenzuela and Arturo Valenzuela, "Modernization and Dependency: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Development," *Comparative Politics* 10, no. 4 (July 1978), pp. 535–57; and Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation-Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

55. Thierry De Duve, "Dan Graham and the Critique of Artistic Autonomy," in *Dan Graham*, ed. Alex Kitnick (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), p. 87. Italics in original.

we can find this in the transition from the 1930s Bauhaus-inspired work of Juan O'Gorman to the Corbusier-inspired housing complexes of Mario Pani built under Mexico's turn towards a free-market economy in the 1950s and '60s to the urban chaos of present-day Mexico City.[56] For Cruzvillegas, this trajectory was compounded by two further historical events. The first occurred on October 2, 1968, when the Mexican state ordered the military to open fire on a peaceful student protest in Tlatelolco Plaza—an event that continues to register as a national trauma.[57] The military effectively used the high-rise housing complexes that border three sides of the plaza to pen in the students and carry out a wholesale massacre. Any pretense of Pani's sleek modernist buildings' having been architecture for the masses was instantly shorn, their complicit role in authoritarian modernization revealed.[58] For Cruzvillegas, like many born in 1968, the Tlatelolco massacre frames his understanding of the so-called Mexican economic miracle of this period.[59]

Mario Pani. Nonoalco-Tlatelolco housing complex. 1964. © Fondo Mario Pani, Fototeca Tecnológico de Monterrey. Photograph by Guillermo Zamora.

The second incident occurred in 1985, when Mexico City was hit by an earthquake that destroyed the city center, killing some 10,000 people. State indifference to the plight of its citizens—as manifested in the poor construction of those same modernist buildings, many of which collapsed—was countered by massive grassroots organizing that relied on the expertise of paracaidista organizers such as

56. José Castillo examines the simultaneous rise of Pani's Corbusier-like housing complexes and the "informal" urbanization of Mexico City's periphery, noting the eventual failure of the Pani model and the rise of informality until "the whole city has become informal." Castillo, "Urbanisms of the Informal," p. 106.

57. The massacre, in part a response to state fears that the student protests would ruin Mexico's international reputation as a modern nation fit for tourism, occurred ten days before the opening of the 1968 Olympics, hosted in Mexico City. On the Tlatelolco massacre, see Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1971); and Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis, *Parte de guerra,* vols. I and II (Mexico City: Aguilar, 1999–2002).

58. See Rubén Gallo, "Modernist Ruins: The Case Study of Tlateloloco," in *Telling Ruins in Latin America*, ed. Michael Lazzara and Vicky Unruh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 107–18.

59. From 1940 to 1970, the "Mexican miracle" combined developmentalism with a highly centralized corporatist state under the PRI to effect a period of substantial national economic growth. Despite the rise in income inequality, the PRI maintained relative social and political stability and contained social unrest such as the 1959 rail strikes. See Sarah Babb, "The Mexican Miracle and Its Policy Paradigm, 1940–1970," in *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 75–105. The 1968 student movement, which ended with the Tlatelolco massacre and subsequent state persecution of leftists throughout much of the 1970s, ruptured the Mexican miracle's illusion of social equality. See José Revueltas, *México 68: Juventud y revolución* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1978); and Laura Castellanos, *México armado, 1943–1981* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 2007). Cruzvillegas has cited Castellanos's book as an influence (personal communication, May 2010).

Cruzvillegas's mother.[60] This catastrophe prompted Gabriel Orozco, Mauricio Maillé, and Mauricio Rocha to refigure sculpture as the negation of architecture's utopian aspirations. *Propping Up Our Modern Ruins* gives us a rough wooden scaffold wedged between floor and ceiling in Mexico's Museum of Modern Art, as if holding up the museum itself. Produced just two years after the earthquake, when many buildings were still shored up by improvised scaffolding, it opened up public debate on the social costs of uneven modernization.[61]

Like Maillé, Orozco, and Rocha, Cruzvillegas addresses modernist architecture's crisis by investigating its underside. But his work is less a conceptual critique of institutions and of architecture's utopian ambitions than an effort to repurpose utopian discourses of early modernist architecture within the constraints of contemporary socioeconomic conditions of developing nations.[62] Mark Godfrey writes perceptively that "without naively believing that sculpture can assume architecture's utopian role of universal public accessibility and functionality, Cruzvillegas refuses the negation and defeatism that is implied in representing architecture *in* fragments [by proposing] an architecture *of* fragments."[63] Autoconstrucción takes up the negative entropy embodied in *Propping Up Our Modern Ruins*' flimsy wood scraps not to invalidate its pessimistic critique but to reformulate its formal and ideological postulates in light of the specific conditions of current historical

Top: Mario Pani's Nonoalco-Tlatelolco housing complex after earthquake. 1985. Photograph by Marco Antonio Cruz. Bottom: Gabriel Orozco, Mauricio Rocha, Mauricio Maillé. Propping Up Our Modern Ruins. *1987. Courtesy of the artists.*

60. Voicing a prevalent view, journalist Hermann Bellinghausen wrote in the major Mexican daily newspaper *La Jornada* that the earthquake sufferers were the "victims of that phenomenal deceit called Mexico City, jointly perpetrated by private contractors and government representatives whose corruption, rapaciousness, and despoiling have been rampant for almost a century." Quoted in Elena Poniatowska, *Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake*, trans. Aurora Camacho de Schmidt and Arthur Schmidt (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 310. Poniatowska documents the self-help groups formed to deal with the crisis.

61. Debroise, *La Era de la Discrepancia*, p. 236; and Paulina Pobocha and Anne Byrd, "Chronology," in *Gabriel Orozco*, ed. Ann Temkin (New York: MoMA, 2009), p. 52.

62. On Orozco's sculpture as the ruin of architecture, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Gabriel Orozco: Sculpture as Recollection," in *Gabriel Orozco* (Mexico City: Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, 2006), p. 174.

63. Godfrey, "Instability and Fragmentation/Improvisation and Autoconstrucción," p. 73.

processes, of how we apprehend those processes, and of how they may be transformed. Against *Propping Up Our Modern Ruins*' equation of jerry-built architectonic detritus with societal breakdown, Cruzvillegas's work holds within it the issue of precarity as both memory and potential, as both trauma and renewal. Its tenuous balance does not reject chaos so much as embrace its past histories and future possibilities as an oblique metaphor for asymmetry not as a static condition but rather as a dialectic generated from the tension between potential and disintegration.[64] Autoconstrucción therefore presents us with a model of object experience in the public realm imagined as both promise and failure, both structure and collapse.

The second example—the reception of Duchamp—also demonstrates the distinct trajectory of aesthetic ideas in Latin America versus Europe or the United States, and how these distinctions have been important for Cruzvillegas. During the 1960s and '70s, Duchamp's anti-aesthetics became a terrain over which critics in Mexico fought, in their efforts to define an autonomous cultural politics for Latin America within global Cold War power struggles. In particular, poet Octavio Paz and critic Juan Acha demarcated two opposing camps: a postwar humanist malaise versus an anti-imperialist Marxism. Troubled by what he saw as an inevitable process of cultural degradation and loss of meaning after World War II, Paz rejected a Marxist critique; instead, he read Duchamp through his own profound sense of existential anguish in the wake of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.[65] In his appraisal of *The Large Glass*, Paz elaborated a theory of artworks as "machines for signifying" that would confront the angst-provoking senselessness of an incoherent reality, not by seeking to fix meaning but rather through an incessant proliferation of new significations.[66]

Juan Acha, reacting against Paz's impressionistic metaphors, rejected his

64. Michael Orwicz has astutely observed that the extant photograph of *Autoconstrucción–Subtly Miserable* only encompasses the potential of unbalance, not its actualization. Thus the photograph effectively truncates the full experience of the work—something that must be kept in mind, especially in discussing its temporal aspects. I am grateful to Dr. Orwicz for sharing this observation with me.

65. Cuauhtémoc Medina, "La oscilación entre el mito y la crítica: Octavio Paz entre Duchamp y Tamayo" (unpublished paper presented at the Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, 2003). Medina argues that for Paz, the Duchampian readymade allowed a "critique of critique"—a return to an analogic tradition that critiques (through irony) the modernist "myth of critique." Yet, according to Medina, Paz understood this less as a critique of consumer capitalism than as an opportunity to open the possibility for a "new allegory" that would return the ancient power of symbolism to forge a link between a "universe of symbols" and tangible reality.

66. Octavio Paz, *Duchamp: El castillo de la pureza* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1968), p. 59; quoted in Medina, "La oscilación entre el mito y la crítica." Medina notes elsewhere that Paz at this time "had placed his poetic project in equal proximity to Mallarmé, Hindustani tradition and John Cage." Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Systems (Beyond So-Called 'Mexican Geometrism')," in Debroise, *La Era de la Discrepancia*, p. 130. Following this line of thought, I argue that Paz's interpretation of Duchamp can be read through Cage's statement that aesthetic production "must take the form of a paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play" that is "not an attempt to bring order out of chaos . . . but simply a way of waking up to the life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord." John Cage, "Experimental Music," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 12. Unlike Cage, however, Paz understands "purposelessness" as an existential condition of anxiety, rather than as a mechanism for comprehending a delightfully intriguing world.

model of existential angst in favor of a militant Marxist analysis of art in terms of class struggle and anti-imperialism. Acha proposed what he called *"arte no-objetual"* ("non-objectual" art)—a theory of conceptual practice that critiqued Latin America's neocolonial status as a "peripheral" region.[67] Appropriating Duchamp's rejection of "retinal" art, non-objectualism politicized it as a structural critique of the First World imposition of so-called modern (i.e., contemporary US) values on purportedly "backward" societies through a combination of mass-media spectacle, consumerism, and brute force.[68] In so doing, Acha recuperated for aesthetic production the moral basis of dependency theory's socioeconomic challenge to Cold War capitalism's neo-imperialist project. Dependency theory, pioneered in Latin America in the 1960s, argued that economic underdevelopment was not merely a question of some nations lagging behind others, but was effectively produced by capitalism's world system.[69] Non-objectualism recast this economic model to theorize such politicized, anti-aesthetic practices as those of the collectives No-Grupo and Grupo Proceso Pentágono that were foundational for Cruzvillegas and his generation.[70] Thus, for example, the Coke bottle modified by No-Grupo member Melquiades Herrera in 1979 enacts a double turn of Duchamp's scandalous mechanistic operations through an ironic linguistic subversion of Warhol's consumer design aesthetic, while *Ring* (1973) breaks with Mexico's long-standing tradition of figurative political art to recall the aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre.[71] In *Ring*, a scene surrounded by barbed wire and hanging trash bags was covered with discarded personal objects, reimagining the detritus left by the panic-stricken

67. Juan Acha, "Teoría y práctica no-objetualistas en América Latina," in *Ensayos y ponencias latinoamericanistas* (Caracas: Ediciones Gan, 1981), pp. 221–42.

68. Acha opens his essay by positioning non-objectualism in the tension between "pure" art and technologies of mass-culture production and circulation. As the inheritor of the Duchampian ready-made's critique of object fetishization under capitalism, he argues, non-objectualism reveals capitalism's duplicitous ("*doble juego*") promotion of "pure" art while simultaneously subjecting all aesthetic concerns to the culture industry (p. 225). With regard to Latin America in particular, he argues that postwar capitalist mass media "invaded" the region, disrupting its search for an independent cultural identity, and "tightened the bonds of our cultural dependency" (p. 228). Non-objectualism marked a renewed effort to define a cultural autonomy for Latin America. For a résumé of the debates around its potential as an aesthetic, political, and ethical position, as well as critiques of it, see Augusto del Valle C, "La Fiesta del no-objetualismo: Polémicas sobre arte contemporáneo en América Latina," in *Memorias del primer coloquio latinoamericano sobre arte no-objetual y arte urbano: Realizado por el Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín en mayo 1981,* Alberto Sierra Maya (Medellín: Museo de Antioquia/Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, 2011), pp. 33–71.

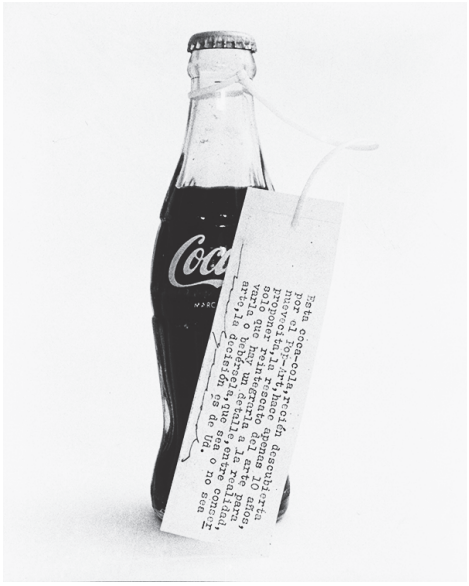
69. The classic Dependency theory text is Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, trans. Marjory Mattingly Urquidi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

70. See Sierra Maya, *Memorias del primer coloquio latinoamericano sobre arte no-objetual*; Maris Bustamante and Sol Henaro, "No-Grupo: Una estrategia colaborativa del México de los setenta," in *No Grupo: Un zangoloteo al corsé artístico*, ed. Sol Henaro (Mexico City: Museo de Arte Moderno, 2011), pp. 145–52; and Cruzvillegas, *Round de sombra,* pp. 169–70, for his relationship to Los Grupos and Mexican conceptualism.

71. *Ring* addressed state-sponsored terrorism both in Mexico and throughout Latin America. The collective of Víctor Muñoz, José Antonio Hernández Amézcua, and Carlos Finck, which produced *Ring*, took the name Grupo Proceso Pentágono in 1976 with the addition of Felipe Ehrenberg.

Tlatelolco crowds through a conceptual paradigm that dismantled conventional categories of both sculpture and political art in Mexico.

While Acha's model was very powerful in the 1970s and early '80s, by the late '80s its strict division of nations and regions into center versus periphery seemed outmoded, a defensive continuation of what Brazilian critic Frederico Morais called Latin America's "identity neurosis"—the long-term sense of inauthenticity and backwardness, harking back to the colonial period, "which is always linked to the debate about Latin America."[72] Thus, from the late 1980s onward, the legacy of Duchamp was turned in yet a third direction. Reading anti-aesthetics through both the precedent of Acha's non-object and a host of Euro-US interpretations (Fluxus, Beuys, Smithson, Arte Povera, etc.), artists in Mexico retained Acha's politicized critique of the object's function in developing nations, but rejected the center-periphery model still inherent in his theory (along with its nationalist tendencies) in favor of a deliberate internationalization along both south-north and south-south axes.



Melquiades Herrera. Found Object-Coca Cola. *1979.* © *Fondo No-Grupo Centro de Documentación Arkheia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM.*

As part of this shift, Cruzvillegas would rethink this politicized conceptualist trajectory through a return to what Alex Potts calls "the troublesome facticity of

72. "É preciso superar tanto a 'neurose de dependência' . . . quanto a neurose da identidade, que vem sempre associada ao debate sobre a América Latina" ("It is as necessary to overcome the 'neurosis of dependency' . . . as the neurosis of identity, which is always linked to the debate about Latin America"). Frederico Morais, *Artes plásticas na América Latina: Do transe ao transitório* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1979), p. 18. Other critics have argued that the region's conflicted historical trajectory vis-à-vis Europe and the US has nonetheless given Latin Americans unique and powerful insight into the wider failure of modernity and an ability to allegorize it aesthetically, something unavailable to their Euro-US counterparts. See Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1992); and Gerardo Mosquera, "Walking with the Devil: Art, Culture and Internationalization," in *Cultural Expression, Creativity and Innovation*, ed. Christopher Waterman (London: Sage, 2010), pp. 47–56. With regard to the models of center-periphery and dependency theory on which Acha relied, it is important to recognize both the innovative challenges to Euro-US-generated modernization theory they posed and their ultimately flawed assumptions regarding the relationship between internal and external socioeconomic factors in the region's nation-state contexts. Important to note also is that Acha was writing after the sharp Marxist politicization of these economic theories in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. For an overview, see Joseph Love, "The Origins of Dependency Analysis," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 22, no. 1 (February 1990), pp. 143–68; Joseph Love, "The Rise and Decline of Economic Structuralism in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 40, no. 3 (October 2005), pp. 100–25. Cruzvillegas and his generation, I argue, acknowledge the persuasive power of these models, even as they recognize the need to revise them.

Víctor Muñoz. Ring. *1973. Photograph courtesy of Víctor Muñoz.*

the sculptural object."[73] Key to this is the question of the aesthetic experience. What I want to argue is that the praxis of autoconstrucción does not reject the anti-aesthetic legacy so much as work through it, towards a conditional reopening of the aesthetic as a site of performing the social. As a sculptural praxis, it thus proposes an aesthetic experience generated by the stubborn materiality of things as part of its arsenal aimed at dismantling the autonomous object. In this way, autoconstrucción strategically holds in tension anti-aesthetic attacks on the commodity and those discourses that view the aesthetic experience as the basis of democratic potential for new sociopolitical configurations.[74]

Materialist Aesthetics

It is with this insistent return to materiality, embodied in the praxis of autoconstrucción, that I want to conclude. To do so, I want to come full circle back to Appadurai and his concept of "social objects." As I said earlier, this model posits a confrontation between commodities and things that, Appadurai claims, can open a space of "redemption." This confrontation of course coincides, for Appadurai, with the confrontation between the foundational universalizing elements of Western modernity's social imaginary—the bourgeois public sphere, the market, and the nation-state—and other modernities with different social imaginaries.[75] Yet, although celebrated as ostensibly concerned with the resistant character of things, Appadurai nevertheless ultimately reinscribes the object within the social, by attributing "social lives" to things. By bestowing anthropomorphic characteristics on objects—giving them "life histories," "biographies," and the capacity to act and communicate—Appadurai rejects any notion of the intransigent otherness of the material object vis-à-vis the human

73. Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, p. 4.

74. On this issue in relation to Adorno, Jameson, and Kant, see Robert Kaufman, "Red Kant, or the Persistence of the Third 'Critique' in Adorno and Jameson," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (Summer 2000), pp. 682–724. I have found this essay very helpful in considering the aesthetic as key to analysis of the dialectical interaction between human subjects and material objects, and on Adorno's theorization of this. Moreover, Kaufman importantly distinguishes between "anti-aesthetic" and "anti-aesthetic*ist*" philosophies of thought. Cruzvillegas's work, I argue, similarly pits the aesthetic against aestheticization, using the aesthetic's ability to "defamiliarize the given" (Kaufman, p. 703) to open up new perceptions of material conditions under today's capitalism.

75. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996). In Latin America, a now-classic example of this confrontation between Western and other modernities is the 1994 eruption of the Zapatistas onto the world stage in protest against the implementation of NAFTA. On the structure of Western modernity's foundational spaces of social action, see Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002), pp. 91–124.

subject.[76] "Persons and things," he argues, "are not radically distinct categories."[77] That is, he rejects any insistence on the irreducibility of subject and object, person and thing. This unwittingly catches Appadurai in a trap. As anthropologist Christopher Pinney writes, for Appadurai, "the fate of objects . . . is always to live out the social life of men . . . to become entangled in the webs of culture whose ability to refigure the object simultaneously inscribes culture's ability to translate things into signs and the object's powerlessness as an artifactual trace."[78] The similitude Appadurai proposes between people and things privileges the cultural over the material, effectively spurning any theory of a subject-object dialectic vis-à-vis the material conditions of existence. Appadurai's model thereby undercuts any substantive critique of the role those conditions play in determining the fetish character of commodities; far from offering a space of "redemption," objects in his model lead us right back into the commodity-as-fetish divorced from concrete material conditions.

By contrast, Cruzvillegas's praxis gives us an aesthetic experience that recognizes the recalcitrant materiality of things, a material excess that can never be fully assimilated to "culture" or the social.[79] Autoconstrucción, by insisting on formal, nonconceptual aesthetic attention to that obdurate materiality while nevertheless positing artistic experiment as a metaphorization of wider social conditions of production, propels the viewer from the artist's first-level action of making to a "second order [of] reflection" that abstracts from production to critical thought.[80] That is, the perceiving subject is pushed into a self-reflexive

76. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3; 17; 4.

77. Appadurai, "The Thing Itself," p. 15.

78. Christopher Pinney, "Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 259.

79. Theodor Adorno terms this "the implacable, as it were ahistorical demands of objects" in *Minima Moralia,* trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1978), p. 19, quoted in Pinney, "Things Happen," p. 269.

80. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 26–27. Adorno theorizes this "second reflection" as a dialectical action on the part of the viewer that "lays hold of the technical procedures, the language of the artwork in the broadest sense" (p. 27), not to pin down a specific content, message, or artistic intention but to engage aesthetically with the artwork as the embodiment of the artist's own grapplings with the dynamic interaction between obdurate materiality and the social conditions of production. Adorno figures those artistic grapplings as artistic *construction*—a term he uses in contradistinction to the more prevalent Marxist *productionism,* with its instrumentalist emphasis on artistic making as metaphorizing not only the production of commodities but also the means by which the producers of those objects simultaneously produce their own social agency (p. 236). Construction serves to transform the artwork's expressive attentions to the human condition "out of their primary context" (p. 57) in order to release their historical truth value—a "truth-content" that emerges through construction's dissonant, oppositional relationship to society ("In Adorno's aesthetics the art work is socially interpretable not because it represents society but because it acquires its social content through resistance to society and is thus the unconscious writing of history," writes Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Foreword: Critique of the Organic," in Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989], p. xviii). Second reflection responds to the aesthetic "opacity" (p. 27) generated out of the artist's constructive confrontation with the "objective impenetrability" (p. 166) of materials and her/his efforts to bring those materials to a level of expressive correlation with the human condition. In so doing, second reflection

"thought-experience" precisely through a defamiliarizing aesthetic grappling with the irreducible material otherness of the object—a model that opens up a series of related philosophical postulates.[81] Without otherness, thought would become mere tautology; what would be open to knowledge would only be what is already known.[82] Human consciousness—and thus human subjectivity—is formed through this self-reflective process of critical apperception of material otherness. Against Appadurai's model of "social objects," therefore, autoconstrucción takes materiality as the site of a materialist praxis of making and unmaking, through which subjects and objects are formed as mutually constituted but ultimately incommensurable.[83] Whereas Appadurai effectively abandons any sense of the dialectic between human subjectivity and the material world, Cruzvillegas places it at the center of his praxis. Autoconstrucción is thus a project that offers profound insight into human consciousness as something formed in dialectical interaction with material socioeconomic conditions and the political conditions circumscribing them.

Autoconstrucción locates the critical potential of the aesthetic experience squarely in relation to this materialist subject-object dialectic and its current historical configuration under neoliberalism. The possibility of revitalizing a critical materialist aesthetics—however compromised and tenuous that project may be—comes through attending to historically generated asymmetries of object experience. And by locating that praxis in relation to the asymmetries of object experience enforced by globalization, these works mount a persuasive argument about what a return to materiality might do for us, and on what terms such a return can be made.

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opens the potential for critical thought. On Adorno's theory of construction, see Hullot-Kentor, "Foreword," pp. x–xxiii; Martin Jay, "Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 29–54. On the Kantian bases for Adorno's construction, see Kaufman, "Red Kant," and Robert Kaufman, "What Is Construction, What's the Aesthetic, What Was Adorno Doing?," in *Aesthetic Subjects*, ed. Pamela Matthews and David McWhirter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 366–96.

81. "Thought-experience" is the term that Robert Kaufman associates with an Adornean dialectical aesthetics. Kaufman, "Red Kant," p. 704.

82. Adorno makes this point via Kant in *Negative Dialectics*, p. 184.

83. See also the "Subject-Object" section of Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 163–75.