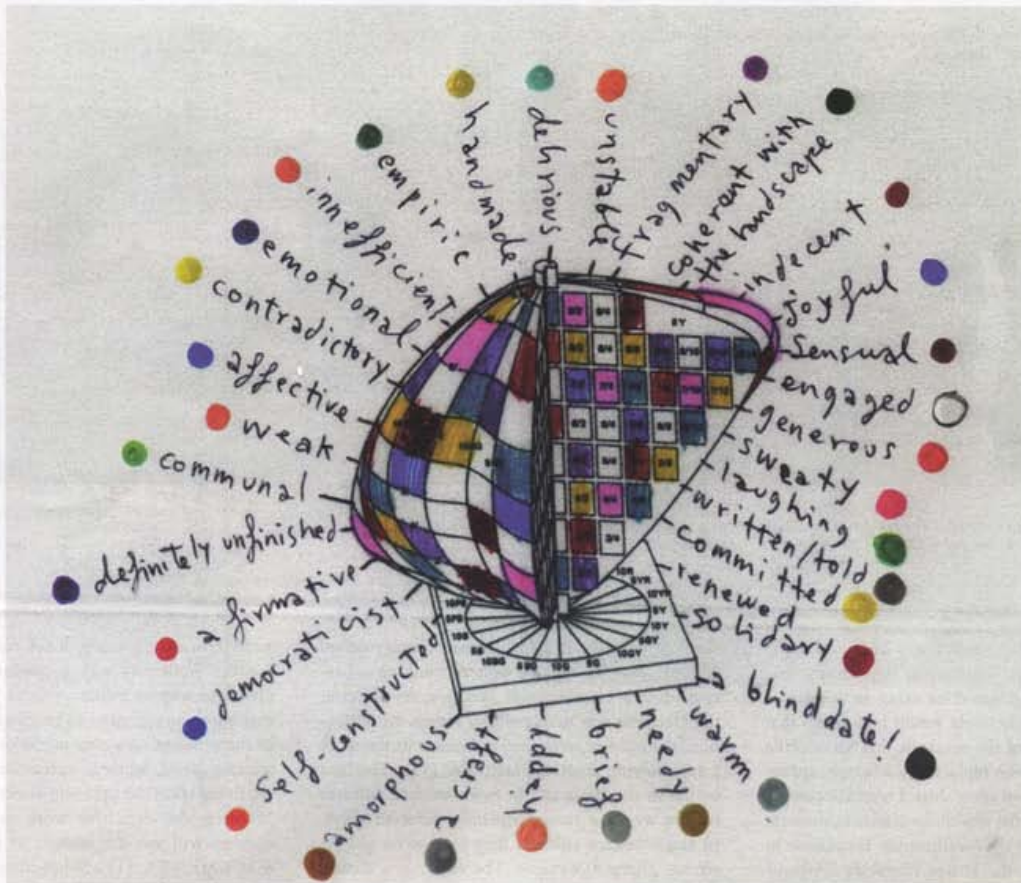


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Andrew Berardini, 'A Fortuitous Encounter with color in the street: interview with Abraham Cruzvillegas', *Mousse Magazine*, Summer 2012

A FORTUITOUS ENCOUNTER WITH
COLOR IN THE STREET: INTERVIEW WITH
ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS

BY ANDREW BERARDINI



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MOUSSE 34 ~ Abraham Cruzvillegas



Cruzvillegas' work as an artist has always found a way to make-do with the materials at hand, arranging the accidental and the everyday in graceful systems of color and meaning, finding and fulfilling the need to make art, in any circumstance, no matter what resources are available. His large projects, regularly repeated and constantly evolving, go under the name "autoconstrucción" (or self-construction), an artistic self that through objects and actions is in a constant state of becoming.

We spoke with Cruzvillegas when he arrived in Kassel in May, 2012.

andrew berardini: I was wondering if you could describe the concrete details of your project for dOCUMENTA (13).

abraham cruzvillegas: I will make a series of improvised events—so they will not be an-

nounced—in different places in Kassel (and some other cities where I may travel). The nature of these activities will be decided using a device designed by me, through which I assign a color to thirty-four different ideas that have been symbolic, formal or conceptual intentions or constants in my work for twenty-five years, many of them related one way or another to my working platform named "autoconstrucción", which forms the material and structure of almost every exhibition or project I've done in recent years.

Comparing the colors in a catalogue for house paint with the names they give them, each concept could be renamed by chance, i.e. my concept "democratist" was attributed to a kind of blue, which in Spanish is named "constelación" in the catalogue. My "communal" becomes "picnic," a shade of green at the paint store. One of my two pinks—"affirmative" in my list—is named "rehilete." "Unstable" is now "cidro," a type of orange. "Autoconstruido" is "golden" and "definitely unfinished" is "carrusel," and so on... authentic abstraction.

After this, I painted a modified "Mikado" set (the German name for pick-up sticks) with every color in my list, so I will use them, throwing them in the street or wherever I might randomly be, patiently removing all the sticks but the last two (or three), in order to combine the two (or three) remaining ideas to determine an action to be done, using only materials I can find in the very place where I find myself in that moment.

For instance, if after playing with the pick-up sticks

I end up with one pink and one green, I will choose between making an action/sculpture that could be an affirmative picnic, a communal pinwheel (rehilete), and/or other possible combinations.

I can also activate my everyday program of non-productive actions without using the "Mikado" game, though still following the indicated chromatic index. For example: if I find a person with a purple sweater, leaning on a red wall, or if I see a gray vehicle passing fast in front of a green landscape, or a yellow balloon against the blue sky, an orange being eaten by a brown animal, anything on a blank space... Then I can plan my actions.

I will ask any possible passerby to take a picture with a mobile phone, and the sum of these records will be available in a book to be published at the end of this part of the project, and in a blog that has been online since the start of my activities for dOCUMENTA (13).

My aim is to generate a deliberately subjective and self-sufficient project, without a production budget, without plans or structures linked to an exhibition space, trying to bring my own gaze to the question of making an art project without resources, with resources and in spite of resources.

ab: There's a lot to talk about there, but to begin, I am very moved by the idea of non-productive activities. Often in a drive for efficiency all the things that make up life (or the most important parts, by my lights) become inefficient,



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like love, family, self-reflection, poetry, art and on. I was curious if you could talk about what makes up a 'non-productive activity' in the context of DOCUMENTA (13)?

ac: The question nowadays—talking about economics—could be “what is production?” or “what is productive?” In my mind I want to produce knowledge, language, some educational processes, which means—hopefully—that I can learn. I don't want to teach anybody anything. I don't want to provide any kind of service, because I can't, not even a message. I'm not against the productive sphere of contemporary art, in terms of money, budgets, plans, funding, patrons and so on. I'm just trying to test myself in a different environment, in which production occurs as an impromptu, as David Medalla puts it.

ab: You're in the middle of these activities, I believe (having a good conversation I hope constitutes a non-productive activity). How's it going so far? What discoveries have you made?

ac: For me, understanding the city where these events are taking place is crucial, but the actions are not about the city. In fact they are about nothing. Conversing takes people to different places, beyond the site where the conversation happens. I'm taking my own experience as a reference, to activate in any other place, which in this case is Kassel; so I'm discovering very diverse things about Kassel, such as the fact that many people here don't like documenta...

ab: Lately I've been thinking a lot about Allan Kaprow and his notion not only of art having a more authentic relationship to life, but also of the dissolving of the boundaries between art and life. So many of your actions are untimed here... do you think the fact that Kassel is entangled in documenta is the frame to the picture, so to speak, or do you think these actions will just seamlessly blend with the practice of everyday life?

ac: Kaprow is a great reference, but there are some others, like Melquiades Herrera, who lived a permanent performance, in which there was no real difference between his life and his work. He mastered the art of everyday life as art, not as a metaphor, not as subject matter for art, not as an action that happens only for an art audience. There's almost no documentation of his work/life, and he never claimed to be making an artwork. For him it was evident, by itself.

ab: On some level, a permeability between art and life almost makes a moment where art dissolves into life. So many visionaries maybe start out in art and end up somewhere far away or leave art altogether. Even Kaprow, at some point, called himself an un-artist. Why continue in the system of distribution called art? Why not dissolve into the landscape of the everyday, without the framing word of 'art'?

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ac: I'm an artist, and I have the will to make art, whatever shape it takes, according to specific needs (my needs), even when it does not look very much like artwork. But I think these days it is hard to find something you can't use, abuse or misuse in an art project. I'm not looking for new ways of making art, or trying to escape from art, I'm just trying to understand things, to ask questions, and it happens that now I need to make things in the street, not necessarily as performances or events, just simple actions that may not lead to anything productive. But who knows?

ab: Some of my all-time favorite sculptures have been made out of almost nothing (or perhaps nothing, in some cases). I came out of the punk/indie music scene as a teenager, and the two things that most attracted me to it were the community that it gave me as a weirdo kid, and the economy of means that went into making the music. I was curious: you could talk a little about the economies of making art? Out of nothing, out of something, out of a community or just by one's self?

ac: My desire to make something out of nothing doesn't come from art—even if I'm aware and proud of my artistic genealogy and vocabulary—but from my own experience. The concept at the center of my long-term project, tautologically named "autoconstrucción," is about the fact of constructing a house—many times, or almost always, in a collaborative way, in the most correct use of the word "community"—after identifying specific needs, apart from scarcity. Then you have no choice but to make things with what you have at hand, which in some cases might only be the dirt under your fingernails, or nothing at all. Then, in my case this would be the material for any artwork or project. Now, in Kassel I'm attempting to extend my practice, standing on that mobile structure for making things here in the same way. But autoconstrucción works for me in different simultaneous ways, like appealing to the construction of one's own identity as an individual. This way, by making things during dOCUMENTA (13), I'm still changing myself. As I try to do permanently.