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In December 1975, Carlos Cruz-Diez completed his first ephemeral painted walkways, initiating a mode of urban intervention that the Venezuelan artist would adopt for numerous public art projects in the half-century that followed (Fig. 1). Located in two different areas of Caracas – one in the east, the other in the west – these walkways belonged to a wider array of interventions that Cruz-Diez realised to inaugurate a new, government-sponsored programme titled ‘El artista y la ciudad’ (‘The Artist and the City’), for which he also produced a light sculpture projected into the sky, a bus temporarily covered with coloured stripes, and a permanent mural along the Guaire River.¹

Cruz-Diez’s most prominent group of walkways for ‘The Artist and the City’ appeared at an intersection of Sabana Grande, a bustling and then rather fashionable avenue in eastern Caracas (Fig. 2). Collectively titled *Color Aditivo en pasos peatonales* (*Additive Colour in Pedestrian Crossings*), these walkways featured a series of parallel white stripes, just like zebra crossings. Only instead of leaving gaps of unpainted pavement between the white lines, Cruz-Diez used the interstitial spaces to paint diagonal bands of red, blue, and green, which resulted in an interplay of coloured stripes as pedestrians crossed these streets. Cruz-Diez also created a walkway in the quieter, more traditional neighbourhood of La Pastora, located in western Caracas (Fig. 3). There, he placed a series of white, black, and blue bands on the ground of Plaza La Pastora, a large, pedestrian-only area facing a church. Titled *Inducción del amarillo* (*Yellow Induction*), this intervention recalled the Sabana Grande walkways by encouraging passersby to perceive an ‘additive colour’, which the artist defined as ‘a third colour not inscribed on the surface’ but one that appears ‘when two lines of color approach or interfere’.² Yet as suggested by the title *Yellow Induction*, the artist’s goal was to ‘induce’ the perception of yellow – consistent with his concept of ‘chromatic induction’, which, as he explained, involves the appearance of an ‘after-image’ when viewing one or more colours along a plane.³

To a large extent, Cruz-Diez’s walkways and other interventions for ‘The Artist and the City’ evinced a roughly contemporary concern that informed the work of countless artists around the world: the interest in bringing art ‘into the streets’. In some cases, this interest manifested itself by using the street as a surface upon which to display artworks, including a few that audiences could walk on (Fig. 4).⁴ In other cases, artists embedded works directly into the street, recalling the longstanding use of mosaics and other forms of decorative pavement.⁵ While Cruz-Diez’s earliest walkways certainly bore a kinship with such art in the streets, they also differed in an important way. Namely,

1. An exhibition of Cruz-Diez’s art also appeared at Caracas’s Sala de Exposiciones de la Gobernación del Distrito Federal. The publication reproduced in Fig. 1 accompanied this exhibition.

2. Quoted in *Carlos Cruz-Diez: El Artista y la Ciudad, diciembre 1975–enero 1976* (Caracas: Ediciones Lince, 1975), np. Unless otherwise stated, all English translations of Spanish sources quoted in this chapter are by Natalia Espinel.

3. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Reflection on Color*, trans. Vanesa Ana Rodríguez Galindo (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2009), p. 114.

4. On the event ‘Une journée dans la rue’ where Julio Le Parc’s *Dalles Mobiles* appeared, see Lily Woodruff, *Disordering the Establishment: Participatory Art and Institutional Critique in France, 1958–1991* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 31ff. Also see Alexander Alberro, *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2017), pp. 158–60.

5. Notable contemporary examples include the monumental mosaic promenade that Roberto Burle Marx realised in 1970 along Rio de Janeiro’s Copacabana beach and the large mosaic that Joan Miró created in 1976 for the ground of Barcelona’s Plaza de la Boquería.

6. Quoted in Mari Carmen Ramirez and Carlos Cruz-Diez, 'Four Situations Involving Color' (Situation IV: Sensory Color), in *Color in Space and Time: Cruz-Diez* (Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2011), p. 333.

7. Carlos Cruz-Diez, 'Pasos peatonales para Chacao' (unpublished text), 2006; Cruz-Diez Atelier, Paris.

8. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 43.

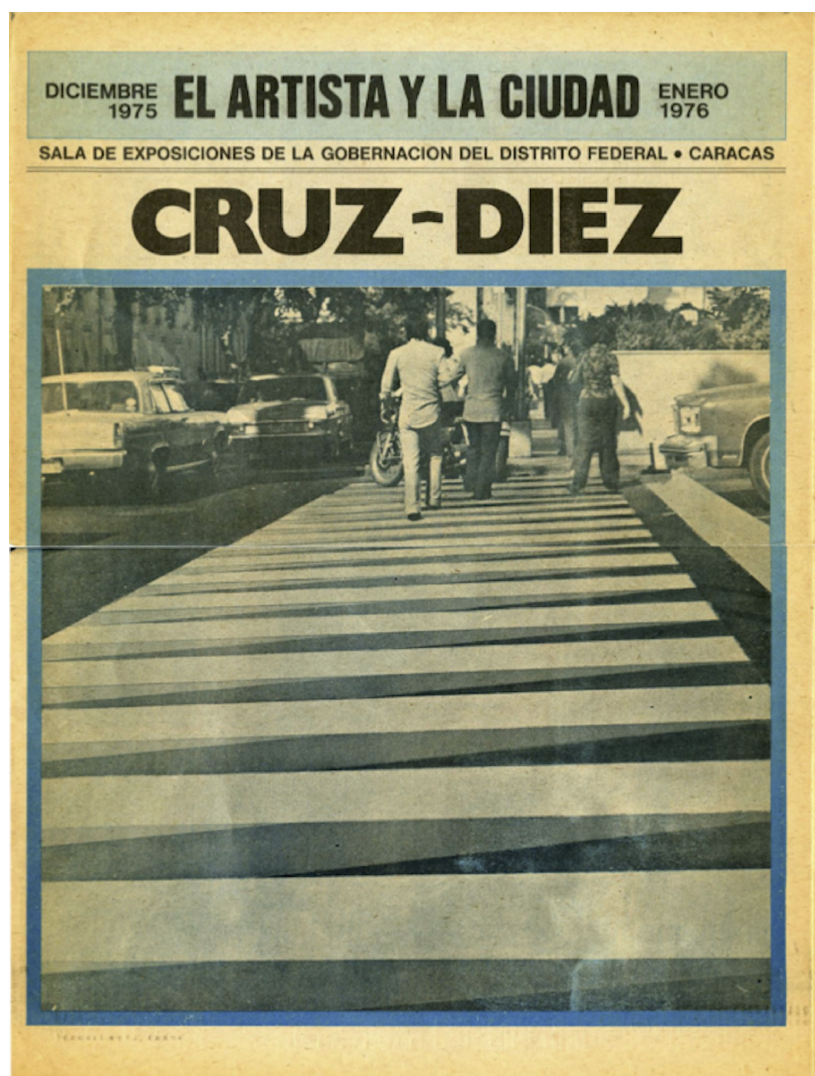


Fig. 1. A 1975–6 exhibition publication with a cover image showing Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Color Aditivo En Pasos Peatonales* (*Additive Colour in Pedestrian Crossings*), 1975, paint on pavement, Caracas. (Photo: Cruz-Diez Atelier, Paris.)

his walkways were ephemeral, with bands of colours (and non-colours) that gradually wore away under pedestrians' footsteps. This ephemerality, Cruz-Diez explained, was decisive. On the one hand, the walkways temporarily disrupted the everyday routines that reduce city dwellers to 'robot[s] in the street, obeying rules without thinking or even being aware of them'.⁶ On the other hand, the disappearing bands of colour ensured that the works themselves did not 'enter' and 'institutionalize ... the robotic unconscious'.⁷

At first glance, Cruz-Diez's stated interest in disrupting the routines of 'robotic' pedestrians suggests that his ephemeral painted walkways challenged an essential feature of life in almost *any* city. Indeed, the fact that Cruz-Diez later realised such walkways for various cities around the world reveals that such works were not limited to a single site but were emblematic of his engagement with 'site specificity as a nomadic practice', to borrow a phrase from art historian Miwon Kwon.⁸ That said, Cruz-Diez's interest in ephemeral painted walkways



Fig. 2. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Color Aditivo En Pasos Peatonales* (*Additive Colour in Pedestrian Crossings*), 1975–6, paint on pavement, Caracas. (Photo: Cruz-Diez Atelier, Paris.)

arose in a specific place and time – Caracas, c. 1975 – and he did not extend this type of work to other cities until 1982. As such, it seems useful to consider how his first such walkways emerged from, responded to, or otherwise mediated key developments in mid-1970s Caracas that shaped the city's 'politics of mobility', broadly defined as the 'ways in which mobilities are both productive of social relations and produced by them', to borrow the words of human geographer Tim Cresswell.⁹ To this end, the present essay closely examines how Cruz-Diez's earliest walkways addressed the moving bodies of spectators who stepped on such works. In particular, I consider how this mode of address helped to cast Caracas as a city on the cusp of becoming a utopia – but, crucially, a utopia 'not yet there' that was still characterised by a fraught relationship between pedestrians and automobiles, among the most significant issues affecting the city's mobility politics at the time.¹⁰ By focusing on the walkways' mode of spectatorial address, I deliberately put the 'walkability' of these works at the forefront, consistent with

9. Tim Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2010, p. 21.

10. The phrase 'not yet there' builds on Ernst Bloch's conception of utopia, which I elaborate later in this article. See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 1 vol, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).



Fig. 3. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Inducción Del Amarillo* (Yellow Induction), 1975–6, paint on pavement, Caracas. (Photo: Cruz-Diez Atelier, Paris.)



Fig. 4. Julio Le Parc, *Dalles Mobiles* (Mobile Slabs), 1964, wood, paint, and metal; as exhibited in Paris, 1966, as part of 'Une journée dans la rue' ('A Day in the Street'). (Photo: Archives Julio Le Parc, Cachan; © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023.)

11. For more on 'walkable' art, see Michael Tymkiw, 'Please Walk on This: Gutai and the Emergence of Walkable Art', *Art History*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2025.

my larger scholarly interest in the postwar rise and proliferation of art expressly made for audiences to step on, or what I elsewhere have called 'walkable art'.¹¹ At the same time, by zeroing in on this single set of artworks by Cruz-Diez, I seek to trace the emergence of a particular subgenre of 'walkable' art, situating it in relation to a constellation of historical developments that defined the city where these works were first commissioned, realised, and experienced.

The Ground as Event

Venezuela had already emerged as one of the world's richest countries a few decades after it began producing oil in 1914, and its oil wealth continued during the 1948–1958 dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez and the subsequent years when the country reestablished democracy. In the 1970s, however, the country's fortunes took a major turn upward following the 1973 oil embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Venezuela was a founding member. This embargo, which triggered an immediate quadrupling of oil prices and an escalation of prices for much of the 1970s, prompted the country's per capita GDP to double between 1972 and 1976 and then grow robustly until the early 1980s.¹²

One consequence of this unprecedented oil wealth was a significant expansion of public art in Venezuela, which had already flourished during the 1950s but became more widespread by the early 1970s. While Cruz-Diez had lived and

worked in Paris since 1960, his international reputation as a major kinetic artist – and a Venezuelan one at that – resulted in him becoming among the largest recipients of government-funded public art commissions, a turn of events that led him in 1972–1973 to open a second studio in Caracas.¹³ For our purposes, the most pertinent precedent among such commissions was his *Ambientación de Color Aditivo* (Environment of Additive Colour) for the Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, just outside Caracas (Fig. 5). This project, which Cruz-Díez designed in 1974 and which finally opened to the public in 1978,¹⁴ was among the earliest large-scale works in which he gave the ground such a prominent role as a 'support' for the application of colour, to invoke a term the artist often used.¹⁵

For his *Environment of Additive Colour*, Cruz-Díez covered a substantial portion of the floor in the airport's main hall with sandstone ceramics in red, green, blue, and black, which formed intersecting bands of colour. This use of the ground as a support for colour instantiated two general concerns that long informed Cruz-Díez's practice as a kinetic artist: the 'challenge of sending color into space' and art's 'integrat[ion] into architecture and life'.¹⁶ However, his use of the ground as a support for colour in *Environment of Additive Color* also responded to the airport's particular role as a site for audiences to experience art, as Cruz-Díez explained to art historian and curator Ariel Jiménez:

I spent a long time thinking about what kind of work I could do for an airport like that. I was traveling a lot at the time and, after thinking about my own experience, I decided that if I was going to create a piece I would have to think hard about what people most often do in an airport: they wander around carrying suitcases, bored, looking at the same watch, the same necktie in the stores, because there's nothing else. And so I thought about a work for the floor, a kind of event that could happen and be observed as you walked past it.

The artist further clarified that although the floor's colour bands extended upwards onto two side walls, 'the airport was designed with a horizontal expansion in mind', which meant that the work's vertical sections 'had to be removable because the walls would disappear when the airport reached its maximum size'.¹⁷

When Cruz-Díez created his first ephemeral painted walkways for 'The Artist and the City', he extended his burgeoning interest in turning the ground into an 'event that could happen and be observed as you walked past it'. However, he also pushed this interest in new directions. For example, by shifting from indoor flooring to outdoor pavement, he transformed how spectators experienced the works underfoot in relation to other mobile bodies and objects. Along these lines, curator Theres Rohde has observed that although 'the flow of airport passengers' might seem 'disturbing', such disturbances pale in comparison to the danger that one confronts 'in the middle of street traffic', where cars and other vehicles may cause serious bodily harm.¹⁸

Beyond shifting from indoor floors to outdoor ground, the walkways for 'The Artist and the City' likely attracted a more diverse audience. For instance, the airport floor created an event for what Cruz-Díez called 'bored' passengers wandering around as they looked at the same 'watch', 'necktie', or other non-essential and potentially high-ticket item – a description that suggests a target audience skewed towards travellers with relatively high disposable incomes or, at the very least, generous expense accounts.¹⁹ With the Sabana Grande zebra crossings, similarly well-heeled pedestrians would have walked on these works when travelling to and from that area's many shops, restaurants, bars, and theatres. However, this area also had absorbed immigrants who had moved to Venezuela in search of economic opportunity, including some who supplied

12. Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 237; <<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/VEN/venezuela/gdp-per-capita>> [accessed 7 November 2024].

13. 'Interview [with Carlos-Cruz-Díez]', in Marion Chanson, *L'Atelier de Carlos Cruz-Díez* (Paris: Thalia, 2010), p. 49.

14. José María Salvador, 'Cruz-Díez en la Arquitectura: Situaciones cromáticas a escala urbana', in Rita Salvestrini (ed.), *Carlos Cruz-Díez en la Arquitectura*, (Caracas: Centro Cultural Consolidado, 1991), p. 16.

15. For a useful introduction to the role of colour and its relation to material supports in Cruz-Díez's work, see Arnaud Pierre, *Cruz-Díez* (Paris: La Différence, 2008), pp. 13–28.

16. Ariel Jiménez, *Carlos Cruz-Díez in Conversation with Ariel Jiménez* (New York: Fundación Cisneros, 2010), pp. 62, 48.

17. Jiménez, *Carlos Cruz-Díez in Conversation*, p. 107.

18. Theres Rohde, 'Verändertes Gehen, Verändertes Sehen. Carlos Cruz-Díez' künstlerische Eingriffe an Orten des Transits', in Theres Rohde and Simone Schimpf (eds), *Carlos Cruz-Díez: Color in Motion* (Ingolstadt: Museum für Konkrete Kunst, 2018), p. 164.

19. In targeting such an audience, the airport's *Chromatic Environment* addressed the moving bodies of what some scholars have called a 'kinetic elite'. See Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 19ff.

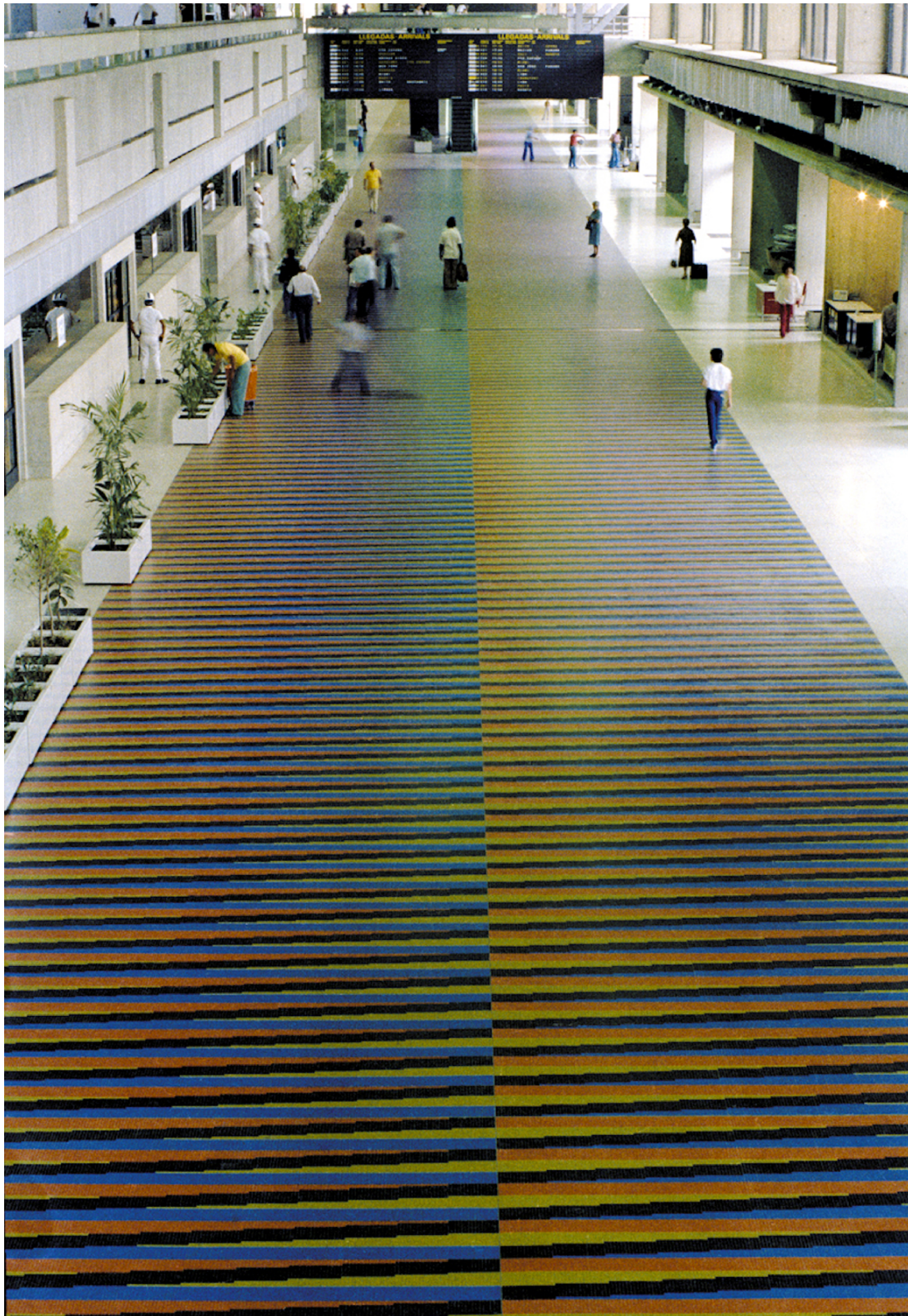


Fig. 5. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Ambientación de Color Aditivo* (*Environment of Additive Colour*), 1974–8, ceramic, Simón Bolívar International Airport, Maiquetía. (Photo: Atelier Cruz-Diez, Paris.)

lower-paying jobs that sustained the country's booming oil industry.²⁰ Moreover, because Cruz-Diez sited one of his outdoor walkways in La Pastora, a predominantly working-class area where he had grown up, this work undoubtedly addressed pedestrians of modest means as they went about their everyday lives: for instance, walking to and from church, running errands in nearby shops, or simply coming to the plaza to meet friends or take a stroll. Considered in this light, Cruz-Diez's earliest outdoor walkways almost certainly attracted a more socio-economically diverse group of passersby than those who walked on the airport floor.

Such inclusivity even extended to the materials used to make the outdoor walkways. For instance, unlike the airport floor, for which Cruz-Diez carefully sourced a material that would 'resist the abrasion' that came from 'millions of people ... constantly walking through' the hall,²¹ the outdoor walkways were made from standard paint, which he selected precisely because it would wear away under heavy traffic, which included not only pedestrians but also cars. Besides allowing members of the public to participate in a work's realisation, this choice of material made Cruz-Diez realise that he could leave an ephemeral artwork's exact duration up to the local community where the work appeared, something that became apparent after those living in La Pastora wanted to keep the walkway there. While the work eventually disappeared, the artist recalled that 'every two months some students from municipal schools came to repaint the colored lines'.²²

Cruz-Diez's earliest ephemeral painted walkways, in sum, emphasised inclusivity on multiple levels: experientially (based on who walked on the artworks), materially (based on the materials used to create these works), and temporally (based on the role of residents in deciding how long one of the walkways remained). To a large extent, such inclusivity gave the walkways a utopian quality commensurate with the ideals that underpinned Cruz-Diez's interest in bringing art into the streets.²³ However, this utopian quality is considerably complicated by the fact that the government commissioned these works through its staggering oil wealth. For although such wealth allowed the Federal District Government and the Venezuelan state more generally to fund a range of public art projects that included Cruz-Diez's walkways, such largesse did not fundamentally alter the extreme economic disparities that characterised mid-1970s Caracas, where, as but one example, over a third of the population lived in *barrios* (informal settlements) that often lacked 'water, electricity, or sanitation'.²⁴ Given this, one might be tempted to interpret Cruz-Diez's walkways as works that, although arising from the maker's utopian intentions, nevertheless emerged in a decidedly anti-utopian context defined by profound socioeconomic inequalities. In this respect, one might say that the walkways instantiated critic Marta Traba's trenchant comments about the public artworks commissioned by the Venezuelan government. As she put it, whereas art movements such as Futurism served as a 'true political weapon that inoculates society with the virus of progressive utopia', the public artworks realised by Cruz-Diez and other kinetic artists exemplified the antithesis of utopia: a form of 'official art' that reinforced the 'ideology' and 'snobbery' of Venezuela's ruling classes and economic elite, both of whom secured and solidified their power mainly through oil profits.²⁵ Yet instead of reductively treating the walkways *either* as a utopian gesture made possible through oil wealth *or* as a dystopian reification of socioeconomic relationships defined by oil, in what follows I will chart an alternative interpretation: namely, that an ambulatory spectator's bodily orientation in relation to both the utopian walkways underfoot and automobiles in the immediate area casts

20. Arturo Almandoz, 'Segregation and Conflict in Post-Modernist Caracas: From Pérez's Gran Venezuela to Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2017, p. 628.

21. Cruz-Diez quoted in Jiménez, *Carlos Cruz Diez in Conversation*, p. 107.

22. Quoted in Ramírez and Cruz-Diez, 'Four Situations Involving Color', p. 333.

23. See, for example, Carlos Cruz-Diez, 'La rue comme support de l'art-événement: Vers une poétique de l'espace urbain' (1996), in *Cruz-Diez*, pp. 289–92.

24. Keith Grant, 'Metropolis Explodes', *The Guardian*, 10 March 1977. Also see Rudolfo Quintero, *Antropología de las ciudades latinoamericanas* (Caracas: Editorial Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1964), p. 149.

25. Marta Traba, *Mirar en Caracas: Crítica de Arte* (Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1974), pp. 125, 123.

26. Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 91–110. For a thoughtful essay that draws on de Certeau's ideas to explore links between gender construction and spatial construction in the contemporary video art of Chen Qiulin, see Namiko Kunimoto, 'Tactics and Strategies: Chen Qiulin and the Production of Urban Space', *Art Journal*, vol. 78, no. 2, 2019, pp. 28–47.

27. See, for instance, some brief c. 1972 film footage of Caracas <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_nKJS3J2cA> [accessed 7 November 2024], Mario Abate's 1976 documentary film 'El artista y la ciudad', and Grant, 'Metropolis Explodes'.

28. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. viii.

29. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2019 [2009]), pp. 49, 1.

a spotlight on the charged politics of pedestrianism in a city being radically transformed by petrocapiatalism.

Walking in the City

As many readers know, the French sociologist and philosopher Michel de Certeau considered the act of walking in the city rife with political potential: above all, because putting foot to pavement helps to evade how urban space controls, restricts, or otherwise structures the movement and behaviour of inhabitants.²⁶ However, whereas de Certeau considered walking a means for pedestrians to transgress and subvert a city's spatial systems, Cruz-Diez's walkways at first glance seemed to conform to and even spectacularise such systems. This is suggested, say, by his use of zebra crossings and a pre-existing plaza to delimit his pavement-based interventions, or by the fact that the Sabana Grande walkways aestheticised the 'channelling' of pedestrians as they crossed the street.

While Cruz-Diez's walkways may have lacked the subversive potential that de Certeau ascribed to walking in the city – at least on any obvious level – it nevertheless seems simplistic to interpret these works solely as an attempt to conform to and spectacularise urban spatial systems. For example, it may be true that the Sabana Grande walkways aestheticised the channelling of pedestrians when crossing the street. Yet as both a native *caraqueño* and someone with a studio in Caracas, Cruz-Diez almost certainly knew that not all passersby would cross the street either in a straight path or within the borders delineated by the artworks (Fig. 6). Indeed, contemporary film footage and newspaper reports suggest that crossing the street in Caracas could be an unpredictable, nerve-wracking, and downright dangerous affair that required constant negotiation, fierce determination, and a bit of good luck just to navigate ubiquitous traffic jams and automobile drivers who often treated stop signs and traffic lights as mere suggestions.²⁷

Given such practical realities associated with crossing Caracas streets, the Sabana Grande walkways did not simply aestheticise the channelling of spectators. Rather, the works did so in a particular manner that implicated pedestrians in a performative form of urban 'weaving'. By this, I mean that although pedestrians' bodies may have often moved within a walkway's boundaries, their patterns of movement created lines that frequently deviated from the linear paths encouraged and delimited by such works. As a result, one could say that the walkways implicated pedestrians in 'queering' an element of urban space designed to structure the movement of human bodies when crossing the street, broadly consistent with queer's connotations of movement *across* a site or surface.²⁸ One might even say that a spectator's performative role in queering this element of urban space reinforced the way that Cruz-Diez himself queered the zebra crossings by using colourful stripes to intersect its white lines not perpendicularly, as in a grid, but along a diagonal. These diagonal lines – which queered the orthogonality of the zebra crossing, the urban grid more generally, and the implied constraints that such features impose on individuals moving within urban spaces – could be read as exemplifying a key feature of queer utopianism: what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz calls the 'disruption of ... binarized logic' so audiences may 'see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present'.²⁹ That said, not only did the walkways and a spectator's patterns of movement when stepping on or near these walkways lack the erotic valence of the term 'queer', suggesting that the form of queering in question remained highly qualified and operated largely on a structural level (that is, as an expression of the orientation that lines may assume, be they the lines of movement articulated by bodies or the



Fig. 6. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Color Aditivo En Pasos Peatonales* (*Additive Colour in Pedestrian Crossings*), 1975–6, paint on pavement, Caracas (Atelier Cruz-Diez, Paris).

lines of visual constructs that guide such bodies). Even more importantly for our discussion, the walkways also lacked the political punch of works by other, roughly contemporary Venezuelan artists who challenged, deformed, or, as it were, ‘queered’ the urban grid by bending it, making it strange, and throwing its connotations of order and power slightly off-kilter.³⁰

One instructive example of such political punch may be found in the work of Eugenio Espinoza, a Venezuelan artist who began his career in the early 1970s. While Espinoza conceived many gridded artworks around this time to upend the conventions of kinetic art with which Cruz-Diez was closely associated, the younger artist did create some works that bore close structural similarities with Cruz-Diez’s painted walkways. Among such works was a 1973 altered postcard with a fantastical, unrealised vision for covering Caracas’s multi-lane Avenida Principal with black-and-white grids (Fig. 7). Although the grid-covered highway depicted in the postcard offered a ‘drivable’ analogue of sorts for the walkways that Cruz-Diez would realise two years later, it also revealed Espinoza’s stronger concern with *deforming* the painted undersurfaces that order movement within an urban environment. After all, even if Cruz-Diez’s zebra crossings gradually wore away under the friction of pedestrians’ footsteps and car tyres, the deformation of an urban environment’s painted undersurfaces remained much more pronounced in Espinoza’s vision. For if nothing else, the eight lanes of highway traffic would have resulted in significantly more tyre marks to sully the rectilinear gridded lines and the light-coloured surface on which such lines appeared – a gridded surface that at once echoed and

30. This interest in challenging elements of the urban grid – or gridded elements of the urban environment more broadly – is evident in roughly contemporary works by Eugenio Espinoza, Claudio Perna, Antonieta Sosa, and others. For an informative account of grids (urban or otherwise) in Latin American art, see Kaira Cabañas, ‘If the Grid Is the New Palm Tree of Latin American Art’, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2010, pp. 365–83.

31. Quoted in Eugenio Espinoza and Madeline Murphy Turner, 'Off the Grid: A Conversation with Eugenio Espinoza', *MoMA Magazine*, 26 May 2021 <<https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/571>> [accessed 7 November 2024].

32. Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive' (1959), in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), p. 62.

33. As Guy Debord noted, psychogeography involves 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals'. Guy Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography' (1955), *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 8. For more on psychogeography, see Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 1–26. Also see Phil Smith, 'The Crisis in Psychogeographical Walking: From Paranoia to Diversity, Ecology and Salvage', in David Borthwick, Pippa Marland, and Anna Stenning (eds), *Walking, Landscape and Environment* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 187–202.

34. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 77.



Fig. 7. Eugenio Espinoza, *Untitled*, 1973, altered postcard. (Photo: Courtesy of Eugenio Espinoza and the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, Miami.)

offered a cheeky alternative to the parallel lines painted on asphalt to separate multiple lanes of traffic.

If Espinoza's gridded artworks from this period frequently deformed the urban grid to reimagine it anew, they equally revealed his effort to provoke forms of *antagonistic disruption* within urban grids. While such antagonistic disruption assumed various forms in Espinoza's work, in some cases it hinged on ambulation's potential for challenging the rationality, order, and control associated with the gridded urban environment, of which postwar Caracas offered a particularly dramatic example, as a city substantially rebuilt, expanded, and replanned over the previous few decades. This potential for antagonistic disruption – including its link to both ambulation and gridded painting – is perhaps best encapsulated by a mid-1970s incident during which Espinoza was briefly jailed for 'breaking with public order' after he 'painted a grid on a newspaper, wrapped [a] friend in it', and then went out with the friend 'walking through the streets in the center of Caracas', as the artist recently explained.³¹

While Cruz-Diez's walkways may have diverged from the emphasis on deformation and antagonistic disruption that characterised the gridded works of contemporary Venezuelan artists such as Espinoza, his walkways also departed from the subversive potential of *dérive* (drifting) that found expression in the work of various European artists, especially in France. A 'technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances',³² *dérive* informed the ambulatory practices of various artists associated with the Situationist International, Lettrist International, and related movements concerned with psychogeography – practices with which Cruz-Diez was almost certainly familiar given that he moved to Paris in 1960, right around the time that this technique gained traction.³³ On the most basic level, Cruz-Diez's interest in disrupting the 'robotised' behaviour and thinking of a city's inhabitants echoed a core concern that had informed *dérive*. However, whereas *dérive* mainly involved 'goal-less drifting',³⁴ the ambulation fostered by Cruz-Diez's walkways remained far more directed and contained, especially at Sabana Grande. Additionally, whereas *dérive* emerged in part from the strong opposition among the Lettrists and Situationists to private automobiles – a 'form of isolated displacement [that] had come to symbolize modern

mobility' through its 'role in the streamlining and compartmentalizing of urban life', as art historian Lori Waxman has put it – Cruz-Diez displayed far greater ambivalence towards private automobiles in urban space.³⁵ Such ambivalence was evidenced, say, by his creation of a few public artworks around this time that he wanted to be seen by both pedestrians and car drivers, such as his 1976–1978 *Physichromie double face* (*Double-Sided Physichromy*) for Paris's Place du Venezuela.

More fundamentally, whereas *dérive* reflected an interest in subverting a city's spatial systems, such subversion proved far more difficult with the walkways, since the very government responsible for organising and controlling urban space sponsored these ambulatory artworks. That Cruz-Diez's walkways and other state-funded public works constituted a form of 'official art' seems irrefutable;³⁶ yet Cruz-Diez insisted that a government's role in commissioning such works did not necessarily negate their potential to effect change. As he explained in a 1975 interview, 'if the government offers an opportunity to make art for the masses, I don't care. You have to take advantage of it ... these are works that I am giving away, I don't get rich with them'. He added:

The same thing happened in Paris in '68 [Shortly thereafter, when newly elected President Georges] Pompidou decided to make contemporary art in the street, ... politicized artists said they would not participate because that would mean the state's recuperation of certain ideas. I deliberated this for months until I concluded that I would participate. Pompidou will disappear [and] the government will disappear, [but] the people will only remember the ideas put into play.³⁷

In these comments, Cruz-Diez refers to his decision to participate in the 1969 festival 'Art dans la Rue' (Art in the Street), which was sponsored by the Centre National d'Art Contemporain. For this festival, Cruz-Diez displayed his *Chromosaturation et promenade chromatique pour un lieu public* (*Chromosaturation and Chromatic Stroll for a Public Place*), an outdoor installation with twenty coloured booths that passersby could wander through on the pavement just in front of Paris's Odéon subway station, near one of the most important sites of student protests the year before (Fig. 8). While *Chromosaturation* certainly instantiated Cruz-Diez's emerging interest in using the ground as a 'support' to create an 'event' for audiences, it also points to the more specific role that the outdoor pavement could assume as a 'support' to make what he called 'art for the masses'. For example, because *Chromosaturation* appeared just next to a subway station, it addressed individuals during the comings and goings of their everyday lives – rather than, say, during the more occasional journeys of air travel that privileged relatively well-off passengers, as with the floor-based artwork that Cruz-Diez conceived roughly five years later for the airport in Maiquetía. As a result, with *Chromosaturation*, the pavement and the stroll it supported proved decisive to interrupting the daily grind of '*métro, boulot, dodo*' (subway, work, sleep) that, for many protesters in 1968, defined the quotidian, automaton-like rhythms of workers in large cities such as Paris – rhythms encapsulated by the act of stepping on a surface so often taken for granted by passersby and thus not even seen or otherwise perceived.³⁸

Much like *Chromosaturation*, the ephemeral painted walkways that Cruz-Diez created in mid-1970s Caracas exemplified a government's 'recuperation' of 'art for the masses'. For instance, the walkways closely recalled *Chromosaturation* in that both projects performed this reclamation in a highly orderly and state-sanctioned manner, departing from calls among some artists to tear up the streets, as the Situationists had famously done through their catchphrase '*Sous les pavés, la plage*' (under the cobblestones, the beach), which emerged as a key anti-establishment slogan during France's 1968 protests. However, unlike *Chromosaturation*, which had surrounded an upright moving spectator with vertical

35. Lori Waxman, *Keep Walking Intently: The Ambulatory Art of the Surrealists, the Situationist International, and Fluxus* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2017), p. 114.

36. Traba, *Mirar en Caracas*, 123.

37. Quoted in Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, 'Cruz-Diez: "No imitamos, nos imitan"', *El Nacional*, 6 July 1975.

38. The phrase '*métro, boulot, dodo*' originally appeared in a 1951 poem by Pierre Béarn but became a slogan among protesters in 1968 to denounce the routinised existence that defined workers' lives under industrial capitalism. Pierre Béarn and Christian Denis, *Métro, boulot, dodo: Entretiens avec Christian Denis* (Chaillé-sous-les-Ormeaux: Le Dé bleu, 1996), pp. 36–8.

39. Denver Nixon and Tim Schwanen, 'The Conflicted Pedestrian: Walking and Mobility Conflict in the City', in Ole Jensen, Claus Lassen, Vincent Kaufmann, Malene Freudendal-Pedersen, Ida Sofie Gotzsche Lange (eds), *Handbook of Urban Mobilities* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 254.



Fig. 8. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Chromosaturation et Promenade Chromatique pour un Lieu Public* (*Chromosaturation and Chromatic Stroll for a Public Place*), 1969, painted wood and plexiglass cubicles with lamps, Paris. (Photo: Atelier Cruz-Diez, Paris.)

planes of colour when stepping on unadulterated pavement, the walkways for 'The Artist and the City' involved the application of coloured paint directly to pavement. Pavement also remained the *only* surface to which Cruz-Diez applied paint when making these walkways. The upshot: compared to *Chromosaturation*, the walkways for 'The Artist and the City' placed far greater emphasis not only on the city pavement as a walkable surface but also on the physical contact that results from a pedestrian stepping on this surface.

Yet what were the larger implications of Cruz-Diez's decision to emphasise a pedestrian's contact with the walkable surfaces of city pavement? One likely answer becomes apparent if we briefly narrow our focus to the walkways at Sabana Grande, which almost certainly experienced the most foot traffic owing to their location. Whereas the Plaza La Pastora walkway appeared on an 'island' of pavement that temporarily isolated audiences from cars – much like *Chromosaturation* did several years earlier – the Sabana Grande walkways placed spectators on the same surface as cars in one of the city's busier intersections. The Sabana Grande walkways also adopted the form of zebra crossings, a type of walkway introduced during the postwar period to reduce pedestrian injuries and fatalities when crossing streets where cars drive. Furthermore, assuming that Cruz-Diez was in fact aware of the formidable dangers and challenges involved in crossing Caracas's car-filled streets around the time he made these works, this very real dimension of 'walking in the city' should not be considered incidental to the Sabana Grande walkways; to the contrary, it was almost certainly integral to the artist's conception of how audiences would experience such works. Taken together, all these factors suggest that the Sabana Grande walkways did not merely bring art into the street. Rather, the walkways also directed a spectator's attention to the tense relationship between pedestrians and automobiles, among the most important forms of 'intermodal mobility conflict' in Caracas and other modern cities.³⁹ We might even say that the Sabana Grande walkways *accentuated* this relationship by luring a spectator's gaze downward to view the ever-changing patterns of coloured lines on the pavement – but at the precise

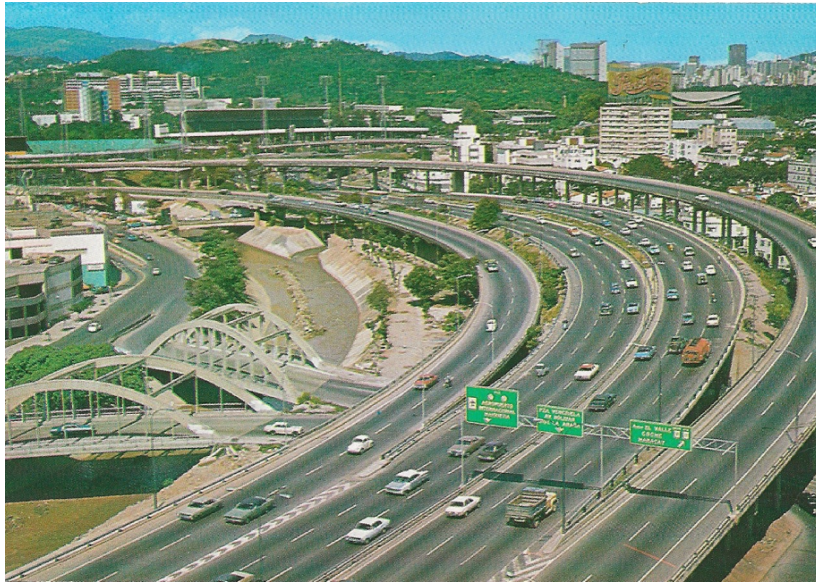


Fig. 9. Postcard showing Caracas highways, c. 1970. (Photo: Private Collection.)

moment when a pedestrian had to cross the street quickly while navigating cars that may not always stop.

Hunted Pedestrians, Privileged Cars, and the Anthropology of Oil

Conflicts between pedestrians and cars were of course hardly limited to Caracas but were symptomatic of a wider transformation playing out in countless cities around the world after World War II. As philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre wrote in his 1970 *La Révolution urbaine* (*The Urban Revolution*), ‘the invasion of the automobile and the pressure of the automobile lobby have turned the car into a key object, parking into an obsession, traffic into a priority, harmful to urban and social life’.⁴⁰ As Lefebvre further explained, ‘although the street may have once had the meaning of a meeting place, it has since lost [this meaning], ... splitting itself into a place for the passage of pedestrians (hunted) and automobiles (privileged)’.⁴¹

While Caracas epitomised the wider transnational displacement of power from pedestrians to automobiles during the postwar period, Venezuela’s burgeoning oil wealth also meant that the city underwent an unusually dramatic and rapid transformation to accommodate automobility. This is suggested, say, by the construction of several new highways that cut through the city and formed a juggernaut near the Sabana Grande walkways (Fig. 9). This is further suggested by the record levels of car ownership spurred on by the country’s oil revenues as well as government price controls on fuel and vehicles, with the end result being that roughly 420,000 private automobiles were circulating in Caracas alone.⁴² Paradoxically, however, although Venezuela’s oil-dependent economy substantially benefited from the growth of automobiles – as did Caracas, as the country’s political and economic capital – the ill effects of automobile driving were becoming acutely apparent to the city’s architects, urban planners, and politicians, among others.

This concern was evident, for instance, in the city’s decision to establish a comprehensive subway system, the construction of which began in 1976 and ended in 1983. The negative consequences of automobility were also clearly on

40. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1970]), p. 18.

41. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, p. 20.

42. Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 251; Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, ‘Reproducing Dependency: Auto Industry Policy and Petrodollar Circulation in Venezuela’, *International Organization*, vol. 36, no. 1, Winter 1982, pp. 78, 87; Grant, ‘Metropolis Explodes’; Jorge Rogat, ‘The Politics of Fuel Pricing in Latin America and Their Implications for the Environment’, *Energy & Environment*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2007, p. 3.



Fig. 10. Expanded and remodelled sidewalks; image reproduced in *Caracas Para Todos*, 1976. (Photo: Private Collection.)

43. Olivier Namias, 'L'Espace sans paraphrase: Entretien avec Carlos Cruz-Diez', *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui Hors-Série AA Projects*, 2016, p. 9.

44. Diego Arria, *Dedicación a una causa: La calidad de la vida* (Caracas: Fundación HABITAT, 1977), pp. 39, 86, 89.

45. Gabriel Rodríguez and Centro Simón Bolívar, *Caracas para Todos* (Caracas: Centro Simón Bolívar, 1976). This book included a forward by Arria.

46. Rodríguez et al., *Caracas para Todos*, p. 144.

47. See his interview with Estrellita Brodsky, 'Carlos Cruz-Diez', *Bomb*, no. 110, Winter 2010, pp. 64–71, esp. 67.

48. Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 8, 104.

49. The not-yet-there is a defining feature of Bloch's conception of utopian consciousness. As but one example, he writes that the 'Not-Yet-Conscious in man belongs completely to the Not-Yet-Become, Not-Yet-Brought-Out, Manifested-Out in the world'. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 13.

the mind of Diego Arria, the politician who had invited Cruz-Diez to create works for 'The Artist and the City'.⁴³ Appointed Governor of the Federal District of Caracas in 1974 by the recently elected President Carlos Andrés Pérez, Arria warned repeatedly about the dire consequences of automobile pollution, which he described in his 1977 book *Dedicación a una causa* (*Dedication to a Cause*) as damaging to 'emotional stability', 'health problems', 'environmental quality', and the 'quality of our life'.⁴⁴ A roughly similar line of argumentation, albeit more upbeat in tone, also surfaced the prior year in a promotional book for Caracas para Todos (Caracas for All), an organisation under Arria's remit.⁴⁵ Such concerns further assumed concrete form through various contemporary initiatives to pedestrianise areas of the city. Key among these areas was a stretch of Sabana Grande about six blocks away from where Cruz-Diez realised his walkways (Fig. 10). As noted in Caracas para Todos's promotional book, sidewalks there were 'expanded and remodelled', plastic modular roofs were installed to provide shade to those in bars and cafes, and a portion of the street was closed to 'vehicular traffic after a certain hour at night'. The book adds that this was 'when the party starts. The area calms down, the pedestrian wins back the street, [and] people come from distant places so their children can enjoy a moment of joy and rejoicing'.⁴⁶

Against this background, Cruz-Diez's walkways for 'The Artist and the City' cannot be treated as a critique of pedestrians' increasingly precarious role amidst automobiles' encroaching privilege: partly because he was not 'anti-car', as already noted, but also because he had steadfastly resisted using his art as a form of socio-political critique since the 1950s.⁴⁷ However, assuming that the Sabana Grande walkways did highlight and even accentuate the tense relationship between pedestrians and automobiles, one likely motivation for doing so was to enchant spectators. Such enchantment occurred partly by catching pedestrians by surprise to trigger an eruption of the marvellous in everyday life, but above all by orchestrating a 'precarious concatenation [that] requires a delicate balance of forces, a set of fortuitous circumstances, and some practice ... to develop the somatic habits conducive to it', in the words of political theorist Jane Bennett.⁴⁸ Through the precarity of this concatenation, the walkways distinguished themselves from the floor-based work that Cruz-Diez conceived around the same time for the Simón Bolívar International Airport. After all, a spectator's perceptual experiences there were defined not by a precarious relationship with moving vehicles when stepping on the artwork but, rather, by the quasi-diversionary experience that this work sought to elicit among audiences as they wandered around looking at watches and neckties in shops.

The interplay between enchantment and precarity that defined a spectator's experiences when stepping on the Sabana Grande walkways arguably encouraged audiences to reimagine Caracas as a city on the brink of becoming an urban utopia that would place pedestrians in a more harmonious relationship with cars – but a utopia not yet there, to draw on philosopher Ernst Bloch's conception of utopian consciousness.⁴⁹ The not-yet-there quality of this urban utopia becomes clearer when we consider a short 1976 film sponsored by Caracas para Todos to promote the walkways. In this documentary, filmmaker Mario Abate intersperses images of crowded streets, happy faces, and pedestrians walking along Cruz-Diez's zebra crossings (Figs 11–12). Within such sequences, the film suggests that the zebra crossings would help to transform Caracas's traffic-jammed streets into a source of pleasure. However, it also casts this source of pleasure as one that had not fully materialised, as evidenced by a few images of densely crowded streets (Fig 13) in which pedestrians cross wherever they can and even walk between rows of backed-up cars in what seem like haze-filled

streets (perhaps an effect of the film's lighting, but most likely a trace of the very automobile pollution that Arria repeatedly criticised in his 1977 book).⁵⁰

Like in other cities around the world, concrete and asphalt became the materials of choice for transforming Caracas into a 'concrete utopia': a utopia 'not yet there' that, in Bloch's words, diverged from the escapism or 'dreaminess' of abstract utopia by offering the 'power of anticipation' along 'the horizon of every reality'.⁵¹ To awaken this power of anticipation, the walkways involved pedestrians in bringing Caracas a few steps closer to a concrete utopia, or what we might better describe as a concrete urban utopia. For example, Cruz-Diez's effort to use the walkways to disrupt the 'robotic unconscious' of city dwellers – which the artist considered essential to an individual's eventual liberation from the 'repression' of urban life in 'industrial societies' – loosely chimes with Bloch's concept of the 'not-yet-conscious', or a 'preconscious of what is to come'.⁵² Cruz-Diez's particular decision to transform the otherwise banal zebra crossings of a busy intersection into a set of enchanting artworks further recalls Bloch's notion that 'great art' contributes to constructing a concrete utopia through 'exaggeration and fantasizing', both of which may catalyse alternative forms of experience for audiences so they discover an 'aesthetic pre-appearance' of utopian reality.⁵³ Indeed, it may be true that Abate's film reveals a rather calculated if subtle attempt by Caracas para Todos to use the walkways as a publicity tool for celebrating the Federal District Government's contemporary efforts to pedestrianise major sections in Caracas. However, even this publicity effort may be considered indicative of the walkways' role in providing a pre-appearance of a concrete utopian reality. For as Bloch notes, it is only through 'contact with the process[es] of the world' that such a pre-appearance can 'possibly becom[e] real', since an artwork's 'call for perfection', as a call to a utopian form of life, 'is not decided in [art], but in society'.⁵⁴

That all said, the walkways did more than offer a pre-appearance of a concrete utopia. More specifically, these works pointed to an effort to build an 'inverted' form of concrete utopia, to borrow a term used by curator Mari Carmen Ramírez to describe the tendency among Latin American artists to create works that at once recalled and departed from the models of utopia articulated by the European historical avant-garde and its related intellectual traditions.⁵⁵ Consistent with Ramírez's assertion that Latin American artists often developed forms of utopia in response to particular social and political developments within a Latin American context, Cruz-Diez's walkways remained inextricably linked to the politics of pedestrianism and of mobility more generally in mid-1970s Caracas. Moreover, because such politics were directly related to Venezuela's rise as a petrocapitalist state – and because the profits of petrocapitalism made possible the very commissioning of Cruz-Diez's walkways – his pedestrian crossings ultimately revealed an inversion of the Marxist principles that Bloch associated with concrete utopia.⁵⁶

While the not-yet-there quality of Caracas's concrete utopia was most evident in the Sabana Grande zebra crossings, which placed spectators in a relationship of both temporary harmony and confrontation with cars sharing the pavement, this quality extended to the walkway of Plaza La Pastora, where it played out in a different manner. There, the walkway enchanted passersby not by placing audiences in a precarious relationship with nearby cars but by fostering a slower, more 'discursive' mode of ambulatory spectatorship.⁵⁷ This occurred partly by giving visitors more freedom to wander in non-linear paths, and partly by allowing them to linger so they could become more aware of how changes in light, leaves falling on the ground, shadows from nearby trees, and the bodies of other



Fig. 11. Mario Abate, *El Artista Y la Ciudad* (*The Artist and the City*), 1976, film (accessed in 2018 through www.cruz-diez.com; screen grabs by author).



Fig. 12. Mario Abate, *El Artista Y la Ciudad* (*The Artist and the City*), 1976, film (accessed in 2018 through www.cruz-diez.com; screen grabs by author).

50. Arria, *Dedicación a una causa*, pp. 39, 89.

51. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, pp. 146, 157, 223.

52. Cruz-Diez, 'Pasos peatonales para Chacao'; Cruz-Diez, 'El Arte en la Calle' (unpublished text), 1991; Cruz-Diez Atelier, Paris. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 116.

53. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 216.

54. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, pp. 173, 216.

55. Mari Carmen Ramírez, 'A Highly Topical Utopia: Some Outstanding Features of the Avant-Garde in Latin America', in Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea (eds), *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 1–15.

56. Ruth Levitas, 'Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia', *Utopian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1990, pp. 19–21.

57. I borrow the term 'discursive' from Filipa Matos Wunderlich, who distinguishes 'discursive' and 'purposive' walking. Filipa Matos Wunderlich, 'Walking and Rhythmicity: Sensing Urban Space', *Journal of Urban Design*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2008, pp. 131–2.



Fig. 13. Mario Abate, *El Artista Y la Ciudad* (*The Artist and the City*), 1976, film (accessed in 2018 through www.cruz-diez.com; screen grabs by author).

58. Arturo Almandoz, 'Introducción: Caracas, entre la ciudad guzmancista y la metrópoli revolucionaria', in Arturo Almandoz (ed.), *Caracas, de la metrópoli súbita a la meca roja* (Quito: Olacchi, 2012), p. 14.

59. Rodríguez et al., *Caracas para Todos*.

60. Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 5.

61. Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 239.

62. Rodolfo Quintero, *Antropología del petróleo* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1972), p. 45ff.

63. Arria, *Dedicación a una causa*, p. 24.

64. Arria, *Dedicación a una causa*, p. 29.

pedestrians inflected visual perception of the colours underfoot over time (see Fig. 3).

Through this more discursive mode of ambulatory spectatorship, the Plaza La Pastora walkway may not have been intended by Cruz-Diez as an explicit form of socio-political critique. Nevertheless, its mode of spectatorship did help to celebrate a plaza's more traditional role as a site for strolling and gathering – and, crucially, at a safe remove from cars just around the perimeter. In this respect, this walkway offered an antidote to what urban studies scholar Arturo Almandoz has called Caracas's tendency 'during the sixties and seventies' to explode while ignoring 'the essential need for public life in squares, streets, and side-walks', a tendency that emerged in large part through the unbridled expansion of (private) car culture and contributed to the city's 'disastrous environmental and mobility conditions' at the time.⁵⁸ By providing such an antidote, the walkway may be read as a *sotto voce* means for its commissioners to highlight alternatives to the status quo of the 'hunted' pedestrian – alternatives that Caracas para Todos often sought to realise by transforming sites with heavy automobile traffic into leisurely pedestrian-only areas for strolling and gathering, much in the vein of Plaza La Pastora.⁵⁹

Assuming the walkways in both locations did help to frame Caracas as a concrete utopia – again, a utopia palpable on the 'horizon of every reality' but still in the process of becoming – then these works cannot be tidily reduced to an illustration of what anthropologist and historian Fernando Coronil influentially called Venezuela's role as a 'magical state', which involved casting a 'spell over audiences and performances alike' to 'engender collective fantasies of progress'.⁶⁰ To the contrary, although the walkways were commissioned by the 'magical state', and although they were patently intended to enchant audiences, the works highlight several contradictions and complexities within the process of 'engender[ing] collective fantasies of progress', especially those concerning car culture. For example, then-President Pérez was working aggressively at this moment to expand the domestic automobile industry, one key reason why Coronil positions Pérez as 'the state's most effective enchanter'.⁶¹ Yet these works also provided a means to promote the various efforts of Arria, Caracas para Todos, and other individuals or organisations working within the government to limit the encroachment of car culture. That said, the works' role in celebrating limits to car culture did not mean that they escaped being part of 'oil culture', to borrow a term from anthropologist Rodolfo Quintero's 1974 *Antropología del petróleo* (*Anthropology of Oil*).⁶² By this, I mean that Arria may have articulated his vision of a Caracas filled with clean air, less noise, less traffic, and more areas to roam on foot freely, a vision that would have required the drastic curtailment of gas-guzzling cars. At the same time, he considered this vision contingent on the country's ability to capitalise on its 'still sufficient reserves to cover national and world needs for oil and other non-renewable resources' – needs driven largely by cars.⁶³

To sum up this highly dependent, love-hate relationship with oil, Arria stated rather pithily: 'We want oil to ensure a future without oil'.⁶⁴ However brief, this comment is revealing, since it highlights the limits of his utopian vision of Caracas. For instance, Arria's vision of using oil in the present to ensure a 'future without oil' at first glance seems to recall the notion of futurity that underpins the concept of utopia in Bloch's writings, which political theorist Susan McManus aptly describes as the 'guiding potential of the future [that] is always present'. Nevertheless, the politician's embrace of oil as the primary means for approaching the future's guiding potential also reveals Arria's 'acceptance of given realities [in the present] as the only realities', to again draw on

McManus's words.⁶⁵ On the one hand, his 'acceptance of [these] given realities' demonstrates how the walkways entered into 'contact with [real] process[es] of the world', as Bloch put it. On the other hand, the fact that Arria and others involved in commissioning the walkways accepted rather than disrupted such realities points to how the works fell short of a concrete utopia in a true Blochian sense – even if the walkways did remain entwined in contemporary efforts to tackle real socio-political problems, most notably those that pedestrians faced in Caracas due to the city's explosive growth of automobiles.

Interpreted in this manner, Cruz-Diez's first ephemeral painted walkways not only offered an aesthetic pre-appearance of a concrete (urban) utopia. More specifically, the works created this pre-appearance within what Quintero called the 'anthropology of oil': partly because these works belonged to a 'culture of oil', but just as importantly because a spectator's act of stepping on such walkways helped to lay bare 'the reality of an oil-dominated world from the vantage [point] of everyday, experienced lives', a key feature of the anthropology of oil as anthropologists Stephen Reyna and Andrea Behrends have recently observed.⁶⁶ Additionally, given that a core issue in Venezuela's anthropology of oil was what Coronil termed the 'exploitation of the Venezuelan subsoil by foreign companies', one might even say that Cruz-Diez's walkways indirectly helped to celebrate the state's return of such subsoil to the Venezuelan people as they went about their 'everyday, experienced lives'. I make this claim for two interconnected reasons. First, the walkways drew considerable attention to the ground on which Venezuelans walked: that is, not just to a ground made from asphalt, a material derived from petroleum, but also to a ground that symbolically lay just above the very subsoil from which oil was extracted and exploited by foreign companies. Second, the artworks' brief appearance directly overlapped with the nationalisation of Venezuela's oil industry, on 1 January 1976.⁶⁷ As such, the fact that pedestrians stepped on works embedded into a surface that remained so connected to oil on a material and symbolic level arguably implicated audiences, however indirectly, in feting the oil industry's nationalisation – an issue that Pérez had used as a rallying cry since the early 1970s to garner support among 'the poor and the professional elite' alike, as anthropologist Naomi Schiller has noted.⁶⁸

By drawing so much attention to the ground on which pedestrians stepped during their 'everyday, experienced lives', Cruz-Diez's walkways had the potential to make audiences think about the political implications of what lay underneath the surfaces of city pavement and, by extension, about their own relationship to this politically charged subsurface – somewhat in the spirit of the Situationist catchphrase mentioned in passing earlier, '*Sous les pavés, la plage*'. Crucially, however, the Situationists' catchphrase served as a call to disrupt the status quo: both by ripping up streets so that their paving stones could be used as ammunition against the police,⁶⁹ and by using such weaponised paving stones to get closer to locating a utopia in the present, as symbolised by a sandy beach just underneath the street's surface. By contrast, Cruz-Diez's walkways, as works commissioned and promoted by the Federal District Government, suggested on a tacit level that the very utopia for which they offered a pre-appearance depended on governmental policies rooted in the Realpolitik of petroculturalism. In this respect, the walkways provided what we might call a politically expedient utopian spin on the 'asphalt hell' of Caracas's streets during the 1960s and 1970s, to borrow the title of a 1963 book by Adriano González León and Daniel González.⁷⁰ For whereas that book, in the words of cultural historian Lisa Blackmore, positioned Caracas's pavement and the city more generally as 'metamorph[izing] into a [dystopian] embodiment of crude oil',⁷¹ Cruz-Diez's

65. Susan McManus, 'Fabricating the Future: Becoming Bloch's Utopians', *Utopian Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2003, p. 7 (emphasis in original).

66. Stephen Reyna and Andrea Behrends, 'The Crazy Curse and Crude Domination: Towards an Anthropology of Oil', in Andrea Behrends, Stephen Reyna, and Günther Schlee (eds), *Crude Domination: An Anthropology of Oil* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 11.

67. Coronil, *The Magical State*, p. 111.

68. Naomi Schiller, 'Now That the Petroleum Is Ours: Community Media, State Spectacle, and Oil Nationalism in Venezuela', in *Crude Domination*, pp. 196–7.

69. Phil Smith, 'The Contemporary Dérive: A Partial Review of Issues Concerning the Contemporary Practice of Psychogeography', *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2010, p. 104.

70. Adriano González León and Daniel González, *Asfalto-Infierno y Otros Relatos Demoniacos* (Caracas: El Diario de Caracas, 1979 [1963]).

71. Lisa Blackmore, 'Caracas: From *Sucursal del Cielo* to *Asfalto Infierno*' (paper presented at the Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, May 2012), np.

72. Michael Tymkiw, 'Planes of Immanence: Walking on Carl Andre's Art in Moments of Protest', *Art History*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2021, p. 245.

73. Lisa Blackmore, *Spectacular Modernity: Dictatorship, Space, and Visuality in Venezuela, 1948–1958* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), p. 172.

74. Blackmore, *Spectacular Modernity* p. 176.

walkways *re*-metamorphised the city by offering pedestrians a more enchanting, utopian experience when stepping on such pavement, but an experience that remained contingent on the country's embrace of petrocapitalism.

When placed in this context, Cruz-Diez's earliest ephemeral outdoor walkways did far more than instantiate the artist's nascent interest in transforming the ground into an 'event'. Rather, the highly charged significance of the ground, at this particular place and time, also inflected the kind of event that the ground could become within an anthropology of oil. Indeed, assuming Cruz-Diez's walkways offered an example of the wider development I elsewhere have called 'ground centrality' – the expanded interest among artists from the c. 1960s onward in making works that lie flush with, get embedded into, or otherwise enter into close dialogue with the ground on which spectators walk – these walkways pointed to the ground's multilayered relationship with oil around the time of their realisation.⁷² In a nutshell, the ground constituted at once a surface to be dug up and dug into for extracting oil from Venezuelan subsoil; a surface paved with asphalt, a material typically derived from oil; and a surface aestheticised through artworks commissioned with oil money. When spectators walked on these 'ground-centric' works, in other words, the ground's connection to oil operated on multiple levels, even if this went unsaid in contemporary discourse surrounding the walkways.

If Cruz-Diez's earliest ephemeral painted walkways may in fact be interpreted as an outgrowth of Venezuela's anthropology of oil, then this facet of the works' significance points to a qualified kinship with the political stakes of ambulation during the country's dictatorship between 1948 and 1958, a moment defined by the confluence of oil wealth, a shift towards far-right politics, and an embrace of modernity. As a case in point, consider Cruz-Diez's walkways in relation to the Sistema de la Nacionalidad (System of Nationality), a long and imposing thoroughfare built in the 1950s under Venezuela's dictatorship, when the government sponsored numerous ambitious building and infrastructure projects (Fig. 14). As Blackmore has explained, the Sistema implicated everyday subjects into a spectacle of progress by having them walk in the 'footsteps of military leaders from the past and the present'.⁷³ Much like the Sistema and various government-organised parades from this period, Cruz-Diez's walkways 'harnessed the microgestural terrain that Lefebvre associates with the affective agency and individual experiences of space', to quote Blackmore.⁷⁴ However, because spectators' own footsteps could efface Cruz-Diez's walkways, and because the walkways remained more ambivalent in their signification, they also celebrated more open-ended 'fantasies of progress' within the so-called magical state – even if such open-endedness could still be appropriated for political purposes, as evidenced by the publicity initiatives of Caracas para Todos. Additionally, because Cruz-Diez's walkways on Sabana Grande so forcefully highlighted a pedestrian's precarious role in a city both enriched and endangered by petrocapitalism, the works more pointedly raised questions about the politics of pedestrianism within an anthropology of oil.

Coda: Cruz-Diez's Final Crosswalks for Caracas, 2014

After completing his first ephemeral painted walkways in 1975, Cruz-Diez did not realise any more such works for seven years, undoubtedly because he was consumed with large-scale commissions from the Venezuelan government and corporate clients. However, the artist eventually produced more ephemeral painted walkways: initially during the 1980s and 1990s, when he completed eight such projects in Brazil, Colombia, France, and Venezuela, and then from



Fig. 14. Plaza Los Símbolos (Plaza of Symbols) in the Sistema de la Nacionalidad (System of Nationality), Caracas, c. 1956. (Photo: Foto Estudio Palacios; © Archivo Fotografía Urbana, Caracas.)

the mid-2000s onwards, when he realised such works at a greater pace, with over sixteen ephemeral walkways in countries that included France, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, the UK, the USA, and Venezuela.

Cruz-Diez's dissemination of ephemeral painted walkways to so many countries suggests that this mode of urban intervention was no longer as closely tied to mid-1970s Caracas as in its initial manifestation. Yet given my claim that his first such works exemplify an anthropology of oil, I would like to conclude by briefly considering the final ephemeral crosswalks that Cruz-Diez realised for Caracas in 2014, five years before his death, if only because these more recent walkways reveal how significantly their entwinement with the anthropology of oil had shifted.

Titled *Color Aditivo* (*Additive Colour*) and commissioned by Venezuela's Foundation of National Museums, the two crosswalks from 2014 brought passersby from the median strip of the multi-lane Avenida Bolívar to the sidewalks in front of the Museo de la Estampa y del Diseño Carlos Cruz-Diez (Carlos Cruz-Diez Print and Design Museum).⁷⁵ In so doing, the 2014 walkways somewhat recalled the 1975 zebra crossings at Sabana Grande, which served a similar function in another part of the city. However, one key difference was that pedestrians encountered far more motorbikes when walking on the 2014 works, a point evident in numerous photographs (Fig. 15). However seemingly incidental, this difference offered one indication of the country's wider economic crisis at the time, which stemmed from a conflation of developments that included hyperinflation, plunging oil prices, and a major drop in oil production largely provoked by the policies of former President Hugo Chávez, who had ruled the country from 1999 until his death in 2013.⁷⁶ Among other implications, this economic crisis made it extremely difficult for Venezuelans to buy and even find automobiles and replacement parts,⁷⁷ while fuel shortages resulting from the crisis made it more difficult to operate automobiles due to their higher fuel consumption compared to motorbikes.

75. This museum opened in 1997.

76. On this crisis, see the *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 109, 2020, pp. 1–202.

77. Eyanir China, 'Venezuelan Auto Industry in Free Fall amid Economic Woes', *Reuters*, 8 August 2014.



Fig. 15. Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Color Aditivo (Additive Colour)*, 2014, paint on pavement, Caracas. (Photo: Atelier Cruz-Diez, Paris.)

78. See Stiven Tremaria, 'Violent Caracas: Understanding Violence and Homicide in Contemporary Venezuela', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2016, pp. 62–76.

79. Emily Avendaño, 'Avenida Bolívar, donde el chavismo y la indigencia compiten', *Climax*, 19 September 2016 <<https://elestimulo.com/climax/ciudad/2016-09-19/avenida-bolivar-donde-el-chavismo-y-la-indigencia-compiten/>> [accessed 7 November 2024].

80. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Granta, 2014 [2001]), p. 217.

The economic crisis, however, went hand in hand with the country's larger political crisis, as revealed by the hundreds of protests that took place in Venezuela during much of 2014. While multiple developments sparked these protests, including the extreme scarcity of basic goods, one was the substantial increase in urban violence, which not only caused Caracas to count among the world's most violent cities but also meant that the mere act of crossing the street could be a life-or-death experience.⁷⁸ For example, when one considers the area where Cruz-Diez designed his final walkways, near several major museums and parks, the prospect of violence there might seem remote. Yet the danger of walking along these crosswalks was undoubtedly both real and palpable. As but one anecdotal indication, a long-time coffee seller from the area told a reporter in 2016 that people simply should not walk around either the Cruz-Diez Museum or the nearby Museo de los Niños (Children's Museum): partly because the area in general was 'too unsafe', and partly because the area around the former is one where a 'gang will surely leave you without a phone'.⁷⁹ Moreover, regardless of whether a pedestrian felt danger when walking on or near Cruz-Diez's crosswalks, the works' location on the Avenida Bolívar came with a strong political charge, since this avenue counted among the city's most important sites for protest: that is, as sites where people did not just walk but walked collectively so their 'bodily movement becomes a form of speech' and articulates a 'common ground' to advance a political cause, to borrow the words of writer Rebecca Solnit.⁸⁰ While this political charge was certainly true under Chávez's rule, it was equally so in 2014 during the many protests that occurred under Nicolás Maduro, who had become Chávez's successor the year before. For at

this moment, although protests appeared in various locations across Venezuela, the avenue was one of the more high-profile sites – both for pro-government demonstrations and for some demonstrating against Maduro's new government.

Considered from this perspective, Cruz-Diez's 2014 crosswalks for the Avenida Bolívar cast a spotlight on how the changing fortunes of a petrostate transformed the act of stepping on such works. After all, unlike during the mid-1970s, when this act called a spectator's attention to the aesthetic pre-appearance of a utopian reality, by 2014 the gesture largely seemed to highlight the enormous gap between the original utopian vision of the works underfoot and the acute socio-political problems that prevented such a utopian reality from becoming 'practical', to return to Bloch's term.⁸¹ By highlighting this gap, the act of stepping on such works recalled how close-up images of feet standing or walking on Cruz-Diez's floor at the Maiquetía airport emerged around this time as a ubiquitous motif in social media posts by Venezuelans emigrating from the country.⁸² Indeed, the airport floor may have featured a permanent rather than ephemeral work and, through its permanence, signalled hope for an émigré's eventual return in brighter times. Nonetheless, stepping on both the airport's floor and the ephemeral walkways of 2014 ultimately encapsulated the extent to which a delay in reaching utopia's 'then and there' during the 'here and now' of the present remained closely defined by issues of mobility within Venezuela's anthropology of oil: partly because oil spawned multiple forms and directions of movement, but also because oil shaped how, where, and why one moved, and often in more complex ways than merely providing fuel for one's vehicle.⁸³

81. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 216.

82. Besides photographing themselves on the floor-based artwork, many Venezuelans leaving the country have physically removed tiles from this work. This practice has led the artwork to acquire additional layers of meaning, particularly as 'a symbol of a democratic Venezuela that no longer exists', to borrow the words of Natalia Sassu Suarez Ferri. Natalia Sassu Suarez Ferri, 'Since They Can't Put Venezuela in Their Suitcase, They Take Mosaic Tiles from the Maiquetía Airport', *Third Text*, vol. 37, nos 5–6, 2023, pp. 581–600 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2023.2296207>>.

83. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 1.