

Contradictions and Containment

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All these pieces are indestructible because they can be endlessly duplicated. They will always exist because they don't really exist or because they don't have to exist all the time. . . . there is no original, only one original certificate of authenticity.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres¹

Among the characteristic methods and products of modern art history, the catalogue raisonné ranks among the very oldest. While the oeuvre catalogue dates from the middle of the nineteenth century, it bears the even older imprint of earlier attempts by connoisseurs to secure the authorship of works of art when most were only loosely attributed, if attributed to any master at all. Art historian W. Eugene Kleinbauer has singled out Carl Friedrich von Romohr's three-volume study, *Italienische Forschungen* (Berlin, 1827–31) as an influential model. While von Romohr's interest in the evolution of style suggests he was something of a proto-formalist, it was his empiricist's determination to insulate his judgments from the vagaries of individual emotion or the biases of aesthetic theory that proved most influential to the formation of the catalogue raisonné.²

Essentially a chronological list of an artist's works, or of the works of a school of artists, catalogues raisonné typically aim to provide such data as a work's dimensions, its medium, date, inscriptions, provenance, exhibition history, and physical condition. Notwithstanding the apparently generic nature of such data, the emergence of these reference works had ideological as well as cultural implications. The oeuvre catalogue reflected, even as it advanced, the increasing primacy of the individual artist and of *signature style* during the second half of the nineteenth century, when such matters were becoming increasingly indispensable aspects of bourgeois culture.

Catalogues raisonné have not only been the projects of scholars and amateurs; they have also been compiled and sometimes been financed by art dealers. As a rule, whoever has elected to produce these studies has refrained voluntarily from speculating about the meaning and value of the art in question. Those considerations have been understood as the prerogative of other devotees. They still are. "We have construed a catalogue raisonné to be a clear, objective, and documented description of each work made by an artist," Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene V. Thaw observe in the introduction of their authoritative four-volume account of Jackson Pollock's art. "Any evaluation or interpretation, except that required to deduce a coherent chronological sequence for undated work, has for us, no place in such an enterprise," they continue. "We intend to inform theory, not to promulgate it."³ Thus the acknowledged purpose of the catalogue raisonné has been to

establish a reliable, purely descriptive record of authentic works of art as a base for elaboration by other scholars; and for the benefit of the modern cultural economy, which prizes authenticity as it does originality.

In the monumental *Grove Dictionary of Art*, Alex Ross's entry for, "Catalogue raisonné" takes note of a secondary function, which the catalogue's tenaciously empirical method has largely masked: to endorse, and even to enhance the value of, the oeuvre it objectively records. Observing the increasingly active participation of art dealers throughout the twentieth century in realizing such projects, Ross adds that the "uncomfortably close connection between commerce and scholarship, and the fact that works of art that receive the endorsement of a catalogue raisonné usually increase in value, has led some scholars to decry such cataloging as an auxiliary of the art market."⁴ In this context, it becomes impossible not to realize that the empirical method of the catalogue raisonné may not be so objective after all. And the more such a reference work veers toward endorsements and enhancement of value, the greater the risk that its author(s) will omit from its listing the less fully realized studies and experimental works the artists create as they develop – often by fits and starts. The resulting record may well be canonical, but misrepresents the artist's actual process and developments and distorts the meaning of the legacy he or she leaves behind.

Even when a catalogue raisonné is a model of integrity, the form of the oeuvre catalogue is such that it can only admit into the artist's official corpus those items that can be declared *authentic* – without altogether nullifying the meaning of that word. Precisely how can such authenticity be secured – and at what cost to an artist's process and purpose – when the artist has made it his or her business to challenge traditional understandings of authenticity and originality in art? What paradoxical – even contradictory – implications arrive from devoting a catalogue raisonné to the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres?

During the little more than eight years of his fully developed aesthetic practice, Gonzalez-Torres became known for works that correspond very little with one's preconceptions of what art is supposed to consist of, how it is supposed to be exhibited and distributed. The catalogue raisonné was not designed for mounds of candy, stacks of removable offset prints, billboards, plastic beads, or any number of other works that this artist fashioned in serial configurations from industrially manufactured units. In 1991, he could question an interlocutor about the paper stacks he had been creating for two years: "What is this thing? A two- or three-dimensional object? Is the work the certificate of authenticity or the piece itself?"⁵

Gonzalez-Torres was inclined to note his "exclusion from the circle of power where social and cultural values are elaborated," and to affirm in the same breath his "rejection of the imposed and established order."⁶ Still, he was no romantic when it came to the prospect of life on the margins. He insisted on creating works that, despite their many challenges to conventional methods of making and distributing art, could circulate with remarkable efficiency within the mainstream cultural economy. "For me," he once explained, "it makes a lot of sense to be part of the market. It would be very expected, very logical and normal and natural for me to be in alternative spaces," he remarked, perhaps in relation to his identity as a Cuban-born American gay man. "But it's more threatening," he continued, "that people like me are operating as part of the market – selling the work, especially when you consider that, yes, this is just a stack of paper that I didn't even touch. Those contradictions have a lot of meaning."⁷

"Untitled" (Strange Bird), 1993
Dimensions vary with installation
Installation in Los Angeles for
Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Traveling
at The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Los Angeles, 1994



Whether or not the market culture's economic and social relations and traditional hierarchies have ever truly been threatened by Gonzalez-Torres's art remains unclear. What is beyond doubt, however, is the fact that his works, which could be discrete to the point of near invisibility, have generated the kinds of paradoxes and contradictions that at least can highlight some of the ways in which power and influence permeate and structure the institutional framework of contemporary art. The prospect of a Gonzalez-Torres catalogue raisonné therefore casts a strange new light on the implications of certain creative decisions he made. And, at the same time, perhaps the continuing viability of the oeuvre catalogue itself may subtly be corroded through its association to the works that he made. How can this reference work define the "authentic" work, which is at the same time a sculptural object and a pile of offset prints, a single photograph and a series of billboards, a piece of candy, and a carpet of sweets? Is the work the sculptural stack? Or is it at the individual print that the spectator is permitted to take away? Can the catalogue define the work as both? And if the

"Untitled" (For Jeff), 1992

Billboard

Dimensions vary with installation

Installation in Stockholm for

Felix Gonzalez-Torres at Magasin 3,
Stockholm Konsthall, 1992

Front to back:

"Untitled" (Republican Years), 1992

Offset print on paper, endless copies

8 in. at ideal height x 48 x 34 in.

and

"Untitled", 1990

Offset print on paper, endless copies

25 in. at ideal height x 29 x 23 in.

and

A selection of framed photostats

Installation view of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*

at Le Consortium, Dijon, 2001



individual offset print is not the work then to what cultural limbo will it be consigned? Is it still a work?

These and other related questions also affect claims that have commonly been made in defense and praise of Gonzalez-Torres's art. Critic Susan Tallman, for instance, has spoken of "this generosity, this designed fluidity of the meaning, this repudiation of artistic control." Others have claimed that Gonzalez-Torres created works that were, on the one hand, "private," inasmuch as they were made for private ownership, and yet "public," inasmuch as the individual parts of such works can be freely distributed. How could the artist have rigged the details so that all of these claims could remain justified? And how does an "objective" catalogue arbitrate such apparently self-contradictory claims? Gonzalez-Torres himself could be decidedly playful in issuing pronouncements about such things. He would often play a particular spin on his art depending on his mood or the larger circumstances in which he found himself. In a recorded discussion with the artist Tim Rollins, he seemed to enjoy detailing the intricacies of his *modus operandi*:

Yes, an individual sheet of paper from one of the stacks does not constitute the 'piece' itself, *but in fact it is a piece*. At the same time, the sum of many pieces of the identical paper is the 'piece,' *but not really* because there is no piece only an ideal height of endless copies.

Then again, he might distill matters to the kind of provocative information that just barely permits business to be conducted: "After all, there is no original, only one original certificate of authenticity."⁸

More than once, Gonzalez-Torres alluded to the centrality of the certificate of authenticity in maintaining his aesthetic practice. As contractual agreements – signed by the artist, his dealer and the owner of the work – these documents offer a concise map of the limits to which Gonzalez-Torres felt he could go in toying with some of the linchpins of the mainstream cultural economy without resulting in his expulsion from it. The certificates declare the authenticity, even the uniqueness, of works that anyone can see are made of the most commonplace and readily available stuff. Consequently, they signaled the capriciousness of cultural processes by which certain objects (those associated with wealth and power) have come to inspire veneration, while other objects (those associated with more marginal lives) have been deemed worthless. Gonzalez-Torres took pride, as he said, in "trying to alter the system of distribution," and attempting to "investigate new notions of placement, production, and originality."⁹ It may therefore seem paradoxical in the extreme that the certificate of authenticity (of all things) should ultimately have become the keystone of his artistic practice.

From 1990 until Gonzalez-Torres's death, during the brief spell of his most remarkable accomplishments, the certificates of authenticity grew longer, their type more condensed, their details more carefully elaborated. For the most part, they make for terse and repetitive reading. But they do clarify the artist's method, track the progress of his determinations of relative value, and testify to the limits of his willingness to impose conditions and responsibilities upon collectors and museums – and his willingness to make concessions to them. And in some ways, many of these documents reflect Gonzalez-Torres's appreciation for irony, his wit

and even, at times, his joy in living. An early certificate of authenticity (1990) for one of the artist's very first stacks – “Untitled” (*Memorial Day Weekend*), 1989, abruptly declares: “This is a unique piece.”¹⁰ It further stipulates that it “may not be duplicated or exhibited in more than one place at a time.” A later certificate of authenticity pertaining to another stack reflects the growing interest of collectors and museums, and perhaps their increased confidence in risking the purchase price to acquire such unconventional works of art. This certificate has a new proviso stating that, with the owners consent, the artist may “include a simulation of this unique piece in an exhibition,” after which the “simulation” would be destroyed. Under these conditions, one could not simply assert the “uniqueness” of the work, and so a mystifying new statement appears: “The physical manifestation of this work in more than one place at a time does not threaten the work’s uniqueness since its uniqueness is defined by ownership.”¹¹

Even the earliest certificates include, as “part of the intention of the work,” a notation stipulating that third parties are allowed to take individual sheets from the stacks, adding definitively that “individual sheets do not constitute a unique piece nor can be considered the piece.”¹² This does leave open the possibility that even this endlessly copied print can be considered, in the artist’s own phrase, “still a piece.” What inferences can be drawn from the fact that a single print from a Gonzalez-Torres stack is “still a piece”? Clearly, these potentially countless copies could not share the same status in a catalogue raisonné with fully certified *unique* works. Should the individual sheets not be considered among the artist’s works because, in a rather particular way, their authorship is in question? As puzzling as this question may seem, there is reason to believe that it reflects Gonzalez-Torres’s own attitude toward these individual prints.

No other artists of Gonzalez-Torres’s generation devised a more inventive and poetic means of addressing the “death of the author,” and of integrating it and the concomitant, and fundamentally emancipatory idea of the “birth of the reader” into the structure of their work. In trying to describe the status of the single sheet from a Gonzalez-Torres stack, Susan Tallman calls it “a gift of the artist.” By way of explanation, she alluded to Marcel Duchamp’s 1957 speech on the creative act, in which he claimed that there are “two poles of the creation of art: the artist on the one hand, and on the other the spectator.” Duchamp described the spectator as an active cultural producer, who “brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his [sic] contribution to the creative act.”¹³ Similarly, the passersby who remove individual sheets from a Gonzalez-Torres stack inaugurate a collaboration with him in which they assist in determining the meaning and value, as well as the fate, of the individual print.¹⁴ It is because the individual sheets comprising a Gonzalez-Torres stack were conceived expressly to be removed by spectators whom they move into cultural collaboration that they cannot be considered the work of Gonzalez-Torres alone.

The fact that Gonzalez-Torres created the stacks, candy pieces, and billboards with third-party participation in mind also raises the compelling question of who is to pay for the artist’s many “gifts.” When collectors or museums become the bearers of the certificates of authenticity, are they obliged to incur the additional and potentially ongoing expense of maintaining the works as well? According to the terms of the certificates of authenticity, the owner of any work that is subject to public depletion has “the right” to regenerate the piece back to its ideal height

or weight. This implies that, given a sufficiently miserly owner, such works could pass silently out of existence. This voluntaristic language informs the certificates of authenticity accompanying the candy and cookie “spills.” But in these cases the utilitarian prose of the legal document generates an absurdist friction with the objects comprising the work to leaven the otherwise solemn proceedings: “The individual bubble gums and all individual bubble gums taken from the piece collectively do not constitute a unique work nor can they be considered the piece.” Such certificates also offer a parenthetical rationale for wanting to exercise one’s proprietary “right” to regenerate the work back to its ideal weight: “for the purpose of replacing bubble gums taken by third parties or to replace for freshness.”¹⁵ All certificates accompanying edible works offer specific advice regarding where to go and precisely what to buy to replenish eaten or stale provisions. But only one certificate adds this delightful proviso: “Fortune cookies of other producers may be used provided that the messages they contain are optimistic.”¹⁶

When offering fortune cookies, stacks of offset prints, strings of lights, or billboards as authentic and unique works of art to collectors and collecting institutions, it is necessary to maintain a delicate balance between “rights” and more burdensome “obligations.” The certificates of authenticity employ the rhetoric of owner’s rights and privileges to encourage – but never quite to require – the fulfillment of the duties (cultural and even civic) that Gonzalez-Torres’s works imply. Thus for each billboard project, it is the artist’s intention “for the owner to reproduce the specific image provided as a public billboard.” But the owners of such projects have “the exclusive right” to reproduce the billboard in public “as often as they like, at whatever scale they like, at however many locations they choose.” They also have the “right” to install their billboard directly on a wall “in the interior of their space – an actual billboard,” but only at one location.¹⁷ Gonzalez-Torres also wanted the public display of his billboard projects to be photographically documented at each outdoor location, and the certificates therefore pronounce such documentation “a conceptual part of the piece.” However, out of deference to the realities of life as it is lived – or to the limits of the commitment that prospective owners could realistically be expected to make – the certificates of authenticity do not require, but “request,” that the owner provide such documentation of the billboard at each of its public locations. The wording takes on marginally more force when addressing the owner’s right to consign the work to a museum for exhibition, in which case “it should be stated [to the consignee] that each location be photographed.”¹⁸

Ever since Marcel Duchamp demonstrated the power of art’s institutional frame to endow even a common bottle rack with the aura of art, that gesture has generally been understood more as a way of secularizing and demystifying the spaces and procedures of bourgeois art than as a way of asserting the dignity or beauty of the common object. But in Gonzalez-Torres’s adaptation of the Duchampian gesture this order of things is largely reversed. Gonzalez-Torres deployed the power of the aesthetic context to demonstrate how even the most commonplace, commercial products of industrial production – a pile of candies, a pair of electric clocks, strings of lights, curtains of plastic beads – can be saturated with personal associations, memories, and emotions. This aspect of his project recalls an important exhibition that Group Material staged in 1980 – seven years before Gonzalez-Torres would join the artist’s collaborative. *The*



Snapshot, 1993



Snapshot, Los Angeles, 1990

People's Choice (Arroz con Mango), featured a variety of images and objects borrowed from the residents in buildings neighboring Group Material's storefront on Manhattan's East Thirteenth Street. The characteristically sensitive installation included religious images, original paintings, snapshots, framed wedding and baby pictures, dolls in frilly dresses and the infamous poster of Robert Morris in chains, shades, and a Nazi-style military helmet. Significantly, the residents of East Thirteenth Street had volunteered this array of found ephemera, popular devotional images, personal mementos, and folk art in response to Group Material's invitation to submit "things that you personally find beautiful, the objects that you keep for your own pleasure, the objects that have a meaning for you, your family and your friends."¹⁹ The resulting exhibition underscored how dependent the modern construction of art has been on its systematic exclusion of the ephemeral, the everyday, and the sentimental. Gonzalez-Torres went on to develop an aesthetic practice that was predicated upon the rehabilitation of precisely those aspects of experience that have had no place in "serious" art. To the extent that the catalogue raisonné was conceived to define and protect the limits of such art, it therefore opposes certain implications of Gonzalez-Torres's practice.

Consider "*Untitled*", 1991, a billboard project consisting of an image of a rumpled, gossamer bed with two pillows bearing the imprints of a pair of sleepers' heads. Originally realized as the thirty-fourth installment of the Museum of Modern Art's Projects series, the billboard appeared simultaneously inside the museum and at twenty-four locations throughout metropolitan New York. I first saw the billboard at night from a distance at one of its outdoor settings above a building in the West Village. It had a rich, silvery look, which made the bedding appear to have been made of exceptionally soft cotton. Looking up from the street, it appeared as if it could have been a color photograph of a white bed in a pearl gray interior. Seen again, closer at hand on the wall of the museum, it was obvious that the billboard was nothing more than a greatly enlarged half-tone reproduction of an original photograph that could either have been in color or black and white. At the time, this seemed extraordinary. How could such a lowly, low-tech form of photomechanical reproduction have generated such an opulent visual experience? In this way, the billboard project underscored the dignity and expressive potential of the



Snapshot, Pebbles and Biko, 1994



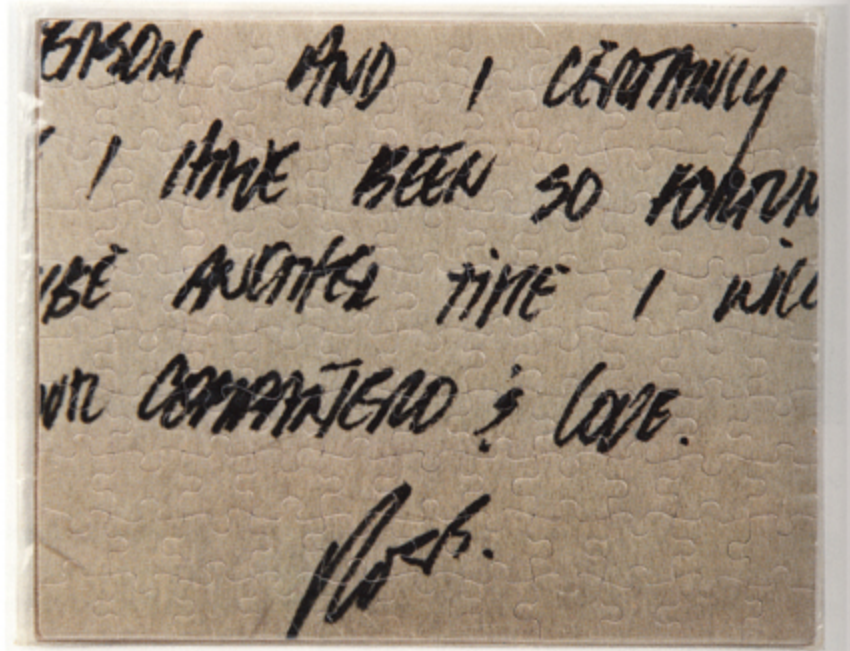
Snapshot, Miami, 1993

photograph that had served as the source of the billboard. But what seemed most remarkable about the photograph was its plainness – no fancy lighting, no art direction of the kind that could have served in an ad for a white sale, no costly printing. As such, it seemed indistinguishable from the many other snapshots that Gonzalez-Torres was known by friends and acquaintances for taking, a great many of which he sent to them through the mail as greetings and / or gifts with alternately laconic or loquacious inscriptions on the back.

Within the rarefied arena of “serious” culture, snapshots have been regarded as worthless, both because of their sentimental and personal associations, and because of the profligacy with which they are generated daily. As such, they could have no place in the catalogue raisonné. Yet it is the snapshot – the apparently casual photograph with all its sentimental and ritualistic associations intact – that Gonzalez-Torres repeatedly magnified to the scale of billboards, trusting in the ability of the image he chose to stimulate in the minds of passersby the construction of disparate meanings that are no less important for being so disparate; no less important for being so profoundly contingent and deeply rooted in personal emotion. It is snapshots as well that Gonzalez-Torres most often used to transform commercially into his jigsaw puzzles – those poetic condensations in plastic bags that, notwithstanding their extreme modesty, could sometimes manage to evoke the contingency, fragility, and complexity of meaning in a culture that Gonzalez-Torres so often indicted for its “explosion of information” and its “implosion of meaning.”

Given the constant willingness of this artist to challenge the implicitly hierarchical distinctions that regiment culture and fracture experience, it is disturbing to think that the catalogue raisonné can record only a small number of Gonzalez-Torres’s photographs. Included here are only those he selected to be signed and numbered, reconceived as billboards or puzzles, or printed on especially fine paper – and, of course, certified as *authentic*. Does the existence of this reference work, and the artist’s determination to function within the cultural economy that it typifies, therefore ascribe to his other photographs a kind of second-class status? Yes and no. I seriously doubt that anyone fortunate enough to have known Felix and to have received one of his photographs in the mail would feel that its absence from the catalogue raisonné in any way diminishes its importance. Sentimental value alone should be reason enough to

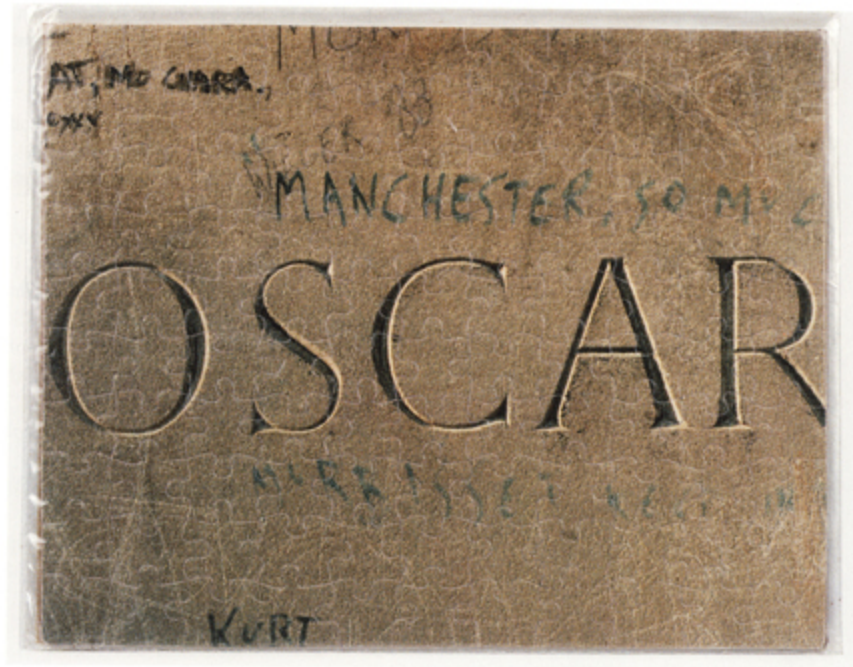
"Untitled" (Last Letter), 1991
C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag
7 1/2 x 9 1/2 in.
Edition of 3, 1 A.P.



cherish it. But, in addition, many of these photographs are seriously beautiful images: of the sea or the sky billowing with clouds at a magical time of the day; of cats tumbling with toys on the same bed you have seen uninhabited on billboards and in the museum; of seagulls in flight, of flowers or beaches strewn with tide-smoothed stones. Qualitatively these snapshots seem the equal of many of the photographic works that Gonzalez-Torres certified as *authentic*. Moreover, as snapshots their reproducibility ties them closely to an important aspect of his cultural practice as a whole.

Having created an oeuvre that consists so largely of industrially manufactured objects and serial configurations, Gonzalez-Torres made it that much more difficult for people with firsthand experience of his art ever to regard similar objects in quite the same way again. This emancipatory Duchampian effect can also make the catalogue raisonné appear defensive, as it shores up an official body of work to define the artist's legacy. Yet, Gonzalez-Torres did have a number of valid reasons for complying in the uniquely double-edged way that he did with the conventions of the mainstream cultural economy, which are enshrined in the catalogue raisonné. Aside from his understandable distaste for marginality, there were other important aspects of Gonzalez-Torres's practice that he could only have accomplished in concert with the art world as it is currently constructed. For instance, he conceived some works that would disappear as passersby remove their parts over time and reappear as new parts are provided. Especially in the United States, at present there is no way for such objects to exist outside of the system of private ownership. Gonzalez-Torres's practice therefore depends upon the survival of the cultural economy that his gestures simultaneously undermine. This paradox is central to his art. In a further departure from cultural convention, Gonzalez-Torres utilized this imperfect system to establish symbolic means of

"Untitled" (*Oscar Wilde's Tombstone*), 1989
C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag
7 1/2 x 9 1/2 in.
Edition of 3, 1 A.P.



admitting the inescapable contingency of life into art. And to the extent that his art embraces contingency, it violates the stability and permanence that the catalogue raisonné struggles to secure.

While Gonzalez-Torres's art entails a critique of modernist cultural ideologies that center on such concepts as originality, authenticity, and uniqueness, clearly he never intended to eradicate these concepts from culture. He wanted, instead, to create art that might pry these concepts loose from reified and fossilized meanings that have come to strangle them. He sought to realize new forms of originality, authenticity and uniqueness that for once might embrace, rather than deny the contingency of life and thereby diminish the dread that such impermanence inspires. He created art that admitted, as well, the methods and commonplace products of commercial production and mechanical reproduction. This was hardly a matter of being fashionably transgressive; it was a matter of this artist's refusal to add to the proliferation of artworks that serve – implicitly, through the burden of their exulted example – to debase the more commonplace objects, images, pastimes, and rituals that mean the world to so many people.

Gonzalez-Torres was therefore an ambitious artist, and though it has often been said that his art entailed a "letting go," a surrender to the fates (which on certain levels it did) this should blind no one to his attention to detail, and to the extraordinary degree of control he ultimately maintained over every detail of creating, installing, and even informing the critical reception of his art. It should therefore come as no surprise to learn the extent to which this artist required the controlled circumstances and the protection that only the highest cultural economy could provide. In this way Gonzalez-Torres put himself in the position of helping to reclaim the importance of things that – like art and love – help to defy estrangement, multiply joy and thereby renew life as it is lived.

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- ¹ Felix Gonzalez-Torres, interview by Tim Rollins, in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (New York: A.R.T. Press, 1993), 22. Excerpted in this volume, pp. 68–76.
- ² See: W. Eugene Kleinbauer, *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 44.
- ³ Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), viii.
- ⁴ Alex Ross, "Catalogue Raisonné," in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 6 (New York: 1996), 79.
- ⁵ Robert Nickas, "Felix Gonzalez-Torres: All the Time in the World," in *Flash Art*, 24, no. 161 (November–December 1991): 86. In this volume, pp. 39–51.
- ⁶ Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Not Quiet*, Galerie Jennifer Flay, Paris 1992, unpag.
- ⁷ Gonzalez-Torres, interview by Tim Rollins, 20.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, interview by Tim Rollins, 23, 22 (emphasis added by the author).
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, interview by Tim Rollins, 22.
- ¹⁰ Certificate of authenticity for "Untitled" (*Memorial Day Weekend*), 1989, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
- ¹¹ Certificate of authenticity for "Untitled" (*Aparición*), 1991, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
- ¹² Certificate of authenticity for "Untitled" (*Memorial Day Weekend*), 1989, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
- ¹³ Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Petersen (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 138, 140.
- ¹⁴ When Gonzalez-Torres conceded that the individual sheet is "still a piece," it is interesting to consider that he avoided the more heavily freighted term "work." In "From Work to Text" (1971), Roland Barthes intimately linked that term with the conventional understanding of the author / artist as a solitary creator who is uniquely empowered to determine its meaning and value. Inasmuch as Gonzalez-Torres avoided referring to the individual prints from a paper stack as "still a work," he was remaining consistent with Barthes's logic when the latter proposed the use of the more secular term, "text," in his effort to supplant the humanistic view of the creative act as a solitary endeavor with the merely *humane* understanding of cultural production as a social process. That said, art that, like Gonzalez-Torres's, acknowledges – even depends on – the role of the viewer in completing the creative act also imposes a subtle burden of responsibility on the viewer. This became painfully apparent when, on the occasion of the opening of Gonzalez-Torres's 1995 show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, visitors grabbed armfuls of prints only to trash them both in and outside of the museum's walls.
- ¹⁵ Certificate of authenticity for "Untitled" (*Welcome Back Heroes*), 1991, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
- ¹⁶ Certificate of authenticity for "Untitled" (*Fortune Cookie Corner*), 1990, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
- ¹⁷ Certificate of authenticity for "Untitled", 1992, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
- ¹⁸ Certificate of authenticity for "Untitled", 1992, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
- ¹⁹ Croup Material (letter to friends and neighbors of 13th Street, 1980), Political Art Documentation / Distribution Archive, New York, The Museum of Modern Art.