

tation in Gonzalez-Torres's work; his disidentificatory strategies of cultural production eschew representation for performance, specifically, disidentificatory performance.

Identity against Itself: Felix Gonzalez-Torres and the Limits of Multiculturalism

Like Sara/Ricardo and Pedro Zamora, Gonzalez-Torres was queer, *cubano*, and a person living with AIDS. His work never invoked identity elements in any obvious way. He depended on a minimalist symbolic lexicon that disidentified with minimalism's own self-referentiality. Gonzalez-Torres's minimalism evoked meaning and employed connotation, using the minimalist style to speak to a larger social order and to expanded issues of identity. His refunctioning of minimalism enabled him to rethink identity and instead opt for a disidentity.

I am not the first to mark his nuanced relationship to identity. Robert Storr, for instance, has stated:

In an art world too often obsessed with simplistic affirmations of origin or essence, Gonzalez-Torres eschews the role of Latin [*sic*] artist or queer artist or even activist artist, while using everything that his experience as a Cuban-born, politically committed gay man has taught him. What he has learned is that in America's presently chauvinist climate, loudly declaiming who you are frequently preempts showing an audience what you see.²

Although the artist does not speak from the space of an identity, his work is influenced and shaped by a vision that is always structured through his own multiple horizons of experience. This is true of almost anyone, but in the case of Gonzalez-Torres one needs to consider the ways in which his horizons of experience have been debased and stigmatized within the dominant channels of representation. By refusing to simply invoke identity, and instead to connote it, he is refusing to participate in a particular representational economy. He does not counter negative representations with positive ones, but instead absents himself and his work from this dead-end street. One need not turn to art critics to verify this point; the artist himself spoke eloquently on the subject. Indeed, in all his work, interviews, teaching, and public lectures, he actively rebelled against any reductive understanding of how his identity affects his cultural production. In his response to interviewer and fellow artist Tim Rollins, who asked about the the "content" of his work, Gonzalez-Torres articulated his own understanding of how identity formation is more complicated than most familiar models of multiculturalism:

TIM [ROLLINS]: I've heard a lot of grumbling, Felix, about the lack of an overt political or Latino content in your work.

FELIX [GONZALEZ-TORRES]: (*laughing*) Well, I just want to start by saying that the "maracas" sculptures are next! I'm not a good token. I don't wear the right colors. I have my own agenda. Some people want to promote multiculturalism as long as they are the promoters, the circus directors. We

have an assigned role that's very specific, very limited. As in a glass vitrine, "we"—the "other"—have to accomplish ritual, exotic performances to satisfy the needs of the majority. This parody is becoming boring very quickly. Who is going to define my culture? It's not just Borges and García Marquez, but also Gertrude Stein and Freud and Guy Debord—they are all part of my formation.³

Gonzalez-Torres foregrounded the complexity of contemporary hybrid identities. Given his Latino ethnicity, a sector of the arts community expected his work to be influenced and shaped by a strong identification with Latin American masters. Identifications with a very queer Anglo-American modernist, the father of psychoanalysis, or a French high theorist of the spectacle are not, according to the critics the interviewer invoked earlier in their dialogue, proper identifications for the artist.

When Gonzalez-Torres, out of frustration, asked, "Who is going to define my culture?" he was expressing a view shared by all the cultural producers considered in this study. The roles that are available within dominant culture for Latino/a and other minority identities are narrow, static, and fixed. These identity constructs are more often than not exotic rituals and performances commissioned by mainstream culture. These accounts of mainstream identity are, in most instances, unable to account for the specificity of black and queer lives or any other collision of two or more minority designations. Gonzalez-Torres's art insisted on speaking queerly and speaking Latino in ways that were oblique. Consequently, his work functioned as a formidable obstacle to facile conceptions of identity. He elaborated forms of representation premised on *invisibility*. Gonzalez-Torres invokes a disidentity that is predicated on transparency and the everyday instead of the more familiar models of minority identity that invoke exotic colors and rituals.

The interviewer's suggestion that Gonzalez-Torres's work is apolitical is a charge leveled at many minority cultural producers who do not critique the dominant culture through predictable routes. Gonzalez-Torres's work enables a discussion of the way in which dominant publicity, especially the interpellating call of multiculturalism—or, as I will specify, reductive multicultural pluralism—is challenged and obstructed by a series of disidentificatory maneuvers that are calibrated to forge an activist anti-identitarian counterpublicity.

Gonzalez-Torres's response to Rollins's question betrays a frustration with the way in which multicultural pluralism disarms the politics of specificity. Multicultural pluralism's rhetoric of inclusion homogenizes difference. Difference becomes part of the race, class, and gender mantra, essentially a form of sloganeering. John Guillory, in his study of the politics of canonization, identifies all the problems of the mantra in relation to the politics of canonization:

[T]he ubiquitous invocation of these categories of social identity continually defers their theoretical discrimination from each other on the behalf of whatever political work is being done by pronouncing their names in the same breath as