

**Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Specific Objects without Specific Form*,
Fondation Beyeler, 22 May – 29 August, 2010.**

Specific Objects without Specific Form is a travelling show of work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres curated by Elena Filipovic that has now reached the Fondation Beyeler on the outskirts of the Swiss city of Basel. The basic set-up of this show is highly intriguing: Fondation Beyeler is the second of three locations that will hold this retrospective of Gonzalez-Torres' works. For each manifestation of the show, the local curator has a relatively freehand as to how the works are installed and which ones are selected. At a midpoint through each exhibition an artist will be invited to re-curate the show at each location. They would be allowed to present the works differently, select some and deselect others, and impress their own stamp upon the exhibition in general. Overall, the aim of the travelling retrospective is to defy 'the idea of the exhibition as fixed and the retrospective as totalizing'.¹ And this is done in order to identify this peculiar curatorial practice with 'the oeuvre of an artist who put fragility, the passage of time, and the questioning of authority at the centre of his artwork'. The show started at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels (January to April 2010), and was rearranged by Dahn Vo; it's current stop, as mentioned is the Fondation Beyeler (May to August 2010), where it will be restaged by Carol Bove; the final stage on its itinerary will be the Museum Für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt am Main (January to April 2011), and Tino Seghal will this time intervene midway through the exhibition. Choosing these artists in particular has been a careful decision insofar as for all three Gonzalez-Torres is a crucial reference point for their respective practices.

In its current form (at the time of writing this review the exhibition had yet to be artistically reinstalled by Carol Bove), the exhibition is interspersed amongst the main collection for the most part rather than secluded within its own dedicated space. The juxtapositions this creates are striking and extraordinarily effective. Step into one room, and you find light bulbs—*Untitled (For Stockholm)*, 1992—hanging from the ceiling in a downwardly orientated cascade, thereby casting electric illumination into a room within which large

canvases by Barnett Newman and Jackson Pollock hang (fig. 1). The combination is carefully judged; too much light could have obscured these canvases, drowning their darker painterly surfaces beneath a reflected glow. In another room, in which paintings by Claude Monet and Gerhard Richter are displayed, there is a stack of posters. Visitors are invited to take a poster from the stack home with them. Gallery attendants are on hand to give each visitor a rubber band so that the poster can be carefully rolled up and then secured in position. In various rooms are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of sweets, generally laid out flat on the floor in the shape of a rectangle (the rectangles vary in size. The viewer is invited to take a sweet from the pile; but rather than gradually diminishing the pile, the pile is always maintained at the size—or rather, the weight—set by Gonzalez-Torres), but on one occasion they are piled against the wall. Most of the time the sweets are in silvery cellophane wrapping; on one occasion—the occasion that they are piled against the wall—they are wrapped in different colours, with each colour representing a different flavour.



Fig. 1. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (For Stockholm), 1992. Light bulbs, porcelain light sockets and extension cords. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Twelve parts: 42 ft. in length with 20 ft. of extra cord each. © Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Barnett Newman, *Here II*, 1965, Core-Ten Steel, 305.50 x 200.00 x 129.50 cm. Jackson Pollock, *Number 11*, 1951, Enamel on canvas, 146.00 x 352.00 cm. Daros Collection, Switzerland. © Pollock-Krasner Foundation / ProLitteris, Zürich. Barnett Newman, *The Way II*, 1969, Acrylic on canvas, 198.5 x 152.5 cm. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel © 2010 ProLitteris, Zurich. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler. Installation view of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form* at Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2010.

Not everything in this show is for the taking, however. A room given over to Francis Bacon paintings and Alberto Giacometti sculptures is split in two by a curtain made from gold beads that must be passed through in order to reach

the other side (fig. 2). The work, dated 1995, is simply titled *Untitled (Golden)*. Nonetheless, a certain embodied engagement on the part of the beholder is required; the beholder must use his hands to part the hanging strands of the curtain in much the same way that he must reach down to pick up a sweet. A different embodied response is demanded in another room: on the walls hang paintings by Cézanne and Picasso, but high above them, near the ceiling and stretching along the four walls of the room are words accompanied with dates: Mother 1986, Beyeler 2010, VCR 1978, Dad 1991, Bay of Pigs 1961, D-Day 1944, etc. This work is one of Gonzalez-Torres' word portraits, which refuse the depiction of the face as definitive of the supposedly individualizing portrait and instead posits our memories as the locus of portraiture—words and dates available to everyone in their own way, that nobody has ownership of, which have the power of conjuring personal images or recollections in the mind of the beholder. In the corridor that leads to the downstairs section of the Fondation Beyeler there is a video on a small television. On a black background words written in white text appear and then are replaced by other words. Again, this is another of Gonzalez-Torres' portraits, but this time utilizing a different medium.



Fig. 2. "*Untitled*" (*Golden*), 1995 Strands of beads and hanging device. Dimensions vary with installation. ©The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Francis Bacon, *Lying Figure*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 198,00 x 147,50 cm and *Portrait of George Dyer Riding a Bicycle*, 1966, Oil on canvas, 198 x 147.5 cm, Alberto Giacometti, *Homme qui marche II*, *Grande femme III*, *Grande femme IV*, 1960. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel © The Estate of Francis Bacon/ ProLitteris, Zurich. © FAAG/ 2010, ProLitteris, Zurich Photo: Serge Hasenböhler Installation view of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form* at Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2010

The downstairs section proffers a different mode of curatorial arrangement, using two large rooms and two corridor spaces. In the first of the corridor spaces (through which one must pass in order to access the other downstairs rooms) are three stacks—placed at different heights—of rubber welcome mats. Here the beholder is stymied: although their arrangement is similar to the takeaway posters upstairs, the beholder is actually not welcome to take from the pile; a sign warns that this work isn't to be touched. Inside the first of the large rooms is *Untitled (Placebo)* from 1991, another pile of sweets placed in the form of a rectangle, but here occupying a greater floor area than the other works in the show that are of the same ilk (fig. 3). Its wall label gives the basic sense of this work: 'Bourbons in silver cellophane. Endless supply. Ideal weight—454-544kg'. On the wall is *Untitled (31 days of Bloodworks)* which is comprised of 31 canvases, each one being 50.8 x 40.6cm, and made from an admixture of acrylic, gesso, graphite, and photographs on paper. Despite the motley of materials, however, each canvas resembles an Agnes Martin painting, with their delicate grids contiguous with the planar surface of the canvas.



Fig. 3: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled", 1991-1993. Billboard. Two parts: dimensions vary with installation and "Untitled" (Placebo), 1991. Candies individually wrapped in silver cellophane, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 1,000 - 1,200 lbs. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler © Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Installation view of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form* at Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2010.

The next corridor that adjoins the two rooms is actually a viewing space that looks into a room set aside for the restoration of artworks. The idea is that visitors can occasionally witness experts restoring Matisse's *Acanthes* (1953) through a large glass window. Placed subtly inside the restoration room on the left-hand wall are two silver-plated brass rings (42cm diameter) that touch each other. This is another work by Gonzalez-Torres, part of an edition of twelve produced in 1995 that are simply called *Untitled*. Contrasting with the rest of the works shown in this exhibition, this work doesn't share the same space as the beholder, but is instead separated from the viewer through the imposition of a glass window. This glass window, however, doesn't just physically demarcate the viewer from the work, but also creates a transparent boundary that segregates public and private (professional) spaces and, furthermore, displays this segregation. To that degree, *Untitled* is placed within a location that is normally institutionally private, but has been made visually observable to the public.

Out of all the spaces used in this exhibition, the final space is the dimmest with regard to lighting. Placed directly upon the floor is a serpentine line of forty-two light bulbs, called *Untitled (Summer)*, made by the artist in 1993. The low-wattage light emanating from these bulbs, barely enough to lighten the space, is reflected by two 75 x 25.5 inch mirrors placed on the wall, titled *Untitled (Orpheus, Twice)* (1991). The cumulative effect is almost to suggest that these works—light bulbs, on the one hand; mirrors, on the other—are a single piece. On the other two walls there are photographs. Overall, the cumulative effect of this room is very powerful, even if the photographs seem—perhaps intentionally—to disappear almost into darkness.

This retrospective as it currently stands, then, exists in two distinct but interlinked halves (it is essential, I think, to keep reminding oneself that each arrangement of the exhibition is only momentary, and hence ephemeral). On the one hand, we have works that are distributed amongst the permanent collection and disrupt that collection. Indeed, the fact that we are permitted to not only touch but also take away the sweets and posters renders the works

in the permanent collection somewhat aloof, untouchable, and resistant to the viewer's presence; this underscores a kind of '*noli me tangere*' quasi-spiritual logic common to traditional modes of address in exhibition displays. In comparison to Gonzalez-Torres, even Richter's *1024 Colours* and the photo-paintings seem to take on a social-experiential quality that they are famed for manifestly resisting: namely, the auratic.² This seems to me an almost brave decision insofar as the disruption of the largely modernist collection of paintings and sculptures by an artist associated with the heyday of postmodernism is, to an extent, a critique of the assumptions and narratives incorporated within modernist art production.

On the other hand, however, the second half of the exhibition is more self-contained, and it's interesting to note that—with the exception of *Untitled (Placebo)*—there is nothing that can be touched or removed here. The combination of rubber welcome mats and an exhibition label exhorting us not to touch those mats sets the tone for the second half of the present exhibition. When we step into what is more or less the 'final' room of the exhibition (the exhibition as a whole, though, is not arranged according to chronological narrative and artistic development like most retrospectives; and works sharing the same space are generally not contemporaneous), its dimmed lighting, which contrasts with the well-lit rooms throughout the rest of the exhibition, gives the space as a whole a rarefied atmosphere akin to a crypt beneath a cathedral (that one needs to descend to the lower floor of the Fondation Beyeler to reach this room probably helps to generate this perception).

We have, then, a significantly complex exhibition that demands a range of different types of engagement from the viewer. We might, for instance, consider the basic corporeal engagement required of the viewer: it's notable that sometimes the viewer is asked to bend down, other times to crane his neck upwards, sometimes to roll a poster, sometimes to unwrap a sweet, sometimes not to touch, sometimes to read, sometimes to look. And as it stood when I saw it, there appeared to be a relatively clear-cut division between the disruptive strategies and the more classical single-artist retrospective approach (which I described as the two halves of the exhibition)

in the pre-reinstalled exhibition. And this dynamic would potentially change when Carol Bove performs her role. But this dynamic is largely specific to the manifestation of the exhibition at Fondation Beyeler. After all, WIELS has no permanent collection, preferring to style itself as a laboratory for different contemporary art exhibitions, while the Museum Für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt am Main does have a permanent collection mostly dedicated to contemporary—basically starting with 1960s Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptualism, and then tracing their legacies to the present—and emerging artists (the Museum has connections with the prestigious Städelschule Art Academy), meaning that their collection has a significantly different impetus to that held by the Fondation Beyeler.

No matter how much I enjoyed the exhibition, though, there are fundamental weaknesses in this showing of Gonzalez-Torres' works and, more precisely, in the way they are threaded through the main collection of the Fondation Beyeler. One such weakness is that the opportunity—or, even, the necessity—to self-reflexively analyse at a curatorial level this weaving together of Gonzalez-Torres and these icons of modernism has not been taken in any explicit sense. What does it mean to divide a room displaying bronzes by Alberto Giacometti and canvases by Francis Bacon through the insertion of a gold bead curtain produced by Gonzales Torres? In responding to that question, one could speculate, for instance, that the playfully almost tawdry curtain made up of golden coloured beads comments upon the high economic values ascribed to Giacometti and Bacon by the conjoined historicization of modernism and the art market. Or we might suggest this curtain somehow undercuts the existential pathos associated with these two giants of twentieth-century art. Or we could take an alternative approach—or perhaps rather an additional approach—and note that the gold curtain renders somewhat difficult that mode of gallery-based embodied visual scanning that seeks regularities or logical juxtapositions amongst artworks that have been purposely gathered within a single determinate space—regularities and logical juxtapositions that guarantee the cogency of bringing these particular works together. The golden beaded curtain serves as a veil that not only divides but

also obscures, and, in line with the general function of beaded curtains, simultaneously permits and prevents access.

Such self-reflexivity should be carried out within this curatorial context not simply because self-reflexivity in itself is a desideratum, but also for the subdivision of a space by a gold beaded curtain not to appear a mere formal or even arbitrary decision. That is not to contend that the curators must determine every critical effect in the way they have staged this show; beholders must carry out their share of the work, too, and beholder and curator alike should be alive to unexpected transactions and correspondences deriving from these combinatorial procedures. It is important, though, that the curators should play a greater or more explicit role in facilitating the beholder's capacity for artistic and critical reflection than they seem to do so here. But there is a further reason why a degree of greater explicit self-reflexivity would arguably be beneficial here: given that one of the key elements of this travelling exhibition is that it would be rearranged by an artist midway through each showing, then it's certainly arguable that the full significance of the work *after* it has been rearranged—or even the significance of the rearranging—may not be apparent if the prior arrangement has not been discursively analysed first. Likewise, it becomes more difficult to consider the particularity of this travelling show momentarily residing at the Fondation Beyeler in theoretical relation to the other spaces this show has travelled to when that self-reflexive examination has not been carried out.³ Although, to be sure, it is entirely possible that the initial state of the exhibition can only become open to the level of explicit self-reflexivity I am advocating here only after the artist's displacement of the show or after the exhibition has completed all its stages.

Another unfortunate oversight is the inadequate contextualization of Gonzalez-Torres' works themselves. His involvement in Group Material is mentioned, but the nature of that involvement and the political responsibilities it entailed remains undeclared. Any beholder encountering Gonzalez-Torres' work for the first time, or broadly unfamiliar with the political situation of North America circa 1988-1995—the era of the so-called “culture wars” typified by fierce debates over the state funding provided by the National Endowments of

the Arts, and negative discriminatory attitudes towards gay subjectivity and rights brought out by the AIDS crisis—may leave him or her with a heavily skewed perspective upon Gonzalez-Torres' oeuvre. For example, the beholder might view being allowed to take from the 'endless supplies' of sweets and posters from a generalized locus of relational aesthetics whereby specific and concrete political invention is masked by a wider concern for social networks and participation as such. By the same token, the viewer may well not realize that the weight of the sweets is keyed into the weight of Gonzalez-Torres' lover, Ross, whose body was being eaten away by AIDS. With the sweets functioning as metaphors for the human body, by removing a sweet we contribute to the body being eaten away. And yet, the sweets, in being an 'endless supply' also serve as a psychological defence mechanism: we can eat the body away in the manner that AIDS does, but that body will continuously regenerate itself. In not knowing this, it might be contended that a vital emotional dimension of the artwork is rendered invisible. Along similar lines, the hypothetical viewer would surely struggle, perhaps, to decode fully the red poster they have picked up from the room where Picasso and Cézanne paintings are hung; the words emblazoned on that poster—"Helms," "Hope," "Hate"—might strike the viewer as free-floating signifiers rather than being attached to particular contexts. And indeed, this lack of contextualization can actively preclude or merely reduce any potential interpretative reading of these red posters in relation to the Picasso and Cézanne canvases residing in that space rather than initiate any such reading..

This is where the conjunction of three large canvases by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Gonzalez-Torres' sweets in the foyer of the Fondation Beyeler seems like a great opportunity to contemplate their respective oeuvres in tandem with each other, but once again this has not been taken. Basquiat (born 1960) and Gonzalez-Torres (born 1957), though very close in age, are not quite perfect contemporaries insofar as Basquiat's career ends in 1988 just as Gonzalez-Torres' is generally recognized to have properly started. But in any case their proximate time frames, the fact they both worked in New York and came from ethnic groups different from the white middle class New

York artworld, and their early deaths (Basquiat died in 1988 from a heroin overdose; Gonzalez-Torres in 1996 from complications arising from AIDS), demands some address. Importantly, such an analysis would not only locate commonalities but also significant divergences between the two artists. For instance, one might make hay with the old postmodern conflict between post-conceptual art practices and painterly or expressive forms; or one might explore the relation of graffiti's shift from an oppositional urbane subcultural aesthetic to its acceptance within commercial galleries to Gonzalez-Torres politicized engagements with public and gallery spaces. And so on and so forth.

This lost opportunity has many explanations. It is certainly apiece with Fondation Beyeler's tendency of juxtaposing two artists within a single space without a justificatory explanation stating why these two artists have been brought together. For the most part these juxtapositions are perfectly obvious to an art-historically literate crowd. There's nothing peculiar at all in paintings by Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman being roommates, and while the co-presence of Giacometti and Bacon is slightly less immediate, then their linkage in this context is fairly cogent; much less clear is Gerhard Richter, whose conceptualist *1024 Colours* hangs opposite a horizontally long Monet canvas, or, in another room, Richter's *Feldweg* and *Abstrakt Bild* occupying a wall near a Van Gogh's *Champ aux meules de blé*, (1890). But it is also partly the case that the foyer itself where Basquiat and Gonzalez-Torres are shown together evinces a degree of uncertainty in its conception. Whether or not one has come to visit Fondation Beyeler in order to see the Basquiat retrospective as well as the Gonzales-Torres show, these three canvases positioned in close proximity to Gonzalez-Torres are the first Basquiat canvases the viewer confronts. And yet, the foyer is expressly—if the map of the Fondation Beyeler is anything to go by—not the first room, the last room, or even considered part of the Basquiat exhibition as such. Instead, the foyer is a kind of 'taster'—literally when it comes to Gonzalez-Torres' sweets—for the two exhibitions running concurrently. Admittedly, the foyer does introduce by means of wall text and takeaway information sheets the Gonzalez-Torres exhibition, but the introduction ultimately serves to take us into the main collection, thereby

generating the consequence of virtually disassociating Gonzalez-Torres from Basquiat.

All that being said, perhaps another reason why the exhibition lacks manifest curatorial self-reflexive analysis is surely that the exhibition is not simply a retrospective as such (to that extent, the Basquiat retrospective happening under the same roof is something of an object lesson in what constitutes a traditional retrospective); rather, it is an intervention *in* or *amongst* a pre-existing collection of mostly modernist paintings and sculptures in which the categories of painting and sculpture are normally seldom challenged.⁴ *Qua* intervention, Gonzalez-Torres' works are aligned with some of the more subtle types of institutional critique strategies; think, for instance, of Daniel Buren, or Michael Asher's famous displacement of the *George Washington* statue for the 73rd American Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979. And indeed, Gonzalez-Torres' career intersects with artists whose oeuvres belong, more or less, to the second generation of institutional critique practices (Louise Lawler, who Gonzalez-Torres worked with, might be considered the bridge straddling the first and second generation; Andrea Fraser, Julie Ault, and Renée Green belong to the same approximate generation as Gonzalez-Torres). Yet, having died in 1996, the intervention is not Gonzalez-Torres' own, but rather the curatorial team at the Fondation Beyeler. Thus in deciding to exhibit these works the way that they have done, it might be contended that they have taken upon themselves a certain discursive responsibility to account for the curatorial decisions rendered by them. Within a show determined by a high level of curatorial involvement, both in its concept and implementation, as well as the artist's obvious absence, then it's almost as if the name "Felix Gonzalez-Torres" itself serves as an 'author function' that normalizes the curator's role and masks the curator.⁵ And insofar as the impetus of Gonzalez-Torres' work is not solely orientated towards institutional critique but is also responsive to the AIDS crisis and battles over gay rights, and insofar as these remain ongoing issues across the globe, then the near decontextualization of this work is deeply disappointing indeed and, at worst, morally questionable. That is to say, I worry that there is inherent within this mode of display facets which nullify and render almost invisible political issues

of AIDS, sexuality, and censorship in such a way that contingently dovetails with the attempts of some on mostly the rightwing of politics to make these issues invisible (generally by burying them underneath a normative morality premised upon straight sexuality).

However, these are all issues that are not entirely at odds with Gonzalez-Torres' practice and, moreover, the actual analysis of the exhibition looks set to happen retrospectively. With regard to the first point, Gonzalez-Torres frequently took an intensely subtle and poignant approach to AIDS activism that distinguishes him from the considerably more forcefully direct presentations by ACT UP.⁶ For example, as part of his exhibition *Projects 34: Felix Gonzalez-Torres* held at MoMA the artist placed twenty-four billboard posters around New York in 1992. Each poster was a photograph of pillows and sheets on a double bed; the sheets were rumpled and imprinted traces of the heads that rested upon those pillows were legible. Because the posters were unadorned without any kind of textual explanation, anybody passing by might not have comprehended the billboard as an artwork connected to an exhibition at MoMA, or even understood the billboard's meaning. Double beds designate an intimate space that can be shared in sleep, in togetherness, in love making. This particular bed, though, is Gonzalez-Torres' own; one pillow is his, the second belonging to his lover Ross. Tragically, Ross had died from AIDS in 1990; the imprinted trace of his body upon the bed, betokening an absence, stems not so much from him having arisen from sleep but from his death. His traces remain, but he will never return to his lover's bed again.

The second point will come into action after the completion of the final stage of the exhibition in Frankfurt near the end of April 2011. A catalogue is planned that will document the six manifestations of the exhibition and include interviews with the artists who have participated in restaging the works. To a large extent, the curatorial experiment performed by this exhibition has correspondences to the tripartite exhibition of Sigmar Polke works that was held at the Hamburg Kunsthalle between March 2009 and January 2010. Because of the format of the exhibition, in which the curators analysed and displayed Polke's little discussed *Wir Kleinbürger* works produced while

staying at the Gaspelshof—a farm-cum-commune near Willich—from three successive perspectives (Part One: Clique, March to June 2009; Part Two: Pop, July to October 2009; and Part Three: Politics, October to January 2010), with each perspective bringing the works together in different combinations and with different effects, the curators found it impossible to create an accompanying catalogue until near the end of the nine-month exhibition. Any such catalogue would have ossified the works themselves and the essentially dynamic and experimental curatorial process in a manner that would have thoroughly betrayed those works and that process. The same problematic, then, seems to stand for the present Gonzalez-Torres exhibition.

Nonetheless, even though that on the basis of this curatorial format that to make a catalogue now would go at against the grain of the intentions of this exhibition, I still feel that each particular version of the exhibition can address some of the issues I have raised here from its own localized vantage point. After all, each version of the exhibition has to work on its own terms, within its own situation, as well as within its long term process. Such a process is both exciting and frustrating. And I await the endpoint with plenty of eagerness. In the meantime, there is much to enjoy in this present exhibition of work by a major artist whose career was cut far too short.

However, in having said all this, it's important to acknowledge there is a structural problem with my own review of this exhibition. Because the exhibition is premised upon the refusal of totalization and the traditional conventions of the retrospective, because the actual showing of Gonzalez-Torres' work is staged as *series* rather than *event*, then this review is at best a snapshot arresting a moment in time, thereby representing the perspective of a relatively singular experience. Under that light, it's evident that this review, while hopefully responsive to a particular stage and staging of the exhibition, is nonetheless condemned to a certain failure in matching the concept and ambition of this exhibition as series. Indeed, the current stage of the exhibition under review here gains considerable significance from both its previous two stages in Brussels and the three that are yet to come, and without being able to prejudge how the exhibition continues, and without possessing direct

experience of its previous arrangement, then it's difficult to gauge the adequacy of this specific review process. In conclusion, then, it is hoped that this review will elicit a postscript of sorts within *Rebus: A Journal of Art History and Theory* after the completion of *Specific Objects without Specific Form* in Frankfurt in 2011 and after the release of the catalogue, with different authors reflecting upon and reviewing different manifestations of the show.

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¹ These statements are taken from the wall text in the exhibition space.

² See Walter Benjamin's oft-quoted statement that 'We define the aura . . . as the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be'. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938 -1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, 2003): 255.

³ This is quite important, one might argue, especially insofar as the travelling exhibition is common to curatorial practice. For example, also on show in Basel at the Kunstmuseum and at the same time as the Gonzalez-Torres exhibition is a mid-career retrospective of Gabriel Orozco. This show originated in New York at the Museum of Modern Art, then arrived in Basel. After that it will travel to the Pompidou in Paris and then will end its journeys in London's Tate Modern. To a degree, although the travelling Orozco exhibition is in line with the artist's own peripatetic lifestyle, the notion of a 'travelling show' is not being considered as such. But in the Gonzalez-Torres exhibition, the fact that it is travelling, and that it is intentionally responsive to local contexts, means that it should be able to not only thematize and analyse its own structure of identity and difference that it generates through travelling and site-specific interventionism; it should also be capable of exposing what is at stake in other travelling exhibitions.

⁴ Embedded within this are questions about the historical and conceptual relationship between modernism and postmodernism exemplified by positioning Gonzalez-Torres works within gallery spaces housing quintessentially modernist painting and sculptures. These questions are further extended when one considers that the first and final locations for the exhibition are in institutions that have a commitment towards contemporary art, or, more broadly, the contemporary. Given that in recent months the notion of *contemporary art* or *contemporaneity* has been a matter of sustained critical debate in the pages of *Texte zur Kunst*, *October*, and *e-flux*, as well as in Terry Smith's *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009) and Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008). Within these debates 'contemporaneity' seems to have become a third term in the historio-chronological sequence 'modernism, postmodernism, and contemporaneity' (or, in some quarters, a suggested replacement for the term and concept of postmodernism *tout court*), then we might comprehend the various stages of *Specific Objects without Specific Forms* as tapping into these rather large issues. See *Texte zur Kunst* 74, June 2009; *October* 130, Fall 2009; *e-flux* 12, December 2009, downloadable at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/96>; and *e-flux* 12 (part two), January 2010, downloadable at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/issue/12>.

⁵ The concept of the 'author function' is discussed by Michel Foucault in 'What is an Author?' in Donald Preziosi (ed.), *The Art of Art History* (Oxford and New York: University of Oxford Press, 1998): 299-314.

⁶ Interviews with Gonzalez-Torres evince the importance for him of Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author', open-ended notions of textuality, and the foundational role of the viewer

and gallery. Regarding the viewer, he remarks to Hans Ulrich Obrist in 1994: 'In the same way, I tell the viewer, "you are responsible for the final meaning of this piece of paper that is part of this stack." And that's problematic on many levels, because what is the piece? Is the piece the simple sheet of paper or is the piece the stack? Well, it could be both, and I never define which one is which. I like that "in-betweenness" that makes the work difficult to define, hopefully'. See Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews, vol. 1*, ed. Thomas Boutoux (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2003): 313.