

Becoming homosexual, for Foucault, would then be a political project, a social movement of sorts, that would ultimately help us challenge repressive gender hierarchies and the structural underpinnings of institutions. Thus, mark Sean and Pedro's union as something new, a new form that is at the same time formless from the vantage point of established state hierarchies.²⁸ The new form that Sean and Pedro's performances of self brings into view is one that suggests worlds of possibility for the minoritarian subject who experiences multiple forms of domination within larger systems of governmentality.

When considering Zamora's lifework one is struck by his accomplishments, interventions within the dominant public sphere that had real effects on individuals (such as the woman from South Carolina whose letter was cited at the beginning of this chapter), and other interventions as an activist. Zamora tested positive for HIV while still in high school, a few years after he arrived in the United States with his parents and two siblings in 1980 with some one hundred thousand other Cuban refugees who sailed to Florida in the Mariel boat lift. His activism began not long after he tested positive for the virus. Zamora testified before the Presidential Commission on AIDS and twice before congressional committees, took part in a public service ad campaign for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and was appointed to a Florida government panel on AIDS. He also gave many interviews in the print and electronic media. I first encountered Zamora before his tenure on MTV. I saw him and his father on a local Spanish-language television news program in south Florida while I was visiting my parents during college. As I sat in the living room with my parents, I marveled at the televisual spectacle of this young man and his father, both speaking a distinctly Cuban Spanish, on television, talking openly about AIDS, safe sex, and homosexuality. I was struck because this was something new; it was a new formation, a being for others. I imagined countless other living rooms within the range of this broadcast and I thought about the queer children who might be watching this program at home with their parents. This is the point where I locate something other than the concrete interventions in the public sphere. Here is where I see the televisual spectacle leading to the possibility of new counterpublics, new spheres of possibility, and the potential for the reinvention of the world from A to Z.

Performing Disidentity: Disidentification as a Practice of Freedom

There are the limits to the strategies, tactics, and performativities that I have been exploring. There is also more to say about disidentification, its nuances, and its intricacies. This chapter will consider questions of publicity and privacy. It will also further elaborate the concept of counterpublicity. Questions that emerge around the public/private thematic will lead me to interrogate "the place" of multiculturalism within the politics of disidentification. I will follow these threads from the preceding chapter on Pedro Zamora's work by considering two other cultural workers (one a conceptual artist, the other a transgender sex worker turned evangelist) who shared similar identity coordinates with Zamora and, more important, employed disidentificatory performances to do their work.

By "limits" I mean something other than failures. Instead, I want to call attention to some of the material and psychic forces that work against the disidentifying subject. I wish to disarm a *precritical* celebratory aura that might attach itself not only to disidentification but also to some of this book's other key words: *hybridity*, *queerness*, *migrancy*, *autoethnography*, and so forth. Let me be clear about one thing: disidentification is about cultural, material, and psychic survival. It is a response to state and global power apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation. These routinized protocols of subjugation are brutal and painful. Disidentification is about managing and negotiating historical trauma and systemic violence. I have gone to great lengths to explicate, render, and imagine complicated strategies and tactics that enact minoritarian subjectivity. I have wanted to posit that such processes of self-actualization come into discourse as a response to ideologies that discriminate against, demean, and attempt to destroy components of subjectivity that do not conform or respond to narratives of universalization and normalization. The disidentifying subject is not a flier who escapes the atmospheric force field

of ideology. Neither is she a trickster figure who can effortlessly come out on top every time. Sometimes disidentification is insufficient.

Failed Transformations

In the Introduction, I wrote that disidentification is not an appropriate strategy for all minoritarian subjects all of the time. *The Transformation* (1996), a follow-up by Susana Aiken and Carlos Aparicio to their powerful 1990 documentary *The Salt Mines* (1990), will serve as an example to help me illustrate the "limits of disidentification."

The Salt Mines worked for me as something of an antidote to Jennie Livingston's famous documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1991). I programmed the film for a queer film collective I worked with in North Carolina in the early 1990s. *Paris Is Burning* presented a highly sensationalized rendering of Latino and black transvestite and transsexual communities. *The Salt Mines* and *The Transformation*, two texts that have received far less critical consideration, have offered a narration of transgender communities of color in New York City that has resisted the impulse to glamorize the experience in the way that *Paris Is Burning* does.¹ Poverty and disease, for instance, have not been sacrificed in these videos for the sake of spectacle and style, as they were in Livingston's film. Thus, I think of the Aiken and Aparicio videotapes as antidotes of sorts to the overexposed *Paris Is Burning*. They offer a much starker and less glamorous rendering of the minoritarian subject: specifically Latino transsexuals. The "salt mines" of the video's title is taken from the name given by its inhabitants to the parking lot of a New York City salt reserve that had been converted into a makeshift transgender village. The video documents the lives of different transvestites and transsexuals who lived in the broken-down garbage trucks at the salt reserve lot. This community of homeless queers of color is not shown voguing in spectacular balls. Instead, the video depicts the queens cooking hamburgers over a campfire, shooting up female hormones, and "reading" each other. Many of the salt mine's population are on crack and a large number are sex workers. Beyond these activities, the queens of the salt mines do quite a bit of talking. One of the best talkers is one of the video's most engaging documentary subjects: Sara. Sara is a transgendered subject who was born male and has been shooting female hormones over the course of many years. Sara and the other queens of *The Salt Mines* are preyed on by missionaries who are interested in winning their souls. The queens are highly skeptical of these mostly white evangelists whose notion of salvation is decidedly antiques and homophobic.

The Transformation begins with a letter sent to Aiken and Aparicio by Sara, who now, four years after the events depicted in *The Salt Mines*, has relocated to Texas and is going by the name Ricardo. Ricardo is Sara's male birth name. He has taken on this name in the same fashion that he has taken on a heterosexual identification and a conversion to fundamentalist Christianity. Ricardo has even gone so far as to marry a woman from his church group. Even though Sara had breasts and had undergone years of guerrilla hormone therapy, he is trying to masculinize himself to fit into his

new community. This masculinization includes having his implants removed, cutting his hair, and renouncing his homosexual desire.

His job, it would seem, is to be a good husband to his wife and work with the white male evangelical soul hunter who snared him. He works as an assistant and a walking "example." In the course of the documentary, Ricardo and the white man go after two of his former friends from *The Salt Mines* and fail to convert either. One queen, who has just gotten out of jail, rejects the evangelical proposition, explaining that she can never pretend to live as a man. The other queen is no longer living on the street and has returned to her family, who now accept her as a sister, daughter, and aunt. Ricardo strikes out in both his attempts to convert his former friends.

It is not difficult to understand why Ricardo has made this transformation. The chief reason is his health status. Ricardo was living with AIDS. His already tragically shortened life span would have been even more painful if he had continued to live on the street in poverty and malnourished. His choice to leave the street for the relative warmth and comfort of the materially supportive church community is an act of survival that can possibly be understood as a disidentification. Ricardo worked with and on the ideology of born-again Christianity, attempting to benefit from its rewards (material support, supportive communities, companionship) while resisting total co-optation by that discourse. Ricardo's disidentification, like other forms, entailed a series of negotiations. The cost of Ricardo's "transformation" was his breasts, his homosexual desire, and his queerness. He tried his best to perform normative heterosexuality. The interviews with his wife and other members of the Texas community indicated that he had made serious inroads—he was accepted and nurtured. Yet at what cost? It is clear that Ricardo compromised a great deal to reformulate his identity into a form that was legible to and compatible with born-again Christianity.

Yet, Ricardo's attempt at disidentification failed. The video ends with a chilling monologue in which a tired and infirm Ricardo seems especially bitter and sad. His final wish is not to appear ridiculous to others in his illness. He admits that he never successfully negotiated his desire—that he missed the touch of other men tremendously. This last monologue was recorded shortly before his death. The viewer cannot help but feel the stinging sadness of Ricardo's life—compromising his self to the dominant ideology cost too much. The sadness is underscored by a juxtaposition of images of Sara in *The Salt Mines* laughing and indignant in the face of overarching adversity and heartbroken Ricardo's final video monologue.

Sara/Ricardo was not a queer activist like Pedro Zamora, but a traditional documentary subject—which is not to say that he did not, like Zamora, attempt to mess with the protocols of documentary practice. Ricardo's church knew of the previous documentary and Sara's role in it and attempted to use the video artists Aiken and Aparicio to spread "Ricardo's message/example" in a new documentary. Aiken and Aparicio took the church and Ricardo's bait, yet clearly had no intention of being reeled in. Instead of chronicling the triumph and salvation of Ricardo's new life, they

recorded the way in which he failed to convert his fellow "salt mines" alumni, the difficulties of his marriage, his persistent yet stifled desire for other men, and the sadness of his death. Ricardo's disidentification was not in the service of a larger practice of freedom like the disidentifications enacted by Zamora. He disidentified with the church that used him, the "salt mines" community, and his own desire as a man who desired other men. He attempted to refashion himself in an attempt to negotiate a homophobic public sphere and a world of poverty that would accelerate his illness.

Any comparison of Sara/Ricardo with Zamora requires a consideration of the class differential between the two. Both emigrated in the Mariel boat lift of 1980. Zamora, a small boy at the time, was raised in the working-class Cuban community of Hialeah. Less is known about Sara/Ricardo. We do know that he came of age in Cuba, and it is likely that he was one of the many homosexuals who were ejected from the island during the boat lift. His immigration eventually led to the life of homelessness depicted in *The Salt Mines*. Although Zamora was essentially working-class, he had access to channels of representation that Sara/Ricardo could never have dreamed of. Zamora's relative class privilege afforded him opportunities and possibilities denied to the older immigrant. It might be hypothesized that strategies and practices that constitute disidentification are, for the most part, more readily available to subjects whose class privilege gives them access to systems of representation.

The story this chapter tells shifts to yet another Cuban-American. Felix Gonzalez-Torres immigrated to the United States in the 1970s via Spain and was able, unlike both Zamora and Sara/Ricardo, to pursue a higher education. He rose to fame in the art world during the late 1980s. He died at the zenith of his fame in January 1996. Gonzalez-Torres rejected the general strictures of identity and what he understood as the constraints of multiculturalism. Sara/Ricardo had no access to the spheres of publicity and culture that Zamora or Gonzalez-Torres operated within. Yet, all three Cuban-Americans, operating in vastly different fields of television, evangelical religion, and the New York City art world, all used disidentificatory performances to remake the self. Whereas Zamora worked to publicize his minoritarian identity within the dominant public sphere while disidentifying with his televisual "Real World" and Sara/Ricardo denied and rejected his minoritarian identification in hopes of crafting a majoritarian self, Gonzalez-Torres rejected the very tenets of identity. Instead, through his disidentificatory performances of self, he achieved what I would provisionally call *disidentity*. I am not positing disidentity as a sort of "anti-identity." Instead, I offer the concept as a heuristic example that aims to help explain a subject such as Gonzalez-Torres, who rejected any route understanding of "identity" but nonetheless called for what I see as a *reconstructed* identity politics. The artist's particular version of identity politics critiqued simplistic pluralism and weak multiculturalism as it called for an engagement with the *question of identity*. Although any of the artist's images might invoke a queer or Latino life-world for minoritarian cognoscenti, such meanings, while central, are not the only available ones. Identity is never pinned down by represen-

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 comotatin, 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

practice. But what work is that? What political work requires the deferral of the other, despite the fact that one must always gesture to some future, as yet unelaborated, analysis of the *relations* between race, class and gender?⁴

The mantra thus smoothly positions minority identity designations within a syntax of equivocations that defers the work of theorizing relations of power. In this book, I have insisted that critical hermeneutics and political projects that are not sufficiently intersectional are grossly inadequate to the project of mapping and analyzing the social. Optics that are not sufficiently intersectional are thus blinded by severe cultural myopia. Intersectionality should not be confused with multiculturalism. Intersectionality is primarily concerned with the *relations* between different minoritarian coordinates (which include the "mantra" but also allow for nodes of difference that cannot be anticipated). Intersectionality does not, once again, defer analyses, as Guillory suggests multiculturalism does. Instead, it insists on a theoretical apparatus that is located in the "now."

This is not automatically to foreclose the project of multiculturalism. In fact, a crucial distinction needs to be posited between multicultural pluralism (or weak multiculturalism) and what Wahneema Lubiano has referred to as a "radical" multiculturalism. Lubiano admits that multiculturalism can and has often been appropriated by reactionary and liberal ideologies. She nonetheless locates a kernel of transformative political possibility in multiculturalism, leading to a politics that she describes as radical multiculturalism. Lubiano understands the ways in which elites can hijack the form of multiculturalism but maintains:

If elites manage business as usual and can't call it multiculturalism, they will simply call it something else. We cannot give up the ground because of what they can do in the name of the ground on which we have chosen to fight. The process of normalization or the work of oppositional gestures is an ongoing dynamic of our system and, of course, multiculturalism can be used to continue such management. Radical multiculturalism, however, turns its attention to demystifying just such management and to fighting it. Contestation is the driving force of such a dynamic.⁵

Lubiano's radical multiculturalism is conceived as a counterattack to systems of normalization, as a management of oppositional gestures. For Lubiano, this active, activist, and politicized reconceptualization of multiculturalism is a reaction against corporate multiculturalism. Her writing is designed to be a disidentification with liberalism's outmoded narrative of multiculturalism. Lubiano's narrative of multiculturalism keeps political possibility in motion. Furthermore, unlike the version of multiculturalism that Guillory discusses, radical multiculturalism is focused on the relational or intersectional aspects. Guillory's main reservation about the mantra is that it stands in for politics and disables analysis. Lubiano pushes for a mobilization that synchronizes and choreographs different oppositional gestures, gestures that include different modalities of reading. It also calls attention to the conflicts and strife between identity components, refusing to whitewash such complexities. These writers

make the important claim for methodologies that enable critique. Thus, a critical multiculturalism is a far cry from reductive multicultural pluralism. I understand disidentification in a similar fashion and argue that it too offers a system of volitional and semivolitional gestures whose ethos, while always survivalist, is also *critical*. It would be useful to reconsider the term *disidentification* at this juncture.

Disidentification, Social Theory, and the Public/Private Binarism

A question needs to be posed in relation to the theoretical project that this book puts forth: How does one get from discursive analysis to counterpublicity? Disidentificatory performances (here I mean the work of the artists I read *and* my own readings) resist the social matrix of dominant publicity by exposing the rhetorical/ideological context of state power. To elucidate this point, it is useful to return to the work of Michel Pêcheux, one of the conceptual and philosophical linchpins of this book's theoretical apparatus. Slavoj Žižek, one of Pêcheux's most interesting commentators, elaborates the relation between discourse analysis and state power:

Michel Pêcheux . . . gave a strict linguistic turn to Althusser's theory of interpellation. His work is centered on the discursive mechanisms that generate the "evidence" of Sense. That is to say, one of the fundamental stratagems of ideology is the reference to some self-evidence—"Look, you can see for yourself how things are!" "Let the facts speak for themselves" is perhaps the arch-statement of ideology—the point being, precisely, the facts *never* "speak for themselves" but are always *made to speak* to a network of discursive devices. Suffice to recall the notorious anti-abortion film *The Silent Scream*—we "see" a foetus which "defends" itself, which "cries," and so on, yet what we "don't see" in this very act of seeing is that we "see" all this against the background of a discursively pre-constituted space. Discourse analysis is perhaps at its strongest in answering this precise question: when a racist Englishman says "There are too many Pakistanis on our streets!", *how—from what place—does he "see" this*—that is, how is his symbolic space structured so that he can perceive the fact of a Pakistani strolling along a London street as a disturbing surplus? That is to say, here one must bear in mind Lacan's motto that *nothing is lacking in the real*: every perception of a lack or a surplus ("not enough of this," "too much of that") always involves a symbolic universe.⁶

Žižek's gloss on Pêcheux assists in the visualization of the "work" that disidentification does within the social. Disidentification permits the subject of ideology to contest the interpellations of the dominant ideology. Thus, a subject who is hailed by the ideology cops' cry of "hey, you" may respond with a *tactical misrecognition* like the one that Molina offers Valentín in Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Valentín commands his gay cell mate to "Be a man!" Molina, a seasoned *loca*, responds to his command by exclaiming: "A man! Where do you see a man!" Such a tactical misrecognition permits a subject to demystify the dominant publicity, exposing it as a "discursively pre-constituted" space that often maintains strict and oppressive hierar-

chies within the social. Counterpublicity is thus born from a modality of disidentification that is essentially an act of *tactical misrecognition* that serves as a bulwark against the effects of dominant publicity.

The performances and installations of Gonzalez-Torres achieve a tactical misrecognition of dominant publicity's public/private binary. Gonzalez-Torres was a shrewd tactician and an excellent philosopher of publicity. Nancy Fraser, a leading U.S. philosopher of the public sphere, succinctly explicates the ways in which the public/private binary bolsters the dominant public. She explains that the public/private split "enclave[s] certain matters in specialized discursive arenas so as to shield them from general debate." She concludes: "This usually works to the advantage of dominant groups and individuals and to the disadvantage of their subordinates."⁷ Fraser's proposition is tailored to speak to the ways in which the public/private binarism has been used to historically "enclave" women's experience and perpetuate their subordination. Gonzalez-Torres shared these feminist concerns, but his own horizon of experience was that of a gay man—a gay man whose identity was, from the vantage point of the dominant culture, a "don't ask, don't tell" issue. He was also a person living with AIDS who had lost his adored lover, Ross, in the pandemic. Gonzalez-Torres refused to limit his grief to a privatized self.

The artist's interrogation of a public/private binary also served as a critique of the universalized individual subject. Mónica Amor has read the artist's work, especially his word sculptures that represent public and personal dates and words in seemingly random order, as providing an "indiscriminate intersection of both public and private" that "subverts the Western myth of a self-sufficient subjectivity," which allows her to conclude that the artist suggests that we are "historical and cultural products as well as individuals."⁸ The artist often worked with oblique images that were strategically invisible to the hostile public but visible to those inside different counterpublics.⁹ These oblique images share similar aesthetic philosophies with the art of ACT-UP and other queer/ HIV/AIDS-activist groups. Douglas Crimp's reading of the famous Silence = Death logo outlines some of the strategies of that movement:

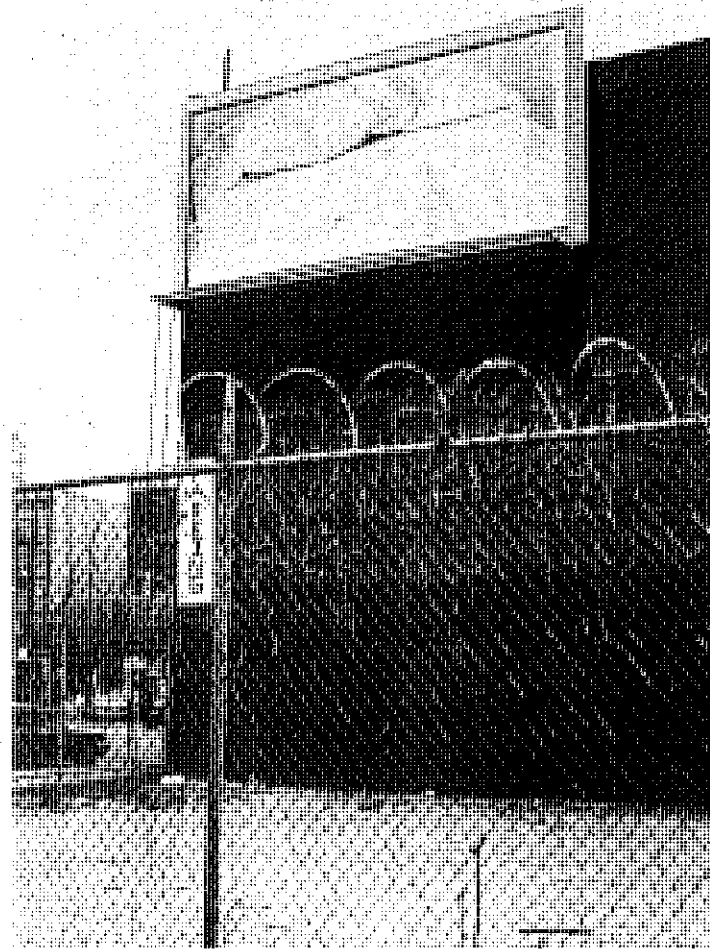
Our emblem's significance depends on foreknowledge of the use of the pink triangle as the marker of gay men in concentration camps, its appropriation by the gay movement to remember a suppressed history of our oppression, and, now, an inversion of its positioning (men in the death camps wore a pink triangle that pointed down; SILENCE = DEATH's points up). SILENCE = DEATH declares that silence about the oppression and annihilation of gay people, *then and now*, must be broken as a matter of our survival. As historically problematic as an analogy of AIDS and the death camps is, it is also deeply resonant for gay men and lesbians, especially insofar as the analogy is already mediated by the gay movement's adoption of the pink triangle. But it is not merely what SILENCE = DEATH says, but also how it looks, that gives it its particular force. The power of this equation under a triangle is the compression of its connotation into a logo, a logo so striking that you ultimately *have* to ask, if you don't already know,

"What does that mean?" And it is the answers we are constantly called upon to give to others—small, everyday direct actions—that make SILENCE = DEATH signify beyond a community of lesbian and gay cognoscenti.¹⁰

The work of Gonzalez-Torres was in sync with many of these AIDS activist post-modern strategies. Consider the billboards that Gonzalez-Torres installed throughout New York City depicting an empty and unmade bed, two pillows marked with the indentation of two absent heads. This vague, roundabout image, when considered from a Latino or queer perspective (to name only two communities under siege, composed of people who Crimp described as cognoscenti), is a comment on the current crisis that shapes such identities. For some spectators, what is suggested is nothing but a mundane image from everyday life. Yet, there is something about the image, blown up and relocated in the public sphere, that casts a shadow of enigma over the picture. Spectators out of the "know" are put in the position where they "have to ask, if [they] don't already know, 'What does that mean?'" For others, those touched by the catastrophe of HIV and other genocidal epidemics, the image is an allusion to the loss, absence, and negation that blankets queer lives, Latino/a lives, and many other communities at risk or people who share this structure of feeling. The billboards powerfully challenge notions of publicity and privacy. The image, repeated throughout the city, is one that represents not a presence, an identity, but instead an absence, a lacuna, a void gesturing to something valuable, loved, and missing. *Private loss is restructured and becomes public art.*

The "cognoscenti" who might "get" the way in which the image speaks to the AIDS epidemic are not subjects who simply "identify" with the image. There is in fact nothing to identify with—no figure, no text, no gesture, barely an object, only an absence. What is evoked is a "structure of feeling" that cuts through certain Latino and queer communities but is in no way exclusive to any identitarian group. I am suggesting that the image connotes a *disidentity*, a version of self that is crafted through something other than rote representational practices, produced through an actual disidentification with such practices and the public/private binary.

Other arts, especially painting and photography, are, as Peggy Phelan has noted, "increasingly drawn to performance."¹¹ Gonzalez-Torres's project utilized performance as a central element. Actual live performances were sometimes included in his work. Yet, even when these performances were not at the center of his installations, the work called on the spectator to become an active participant in his project. The interaction of the spectator to the art object is, as Phelan put it, "essentially performative." This point is uniquely illustrated by Gonzalez-Torres's thematization of "the interactive exchange between the art object and viewer."¹² The artist's stacks of paper and his giant spills of candy, pieces of art that invite the spectators literally to take a piece of the work with them, call on the spectators to move and physically engage the art object. This is equally true on a more symbolic level as the artist's work takes the space of the gallery or museum, remakes it into a performance space, and asks the visitor to become an active interlocutor with the work.



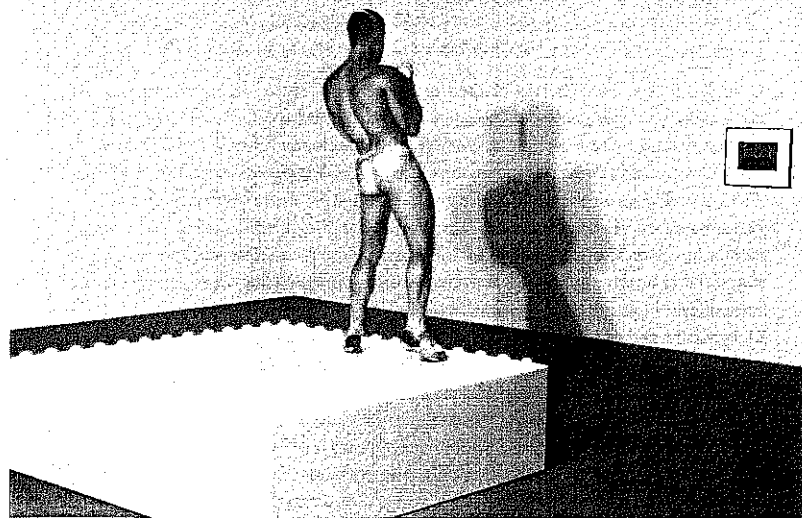
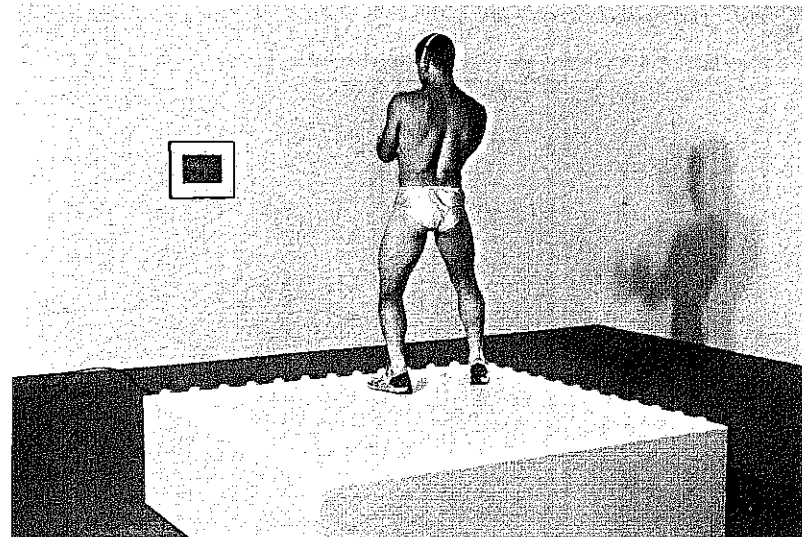
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled*, 1991. View of billboard. Photo by Peter Muscato. Dimensions variable. Gallery credit: As installed for the Museum of Modern Art, New York. "Projects 34: Felix Gonzalez-Torres," May 16–June 30, 1992, in twenty-four locations throughout New York City. Courtesy of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Collector credit: The Werner and Elaine Dannheisser Collection, on long-term loan to the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

An untitled installation by Gonzalez-Torres from 1991 serves as a glaring example of this movement toward performance and the restructuring of gallery space into performance space. The installation positions a dark young man, who is probably Latino, go-go dancing on a platform surrounded with lights.¹³ He wears jockey shorts and a red T-shirt that he strips off during his routine. This Latino body, recontextualized within the space of the art gallery, disrupts its space. The dancer's performance is not the type of activity that usually would be glimpsed in a downtown New York gallery. This image would usually be available to the consumer of such spectacles in the Times Square area of New York, at clubs such as the Eros or the Gaiety Burlesque.¹⁴ Gonzalez-Torres's installation is reminiscent of some of the queer pop art practices that Andy Warhol pioneered in the 1960s. Warhol's films brought Times Square hustlers to the realm of gallery art and art house cinema, and former hustlers such as Joe Dallesandro starred in many of his films from that period.¹⁵ This recontextualization challenges the integrity of distinctions between lowbrow erotic entertainment and high culture. The queer life-worlds of the go-go palace and the Soho gallery are occluded. In this instance, through this sexy performance, queer identity is dis-organized and dis-placed.

The installation also provided a commentary on the location of *latinidad* in gay male culture. In commercialized gay male culture, bodies like those of the go-go boy on the platform are consumed in the privacy of home video screenings and in the semiprivacy of dark clubs such as the Eros.¹⁶ Gonzalez-Torres's installation dislocates the Latino body from its standard location in gay male culture, at once revealing and deconstructing a fixed notion of the role of *latinidad* in queerness. It makes the privatized and compartmentalized desire for Latino/a bodies a public issue. It also functions as public sex act that publicizes queer sexual performance, elevating it from the position of private vice.

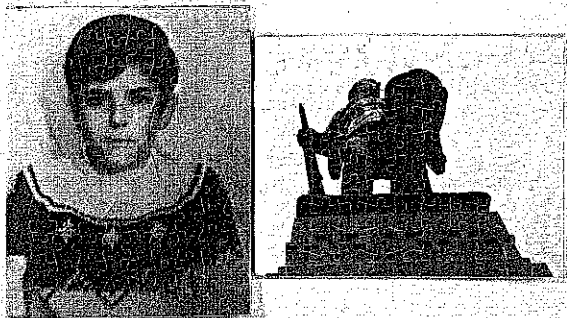
Gonzalez-Torres's work did not identify in clear or pronounced ways with the politics of AIDS and illness management *or* with the hyperstratification of art and the eroticized body of color. Yet, as the readings I have offered suggest, *he did exactly that*, which is to say that through his nimble practice of disidentifying with the public/private binary, he was able to perform activist politics. The negotiation between identification and counteridentification in the artist's work is, primarily, a mode of critical performativity, one that I am identifying as tactical misrecognition of the public/private grids that structure the social.

We can further track the disidentificatory impulse in his work if we consider the ways in which he deals with issues of exile and ethnos. His *Untitled (Madrid 1971)* is composed of two jigsaw puzzles in cellophane bags, stacked next to each other. The first jigsaw is the picture of the artist as a boy; next to him is a photo of a statue, what appears to be a monument, shot from the perspective of someone looking up, perhaps a child. Matched, these two images represent aspects of the artist's biography—in this instance, when he was separated from his parents at age nine so he could leave



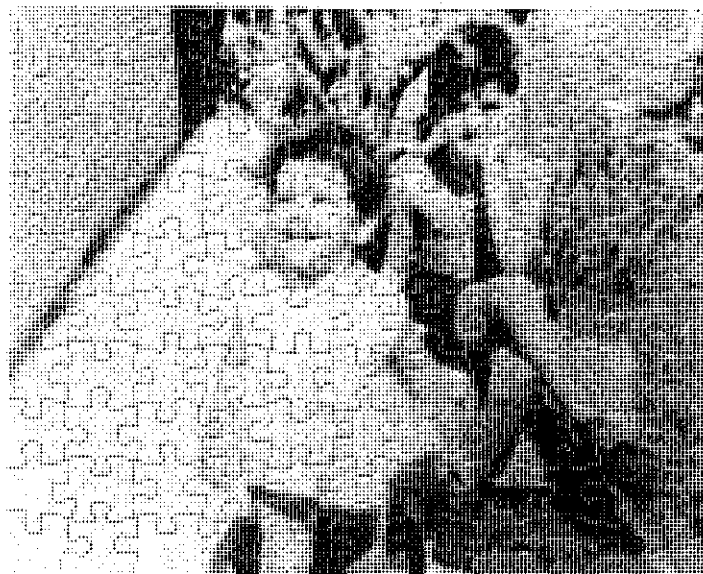
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1991. Photo by Peter Muscato. 21½ x 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy of the Andrea Rosen Gallery. Installation view: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Every Week There Is Something Different," May 2–June 1, 1991. Week Two.

MADRID 1971



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Madrid 1971)*, 1988. Photo by Peter Muscato. 15 x 18 inches. Two C-print jigsaw puzzles in plastic bags, and Letra set. Courtesy of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

Cuba for Spain, where he was housed by the church. These images connote memory's fragility and permanence. The small puzzles remind us of a few things: the ways in which images form memories and, in turn, memories themselves fall together. They foreground the fact that memory is always about the collection of fragments. The constellation of memory is also made through an active spectator who pushed pieces together, like a child with a puzzle. The image of the self alongside the imposing statue connotes the feeling of being small, helpless. The statue looks like a memorial to another place and time. Memorials work to make cogent the fictions of nationalism and individual national culture. The pairing of a photo of the artist as an innocent and sweet-looking boy next to a cold metal sculpture performs, through a calculus of contradiction, the vulnerability of a dismantling of the public/private binary. The piece gestures to the fashion in which one's identity is eclipsed by a system of national signs that do not constitute one's citizenship but instead one's alienation, displacement, and exile. This image speaks to exile and ethnicity in a voice that is evocative and suggestive. It does not announce itself as a cultural artifact. Instead, it renders queerness, ethnicity, and AIDS through a circuitous and roundabout fashion. These connotations are powerful ones that engage the spectators in a way that makes them into interactive interlocutors, half of a performance that is



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Me and My Sister)*, 1988. Photo by Peter Muscato. 7½ x 9½ inches. C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag. Courtesy of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

completed with the art object. Yet, I am not *implying* that these are the only available meanings. Amor has contended that "[t]he majority of his works are untitled, while a word in parenthesis suggests a meaning related to experiences of the artist's life, *but* always open and multivalent."¹⁷

Another piece, *Untitled (Me and My Sister)*, is another small snapshot converted into a jigsaw puzzle. The image's black-and-white tones of gray mark it as being from the fifties or early sixties. The visual effect transports the spectator to another temporality and a different spatiality. Without announcing itself, this image becomes emblematic of exile, the lost home and territory, the lost childhood, and a gilded and fragile recollection of it. Private and individual ephemera are loaded with publicness, once again offsetting the public/private binarism. Identity, ethnic or exilic, is not rendered in these two pieces through representation. The images are obscure in their meaning, mediated through the jigsaw-puzzle effect and the plastic bag.

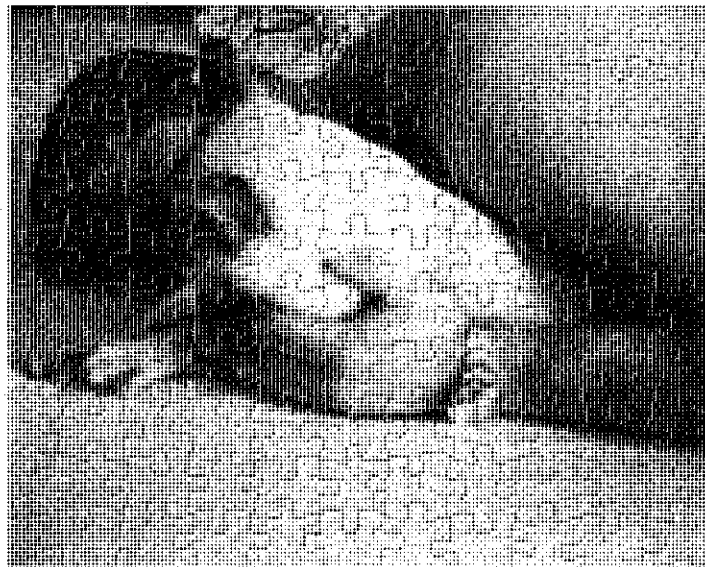
Storr and other critics have gestured to the many ways in which the artist rejected minoritized identity labels. This is certainly true, but it is not the end of the story. More than simply counteridentify/reject identity, Gonzalez-Torres's cultural production disidentified with the representational protocols of identity. Pieces like the one



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Ross and Harry)*, 1991. Photo by Peter Muscato. 7½ x 9½ inches. C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag. Courtesy of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

I have just described hail from the locus of an ethnic and exilic past but do not simply reproduce identity. Performance avoids reproductive economies, and the disidentificatory performances of Gonzalez-Torres are no different.¹⁸ Artful mediation, evidenced by the jigsaw strategy or the plastic bags I have described, points to the ways in which reproduction, representation, and any rote understanding of identity they engender are insufficient. Instead, the mediation of puzzle pieces and plastic bags offers a view of a *disidentity* that potentially informs an *anti-identitarian identity politics* in which commonality is not forged through shared images and fixed identifications but fashioned instead from connotative images that invoke communal structures of feelings. The structures of feeling that are invoked point to a world in which exile and ethnicity are not stigmatized aberrations, but instead everyday aspects of national culture.

The jigsaw-puzzle strategy is also employed to connote a queer life-world. For instance, *Untitled (Ross and Harry)* and *Untitled (Loverboy)* are monuments to Gonzalez-Torres's lover Ross, who died before him in 1991. These too are pictures from a private life, in this instance a specifically queer life, made public. This work, then, challenges dominant protocols that relegate queerness, and other minoritarian histories and philosophies of the self, to a forced exile in the private sphere. Once



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Loverboy)*, 1988. Photo by Peter Muscato. 7½ x 9½ inches. C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag. Courtesy of the Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

again, the jigsaw images achieve a disidentificatory status through the determined negation of direct representational routes, a turn toward a strategic obliquity that is anti-identitarian in the service of a reconstructed identity politics.

Puzzle images of Ross resonate alongside a puzzle photo of Oscar Wilde's tomb, *Untitled (Oscar Wilde's Tomb)*, as a disidentificatory performance that imagines, renders, and signals a queer life-world into visibility by rendering a queer icon, a romantic image from the history of queer politics and culture in the mass public space. This mode of visualizing and portraying private loves and public heroes is a style of disidentificatory portraiture that trades in connotations, connotations that can be described as "almost articulate."

The same disidentificatory and anti-identitarian impulse toward portraiture is located in the artist's spill sculptures, in which spills of candy are weighed to the exact weight of an individual, of whose "portrait" this spill is a rendering. Those candies are then offered to spectators as souvenirs and treats. Through the course of an exhibition, the spills are literally consumed by spectators. The spills are then replenished, symbolically restoring the subject of the piece, who, further along in this symbolic circuit, stands for a sick loved one brought back from a nightmare of wasting illness.

Bodies are also represented through chains of lightbulbs that burn out one by one. Again, bulbs are replenished, rendering a dream in which the dying "lights" of one's life are fantastically reignited.

Whereas Zamora used identity as a stage to perform media-savvy counterpublicity and Sara/Ricardo seemed utterly trapped within the restraints of identity, attempting to perform heterosexuality and failing, Gonzalez-Torres seemingly rejected the politics of identity altogether. Yet, as my readings have indicated, *disidentity* is held in his project through deep disidentification with identity's very tenets. Gonzalez-Torres presents images of the epidemic by offering its cognoscenti a portrait of loss and sadness through mass-produced public art: he "reveals" his own loved object (Ross) and snapshots of his exilic childhood through the heavy mediation of the jigsaw puzzle; he approaches the identity-centric genre of portraiture through the abstraction of his spills and his light strings. Gonzalez-Torres was, as the interview cited earlier indicated, deeply weary of identity. He was especially critical of multiculturalism's narrative of identity. Nonetheless, his work ultimately held on to some aspect of identity. That remaining component of "self" is mined by the artist and used to narrate a transformative politics of the self that enabled a "practice of freedom."

Within the context of AIDS cultural criticism and activism, Simon Watney has called for an "ethically grounded politics of gender and sexuality" in the service of enabling "practices of freedom": "For what," he asked "is morality, if not the practice of liberty, the deliberate practice of Liberty? Rather than assuming a natural, inevitable unity among gay men, or between gay men and lesbians, such an approach grounds our experience, in all its diversity and complexity, within a wider ethical context."¹⁹ Watney extracts this notion of a practice of freedom from Foucault's late interviews.²⁰ Ethics for Foucault (a concept that is vastly different than notions of morality floated in contemporary U.S. culture by the religious right) is achieved through the care of the self. I am suggesting that Gonzalez-Torres's distanced and nuanced rendering of the self, what I have been calling *disidentity*, functions as counterpublicity that provides pictures of possible future relations of power. The self of disidentity is ultimately an *impersonal self*. Following the lead of Paul Veyne, who discussed the self in Foucault's final writings as "a strategic possibility," David Halperin suggests that "To practice a stylistics of the self ultimately means to cultivate that part of oneself that leads beyond oneself, that transcends oneself: it is to elaborate the strategic possibilities of what is the most *impersonal* dimension of personal life—namely, the capacity to 'realize oneself' by becoming other than what one is."²¹ Self cultivated in the work of Gonzalez-Torres visualizes "the strategic possibilities of what is the most *impersonal* dimension of personal life." Furthermore, the impersonal self that is produced in his oeuvre challenges the always already reductive self that is mass-produced in the discourse of multiculturalism. Finally, this self, fashioned through strategic disidentifications with dominant discourses on "selfness," presents the potential to ultimately

"cultivate that part of oneself that leads beyond oneself, that transcends oneself." This moment of transcendence is the moment in which counterpublics become imaginable; it is a moment brimming with the possibility of transformative politics.

Disidentification's use-value is only accessible through the transformative politics that it enables subjects and groups to imagine. Counterpublics are not magically and automatically realized through disidentifications, but they are suggested, rehearsed, and articulated. Disidentifications are strategies that are called on by minoritarian subjects throughout their everyday life. The cultural productions and performances I have considered in this book amplify and often explicate these everyday practices. They offer a metanarrative on disidentification that at once further atomizes and further transmits these practices. This book is thus meant to complement this cultural work and further push the envelope. My desire is to perpetuate disidentification and offer it as not only a hermeneutic but also as a possibility for freedom.