

Sweet Memories: encountering the candy spills of Felix Gonzalez-Torres

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In this paper I discuss some works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Most were produced in the early 1990s. The artist was born in Cuba in 1957, grew up in Puerto Rico and migrated to the USA, becoming an American citizen, and an internationally acclaimed artist. Shown in international exhibitions, most notably this year's Venice Biennale where his art has been selected and curated for the American pavilion, what meanings might his works have for today's transnational audiences, for a new century preoccupied by questions of mobility and migration, and characterised by cultural flows and encounters? This paper explores the configurations of a sensory aesthetics, triangulated between the US, Cuba and Puerto Rico, within the global and the local circuits of art's exhibitions. It examines the staging of his art, in the theatricality of late minimalism/late modernism. Gonzalez-Torres's art invites participation – the removal of a candy, or a piece of paper, perhaps. But it also conjures the senses and sense memories which may transmit between cultures.

1. 'My Felix'

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Guáimaro in Cuba in 1957, and grew up in Puerto Rico, attending the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan. He migrated to the United States of America where he lived, studied and worked for the rest of his life, becoming an American citizen in 1976. Settling in New York, he trained as a photographer at the Pratt Institute, and the International Center of Photography, and, attending the

Whitney Museum of Art's independent study programme, he immersed himself in contemporary critical theory. In the 1980s he was a participating member of Group Material, and also making independent work, becoming best known for the candy pieces, light strings, paper stacks and billboards of the 1990s. From the later 1980s and especially in the 1990s, his work was eagerly, favourably and widely received in the American press, and it also met an enthusiastic reception in Europe. Examples were widely displayed and collected by museums, galleries and private collectors. Eliciting appraisals from 'an all-star cast of critics, artists and writers' (Renaissancesociety.org), his art was frequently exhibited, catalogued, illustrated, and it was collected together in a two-volume catalogue raisonné, published in 1997 (Elger (ed.), 1997).

In making a journey undertaken by so many from places so close to and so far from the United States, the artist made a crossing into a radically different culture and into another language. As Gerardo Mosquera has pointed out, Félix González Torres became translated into Felix Gonzalez-Torres. (Mosquera, 2006:204-7). This version of his name – without accents and with a hyphen – signals the Anglicisation of the artist's reputation. Writing an obituary for publication in *Artforum* in the US, soon after the artist's death in 1996, Mosquera lamented the expected translation of the artist's name by his editors, going on to indicate the 'Latinness' of the artist's work, linking it to the practices of Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles, perhaps to offset the artist's outspoken distance from a 'Latino' identity (Rollins, 1993). In response to Tim Rollins's comment that "I've heard a lot of grumbling, Felix, about the lack of an overt political or Latino content in your work", the artist replies

FGT : (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 is not just Borges and Garcia Marquez, but also Gertrude Stein and Freud and Debord – they are all part of my formation.

Earlier in the interview the artist has been discussing the importance of reading "Benjamin, Fanon, Althusser, Brthes, Foucault, Borges, Mattelart and others", and in his response he firmly refutes desires for authenticity which are made of artists who are demonstrably migrant; he also distances himself and his art from the cultural policies of multiculturalism and the role assigned to "the other", pointing out the rich mixture of writing which informs his work.

Re-reading Mosquera's obituary, reprinted in 2006, the artist Glenn Ligon reflects, "One imagines that Felix would have seen the loss of the accents (and the gain of a hyphen between his last names) as the inevitable, even welcome, result of cultural in-betweenness, of the movement toward new spaces, of always being in process." (Ligon, 2007). The framing of Ligon's argument, as much as unaccented and hyphenated name, is symptomatic of the ways in which the artist came to be incorporated within a US American identity, as a US American artist, and it marks something of the cultural conflicts which are at stake. Let me point to two instances. Firstly, Felix Gonzalez-Torres (and I will continue to use the US spelling of his name) was promoted by the New York dealer Andrea Rosen who represented him from 1990. After his death, the gallery archives and records have become the authorised and authorising centre for the artist, his work, images and image rights, managed through the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation, which is run from the gallery. In administering image rights, the foundation insist on the US Americanized spelling of the artist's name, request that they approve texts pre-publication, they offer comments and

require corrections. Secondly, the proprietorial use of the artist's first name. Although he admits he did not personally know him, Ligon writes, "Felix is the artist that artists of my generation feel on a first-name basis with". Several commentators refer to the artist as "Felix", some claiming a special proximity, an exclusive and privileged knowledge, which comes from knowing the artist, working with him, the intimacies of friendship (see for example, Rosen, 1997). This kind of artist management authorises, in the sense of allowing authorship on the artist, comparable to, yet - because of the artist's ways of working - vastly different from the Warhol foundation, which authorises in the sense of legitimating only those works which it deems were made by Warhol, a tricky business given Warhol's predilection for replication. Artist management has a longevity, and it was rapidly put in place in the later nineteenth century as leading artists died and their legacies, reputations and the corpus of their works were managed by close relatives or dealers who often claimed that the relation with the artist was more than money.

The height, perhaps, of this posthumous management is to be found at this year's Venice Biennale, where the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres has been presented by Nancy Spector, chief curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, for the US pavilion, and entitled "America". Spector worked with the artist, (Spector, 1995), The acceptance of her proposal, in parallel with the overall responsibility for this year's Biennale undertaken by Robert Storr, a former MoMA curator and currently Dean of the Yale School of Art, highlights a move from independent curators working with living artists towards a more corporate approach in which major art institutions and collections have a leading role. Felix Gonzalez-Torres was a varied, inventive and experimental artist who produced a vast array of work in a relatively short life. Photoworks, billboards, beaded curtains, jigsaws, television stills, sit beside what have become the signature pieces of light-strings, candy spills, paper stacks and it was

examples of these signature pieces that were chosen in a selection designed to highlight the artist's relevance for America today. According to one source Spector is reported as saying that Gonzalez-Torres "would probably have considered his art to be even more relevant politically now than when he made it, with the war in Iraq and domestic battles raging over government eavesdropping, gay marriage and the concentration of wealth in America." (Kennedy, 2007). She has also been quoted: "The work is political and very much about democracy. He was very proud to be an American... He really embraced the democratic system and was very critical of the things he thought would compromise that" (Barry, 2007). The presentation includes "Untitled" (*Republican Years*), 1992, a paper stack of blank sheets edged with black; two paper stacks from 1989, with the words "Memorial Day Weekend" and "Veterans Day Sale" respectively printed on the sheets, a light string of cascading bulbs called "Untitled" (*America*), and the candy spill "Untitled" (*Public Opinion*), in which liquorice is laid out on the floor, its individual pieces said to vaguely resemble missiles. The selection, along with the curator's statements, emphasises the artist as a commentator on the United States. And indeed Gonzalez-Torres did comment on the society to which he relocated. He was articulate, vocal, generous with interviews, an artist who enjoyed talking about his art. In October 1993, when invited to give a lecture, the artist provided a lengthy list of statistics about the worsening social conditions in the US during the Reagan and Bush administrations, against a backdrop of a projected formal portrait of the wealthy family from *Dynasty*, a well-known 1980s TV series, so staging effective contrasts between wealth and poverty, image and reality, contrasting levels of representation. While at one level Spector's selection updates the artist's relevance for today, and while it may be appropriate for the particularity of the Venice Biennale and its national pavilions, it also sets limits, circumscribing the works within a narrow, geographically and

culturally specific relevance – for US America and US Americans. In a contemporary transnational world, national units are, however, increasingly under pressure and scrutiny. Clare Harris has elucidated the ways in which “bounded conceptions of culture based on nationality or ethnicity will not suffice in a transnational era when artists and their works are so highly mobile”, and we might also add the audiences for art (Harris, 2007, 167). Miwon Kwon too confirms that artists as well as art works are increasingly mobile, presented to highly diverse and culturally distinct audiences around the world. In the rapid transits of the global exhibition circuit, as she has demonstrated, the figure of the artist, and his /her biography provide a persistent source of meaning, a settled and stabilising function. When art is (re)installed, the artist or his representative are readily summoned to authorise the installation (Kwon, 2002). To this end, the artist and the accounts of his life must remain relatively stable. Interpretation has indeed tended to stabilise the figure of the artist, to regularise his name, to localise this art and artist for circulation within contemporary global circuits and notably at Venice, to delimit him as an American citizen speaking to other US Americans. The artist is rarely considered as a transnational subject, one caught within the cultural flows of a world shaped by migration, including his own. In expanding her ideas for a transnational understanding of contemporary art, Clare Harris explores Arjun Appadurai’s division of the global economy into ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financiescapas, to emphasise the ways in which people and acts - art and artists - are subject to influences beyond the places that they inhabit. These locations are multiple sites, shaped by global cultural flows as much as local conditions. She emphasises that “the cultural logic of one place is not erased on departure from it”, rather, it remains as a memory which can be deployed in an artistic practice which is shaped by “the cumulative impact of multiple locations”. In these terms, the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres can be reconsidered in terms of a

transnational practice shaped by multiple locations and memory. Not only is US America a country formed in migration, which is in part recognized at Venice, but the artist's practice, his ways of working, can be understood within transnational global and local conditions.

2: Candy spills

The candy spills are clustered within a period of three to four years. The first appears to be *"Untitled" (A Corner of Baci)* created in 1990, a corner piece and the last, perhaps, is *"Untitled" (Placebo - Landscape - for Roni)*, of 1993. The candies vary, from Baci chocolates, to bazooka bubble-gum in *"Untitled" (Welcome Back Heroes)* of 1991, black rod licorice deployed in *"Untitled" (Public Opinion)*, also of 1991, lollipops in *"Untitled" (Para un hombre en uniforme)* again, of 1991; or they can be comprised of candies wrapped in a single colour of cellophane, such as the blue cellophane of *"Untitled" (Portrait of Marcel Brient)*, of 1991, green in *"Untitled" (LA)*, or light blue of *"Untitled" (Revenge)* of 1991 or multicoloured as in *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in LA)* of 1991.

There are several major forms. Most usually, as in *"Untitled" (A Corner of Baci)* of 1990, or *"Untitled" (Rossmore, 11)*, 1991, the sweets are piled into a heap in a corner. In a second form, the candies are spread out on the floor, sometimes like a carpet, placed in the middle of the floor, at other times placed up to an edge, or within a defined space within the gallery. Some installations allow limited access, up to the edge; others give all-round access: when *"Untitled" (Placebo)* of 1991 (New York: Museum of Modern Art), was displayed at the Serpentine Gallery in 2000, a strict rectangle of candies in silver cellophane was offset on all four sides by the dark polished wood of the floor. Depending on the curator and the institution, different installations of the same piece can be created. At the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 1994, *"Untitled" (Placebo-Landscape-for Roni)* of 1991 was shown, the candies spilled forward to an irregular outline like

the waves of the sea; elsewhere they have come to rest behind a border over which they do not regularly drift. The artist's works are –therefore– highly dependent on site, as well as the choices made by curators. Although not strictly site-specific, that is the works do not address their sites in any specificity of time or place, the artist's works and their affect are strongly informed by the kind of space available for installation, and decisively effected by their curation.

In both forms, these installations create formal devices, there is a critical edge or edges between the sweets and gallery floor that is always changing, and edge or edges that are approached by and apprehended by the body of the visitor. This sinuous line or lines shifts over time—in the candy heaps the weight of the candies, piled up on each other, introduces movement, which can unsettle the original form; change is also introduced by the abstracting actions of the visitors alongside the replenishing gestures of the museum staff. In a variation of the second form, the candies are dispersed, as they are re-arranged by the audience, as at the Renaissance Society of America's exhibition, "When Travelling" in 1994. Here the work started off as a luminous blue field; a month later, as visitors walked all over the floor, the aquamarine candies were dispersed, the walkers cutting rivulets and pathways through the arrangement, sending the sweets spinning over the floor in all directions, piling them up, and parting them from each other. Many hundreds of aquamarine-wrapped candies sparkled on the floor, like a sea or a swimming pool; a month later, candies had drifted across the floor, and space and shape changed.

As much as the candy spills and the paper stacks are about volume, they are also about edges and borders, about the spatiality of place and the figure in the gallery.

Made over a period of three to four years, the candy spills, whether stacked in a corner or placed/scattered on the floor, offer seas of colour in blue, green, silver, gold, black, or gleaming heaps of multicoloured candies. I use this metaphor

decidedly, to conjure the comparison that the candy spills offer between their sparkling and rippling surfaces, surfaces which differentiate them from the flatter surfaces of the floor works created by Minimalist artists such as Carl Andre, and to conjure, in my imaginative reading of the pieces, the presence of the sea, sea crossings and migrations. The arrangements offer shimmering surfaces as the curved and twisted shapes catch the light capriciously. The works change over time: as visitors pick up a sweet or two, as little bits are taken away, so the work of art has the possibility of being replenished in an endless supply which may maintain an ideal weight. The candy spills exist in an ebb and flow between those who take and those who remake, those who regard and those who touch.

To interact with the candy spills, most mobile adult viewers and older children will bend down, dip towards the work, even kneel on the floor, shifting focus, perception and perspective. While the work's installation depends on the space, the site also shapes the ways in which visitors see it, walk round it, interact with it. Some visitors will remove a candy or two. And the literature is full of excited little stories about how the author or various museum visitors, young and old, decided, after some hesitation, to break with museum protocols and to pick up a sweet and even eat it. Lisa Corrin, curator of the 2000 Serpentine show, asked: "Will we dare to violate the museum's usual protocols by touching and even disturbing the presentation of a work of art? Will we agree to 'own it' by taking it home?" (Corrin, 2000: n.p.) This permitted scattering has accompanied the rise of participation, and it has been legitimated by the museum or gallery that re-sets the frame for actions in which viewers may take away a little bit, but not all of it, and in which they may dispense, only temporarily and to only a small degree, with the conventional rituals for viewing art.

Critical writing often emphasises the viewer's interaction with works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, especially in

terms of bodily activity—visitors may take a sweet, move a piece of paper from a stack or remove it altogether; they may walk through a curtain, dance to music. For Nicholas Bourriaud, this artist's works are exemplary of what he has famously characterised as 'relational aesthetics'. Bourriaud proposes that art practices in the 1990s were concerned with 'the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.' Bourriaud thus moved art from private contemplation and from a preoccupation with internal (artistic) conditions, to an engagement with what he saw as widespread within contemporary culture, linking relational aesthetics to the shifts to service-based economies in the west, to the interactivity of cultural forms and virtual spaces of the internet and virtual spaces, and to responses to globalisation which prompted local initiatives (Bourriaud, 2002. 14) For Bourriaud then, in his concept of relational aesthetics, works by Gonzalez-Torres create encounters between art and its viewers, which in turn create communities between viewers. In this view, viewers are brought together in participation, in interacting with the work of art.

Participation has come to be seen as a defining characteristic of installation art (Reiss 1999; Bishop, 2006). Julie Reiss writes that "The essence of Installation art is spectator participation', noting that 'the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another, and even from one work to another by the same artist.'" It can mean an invocation to undertake specific activities, to walk through or navigate a space, to respond to objects offered by the art work (Reiss, 1999, xiii).

Interaction with the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres is generally construed as a decisive, conscious, determined action, one which is deliberated upon, and then undertaken by a visitor who is construed as a social agent. There is a tendency towards a prevailing utopianism which construes viewers as united in their participation and engagement,

whatever their experience or social construction. These propositions have been countered, though not dismissed, by attention to the specific conditions effecting participation, theories of the fragmented, incomplete subject, and the social relations of antagonism (Bishop, 2005).

But the candy pieces, especially, provoke not only participation, but other kinds of interaction. These are not so much definitive acts, more sensory sensations, some of which, as is so characteristic of sensory experience, take place involuntarily, without premeditated deliberation, beneath the surface of consciousness, available after but not before they happen, yet so often elusive, momentary, and transient, and yielding as much as they conjure sense memories. In part this comes with their staging.

3: Staging the candy spills

The form of the candy spills and their maintenance while on show is derived from the artist's certificates of ownership or authenticity and the interpretation by the curator of the instructions which they give for installation. The artist created a distinctive form for the titles of his works: the reiterated "Untitled", reprised from Minimalism, is accompanied by a subtitle in parenthesis. The legacies of Minimalism are evident, not only in the exquisite clarity and simplicity of his art, but also in its use of repetition, sequence and seriality, as well as in the consistent pared-down and uncluttered curatorial presentation. The box-like forms of the paper stacks reprise Minimalism's ever-present boxes, defined forms, and play with volume, as does the deployment of the floor as an artistic plane. The hard, resilient, industrialised materials and technologies are replaced with the everyday objects of candies, paper, light bulbs, and if participants walk on the art work it disperses and almost disappears. The doubled titles speak of the doubled conditions of the candy spills and their viewing. There are in the subtitles declarations and dedications, places and people, invocations and addresses. And the two-parts,

construed as supplementary in the sense eloquently theorised by Jacques Derrida, add to, undo and displace the work of "Untitled" (Derrida, 1987, 69-74). They may provoke a curiosity that alerts the visitor make to a connection, however elusive or fugitive. Whereas "Untitled" in its blankness, speaks of the resistance of Minimalism to interpretation, the subtitle undoes minimalism's cool detachment, shaping an architecture of affect, a viewing situation, playing upon the "remarkably diverse array of affective responses [to Minimalist works] when they were initially exhibited" (Best, 2005:164-5).

While the theatricality of Minimalism invited the spectator to confront the presence of art, and to wait while this art unfolded, its reprise by Gonzalez-Torres invites the spectator to engage, not only with an action, a participation, in some cases to change the work, but within a theatre of viewing charged with the senses.

4: Spilling the senses

The candy spills first incite vision, then comes touch and perhaps, depending on the visitor, sound, smell and taste: if the sweet is unwrapped, the cellophane crackles, and that heady aroma of sweetness foretells the sickly, sticky taste of a bonbon that is made to slip into the mouth and dissolve on the tongue—the artist does not choose chewy bars. Perhaps there is an erotic frisson: the artist hinted as much when he said in an interview, 'I'm giving you this sugary thing; you put it in your mouth, and you suck on someone else's body. ...For just a few seconds, I have put something sweet in someone's mouth and that is very sexy'. (Rollins, 1993)

The candy spills are sensory works. The colours which enchant the eyes are accompanied by myriad sounds in the gallery of the crisp twists of opened sweet papers, the rustles of bodily movement, the whispers of consultation; there is, for those who take them, the silken touch of the wrappings, and the sweet, saccharine taste of the candies. Their sensory affects

may come all together or one by one, for we could delay opening the sweet-paper, defer its anticipated pleasures, or never open it at all. Or holding off, we might involuntarily hear the rustle of another visitor unwrapping the cellophane, or even noisy eating. Sensory experiences come with the candy spills. If we participate, pick up a candy, then the action brings at least touch. But even if we do nothing, decline to move forward, bend down, the sense of vision is present for sighted viewers. Triggered by the sight, or the presence, of the candy, viewers might simply imagine or remember the sensations of its consumption. And whatever we do, the sounds of the movements by other visitors will be there to be heard. These involuntary sense experiences can run parallel to, or counter, the ones which we decisively seek. And the senses and sensory responses exist as much in the memory and imagination as they do in actuality.

Sensory responses to a single work of art can be extraordinary diverse, and they are not shared by visitors in equal capacity. The candy spills may elicit physical and/or sensory encounters, they may evoke some or all the five senses of sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste; whether we eat one or not, the candies may engage sense memories, recalling perhaps childhood experiences or desires, perhaps never fulfilled to this degree, a satiety of sweet, a sensory *débordement*. For while the work of art can offer sensory experience, it can equally tease, conjure sensory responses or the memory of them, invoking the senses, only to confound them. By and large, commentators view the sweets of the candy spills as conjuring heady, guilty pleasures and pleasurable childhood memories. But the candy spills might equally provoke a sensory disgust, a distaste for the sweet taste, a sense of nausea as much social as somatic, a sensory and physical revulsion triggered perhaps by a glut of sugariness. In this sense, the candy spills may be linked to the abject art of the mid 1990s, in which, as Hal Foster pointed out, bodily detritus appeared in substitute forms rather than as

dollops of raw excreta or slashes of fresh blood, with their characteristic aromas (Foster, 1996). It's not a question of the presence or absence of the senses—in the art or in responses to it. Nor is it a question of the authenticity or the simulacra of sensory provocations projected by the art, or of the authenticity or simulacra of sensory experience and reception by the beholders, or indeed of active participation by contrast to more distanced viewing. Whereas participation depends, by and large, on a corporal activity and inter-activity with the art, neither the senses nor sense memories specifically depend upon a physical action (though they may be triggered by one and accompanied by one). Sensory engagement with a work of art can occur without corporeal connection to it, taking place as much in memory and imagination. Sensory responses change too over time. I have written elsewhere how the specific viewing conditions of now shape attitudes and responses to these works. Re-reading Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1996) in conjunction with this year's *Documenta XII* can produce sensory responses of disquiet, unease, even rejection, the opulence of the candy spills appearing as profusion and excess, as that surplus that exists within and alongside what Agamben characterises as the conditions of 'bare life'.

The artist's candy spills certainly differ from enveloping and captivating sensory environments that have been created by artists from the later 1980s onwards which captured and precipitated the beholder into an affective matrix of sensory interaction, sometimes anticipated, sometimes unexpected. Sensory installations by artists such as Ernesto Neto invoke perceptions, experiences and recollections as auditory, tactile, aromatic and somatic as they are visual. Overwhelmed with sound, over-powered with scent, alive to touch, viewers may be transformed into participants whose senses and bodies are caught into the work, and whose actions become a part of it. Attention to the senses is also significant in accounting for the sensory and affective impact of video art,

especially with the use of surround sound, the display within enclosed deep space in the gallery, and the vast scale of the viewing screens. In the 1990s artists strategically deployed sound, taste, and touch, in sensory art works which reached out to the viewer in myriad, unexpected and unpredictable ways. Hair so fine as to be invisible and suspended from the ceiling brushed the face and skin of unsuspecting visitors to Mona Hatoum's *Recollection* of 1996 as they walked through what appeared to be an almost empty room. In walking over the floor of Ann Hamilton's installation *between taxonomy and communion* of 1991 participants cracked the panes of glass laid down with sheep fleeces, so creating surprising sounds and experiencing pungent scents. In Hamilton's *tropos* of 1993, installed at the Dia Art Centre in New York, the floor was covered with tails of slaughtered horses creating a mass of slippery, pungent, tangled hair. These installations of sense perceptions prompt what Hamilton calls a 'state of suspended reverie' in the viewer, a stage for remembrance, recollection, sense memories (Hamilton, 1993, quoted in Bishop, 2005: 39).

Sensory art takes place in the here and now, yet these art works may change dramatically over time. The work appearing and disappearing before our eyes is by no means exclusive to the art of Gonzalez-Torres, but fairly widespread throughout the period, notably in the installations of Anya Gallaccio. Like those of Gonzalez-Torres, they have provoked interaction, viewers, for instance, bending down to plunge their faces into *red on green* at ICA in 1992, a carpet of red roses and thorns which decayed on site, emitting strong aromas of floral decay. This art of the senses may extend well beyond the gallery. Not only do the works of Felix Gonzalez-Torres invite immediate and local sensory interaction, but they reach into the distance and into the future—a sweet from a candy spill can be carried away, and its smell, taste, touch, look, and sound, as well as memories of its sensory experience, may last well beyond the gallery visit. A sweet can be found some time later, lodged in a pocket, forgotten on a shelf. While this art

can provoke action, the experience will be imprinted with sense memories, from the pleasurable to the troubling, or disquieting.

But attention to the senses is not without its pitfalls. It's all too easy to propose a sensory avant-garde that will triumph over an older optical order. Or to romanticize the senses as transgressive and liberating; to simplify the complex and often unexpected interactions between the senses in artistic practice and everyday life. Or to idealise all viewers as having equal access to sensory experience. The senses are implicated and embedded in social practice and cultural representation, and they mediated by signs. Singling out one sense can work against the multi-sensory nature of an art work: video, film, performance, and installation art often operate on several sensory registers at once. And with the senses come sense memories, embedded in the work itself, as much as in the experience of it.

5: Sense memories

Memory is central to the interpretation of this artist's work. Russell Ferguson has likened the invitation to take a sweet to the most famous moment of memory in Proust, initiated with the madeline dipped in tea (Ferguson, 1994: 30). For the curators to the 1994 exhibition: "Felix has given us the freedom to complete his work through the memories we bring to each piece, and as with every freedom there is a corresponding responsibility." (Cruz, Goldstein, Chez, 1994: 9-10). Memory, which can be personal and collective, is seen to complete the work and to link response to social engagement, social responsibility. But there is more. With the senses, come sense memories, equally, I contend, initiated by the candy spills, whether or not we take a sweet, the sensory experiences of the work, voluntary or involuntary, can bring on beyond the expectations of the everyday. So while a candy spill can offer sensory experience, sensory and physical responses or

the memory of them without an actual event –the taking of a sweet or eating it.

Interest in the senses has coincided with developments in critical theory which have re-examined looking and shown a renewed interest in theories of the haptic, in the body and embodiment, corporeality, bodily experience, and surfaces, particularly skin, with its proximities to touch, smell and taste. It has also coincided with artistic experimentation with new visual forms to convey complex experiences of migration and diaspora, dispersal and re-settlement. As art works circulate through globalised exhibitions, they address differentiated audiences, bodies and sensory regimes, calling into question not only art's intelligibility but its sensory impact. A number of artists deployed the senses to conjure sense memories and to probe their transmission between cultures. Vong Phao Phanet's *Neon Rice Field* of 1993 fills the room with the scent of rice, reminiscent of his native Laos. In *The Skin of the Film* Laura Marks (2000) proposes a theory of inter-cultural cinema in which she interrogates sensory experience and sense memories, examining how haptic forms of viewing are engaged by artists in works that deal with the experiences of being, living and moving between several cultures. She emphasises the importance of sense memories for artists and for their audiences, since the work of art may activate sense memories, deliberately or unconsciously. For Marks the senses are important forms of transmission, between and across cultures, although as she is aware, potential meanings and forms may or may not migrate. There is, therefore, an equal potential for unintelligibility, for meanings, memories and associations to be lost in translation, or to transmit in unexpected or surprising ways. Marks offers a compelling account of "haptic visuality" and embodied vision in recent art and film, recalling and reworking the interests in this field in the writings of Alois Riegl, Bernard Berenson, and Walter Benjamin, attentive to Riegl's tracing of 'haptic' from 'haptēin',

to fasten. Alert to texture rather than outline, she offers the haptic as a mode of perception that is close-up, intimate, proximate, a kind of viewing which emphasizes the senses and attachment, by contrast to modernism's "opticality", its fascination with surveillance and distance viewing.

Marks's propositions return us to the question of transmission. As art works circulate through globalised circuits of exhibition, publication, collections, known more through websites and photographs, they take place in diverse spaces, for diverse audiences and sensory regimes. Sensory experiences and sense memories may be local and localized, culturally specific to communities of viewers. And equally they may be shaped by vast global movements, by cultural flows, by the migration of peoples and things. Sense memories too are embedded – in places, in materials, in the little candy sweets chosen by the artist, in the art works themselves as they are installed and re-installed in "one place after another" (Kwon, 2002).

Sense memories are packed into the industrialised manufacture of the candies, as well as the global circulation of raw materials, notably sugar, from which they are made. They, like the artist himself, may be understood within Clare Harris's argument for "the cumulative impact of multiple locations", and her contention that "the cultural logic of one place is not erased on departure from it". Just as these candies are transnational commodities, the artist made his art within his transnational experience, subject to the influences of places within as well as beyond those that he inhabited in living and working in the USA. It is this cumulative impact of multiple locations that also springs the trap of authenticity which the artist so fiercely resisted.

Gonzalez-Torres spent his early years on two vastly different islands of the Caribbean Eastern Antilles, both of which were released from Spanish rule with the 1898 Spanish-American war. One, Puerto Rico, has become an *Estado Libre Asociado* with closely affiliation as a commonwealth, and for

some the longest standing colony, of the USA. Cuba has been a socialist republic from 1959, with its allegiance, until 1989, to Russia and China. Both islands have been major sugar producers, and their histories, societies, landscapes and populations have been shaped by this product of slavery and colonialism. In Puerto Rico, sugar cane had developed by the mid eighteenth century into a major industry and export; by end of the nineteenth century, the sugar industry was owned and controlled by large US corporations. Vast US investment in the second half of twentieth century diversified with the development of sugar-related products such as rum, tourism, and pharmaceuticals, but, as was realised from the 1970s onwards, US investment came with huge costs in terms of the environment and economic dependence on US. The sugar industry was also highly developed in Cuba by the eighteenth century, so much so by 1820s the island was the world's largest sugar producer. US investment here was also substantial, and one factor which prompted the revolution. Later diversification, similarly to Puerto Rico, has included tourism and pharmaceuticals, distributed to the developing world in competition with western drug companies.

The artist's journeys, from Cuba to Puerto Rico, to the USA are not uncommon in terms of the movement of people between the islands, and from both to the US. Sugar, pharmaceuticals, and people have moved from these two Caribbean islands, taking memories and sense memories with them. In two artworks, at least, the alliance of sugar and pharmaceuticals is hinted at by the titles. "*Untitled*" (*Placebo*) of 1991 (New York: Museum of Modern Art) and "*Untitled*" (*Placebo - Landscape - for Roni*) of 1993, link the sweets to medicinal placebos used in drugs trials, organised in the development of cures and antidotes for AIDS. Thus bordered, the sweets conjure not so much sensory delight and gratification, but pain, loss, grief, sickness, nausea, even horror; Charles Merewether likens the bonbons to Derrida's pharmakon, at once remedy and poison, (Merewether, 1994:

72). If the most direct association is to the illness and death of the artist's partner, Ross Laycock, the embedded memories point to the major industries that have shaped the history of the Caribbean.

This sensory sign carries sweet memories, perhaps, for its consumers. But it is also imprinted with social memories and historical relations still embedded in the present, memories carried along the trading links and borne along the migrational patterns of modernity from Spain to the Americas, from Africa to the Caribbean, across the Antilles – migrations forged in colonialism, slavery and the slave trade, wars and their aftermath. This 'sugary thing', to reprise the artist, is redolent of colonial and neo-colonial trade in people, materials and goods. The candy spills, as I have suggested, often conjure metaphors of the sea, their edges ebbing and flowing like the water's edge, their surfaces rippling and glinting like the gentle waves of the sea.

The little sweet chosen by Felix Gonzales-Torres offers its sensory pleasures with its materiality. We may say that this art 'touches' us, its meanings are embedded, embodied. Yet the sweet dissolves, and its meanings diffuse. They resist capture, and the certainty that the work's sensory affect will have any further effect. Will the sense memories embodied in the candy spills and the plenitude of sense memories that this work gives to us linger in time to produce further action? Sense memories are unpredictable, volatile in transmission and translation. Whether the work 'touches' us, I think depends not only on our sensory actions, but also on the sensory associations that the work triggers, and that we – in all our diversity - bring to it and take away.

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