

FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

The impact of television news is heightened and glamorized by its accompanying films of real-life crises and the slick, one-take graphics it uses as backdrops. The effect is not unlike entertainment; images of global violence and turmoil can, at a glance, be mistaken for Hollywood fiction. Felix Gonzalez-Torres's blackened television screens report the news without the mediation of visual aides. Captions announcing historical events from the recent past and their dates run across the bottom register of an empty monochrome square:

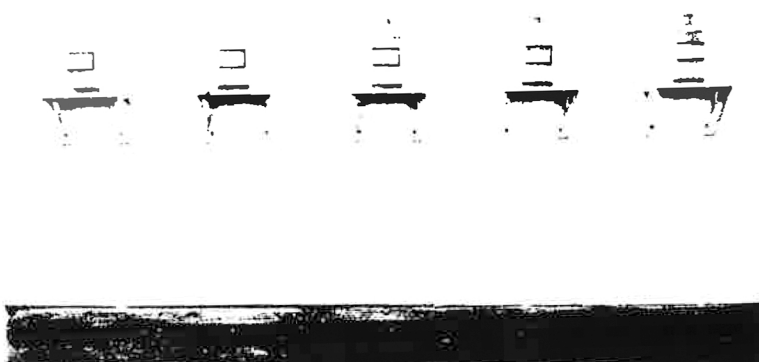
*Pol Pot 1975 Prague 1968
Robocop 1987 H Bomb 1954 Wheel
of Fortune 1968 Spud*

These powerful referents also read as newspaper headlines, devoid of the sensationalism inherent to so much journalistic practice. The visual economy of Gonzalez-Torres's work operates on the level of memory and association. Major historical events—Bhopal 1984, Vietnam 1975—are resurrected along with their minor cultural counterparts—Waterbeds 1971, Bruce Lee 1973. Such seemingly random juxtapositions illustrate the tragic reductivism of the historical process, yet at the same time, they illuminate the spaces between events as the loci of meaning.

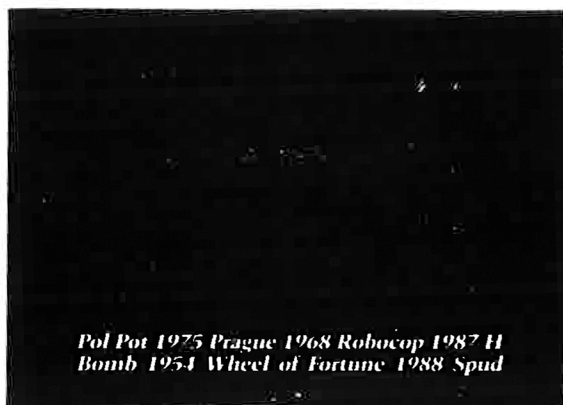
Not all of Gonzalez-Torres's text-pieces embrace such a variety of themes and sources. In the case of gay rights, for instance, his work is direct and internally coherent. A recent piece, consisting of an endless supply of photocopies stacked on a pedestal, made the following message available for mass circulation:

*Helms Amendment 1987 Anita
Bryant 1977 High Tech 1980
Cardinal O'Connor 1988 Bavaria
1986 White Night Riots 1979
F.D.A. 1985*

In another work addressing similar concerns, the message is



1



2



3

- 1) *Jon Tower*. Diluted Holy Water, 1987.
- 2) *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. *Pol Pot*, 1988, photostát.
- 3) *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. *Untitled*, 1988 (detail). Courtesy Rastovski.

engraved on the brass buckles of three leather belts: *Supreme Court Georgia 1986; Preventive Testing; Pater Patriae*. Here Gonzalez-Torres appropriates the signs of a patriarchal, militaristic culture to underscore the fact that an entire section of the population has been marginalized through aggressive, state-sanctioned intolerance.

As a member of the collaborative Group Material, Gonzalez-Torres adamantly opposes the elitism inherent to much contemporary art and the rhetoric that surrounds it. As with the Group's public outreach projects, he wants his art to be accessible and meaningful to the widest range of viewers possible. By inserting provocative signs of our own cultural condition directly into the public sphere, Gonzalez-Torres intends to raise awareness and, perhaps, incite action. Next June he will erect a billboard in Greenwich Village, commissioned by the Public Art Fund. Dedicated to people with AIDS, it will commemorate the lives so tragically lost as well as honor those who continue to struggle for the rights of the afflicted.

DAVID BUNN

David Bunn's work originates in response to the world map, a coded system of geographic abstractions that records the ever-fluctuating history of international tensions and imperialistic struggles. The very act of mapping involves a form of intellectual domination, an imposition of contrived structure over content. Parallels between map-making and photography, in which an aestheticized trace of the visible world is meant to be an analogue of "reality," constitute an important subtext to Bunn's project. The map and the photograph become metaphors of domination, alluding to acts of political and cultural oppression occurring today on a global scale.

By lifting the shapes of individual countries—often Third World nations—from the map and heretically presenting them