After Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Hyun Jean Lee & Jeong Han Kim

To cite this article: Hyun Jean Lee & Jeong Han Kim (2016) After Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Third Text, 30:5-6, 474-489, DOI: 10.1080/09528822.2017.1355149

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2017.1355149

Published online: 02 Aug 2017.
After Felix Gonzalez-Torres

The New Active Audience in the Social Media Era

Hyun Jean Lee and Jeong Han Kim

In June 2012, ‘Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Double’, the first Felix Gonzalez-Torres solo museum exhibition held in Asia, opened at the PLATEAU and Leeum galleries, Samsung Museum of Art, one of the major museums in Seoul, South Korea. The entire museum was devoted to the artist’s work and during the exhibition period his photographs of an empty bed hung on billboards in several locations throughout the city. Gonzalez-Torres’s practice focuses on interpersonal relations and invites audience participation; this results in the work changing over the course of an exhibition. In particular, stacks of posters and piles of sweets attract much audience interest by allowing a part of the artwork to be freely taken away, demonstrating his open and democratic conception of contemporary art. Nowadays, although this kind of socially interactive art has become a staple trope of the contemporary artworld, the conceptual aspect of the work still engages the viewer.

The exhibition was proceeding smoothly until a fairly large audience gathered for a happening at 2 pm on 25 August. Then the viewers gradually moved towards Untitled (Placebo), one of Gonzalez-Torres’s early sweet-pile works, installed in the main gallery. By the time they had gathered around it, I became uneasy and decided to view the performance from afar, to obtain the wider perspective. The security guards also seemed nervous because many spectators had come into the space simultaneously. Some of spectators even had large shopping bags, and several

1 The exhibition ‘Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Double’ ran from 21 June to 28 September 2012.
people had professional cameras (photography was officially allowed in
the entire show). All of a sudden the audience began to grab sweets, as
many as they could, with both hands. Some even swept the candies into
their shopping bags with a brush. A guard immediately made an emer-
gency call and another guard ran into the gallery. They warily watched
the audience and finally requested the camera crews amongst the crowd
to stop taking videos. Although there was a sign on the wall that read
‘Taking photos is permitted in this exhibition’, the guards said that
taking videos was not allowed, and they forced the camera crews to
take the memory cards out of their cameras and delete the data in front
of them. Meanwhile, the sweet-laden participants left the gallery and
put the sweets into a truck waiting outside. The happening ended when
there were no more sweets left on the floor of the gallery.

Soon after, the leader of the happening was summoned to the gallery’s
curatorial office. Curators suggested to him that if he put all the sweets
back in the gallery as they were before the happening, the gallery would
return the video camera memory cards. In fact, the planner and organiser
of the happening had already predicted this scenario in advance, and the
negotiation ended with the swapping of memory cards for sweets.

Following the happening itself, immediately afterwards many com-
ments and several pictures of the event were circulated on Twitter and
Facebook. Some comments were from actual participants, some from
onlookers. This publicised the happening to a much wider audience,
thereby further extending the discourses around it. A few comments
stated that participants’ actions were too aggressive and non-ethical,
but many others commented that this kind of happening looked interest-
ing and felt fresh. One of the noteworthy comments, by Geun-jun Lim,2 a
Korean visual art and design critic, questioned whether the way
PLATEAU handled the event was the only available approach and the
best choice.3

THE EVENT’S CIRCUMSTANCES:
ITS ORIGINS AND PREPARATION

The happening was initiated by Jong Won Park, one of the students in the
media art graduate programme at Yonsei University, where I teach and
work. One day, as he often did, Park came to my office to get advice
about his work. He said he had been to Gonzalez-Torres’s show and
found it impressive. Park was particularly interested in the artist’s democ-
kratic gesture with sweets and posters, as well as in participant engagement.
In fact, before entering the graduate programme he had been a student in
the acting and performing department. While watching others’ actions and
reactions in front of such pieces, he thought, ‘What if all the sweets or
posters were taken at once from the exhibition space?’ Thus he came up
with an idea of organising the flash-mob-like performance. When I first
heard his performance concept, it sounded like a mischievous prank, but
at the same time I could conceive that his intention was not to steal or
destroy the original artwork. Maybe it was possible that such an active
response could expand or develop the meaning and concept of Gonzalez-
Torres’s artwork, and indeed, become part of the artwork. Thus, I encour-

2 Geun-jun Lim aka
Chungwoo Lee.

3 Unfortunately, almost all the
comments about this
happening, including these
tweets, have disappeared
except for a few from social
media.
aged him to develop a strong conceptual underpinning for the action, and to be meticulous in its implementation. In order to plan this action properly, thorough preparation was required beforehand with a close investigation of the site. Thus, for example, what kind of effect would the action have on Gonzalez-Torres’s work, and what kind of reaction could be predicted from the gallery? Also if Park wanted to extend Gonzalez-Torres’s idea in a critical and creative way, the happening should be developed to support and extend the original artwork’s voice as institutional critique (this is discussed later in more detail). Park’s happening needed to be framed as an artwork in itself, a riff on the original, as a postmodernist strategy or gesture of appropriation and recontextualisation. In addition, the entire process of ideation, conceptualisation and realisation of the happening needed to be well documented with video or photography, to be reproduced and reframed as Park’s own artwork. A potential model for documenting the work was Improv Everywhere – a New York City-based prank collective that causes scenes of chaos and joy in public places. This group cleverly documents every performance/happening in video and distributes it via social media in order to solicit volunteers for future work.

**HOW SHOULD THE GALLERY REACT IN THIS SITUATION?**

Park’s intervention is not the only one that has been provoked by Gonzalez-Torres’s work. We have found several similar audience responses to the artist’s work. Discussing the seductive effect of Gonzalez-Torres’s sweets and audiences’ interaction and reaction with and to them, Sandra Umathum confesses that when she first encountered Gonzalez-Torres’s piles of sweets she did not know whether visitors were allowed to take the sweets. But as she could not resist the temptation, she took one or two, even waiting until nobody was watching her in order to take more. In her next encounter with this work she found other visitors eager to grab as many sweets as they could without being bothered by others’ glances. She writes:

> [visitors] dug deep into the mound and, in doing so, preconfigured the activity of its subsequent visitors. Upon arrival, many immediately followed suit. Only very few stood and observed this scene from a distance.

Compared to Umathum’s case, the happening at PLATEAU appears more extreme, particularly when its advance planning is taken into account. Gonzalez-Torres’s work provides no specific direction to guide the audience’s reaction. Rather, he encourages the audience’s active participation, since without their participation the sweet spills cannot be meaningfully implemented as a conceptual work which partially aims to convey the changes made throughout the course of the exhibition. If we think of the happening at PLATEAU along these lines, then although there might be some differences, to a greater or lesser extent, Park’s happening can be read as just one of the aggressive groups attending the exhibition and making a fundamental change to the artwork. If the artwork is open

---

4 http://improveverywhere.com/. We talk about this again below.


6 Umahum, ‘Given the Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s Case’, op cit, p 95.
and allows for the audience’s intervention, such intervention can be viewed as a part of the original concept of the work, and thus it can be deduced that Park’s happening did not damage or harm the original meaning and concept of the artwork.

Was Gonzalez-Torres able to predict this kind of reaction? If he were still alive, how would he react? In his absence the decision as to how to react may be ceded to a gallery, museum, or the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Then, as an institution which delegates the responsibility of planning, opening and managing the exhibition, how should the gallery react? The gallery might respond based on a petty economic rationale. While preparing the happening, Park said that the cost of covering one metre square with a pile of sweets was around 200 dollars (based on the current Korean sweet market). Therefore, Untitled (Placebo) at PLATEAU would cost up to several thousands of dollars. According to the description for this specific work in the book, Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Double, published on the occasion of the first museum presentation at PLATEAU, ‘Overall dimensions vary with installation, ideal weight: 454–544 kg’. The gallery could be embarrassed by this situation because of its unexpected economic loss. Moreover, there would be the possibility that it had not bought enough sweets to replenish the installation ready for the next day. The same description also notes: ‘candies individually wrapped in silver cellophane, endless supply’. Yet although this could be the primary influence on an economic rationale for the gallery, its viral marketing value could also be of high importance,

8 Ibid, emphasis added
Ideas of keeping the system, controlling power and ownership of the artwork are based on the certificate and are discussed in Miwon Kwon’s article ‘The Becoming of a Work of Art: FGT and a Possibility of Renewal, a Chance to Share, a Fragile Truce’, in Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Double, op cit, pp 106–143; the article was originally published in Julie Ault, ed, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Steidl Publishers, Göttingen, 2006, pp 281–314. Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s certificate has been discussed in several articles. Umathum says that the certificates served the artist as a means of informing curators and collectors about the basic parameters within which to (re)produce the installations: see Umathum, ‘Given the Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s Case’, op cit, p 95. Miwon Kwon also discusses the existence and function of the certificate in her article: see Kwon, ‘The Becoming of a Work of Art’, op cit. At the same time, Kwon adds, ‘If [Felix Gonzalez-Torres] was motivated by thoughts of his own mortality to imagine a future that would be different, those who own or are engaged in exhibiting and taking care of his work must also imagine their mortality (individual and institutional) and embrace the openness to change that his certificates insist upon and seek to protect’ (p 137).

Since the discourse was circulated for several days after the happening via social media. In addition, if we count Park’s happening/performance as a reaction or reimagining of the original artwork, we can think of it as a derivative product. A concept from financial economics, ‘derivative product’ denotes a new product created by making changes to an existing product, or resulting from modifying an existing product, and which has different properties than those of the product from which it is derived. Denoted as a financial innovation, a derivative product often generates a larger market value than the original product. Furthermore, financial derivatives can extend several steps, yielding secondary and tertiary derivative products, and so on. Although the happening itself is not regarded as a financial product (we need to approach it from within the category of art and culture), the notion of derivative product expressed in Park’s happening will be examined in detail while discussing the meaning of ‘after’ in a later section of this article; meanwhile, when considered from a wider economic perspective, the advantages for PLATEAU of Park’s happening far outweigh the disadvantages of sweet replenishment – presumably, the gallery calculates the pecuniary cost of the sweats outweighing the non-pecuniary benefit from the derivatives owing to participants. Otherwise PLATEAU’s reaction just looks bureaucratic and authoritarian, demonstrating the official power which comes from the museum and artworld system along with ownership, limiting the original intention of the artist and its possibilities for expansion.9

In addition to this line of questioning, we would also like to ask: In this kind of participatory work, should the audience perform the role which the work implicitly requests of them? Is there any possible space left for the audience to recreate their own interpretation and intervention (whilst still engaging with the work)? Is the artwork equivalent of a secondary derivative and/or a third derivative, prohibited, unlike derivatives in the innovative financial field? Moreover, is the field of art more rigid and bureaucratic than the field of finance? If the audience’s voluntary intervention or new interpretation is prohibited by the institutional authority, does not it play against the original will of the artist? And if this authority comes to be recognised as problematic, who needs to react to such an authority? Who owns value and rights in this kind of space? In other words, what range of behavioural freedom by the audience can be permitted in participatory artwork, and by whom can this freedom be endowed? We ask these questions because, thus far, most contemporary discussions about Gonzalez-Torres’s works appear to be focused on its supportive rules and conventions as regards institutional perspectives, rather than discussing the space left for the participatory audience.

A few days after the happening, someone in the curatorial office at PLATEAU called Park to suggest another meeting. According to Park, several times in the meeting the curators informed him about the existence of a certificate for Gonzalez-Torres’s work, although they never actually showed it to him.10 The certificate describes the operative rules for the artist’s work, and according to it, the work should always be refilled with a certain amount of sweets at the end of each day.11 For curators, keeping the work alive is a great responsibility.12 However, such responsibility rests with the museum, not the audience. Moreover, the certificate may not have restricted the audience’s extended participation. Also, as long as the certificate is kept hidden from the audience, there is no
specific instruction for the audience and this is the reason why the work appeared totally open.

SWEETS AND POSTERS

Gonzalez-Torres’s sweet-pile installations question what the uniqueness in artwork is and how it is different from that of everyday objects. This takes and continues the question posed by Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) and Arthur Danto’s theory of Andy Warhol’s Brillo boxes (1964), namely, is an artwork defined by whether it is inside or outside the museum? If Duchamp breaks with conventional thinking by proposing that any everyday object can be an artwork and Danto leads us to think of the institutional criterion, Gonzalez-Torres challenges how an artwork can be redefined by making work that can be distributed and shared in multiple or infinite ways. Thus, when the sweets are taken out of the museum by the audience, like souvenirs, they become meaningful only when they are considered as a part of the artwork by the audience. If someone thinks that the sweets are just sweets which are not valuable, they can soon be eaten or mingle with other daily objects in one’s pocket. Thus this gesture becomes meaningful, since it also leads us to think about who owns the artwork and who owns the authority and controls the hierarchical system of defining it.

Indeed, the sweets may become a piece of artwork distributed in various places, reminding us of the original work. In this way, the piles of sweets and poster stacks to be taken by the audience can be interpreted as a gesture towards giving these objects an afterlife. While dying of AIDS, Gonzalez-Torres was particularly interested in the infinitely repro-


14 See also Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, op cit, pp 62–64.

ducible object. The piles of sweets and poster stacks are destined to be destroyed from the beginning, as Gonzalez-Torres states:

This work originated from my fear of losing everything. This work is about controlling my own fear. My work cannot be destroyed. I have destroyed it already, from day one.\textsuperscript{16}

Although the first destruction – as a concept – was led by the artist, it is the audience who continue to make his work and revive it by collaboratively performing its destruction. The audience is ‘a crucial link of the value creation process’ and ‘the visitor’s “experience of art – not the artifact itself – is the final criterion of artistic value”’. Thus ‘the visitor co-creates the artwork by adding meaning, value and experience to its completion’,\textsuperscript{17} through the audience the artistic meaning and value of the work can flourish once again.

\section*{THE ETHIC OF THE BEHOLDER}

Many contemporary artworks deal with the interactivity between the work of art and the participant, or between participants, or among audience members in the exhibition space. Such artworks seduce the audience by inviting them to congregate and participate. However, the audience’s participation can often be taken for granted, or even thought of as being endowed by the artist or artwork. In such cases the ethics or responsibility seems to be emphasised over the role of the audience as contributing to the value of the work and as the final criterion of artistic value. According to art critic Nicholas Bourriaud, who widely discusses these kinds of relationships in contemporary art, the happening at PLATEAU can be read as being against ‘the sense of responsibility’ or betraying ‘the ethic of the beholder’ as the audience in front of the artwork. In \textit{Relational Aesthetics}, Bourriaud writes:

The visitor here had a crucial place, because his interaction with the works helped to define the exhibition’s structure. He was faced with devices requiring him to make a decision. In Gonzalez-Torres’s \textit{Stacks} and piles of sweets, for example, the visitor was authorised to take away something from the piece (a sweet, a sheet of paper), but it would purely and simply disappear if every visitor exercised this right: \textit{the artist thus appealed to the visitor’s sense of responsibility, and the visitor had to understand that his gesture was contributing to the break-up of the work}.\textsuperscript{18}

He goes on to write:

At Gonzalez-Torres’s show, I saw visitors grabbing as many candies as their hands and pockets could hold: in doing so they were being referred to their social behavior, their fetishism and their cumulative concept of the world… while others did not dare, or waited for the person next to them to filch a candy, before doing likewise. \textit{The candy pieces thus raise an ethical problem in an apparently anodyne form: our relationship to authority and the way museum guards use their power; our sense of moderation and the nature of our relationship to the work of art}.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{flushleft}


18 Bourriaud, \textit{Relational Aesthetics}, op cit, p 39, emphasis added.

19 Ibid, pp 56–57, emphasis added.
\end{flushleft}
According to Bourriaud, ‘a beholder’s ethic’ is naturally requested: ‘As such, it is part of a specific history, a history of works prompting the onlooker to become aware of the setting he finds himself in (the happenings and environments of the sixties, and in situ installations).’ However, if the ethical norm turns out to be rather rigid, it could easily stifle lively interactions with the original artwork and the participatory audience. The ethics must be defined in some way and properly understood by the audience, but not necessarily imposed by the artist or other external factors, such as gallerists, curators or museum guards.

Interestingly, Bourriaud goes on to insist on the ethical and moral behaviour of the beholder, and also seems to step back somewhat from his rigid and authoritative attitude by adding: ‘democratic concerns’

‘give everyone their chance’, through forms which do not establish any precedence, *a priori*, of the producer over the beholder (let us put it another way: no divine right authority), but rather negotiate open relationship with it, which are not resolved beforehand.

However, do participatory artworks allow for this type of welcome only within the range that the beholder’s ethics permits? How do other kinds of freedom or open relationships between an artwork or artists and an audience operate? Without any democratic right or specific goal for the audience, the meaning and artistic value of the work can be delivered but may not be expanded.
THE PUBLIC AS STRANGERS

Bourriaud expects the audience to behave in ‘unity’ and ‘coherence’ – as an exemplary audience that performs within a directed guideline. However, Miwon Kwon argues that Gonzalez-Torres’s artworks are more like ‘truly public sculptures’. Kwon asserts that Gonzalez-Torres’s work essentially questions the meaning of truly public art by allowing the viewer to make an independent decision within a shared space, and thus the work occupies a position beyond Bourriaud’s idea of ‘momentary grouping’ or ‘micro-community’ that only includes an idealised public. Instead, Kwon argues, the public horizon Gonzalez-Torres’s work wishes to produce is ‘more expansive and encompassing’. The viewing public is ‘an un-unifiable, anonymous, incoherent formlessness’, and ‘[f]ollowing Michael Warner, it means rather “the public is always in excess of its known social basis... It must include strangers”’: it seems clear enough that the artist conceived the public as a performatively determined category, as coming into existence in the self-organizing act of individuals responding to the work’s address, and not as a function of institutional rules of membership or belonging. It is perhaps less clear how important it was for the artist that the particularity of these responses not become colonized through abstraction for the purposes of affirming a coherent collective identity.

From the perspective of an individual audience member, the happening at PLATEAU can be interpreted as mischievous vandalism. However, having examined Park’s intention and concern before and after the per-

---

26 Ibid, p 119. Here Kwon quotes Michael Warner’s thought about ‘the horizon of the public’ from Publics and Counterpublics, Zone Books, New York, 1990. In addition, Christopher Ho also tries to think of Gonzalez-Torres’s crowd as ‘between an unthinking mass and an empowered crowd, a manipulative collective and a motivated collection of individuals’; Ho, ‘Within and Beyond’, op cit, p 11.

Scene in the gallery after the audience had taken most of the sweets from ‘Untitled’ (Placebo), photo: Jong Won Park
In a work entitled *Is a Museum a Battlefield?*, presented at the 13th Istanbul Biennial, Hito Steyerl reflects on the relation of some of the sponsors with the biennial, particularly the connection of the museum with armament manufacturers. Thus she invites the viewer to think of what kind of weapons are used in each battlefield. Although her work tries to touch on the circumstances under which the biennial has been organised, particularly in Turkey in 2013, she would like to expand and appropriate her reflection to think of a Korean context, particularly the circumstances under which Korean art museums and galleries are aligned with chaebol.

Thus far, we have looked at the happening at PLATEAU as a conflict of interpretation based on Bourriaud’s beholder’s ethic vs Kwon’s truly public sculpture within a specifically South Korean context. Both arguments remain orientated to the contemporary artworld. In the next section the discussion will be continued from a different perspective with a view to changing the attitude of the audience to the artist in the context of new media art.
Contemporary art has evolved in the last two decades. This change is due to the rapid development and adoption of technological media. Steve Dietz notes that contemporary art has been transformed because 'new media' changes our understanding of contemporary art behaviours largely due to 'its participation in the creation of a cultural understanding of computational interactivity and networked participation'. People are now familiar with interactive artwork; an audience who used to be admonished by 'Do not touch' signs in front of an artwork, have become acclimatised to interacting with it, which encourages 'please touch me'. Audience behaviour has changed from passive to active in its engagement with art – people now respond, act and react to it. Also, regardless of whether the artwork deploys technology or not – and even if the audience does not know of the existence of relational aesthetics theories, post-dramatic theatre, game culture and the conceptual background of the work’s aesthetic or the philosophy behind it – increasing numbers of people are now exposed to this type of work and understand the communication protocol; they already enjoy looking at art via direct and indirect means, through various Internet blogs and links shared through social media posts by friends and colleagues.

Popular engagement with video games in particular means it is natural for an audience to take an active role in participating with the work of art. Many recent games studies researchers note that player-centred discourses in the gaming experience actually contribute to expanding active audience research in media and cultural studies. Behrenshausen asserts that as a new media, ‘video games do not simply afford or invite audience participation but require it in order to function completely’.

Thus:

- gaming subjects’ playful acts of appropriation or subversion allow those subjects to resist complete determination by game-structures and act ultimately as arbiters of a video game’s meaning, utility, or effectivity.

As subjects-in-ideology, active players are essential components in the ‘co-construction’ of video games and produce socially, economically and politically meaningful experiences and sites of community formation. In the production of culture, the notion of producer and consumer, artist and viewer, professional and amateur, becomes blurred. ‘Post-dramatic theatre’ as theorised by Hans-Thies Lehmann, along with the relational art experience, demonstrates that the boundaries between art and life, space and time are equally indefinable. Gonzalez-Torres’s work suggests that we should examine the institution where the artwork is displayed and shared, and in this way his work is a good example of Bourriaud’s relational aesthetic. The concept of ‘post-dramatic theatre’ also attempts an institutional critique of an artwork which is created in a conventional approach to time and space. In this era of post-production, revisiting and repurposing the historical work of art becomes a popular strategy and tactic for both artists and audience as consumer and co-creator. Although contemporary art and new media
art continue to develop a discourse on the issue of post-medium as opposed to post-media (ie what is the new value and new meaning of a work of art?), we cannot ignore the altered position of the audience within the context of current art practice. The conventional artworld and its institutions need to accept this altered audience and respond to their active participation in appropriate and creative ways. As Domenico Quaranta states in Beyond New Media Art:

the digital revolution completely changed the conditions for the production and circulation of art, and that it is slowly but inevitably changing the ways in which art is experienced, discussed and owned. In these circumstances, art is becoming something completely different from what we were used to – and art worlds have to change accordingly, developing new values, new economies, new structures.

As a student in a graduate art school’s media art department, Jong Won Park is ‘a new kid on the block’ who wants to be the active art practitioner in this new media. The younger generation are accustomed to viewing artwork through diverse channels of communication, including social media.

In the art classroom, students watch Marina Abramović’s retrospective performance The Artist Is Present (2010) via YouTube and Improv Everywhere’s flash-mob-like performances on the group’s official website, where each performance documentation video is linked and shared via YouTube. These media are viable resources for encountering and comprehending historical works of contemporary performance and looking at current trends in pervasive performances and games. Because of them, art becomes an everyday experience, even for artists, who easily find ideas and publish their work online or share them via YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook and Instagram. Although these new media can be viewed as being similar to other types of distribution formats, they have become more powerful due to their real-time and borderless accessibility. Through the ‘Like’ button or ‘Following’ and ‘Sharing’ functions, content which the viewer deems to be interesting, and therefore meaningful, can easily be shared with others and thus the experience of diverse recommended content is ever expanding. Being able to make individual comments about shared content allows people to open and add discussion freely, and by reading discussions communal knowledge can be increased and updated. If the content is art, then the viewer’s indirect experience of it is exponentially increased, and encountering art becomes a common, everyday experience. In this way, people are already used to looking, capturing, reframing and reiterating, or discussing art. Through widely accessible networked media, a new audience actively and aggressively accesses material across diverse genres of art simultaneously.

In their advertising for the Gonzalez-Torres show, PLATEAU emphasised that the exhibition was the artist’s first solo show in Asia. As a prestigious gallery which has eagerly introduced contemporary art, PLATEAU continued to pitch the exhibition as one of their main goals as a leading institution in Asia. If the gallery had been ready to recognise and understand its new audience and accept its changed identity, it could have responded in a more flexible manner to the unexpected intervention.

---


37 Quaranta, Beyond New Media Art, op cit, p 202.


Museum audiences are not naïve; they are not there merely to be educated. As Jacques Rancière states in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, the people share the Zeitgeist and reflect the spirit of intellectual emancipation of a period without institutional authority or intellectual guidance. Indeed, the contemporary artworld should be aware that its audience engages with the entertainment industry rather than the artworld, and shares information and experiences via social media.

**AFTER GONZALEZ-TORRES**

How can the current contemporary artworld function in the face of technological society’s changing audience? Jay Bolter argues that in an era of digital plenitude, changes in culture and the art experience have led to the notion of an end of Art. In *After Art*, David Joselit also expresses concerns about capital in relation to contemporary art, saying that contemporary art has become, like a hedge fund, hoarded and leveraged to benefit the few. Therefore, he argues, art needs to recover its power and function as a cultural artefact and practice by providing paradigmatic transformative experiences in society, and for this, the way that art can function as a currency without falling into monetisation is by positing visual art as ‘image diplomacy’ and considering the redistribution of images as the currency of art. Through the concept of *after* – the prefix *after* means ‘reproduction’ and ‘recontextualisation’ – as a strategic method for populating a number of images, as Sherrie Levine used the title *After Walker Evans* when she rephotographed Evans’s work and used it as her work, Joselit wants to think of the continuity and reverberation of images and art existing as a group, establishing a wide variety of connections simultaneously across space, time, genre and scale. As a result of such ubiquitous image saturation, Joselit believes that a new kind of power in art will be manifest through its heterogeneous formats. In fine, he posits that the power of art can be derived from connectivity and through ‘changes of the potentiality and behaviors of art’, and the content of art can be shared widely and diversely in reiterative and reformatted ways.

In addition, it is worthwhile re-examining how Joselit imagines the ideal way to share and the experience of art. While talking about the proliferation of images, he asserts that their being everywhere at once results in a ‘buzz’ in place of an aura, and this buzz arises not from the agency of a single object or event but from the emergent behaviours of populations of actors. Taking bees as an example, Joselit points out that actors organise themselves into a swarm and such events are not planned or directed by a single focused intelligence – they are ‘distributed’ over several small acts that, taken individually, may have no intention or consciousness of a bigger picture. Therefore, ‘buzz’ indicates a moment of becoming – a threshold at which coherence emerges. In this context, if we go back to the happening at Gonzalez-Torres’s exhibition, although it may be a small, local and individual action, it can be read as the single event of becoming and emergence of a ‘buzz’, and thus, as a result, Gonzalez-Torres’s work can be (re)circulated to aquire a new type of aura.
THE NEW ACTIVE AUDIENCE

As discussed, Gonzalez-Torres’s work attempts an institutional critique by means of interactive sweets and posters, and leaves the open structure to continue this critique. Park’s happening at PLATEAU engaged with this in order to extend his institutional critique and continue to think of it in the current situation. This happening was possible due to the widely accumulated direct and indirect experiences of the audience, whose exposure to social media continues to grow and who have become accustomed to being active players, or game players. The happening’s effects did not stop at its intervention in the physical space of the gallery, but continued via being widely discussed in the social media afterwards. This resulted in the event being available to the audience outside the gallery, and allowed people to think about Gonzales-Torres’s work in a new context or in a new way. This may be critical to the artworld since the effects can be viewed as a symptom of the arrival of new audiences and their active attitude towards a meaningful experience of value sharing with works of art in the networked and social media era. This sort of happening is gaining momentum within the art institution and the art educational establishment, and art criticism needs to reconsider the role and function of art in this networked and social media society, since it suggests and shows a new way in which art can be consumed, opening a new discourse. Hal Foster implies that the role of art in society is still defined by its reflective and resistive function as an aesthetic, cognitive and critical register. The way in which an artwork can survive in perpetuity through value sharing, and continue to possess its aesthetic and historical context in society, could contest the form of that society rather than celebrating it for the purposes of reflection and resistance.

Thus far, we have discussed the arrival in the contemporary artworld of a new active audience and of a new value-sharing process within a new media society. This new active artwork audience is not the audience who follows the rules or performs the role that the artist has created, but can create new roles and rules within the structure that the artwork provides or artists make through their artwork, in order to interpret the work and keep making it valuable. The new audience will be the ones who enable the meaning and narrative of an artwork to be continued, and who will find their own meaning with the work of art.

Finally, if we look at the relationship of contemporary art to media art, and at the tensions that have existed in this relationship over the last few decades, as Quaranta states, the new media artworld still keeps trying to ‘Boho’ dance (a bizarre mock courtship dance) with the contemporary artworld (legitimate high art) in order to gain acknowledgement from it, but its efforts are not yet accepted. The happening at PLATEAU may be the very signal which urges the development of a relationship between the two fields. As such, it demonstrates the need to overcome peoples’ unwillingness to understand more of each other, and to flexibly embrace changes made at the socio-individual and micro level.
The participants walked out of the gallery and put the sweets into a truck waiting outside the museum, photo: Jong Won Park

ORCID

Hyun Jean Lee 📩 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5309-3859
Jeong Han Kim 📩 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2437-5793