
Replicate

— Joshua Decter

Ten years ago, I authored one of the essays in General Idea's *Fin de siècle* exhibition catalogue. Occasionally I return to that publication, and I'm reminded of GI's fresh, provocative, poignant, smart, and utterly imaginative approach to art-making. Just a few days ago, I rediscovered a particular work in that catalogue: the *Test Pattern Wallpaper* edition from 1989. In 2001, I had included GI's *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plates from the Miss General Idea Pavillion* (1988) in my *Tele[visions]* exhibition at the Kunsthalle Vienna. Perhaps I should have also ordered some rolls of the *Test Pattern Wallpaper* (if any of the 101 limited-edition editions were still available), and then adorned the walls of the exhibition space. Instant televisual aesthetics!

Editions were a perfect fit for General Idea: they allowed a means of wider cultural distribution, a deeper penetration into the body politic, and engagement with a somewhat less exclusive, more accessible art market. The logic of the edition is that it is plural. An edition embodies the uniqueness of an individual artwork, yet

extends that kernel of uniqueness, conceptually, into a paradigm of serial repetition. In a sense, the edition allows the artist to continuously re-simulate, or replicate, the authenticity of an "original" artistic idea or gesture, a quality that must have had a basic appeal to General Idea's idiosyncratic revisioning of tropes of popular/media culture. In technical terms, an edition can be infinitely reprintable (unlimited), or fixed to a particular quantity (limited), and General Idea produced both varieties. It's tenable to suggest that GI's commitment to editions and multiples can be traced back to the group's early post-Fluxus, performance/theatre-oriented years. During that time, the focus seemed to be less upon making unique art objects and more slanted toward generating various kinds of time-based activities and events—as well as the documents, artifacts, images, and ephemera that referenced such activities and events. Even the publication of *FILE Magazine* might be considered an extended type of printed edition or multiple that persisted over a number of years. By the 1980s, as GI's cosmology became more complex and layered, the edition began to suggest other symbolic possibilities for General Idea. One example is the metaphor of viral proliferation that was associated with the conversion of Robert Indiana's LOVE emblem into an AIDS logo and its subsequent dissemination by General Idea through a host of communication vehicles—posters, matchbooks, adverts, paintings, wallpaper, and so on—into social space. The edition conceived of as a vehicle of cultural and political activism, replicated into the flow of the world.

Without intending to wax too melancholic or sentimental, I should mention that when I began writing this piece, recollections of an experience with Jorge Zontal surfaced from somewhere in my brain. It is recounted here as a gesture of affirmation and remembrance, a means of recovering a circumstance in which Jorge's life intersected, rather poignantly, with mine. It was the spring of 1993, and I had just attended the opening of General Idea's *Fin de siècle* exhibition at the Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio. The next day, Jorge and I were scheduled to return to New York on the same flight. At the airport in Columbus, while waiting at the departure gate, perhaps fifteen minutes prior to boarding, Jorge excused himself to visit the bathroom. Time elapsed quickly, boarding commenced, and the airplane began to make preparations to push off from the gate. I waited, but Jorge did not return, and my mild anxiety progressed into substantial worry. A few more minutes passed, and I decided to request that the gate page Jorge via the airport's PA system. At that moment, he reappeared, and we boarded the plane. I asked Jorge if he was okay, he responded yes, and I dropped the issue. But it was evident that everything was not right. I then began to imagine that something unfortunate might occur during our flight back to New York, but the trip was uneventful. Although I understood that Jorge had AIDS, he seemed to neither dwell upon it outwardly nor

expect others to be preoccupied with his condition. He was reserved, occasionally inaccessible. Perhaps it was my perception that Jorge was somehow unreachable that created my sense of helplessness in this situation. I felt compelled to reach out, but at the same time didn't want to violate the boundaries of Jorge's pride, selfhood, and privacy.

What does this story have to do with the issue of General Idea's editions? Well, nothing directly, although I can recall, before departing from the Wexner Center to travel back to New York, being given a General Idea AIDS-logo pin, which I promptly affixed to the lapel of my jacket, by either AA, Jorge, or Felix. I occasionally wore that pin during the '90s, but at some point along the way it has been misplaced, or simply lost. I'm not sure if the pin was produced as an edition or a multiple, but wearing it allowed me to participate in a form of cultural and political activism—and this, of course, is one of the most important legacies of General Idea's practice. It also functioned as a memento mori, in a sense, for the absence of Jorge and Felix: an affirmative sign of remembrance, an emblematic conversion of loss into hope.