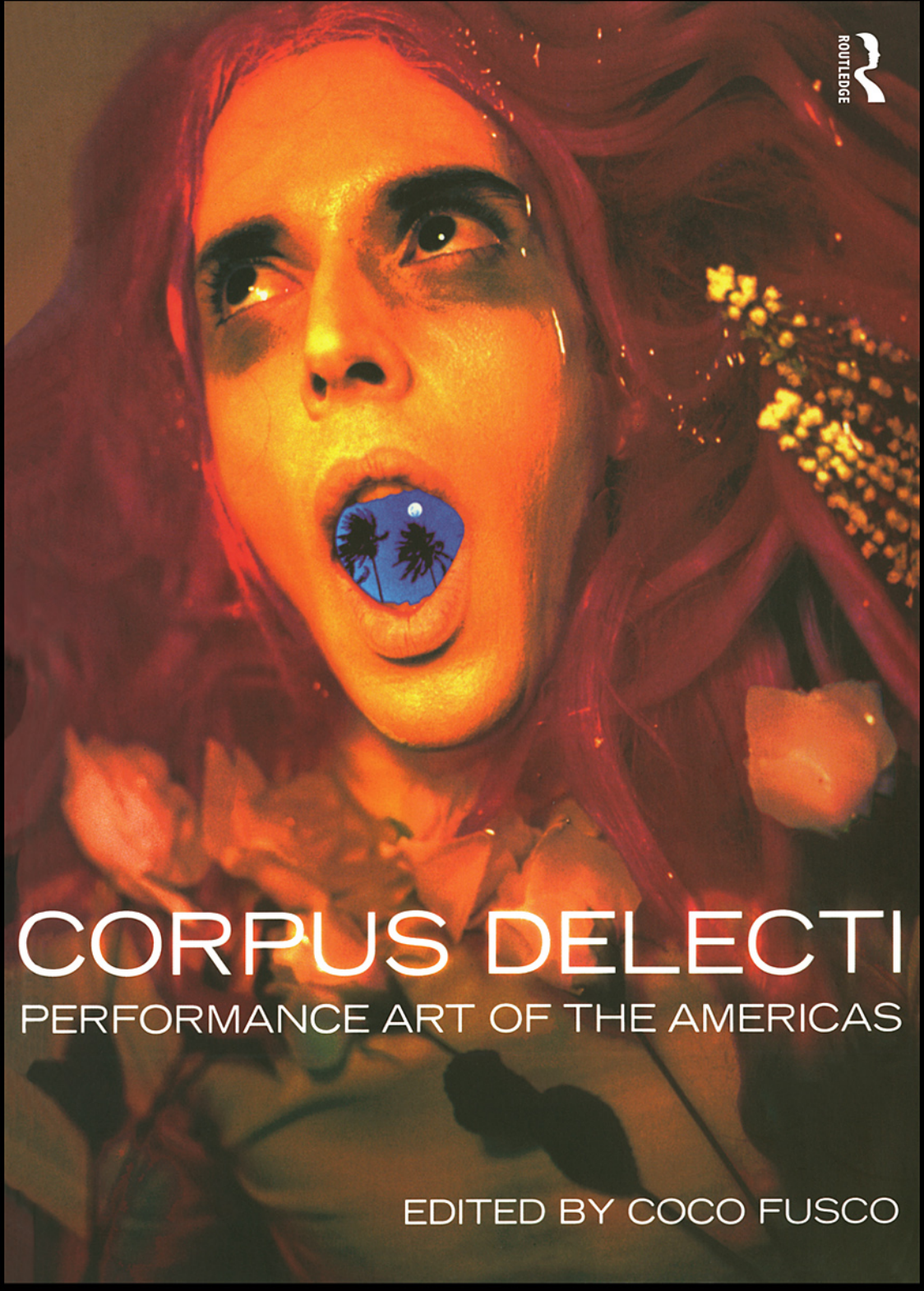

CORPUS DELECTI

Corpus Delecti is an unprecedented event in the history of Latino performance art. Assembled and edited by one of the foremost practitioners and theorists in the field, it charts the extraordinary range of practices, narratives, and theories which make up this unique area of contemporary performance.

Using photos, scripts, essays, and poetry, *Corpus Delecti* explores the impact on performance of Latin American politics, popular culture, and syncretic religions. Nowhere else has such a vibrant and rich collection of writings and documents been fused into a comprehensive archive-volume.

Coco Fusco has brought together artists and scholars to bridge the theory/practice divide and to discuss a wide range of genres. They include:

- body art
- *carpa*
- vaudeville
- staged political protest
- tropicalist musical comedies
- the Chicano Art Movement
- queer Latino performance.

Corpus Delecti probes for the first time the specific contexts which have shaped Latin American performance. It is at once a significant intervention into the history and analysis of contemporary art and an ensemble piece of textual and visual work to treasure.

Coco Fusco is a New York-based interdisciplinary artist and writer and the. author of *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (1995).

CORPUS DELECTI

PERFORMANCE ART OF THE AMERICAS

EDITED BY COCO FUSCO

London and New York

First published 2000
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Fusco, Coco.
Corpus delecti: performance art of the Americas/Coco Fusco.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Performance art-America. 2. Arts, Modern-20th century-America. I. Title.
NX501.F87 2000
700'.98–dc21 99–26480
CIP

ISBN 0-203-98474-9 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-415-19453-9 (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-19454-7 (pbk)

Contents

lllustrations

Contributors

Tania Bruguera is an interdisciplinary artist based in Havana, where she is also a professor at the Instituto Superior de Arte and directs the Espacio de Arte Tejadillo 214. She has presented her work in numerous international biennales and cultural institutions.

Maris Bustamante is a Mexican Non-Objectual visual artist and designer, a participant in the conceptualist grupos movement of the 1970s, the proud mother of Andrea and Neus, a feminist artist, university professor and researcher, writer, lecturer, and cultural promoter.

Nao Bustamante is a performance artist originally from the San Joaquin Valley of Central California. She has been living and working in San Francisco's Mission District since 1984. In addition to performance, Bustamante is a video and installation artist. She has presented her work in Mexico, Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. View her websites at: www.slowburn.com/rosa.html and www.sfgate.com/nao1.html

Francisco Casas is a Chilean artist and writer currently living in Mexico.

C.Ondine Chavoya teaches in the program of visual and critical studies at Tufts University/School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Roselyn Costantino is an associate professor of Spanish and Women's Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. She is completing a book-length manuscript entitled *The Body in Play: Contemporary Women's Theater and Performance in Mexico.*

Angel Delgado is an interdisciplinary artist based in Havana.

Ricardo Dominguez is the Senior Editor of *The Thing* (bbs.thing.net) and a co-founder of The Electronic Disturbance Theater. He is also a former member of Critical Art Ensemble, and a Fakeshop worker. He has collaborated with Francesca da Rimini on Dollspace and the Aphanisis Project with Diane Ludin. http://www.thing.net/~rdom

Felipe Ehrenberg's father gave him Da Vinci's biography to read when he was eleven years old, so he learned how to draw. After his own children

arrived, he became a neologist. Henceforth, he intends to work on his garden and cultivate the ferns.

Maria Elena Escalona is a Cuban writer, curator and theater director based in Barcelona. Prior to moving to Europe, she spent three years working with Flora Lauten's Grupo Teatro Buendia in Havana.

Coco Fusco is a New York-based writer and interdisciplinary artist. She is the author of *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (1995). She is an associate professor at the Tyler School of Art of Temple University.

Maria Elena Gaitán is a Los Angeles-based performance artist, musican and writer.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is a Mexican performance artist and writer based in San Francisco. A recipient of numerous awards, he is the author of *The Warrior for Gringostoika, The New World (B)order* and *The Temple of Confessions*.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–1996) was born in Cuba, studied art in Puerto Rico and moved to New York to complete his studies in 1979, where he then settled and became a member of the artists' collective Group Material. Gonzalez-Torres's public artworks, installations, sculptures, prints and photographs have been exhibited throughout the US, Europe, Latin America and Japan.

María Teresa Hincapié is an artist based in Bogota, Colombia who has worked in the fields of theatre and performance for over twenty years. She is the only performance artist in Colombia to have received the country's top award for visual art. She has created solo performance works throughout Latin America and Europe. She teaches at the University of the Andes.

May Joseph is an assistant professor of performance studies at New York University. She is the author of *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minnesota, 1999) and co-editor (with Jennifer Natalya Fink) of *Performing Hybridity* (Minnesota, 1999).

Cesar Martinez is an interdisciplinary artist based in Mexico City. He has participated in over sixty exhibitions world wide. He is a professor in the department of Graphic Design at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Azcapotzalco.

Raquel Mendieta Costa is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese of Stanford University.

Aldo Damian Menendez is a Cuban artist based in Miami.

Charles Merewether is an art historian and Collections Curator at the Getty Research Institute. His publications include *Art and Social Commitment: An End to the City of Dreams 1931–1948* (1984), *A Marginal Body* (1987) and the forthcoming *Anxieties of Revelation*.

Marta Minujín is an artist based in Buenos Aires.

Rafael Montañez-Ortiz is a an interdiscplinary artist and professor of art at Rutgers Unversity. He is also the founder and first director of the Museo del Barrio. His Destruction Art and Sratch Video works have been exhibited in seventeen museums and other cultural venues in the US and Europe.

José Esteban Muñoz is an assistant professor in the Performance Studies Deparment of the Tischo School of the Arts of New York University. He is the author of *Disidentifications* (1999) and the co-editor of *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (1996) and *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (1997).

Simone Osthoff is a Chicago-based Brazilian artist and writer. She is an instructor at the Art History, Theory and Criticism Department of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Silvia Pellarolo is Assistant Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, California State University, Northridge, and a member of the Irvine Hispanic Theater Research Group. She is the author of *Sainete criollo/democracia/ representación. El caso de Nemesio Trejo* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1997).

Antonio Prieto is the co-author of *El teatro como vehículo de comunicación* (Mexico, 1992). He teaches in Stanford University's Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and is the project director for the DataCenter's Information Services Latin America (ISLA).

María Elena Ramos is a critic and the President of the Museum of Fine Arts in Caracas, Venezuela. She is the author of *Acciones frente a la plaza: Reseñas y documentos de siete eventos para una nueva lóica del arte venezolano* (1995).

Nelly Richard is a cultural critic and the editor of *La Revista de Critica Cultural* in Chile. She directs the Cultural Criticism Seminar at the Universidad Arcis and the Program on Post-Dictatorship and Democratic Transition in Chile sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. She is the author of several publications, including *Metafora y Residuos (Metaphors and Residues)* (1998).

Lotty Rosenfeld is an interdisciplinary artist based in Santiago de Chile who has exhibited nationally and internationally for over twenty years. She is a founding member of the CADA art collective, one of the protagonists of the Chilean *avanzada*.

Leandro Soto participated in the renowned Volumen Uno art movement in Havana in 1981 as the first performance-installation artist in Cuba. He has participated in over 150 exhibitions throughout the world over the past twenty-five years. He currently teaches at Mount Holyoke College.

Merian Soto is Artistic Director of Bronx-based Latino arts organization Pepatian, and Associate Professor of Dance at Temple University's Esther Boyer College of Music and Department of Dance.

1. Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Buenos Aires, 1994 Fundación Banco Patricios, Buenos Aires, Argentina Fusco's and Gómez-Peña's itinerant performance in which they exhibited themselves as exotic "savages" from an unknown island in the Gulf of Mexico explored the history of the ethnographic display of indigenous peoples and its influence in the shaping of images of cultural "Otherness" that informed European and American avant-gardes.

Carmelita Tropicana is a Cuban performance artist based in New York who received an Obie award for sustained excellence of performance in 1999. A book of her writings entitled *I, Carmelita Tropicana, Performing Between Cultures* is forthcoming from Beacon Press.

Evelyn Velez-Aguayo is a choreographer and performer and an assistant professor in the Dance department of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Introduction: Latin American performance and the *reconquista* of civil space

Coco Fusco

It is December 31, 1998, and I am sitting on the malecón, a stone wall that runs along the Caribbean sea in a tiny colonial village on the Venezuelan coast called Choroní. Nestled between sprawling cacao plantations at the edge of a magnificently dense rain forest, Choroní thrives on fishing and hosting eco-tourists and birdwatchers from Northern Europe. The clay-roofed houses built around interior courtyards here distinguish themselves by the inventiveness of the ironwork that covers their windows and entryways, the boldest of the designs resembling the hard-edged geometric patterns of the Kineticist art for which Venezuela became famous in the 1960s.

Each year during Holy Week the fishermen carry the Virgin Mary from their local church out to sea to ask for her protection. Their priest, an illustrious Jesuit called Padre Ignacio, in addition to offering Mass and baptizing babies, has transformed the nineteenth-century electrical plant in the rainforest where, according to the priest, he lives in a grandiose hall full of colonial furniture and religious artworks. Since it's Christmastime, at least five different nativity scenes complete with blinking lights are arranged around the hall. Next door is an artists' retreat where the American choreographer Bill T.Jones and company will soon arrive for a residency. The waterfalls that once provided energy for the electrical plant now serve as recreation for Padre Ignacio's guests and local children.

Between the humidity of the sea and the rainforest nothing dries completely. The pages of this manuscript have grown more and more damp each day since I've been here, and the worry that an unexpected power outage will erase the digital version that is lodged in my laptop has made me create several copies of everything I write. A small price to pay for the luxury of drifting off to sleep under the stars in a hammock, rocked by the breeze from the sea. Enveloped by the ebullient nature of this place I wait for the cannon on the malecón to be fired at midnight, after which the fishermen will spend the first day of New Year parading through the streets of the village, drumming in the doorways of each house just long enough to be awarded a bottle of rum. Locals and vacationers from Caracas and Maracay mingle with barefoot and sunburnt travelers from Germany and Italy, following behind the drummers. Some Irish visitors I've befriended are surprised to learn that the men are singing in Spanish. I wonder

about the delicate balance that residents maintain between showcasing their world for others and enjoying the extraordinary beauty and abundance of their surroundings themselves. I also think about how these fishermen, descendants of slaves who once cultivated the finest cacao in the world, take obvious pleasure in recalling their history through the oral and physical gestures that catapult their chants into the air. The Caribbean, the cradle of New World syncretism, I decide, is the perfect place from which to reflect on the significance of performances that evoke multiple forms of *latinidad*. So from here, from the edge of south facing northward, I take a moment to remember how this project began.

Three years ago, I proposed to create a showcase of Latin American performance art for London's Institute of Contemporary Art. At the time the ICA's live art department was run by two visionary curators, Lois Keidan and Catherine Ugwu, who were interested in bringing the broadest spectrum of programming possible to the British public. I wanted to present an array of artists working in a variety of styles and strategies—first because I liked the work; and second because I wanted to break the tropicalist stereotypes about Latin American performativity and to unhinge the tokenist approach that characterized much "cultural diversity" programming, limiting it to the repeated presentation of one or two "name" artists. Luckily for me, Lois and Catherine instantly accepted my proposal, and I will always be grateful for their unfailing support.

In a way I was also looking at Britain as a sort of refuge from the virulent backlash against multiculturalism that had swept the US, on the one hand, and from the excessively instrumentalist versions of intercultural exchange that foundations and government initiatives had imposed on the other. Britain, after all, had welcomed several members of the Latin American avant-gardes of the 1960s and 1970s, many of whom were fleeing their countries, such as the Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg, who collaborated with members of Fluxus, the Brazilian Hélio Oiticica and Venezuelans Pedro Teran and Diego Barboza. Black Britain had also welcomed me in the 1980s, when I began a dialogue with black artists and intellectuals that has been absolutely fundamental to my sense of how to engage creatively with the politics of identity, and how to understand postcoloniality beyond the framework of American race relations.

When it came time to find a name for the program, I found myself browsing through the list of Latin expressions using the word "corpus" in my dictionary until I came upon "corpus delicti" which was defined as "the material substance, such as a body or a victim in a murder, upon which a crime has been committed." Given that so much performance I was interested in addressed, (albeit in an indirect manner), the illegitimately violent exercise of power over bodies, I thought the expression made a perfect title. Thanks, however, to my capricious memory, the message that I sent to London said "corpus delecti", which would mean something to the effect of "the body that derives or incarnates pleasure." Ironically enough, my slip evoked the tropicalist stereotype of the erotic Latin body propagated by touristic entertainment. Even the mistake—which I discovered much later—was recuperable.

During the festival, a short conference was held at which scholars and artists presented their views of Latin American performance, and it soon became clear that what all the participants shared was a lack of opportunities to discuss their work with each other and to see performances by artists from Latin countries other than their own. In response to that absence, then, I proposed to edit this book, which builds upon the original papers given at the conference. I sought to unite scholarly and creative interventions, to juxtapose performance by Latinos in Latin America, the US and Europe, and to bring together perspectives on performance that derived from visual artists' traditions as well as from theater so that body art, street actions and stage work could be compared and contrasted. I was not terribly concerned about coming up with a very strict definition of Latin America or of Latino performance—after decades of tedious semantic arguments on the subject I would rather concentrate on the work that artists make. Some artists might balk at the idea of being labeled by their nationality or regional affiliation, but I certainly did not mean to suggest that this territorial marker necessarily implies that a given artist *must* create a certain kind of work *because* of his or her having been born in a particular place. It is undeniable, however, that many artists have chosen to engage creatively with their contexts, for reasons that are explored by the writings in this volume. I also did not trouble myself much as to whether "performance" is a term that originated in Latin America every Latino performance artist I have ever met knows what it means and how to use it, and many have offered alternative terms such as "plastic action," "non-objectual aesthetics," etc., vocabulary that is also explored here. And if Latin Americans who have spent the greater part of their lives creating work in the US and Europe still "represent" their nationalities of origin in international exhibitions, I see no reason why children and grandchildren of émigrés whose works evinced strong cultural ties to Latin America should not also be considered as fitting within the purview of this book.

I also purposely let self-consciously artistic performance take center stage in this volume. A good deal of scholarly debate in the US about "the performative" in Latin American culture and in US-Latino communities has been framed in anthropological terms, focusing on the study of rituals, on traditional and "everyday life" performances, and on the performative dimension of political action. This is due in part to the fact that since the field remains dominated by Anglophones, works that demand a knowledge of Spanish or Portuguese, and for which documentation exists largely in those languages, is largely ignored, or at least not systematically studied, by those who do not choose to do their field-work in Latin America. The anthropological bent of the focus on Latino performance artists has also meant that unless the work is perceived as serving a particular sociological agenda, whether it be feminism, queer theory, or cultural hybridity, it is less likely to be studied. While the appreciation of vernacular performativity derives in part from a desire that I sympathize with to dismantle highbrow definitions of culture, I do not believe that such anthropological inclinations should lead to the symbolic erasure of

artistic practices' role in the production of national and regional cultures, or that they should encourage us to misconstrue artists' work as essentially elitist. In addition, I have never understood why some scholars of performance seek to keep artists out of academic discussions of their work, preferring instead a formalist approach that privileges the written text or visual document. This seems peculiarly ironic, given how much effort has been made in the field of performance studies to analyze the power dynamics of conservative anthropological approaches that suppress, marginalize or objectify the subjects of study, or that replace the fluidity of time-based cultural forms with a fixed, static script.

Another somewhat overpowering paradigm is that of agitprop political theatre. As brilliant and necessary as the contributions of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal have been to the understanding of radical pedagogy and social change, the desire to restrict the validity of Latin American cultural production to its capacity to politicize the underprivileged is a symptom of the frustration of leftist intellectuals and a way of ghettoizing Latin American cultural production. It has also been turned in the US into an insistence that all "authentically" Latino artists perform this function—even though the reality is that many Latin American artists' primary audience consists of their peers, other intellectuals, and audiences that do not respond receptively to what they perceive as outdated and dogmatic paradigms. Too many Latin Americans have suffered at the hands of authoritarian systems that reduce all forms of expression—public, private, religious or aesthetic—to a certain political value or meaning for there not to be an enormous amount of skepticism about such approaches to culture. Other interpretative models and performance strategies are just as relevant to understanding Latin American performance art. On the other hand, much Latin American performance art that engages with the social does address traditions and themes that are not taken seriously by conventional theater scholarship in Latin America. As is explained in several of the essays in this volume, a good deal of Latin American . performance recuperates and revindicates "low" theatrical forms such as *teatro frivolo,* cabaret and *carpa* to use them to address social and political issues from authoritarianism and censorship to sexuality.

Another issue that I wanted to explore in this volume is that of intercultural exchange, which I sought to demonstrate as a constant in the twentieth century rather than a product of the 1980s' multiculturalism or a program mandated by a foundation or a trade agreement. Interculturalism can imply many things: it can refer to dialogues among artists from different countries, the absorption of influences from other cultures, the syncretism of diverse sources within a given culture, or the history of theoretical debates about terms such as *mestizaje, creolité,* transculturalism, syncretism, etc. I am often shocked by how little awareness of the history of these debates enters into European and American discussions of the terms—I almost keeled over with laughter recently when I read a catalogue essay by a curator at a prestigious gallery about black British artist Chris Ofili in which it was suggested that "syncretism" was a term

introduced by two young Latino scholars in an article published in 1991! I can only imagine the disdain I would incur if I were to publish a statement to the effect that Mini-malism was a term invented by American critics in the 1990s.

Unfortunately in the US the term "interculturalism" has been limited largely to being conceived of as a corrective, a rubric that designates only the Latin American artists who address the colonial legacy of stereotyping as "useful" to bureaucrats and curators who want to solve the "problem" of racism and save a disenfranchised community from low self-esteem, or to scholars who seek to replace interculturalism introduced by European intellectuals such as Eugenio Barba with a postcolonially reconstructed one from the "margin" or from a "border." While it would be hypocritical for me to suggest that such an artistic project is utterly useless, it is crucial to understand when such strategies and orientations can become exhausted of their transformative potential through excessive use and institutionalization. It is all too easy to conflate cultural hybridity with political parity, and doing so can become a convenient perfunctory solution that substitutes tokenism for serious engagement with the power dynamics that shape specific intercultural relations at both the "centers" and the "margins" of global culture. Too often the strategy of Latin American governments has been to erase or suppress gross economic and political differences by insisting on the essential hybridity of their culture or a nation—thus generating a somewhat skeptical attitude on the part of the artists toward such gestures.

A similarly faulty logic has hampered cultural nationalism, which demands aesthetic product and interpretative models devoid of outside influence. These then would become the hallmark of an authentic national or ethnic culture and put an end to a supposedly colonial fascination with internationalism. Because so much performance art in Latin America and by Latinos in the US has implicitly and explicitly critiqued such cultural politics through their deployment of international avant-garde vocabularies, and because its ephemeral character has been an enabling factor for artists seeking to circumvent institutional control, performance art has rarely maintained a peaceful relationship with state-subsidized cultural institutions in Latin America or with conservative ethnic cultural organizations in the US. The exceptions occur when an institutional policy is established that posits certain modes of performativity as correctives (i.e., the multicultural mandate of the 1980s to educate Americans about racism, or in the case of 1990s' Mexico, to present a postmodern internationalist face for a country whose culture is associated with a pre-industrial pre-Columbian past) or as entertainment for openings and major art events.

In the present, the most common way of rejecting these imposed limitations has been for some Latin American artists to eschew all political concerns or social content in their work, and to reject invitations to present as members of a nationality, a minority, or a disenfranchized sector of humanity, and for curators and critics to downplay the sociopolitical subtext of the Latin American performances from the 1960s and 1970s that they chose to revindicate as part of

a history of Latin American modernism. I would prefer to offer the panorama of perspectives in this volume as another way of addressing the intersection of ephemeral art and the social in Latin contexts. No self-respecting artist, Latin American or not, would want to restrict his or her sense of cultural identity to a bunch of vapid and trite stereotypes, nor would most artists be satisfied with recycling them ad infinitum—and the majority are offended by the facile reduction of cultural difference to stereotypes and rigid identity politics that often appear in uninformed appraisals of their work. But that reductiveness is a problem engendered by poor interpretation, and not of intercultural experimentation itself, even though the neo-formalists of the contemporary art world would deny this. Though some might chose to avoid these issues altogether, as long as global culture remains dominated by simplistic representations of cultural identity, the reception, comprehension, and interpretation of Latin American artists will be affected by that collective imaginary. It seems to me that the necessary antidote to facile interpretations of cultural difference, whether it arrives in the form of a Spanish-speaking Chihuahua who wants Taco Bell, or attempts to impose a single form of syncretism as a moral imperative, is to encourage awareness of just how much of the experimentation in Latin American visual art, literature, and theater in this century has adjudicated between national and regional influences and international vocabularies, and to demonstrate how these experiments cannot be reduced to any single formula. Concerns about cultural identity and interculturalism, then, do not constitute an evolutionary stage for Latin American art, but rather need to be conceived as ever-evolving constants.

It is always dangerous to generalize about Latin American cultural production, whatever the medium, but I would like to take that risk for a moment here and offer some observations about performance from the region and how it might differ slightly from work in other parts of the world that is recognized as constitutive of the performance "canon." The first generalization has to do with popular cultural influences. Most assessments of the Dadaist Cabaret Voltaire take into the account how important cabaret, vaudeville, the circus, and other popular theatre forms were for the Dadaists, who saw in them non-narrative structures, gestural vocabularies, anti-bourgeois sentiment, and interactive dynamics they sought to emulate in order to rupture the sanctity of salon culture and its contemplative reception model. As several of the essayists in this volume point out, analogous popular theatre forms, from the *sainete criollo,* to the Mexican *carpa,* to the tropicalist cabarets of the Caribbean and their televisual equivalents, have been key sources for many Latin American performance artists who also want to take advantage of them as storehouses of non-linear structures, anti-elitist attitudes, archetypal characters, and techniques for encouraging audience engagement. The tendency in gesture toward melodramatic exaggeration derives in large part from these traditions.

The second generalization I will make relates to rituals and religions as sources in the elaboration of corporeal vocabularies. The development of non-

realistic dramatic styles in European and American avant-garde theatre in the twentieth century has relied heavily on the observation and adaptation of non-Western performance; Chinese acting for Bertolt Brecht, Balinese theatre for Antonin Artaud, and Indian theatre for Peter Brook, etc. Dadaist Hugo Ball declaimed poems from Africa and the South Pacific that he read phonetically. Surrealists studied the rituals, dances, and altered states of Native American shamans and Haitian voodoo priests. In the 1950s and 1960s, painters, poets, and theatre artists strove to emulate the improvisational style of black jazz musicians. In the 1960s the Living Theatre called upon its members to "become a tribe." In the 1970s, Performance duo Ulay and Abramovic stayed with Australian Aboriginals for a year to learn how to transform their existence into live art, and even today Abramovic continues to study the relationship between ritualized bodily movement and ecstatic states of consciousness in non-European cultures.

Latin Americans, on the other hand, have more often tended to look within their own cultures or to other Latin cultures for symbolic bodily gestures. They inhabit cultural landscapes with corporeal vocabularies derived from pre-Columbian, colonial, African, and Catholic traditions. Unlike the Prostestanism that underlies the aesthetics of the Euro-American avant-gardes, Catholicism proposes a greater continuity between the human and the divine, between the corporeal and the spiritual. The Catholic concept of the body as a receptacle of the Divine Spirit, and the many rituals of submission of that religion, which offer access to ecstatic states through the sacrifice of physical pain, functions as a conceptual backdrop and social subtext for many Latin American performers. In addition, the presence of African and indigenous traditions which codify collective history through the gestures of dance offer many Latin American artists sources of meaningful gesture. Finally, the extraordinarily rich adaptive processes of Afro-Latin syncretism have offered many Latin American performance artists models upon which to base their own attempts at assimilating Euro-American forms.

The last generalization has to do with what I will call the spatialization of power. Most histories of performance art point to key formal shifts wrought by the medium: from the object to the body as agent *and* object, from "atemporal" apprehension of a completed work to the intensified awareness of temporality through the participatory experience in the process of its making, from the primacy of the rational to the celebration of somatic expressivity. Some of those histories that focus on the social significance of the dematerialization of the object also stress that performance artists displaced the collector as ideal consumer, favoring instead an audience of peers, and sought to take their work outside the mechanisms of the commodification by situating it in non-institutional, and later in artist-run non-profit spaces. In light of the determinant role the art market has placed in the classification and evaluation of European and American art, it makes perfect sense that artists seeking to address the spatial articulations of this powerful institution would make such moves.

Latin Americans, however, have faced another series of problems that influence the relationships between art, society, aesthetic language, and the institutions that control the dissemination of creative expression. First, despite the initiatives of a few private patrons in Latin America who began to collect contemporary art in the 1980s, the art markets there do not play as central a role as they do in North America and Europe. In Cuba, Venezuela, Chile, Puerto Rico, and Mexico, the state continues to be the most important sponsor and patron of the arts, controlling networks of exhibition spaces, major collections, national and international competitions, fellowships, and awards. Whatever the attitudes of each government might be regarding the prevalence of the US in the international art market, official state rhetoric in each country defends the notion of a homogenous national culture, transmitted through its artistic production. Interestingly, Latino artists in the US with limited access to the international art market have also been subject, via the mandates of institutional initiatives targeted at ethnic minorities, to the totalizing discourse of cultural nationalism that dominates the realm of "community art."

The state in many Latin American countries not only plays a central role in determining the place and meaning of art in the public space of "cultural patrimony" but it also has a particularly physical way of exercising power on the bodies of its citizenry. During the period in which performance has flourished, the "presence" of the state in Latin American public space has been experienced as harsh, if not excessively physical. I am here referring to the disappearance of bodies, the brutality of the military and the police, the censuring of contestatory voices, and open warfare against political opposition. This state-sponsored violence reached startling proportions from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, when military regimes controlled much of Latin America; however, it has not entirely disappeared despite the shift to "democratic" governments in the 1990s. Furthermore, this approach to the exercise of power extends to the xenophobic treatment of the Latino subaltern in the US, relegated to *de facto* segregated neighborhoods, and mistreated by the border patrol, immigration authorities, the police, the owners of sweatshops, and neo-fascist groups. This North American situation is often overlooked by upper-class Latin American artists who emigrate or travel freely to the US, but it remains a reality for the majority of immigrants and their descendants, particularly those who are racially designated as "other" than the white American norm.

These factors have contributed to the tendency of many Latin American performance artists to infuse avant-garde strategies with social and political orientations, to address state institutions, and to envision the deployment of art in public space as a symbolic confrontation with the state. These factors also contribute to many artists maintaining the point of view that ephermeral, easily adaptable works constitute the ideal means of circumventing the power of the state. To an extent this not only explains, for example, why the Argentine artist Marta Minujín would build a Parthenon of banned books in the middle of Buenos Aires and invite the public to dismantle it and take home its parts; why,

under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, artists of the Chilean *avanzada* would consider the distribution of milk in poor neighborhoods a cultural gesture, or why the Cuban group ARTECALLE or the Chicano group Asco opted for ephemeral street actions, or why Juan Loyola in Venezuela chose to create actions that would generate a response from the police. It also explains why mail art— which provided many Latin American artists with a network of information exchange and exhibitions during a period of widespread censorship—played such an important role in the development of Latin American experimental art practice in the 1970s in addition to becoming a key precursor of telematic and Internet exchange in the 1980s and 1990s.

The material in this book is divided into three sections, corresponding to different spaces for the execution of performances and the imaginative terrains marked out therein. Interwoven with the critical essays are photographic documentation and excerpts of performance texts by artists. whose works, though not specifically addressed by the critics in the book, nonetheless address similar issues. In conceptualizing the organization of the materials this way, I am indebted to Michel Foucault's concept of the heterotopia; that is, physical spaces that are symbolically charged, where social and political relations can be reconfigured.[1] While the majority of performances described in this volume address the need to expand or even to reinstate civic space and the failure of conventional aesthetic languages to engender this possibility, they do so from different sites, which I have designated here as the cabaret, the sacred space of ritual, and the street.

The cabaret as a venue has been critical to performance work in the past twenty years, particularly in the US. In downtown New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, for example, a scene developed out of clubs and tiny theatres that nurtured such solo Latino performers as Carmelita Tropicana, Marga Gómez, John Leguizamo, Nao Bustamante, Culture Clash, Luis Alfaro, the performance poets of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and many others. In Mexico City, Jesusa Rodríguez and Liliana Felipe, Tito Vasconcelos, and Astrid Hadad present their ribald, politically charged performances in bars and cabarets. But the cabaret functions for many Latinos not only as a venue but as a tradition. Because of this, it was crucial to include the contributions by Silvia Pellarolo, which addresses the influence of the *sainete criollo* in the development of a melodramatic performative style that Evita Perón transposed to the political sphere, and the essay by Raquel Mendieta Costa, who explains how the mulatta archetype developed in nineteenth-century Cuban literature about slavery was carried over into popular theater, eventually became central to the tropicalist cabaret spectacles that enthralled tourists and moviegoers in the 1940s and 1950s. Mendieta reminds us also that the mulatta-rumbera as sign has re-emerged in recent years as tourist entertainment and prostitution have regained their central position in the Cuban economy. Pellarolo notes the importance of popular theater to the formation of a sense of identity for a new class of urban working women, and how Evita's body, in her public political performances, became "a

synecdoche of [her] people's plight." Mendieta Costa notes how vaudeville and cabaret in Cuba have functioned as symbolic spaces where the drama of interracial encounters could be play out repeatedly and thus be made intelligible.

To an extent these spectacles created an intercultural, interracial, and interclass framework within which Latin cultures became recognizable to most non-Latins—and, however distorted that framework was, its power has not abated. The cultural archetypes that evolved out of these traditions continue to be reworked by many Latino artists, such as Carmelita Tropicana, whose entire oeuvre could be interpreted as an homage to Cuban cabaret, Patricia Hoffbauer and George Emilio Sanchez, María Elena Escalona, and even my own collaboration with Nao Bustamante. In addition, essayists Roselyn Costantino, in her essay on Jesusa Rodríguez, and Antonio Prieto, in his work on Tito Vasconcelos, mention the importance of Mexican *teatro frívolo, teatro variété* and *carpa* to the work of those artists.

Though Jesusa Rodríguez sees herself more as a woman of the theater than a performance artist, her independence from Mexican government-supported theatre, her control of her material, the fact that she writes, directs, and performs, the fact that her sketches are often open-ended, and that she readily breaks with her scripts to interact with her audiences, makes her work resemble that of many performance artists in the US. As is described by Costantino, Rodríguez's El Hábito is an extraordinary example of an independent artists' space in Mexico City, a space for theatre and for dialogue about critical social and political issues in a country where the press is regularly censored. Costantino focuses on how Rodríguez uses her body to express the tensions in her social environment, drawing on the traditions of *teatro frívolo*.

Antonio Prieto looks at the cabaret spectacles by the legendary Mexican drag performer Tito Vasconcelos. He examines how the artist contributed to the nascent gay movement in Mexico City in the 1980s by convoking a community by the making-visible of gay issues, characters, humor, and sensibilities. Prieto demonstrates how Vasconcelos' version of camp corresponds to the dark camp of Charles Ludlam. It is a kind of camp that is grotesque, "displays an almost sadistic delight with cruelty," and verges on the aesthetic of French *théâtre guignol*. By pushing the irony and exaggerated theatricality of his camp drag to extremes, Prieto argues, Vasconcelos succeeded in unsettling conventional gender roles in a deeply *machista* society and a gay milieu that was resistant to effeminacy. He also engaged in a mode of symbolic terrorism parallel to the visual terrorism of street interventions by visual artists of the 1970s.

With José Muñoz's essay we move into the domain of the US. Muñoz examines how, in his stage piece "Cuerpo Politizado," Luis Alfaro renders social relations that shape Chicano life in Los Angeles through his performative acts. Muñoz's model for interpreting corporeal gesture is similar to that of Roselyn Costantino in her reading of Jesusa Rodríguez, but he concentrates specifically on how Alfaro dramatizes the interplay between categories of experience as a queer man and a Chicano. He posits a valuable notion of the theater space as an

area in which memory is spatialized, and most importantly where it is presented as an anti-normative space where the self is continuously remade. In her stress on how performers Patricia Hoffbauer and George Emilio Sanchez use mobility and dynamism of their performative bodies to rupture static notions of identity and theatrical space, May Joseph's essay expands upon Muñoz's theoretical paradigm.

The second section of the book, entitled "Ritualizing the body politic," includes essays about Latin American body art. Most of the works discussed were presented in gallery spaces, even though some were designed as implicit critiques of the institutionalization of art and its reduction to a commodified object, or to an exponent of a given country's "true national culture." What emerges in these essays is just how the minimalist concerns of body art in the US and Europe were reconfigured in ways that allowed Latin American artists to address their specific social contexts. Also significant is how artists combined elements of a burgeoning international medium with performative rituals of Afro-Latin cultures, such as Ana Mendieta's incorporation of elements of *santería* in her actions, and Hélio Oiticica's transforming his sculptures into dynamic entities by creating his Parangolés for samba dancers.

Charles Merewether's essay on the late Ana Mendieta's early performances carefully reconstructs the creative steps that the young artist took which eventually led her to a poetics of exile. Examining her interest in everyday-life rituals, and particularly her study of anthropological writings that posited certain universal rituals that linked femininity and sacrifice, Merewether reveals how Mendieta was able to evoke her own experience of having been thrust unwillingly into exile from Cuba as a child and to elaborate an action-based practice that explored the aesthetic and sociological significance of disembodiment. Because Cuban artist Tania Bruguera began her career by reconstructing and continuing Mendieta's performances, I have juxtaposed an excerpt from one of her more recent performances against Merewether's essay. In addition, I have located Colombian artist María Teresa Hincapié in this section because her work focuses on everyday-life rituals and the sanctity of the most minimal human gesture. Her durational performances reinvest human relations and the natural environment with a sense of the sacred amidst the dehumanizing atmosphere of violence that surrounds her.

Simone Osthoff's analysis of the interactive dimension of Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica traces the pre-technological origins of the avant-garde's interest in interactivity. She analyzes Clark's and Oiticica's investigations in the 1960s and early 1970s, which expanded in unique and original ways upon the rejection of the visual in favor of the experiential that was taking place on an international scale. Clark and Oiticica chose to render interactivity metaphorically as the constitutive moment of creation through their concentration on haptic experience. Clark's simple, even crude, gloves and masks were designed to catalyze and even liberate her engaged viewers' self-awareness. Oiticica's now famous Parangolés combined a new intermedia

approach with an intercultural exploration of samba, which enabled him to propose an aesthetics of transformation via pleasurable engagement and simultaneously to reject a model of practice and reception based on rigid and imposed logic. Following this essay is the work of Puerto Rican artist Merian Soto, whose transformation of herself into an altar and her relinquishing of self-direction by blindfolding herself enables her to integrate her will with that of the crowd that directs her movement.

María Elena Ramos presents a panorama of Venezuelan body art from the period in which the medium flourished—the late 1970s and early 1980s. Ramos con-textualizes the performances in her own country in light of the interest in "non-objectualist" practices that swept through many Latin American countries during this time. The term "non-objectualist," coined by Mexican critic Juan Acha, came to represent a set of ideas about aesthetic practice that paralleled those associated with the dematerialization of the art object in the US. This implied, in addition to a rejection of the focus on a finished object, a blurring of the art/life boundary and questioning of cultural institutions and policies. Venezuelans, Ramos also explains, were also responding to the visits in 1976 of Charlotte Moorman, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono, Joseph Beuys, and Antonio Muntadas, as well as to the experiences many had studying and working in the US and Europe. In her essay, Ramos emphasizes how many Venezuelan artists addressed national issues such as the country's dependence on its oil industry and the political hypocrisy of the state, and combined an international vocabulary with knowledge of local anthropology.

The final section of this book is entitled "Stepping toward an oppositional public sphere." I am here alluding to social theorist Jürgen Habermas' notion of an ideal public sphere and its subsequent reformulations.[2] In the early 1960s, Habermas argued that the public sphere in a bourgeois democratic society was a domain between society and the state that consisted of a series of institutions through which citizens could engage in critical political discussions and thereby exert control over the state and hold it accountable for its acts. He believed, however, that this public sphere was eroded by the growth of mass media and the rise of the welfare state, as well as the incorporation into it of non-bourgeois groups. Radical cultural producers and theorists have since proposed that this public sphere, rather than being homogeneous, unified and rational, is better conceived of as fragmented and heterogeneous terrain that should remain open to oppositional cultural and political activity.

In this section of *Corpus Delecti,* artists and scholars examine performative interventions in public space that either call attention to the absence of such a domain or call it into being with their acts. These studies thus explore how performance artists use gestural forms, as Nelly Richard explains, and address the social imaginary through political representation. The works in question emanate from various situations in which political repression is spatially articulated: the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, the aftermath of the massacre at Tlatelolco in Mexico City, the forceful containment of Chicanos in

East Los Angeles, the militarization of the US-Mexico border, the state censorship of news about the Zapatista Revolution, and the strict control of public space and cultural expression in Cuba. At the same time, in each case, the artists involved were equally concerned with the question of aesthetic strategies and how to effectively subvert the dominance of conventional approaches which were understood as simplistic and exhausted. The Chilean *avanzada* self-consciously distanced itself from traditional public artforms such as muralism, as did the Chicano group Asco. The Mexican *grupos* of the 1970s came on the heels of two decades of attempts to dislodge the retrograde notions of public art that had begun with the Rupture generation of the 1950s, but which were still propagated by governmental cultural institutions. As Leandro Soto describes in his testimonial account of the birth of performance in Cuba, it was the academicism imposed by teachers from the Soviet Union that prompted art students to begin rebelling by creating what he called "plastic actions." And the Electronic Disturbance Theater carries the guerrilla interventionist tactic of street graffiti into the domain of the virtual, through FloodNet actions in support of the Zapatista Liberation Army.

As I have already suggested in this introduction, these issues are ones that in a sense distinguish the thrust of much Latino performance art. But they also point to key differences in the relation of Latino performance to the aesthetic question of presence and materiality. Ephemeral actions can be read as a way of making one's work inaccessible to processes of objectification. However, artists who are trying to elude the repressive control of the state will also use them— hence the case of the Cuban group ARTECALLE, whose performances are described here by the group's founder Aldo Menendez. The Border Art Workshop, in its early actions in Borderfield State Park and at the San Ysidro checkpoint, also took advantage of the ephemeral quality of the performance medium to transgress laws that legislated exchange across the border without running a serious risk of arrest. And, as Ondine Chavoya aptly points out in his essay about the Chicano group Asco, the historiography of the Euro-American avant-garde generally links the aesthetic of dematerialization with a critique of the market, implying that the avant-garde ascribes "value" to the act of absenting oneself as an artist from art-institutional mechanisms. However, if one's exclusion from those mechanisms is not self-proclaimed but a byproduct of institutional racism, then perhaps the terms of what is properly understand as "radical" need to be altered to fit another context.

First published more than twelve years ago, Chilean-based critic Nelly Richard's study of the Chilean *avanzada's* art produced during the Pinochet regime remains one of the finest studies of the relationship between experimental art practice and the social in Latin America. I have excerpted here two sections of her study that deal specifically with performance art—the first focuses on the street actions of the group CADA, which attempted to reclaim public space after the military regime destroyed civil life, and the second looks at the use of the body in the work of artists such as Carlos Leppe and Diamela Eltit, who engaged

in acts of self-mutilation and self-sacrifice to represent the collective suffering of the Chilean people. Following her essay is documentation of more contemporary projects by Lotty Rosenfeld, one of the original members of CADA, and Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis (The Mares of the Apocalypse), two openly gay Chilean artists whose performances and political interventions address the marginalization of homosexuals in today's Chile.

Mexican artist Maris Bustamante, in addition to co-founding the conceptualist No-Grupo and the first feminist group in her country—Polvo de Gallina Negra (Black Hen Powder)—has for several years been conducting research on the development on non-objectual artforms in Mexico in the twentieth century. Her essay combines some of the materials she has unearthed and organized in the course of her research with a testimonial of her experiences during the *grupos* movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Her essay traces the impact of the arrival of the Surrealists to Mexico in 1940 and the creation of the first Live Art event that was part of their exhibition, the critique of stultified and localist public art by the Rupture generation in the 1950s and the "happenings" orchestrated by dramatist and filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky in the 1960s—all of which, she explains, lay the groundwork for the emergence of performance in Mexico.

I have no doubt that there will be readers who will wonder why I have chosen this particular group of artists and not others. As open as I may have tried to be in my selection process, there were points at which I did choose to draw the line. Work that was obviously closer to theater, in that the performers worked with directors and scripts they had not written themselves, I decided to exclude. I also left out stand-up comedy and performance poetry because it seemed to me that the centrality of verbal language as opposed to corporeal gesture placed these forms in a different realm from the kind of performance being studied here. For lack of space I could not include work by every single Latin American artist who has created a performance, but I did aim for a range that would be somewhat representative of the variety of work that has been and continues to be made. That women artists and gay artists are prominent in these pages says as much about the performance milieu (which has historically embraced social non-conformity and offered women a space for experimentation that is less encumbered by male-dominated art traditions) as it does about any conscious attempt to engage in affirmative action of any kind. I also limited my selection to artists who had developed a trajectory of work rather than ones who were just beginning. I do not intend this volume to be taken as definitive or exhaustive, but rather as a preliminary gesture. Those who want more writing about artists they are interested in but who are not between these covers should publish more books about Latino performance. They are certainly needed.

This book is the result of the efforts of many people, all of whom deserve acknowledgment. Without the talents of all the writers and artists whose works appear in this book, there would not be a publication, nor would it be such an extraordinary pleasure to be part of this corner of the performance universe. I give special thanks to Eduardo Aparicio, Juan Davila, Paul Foss, and Marcial

Godoy for their fine translations. To Lois Keidan and Catherine Ugwu, for having helped me create the *Corpus Delecti* program, I am forever grateful. To Alan Read for his support for the original conference upon which this book is based, I am also greatly indebted. To Talia Rodgers at Routledge for her steadfast support and to Jason Arthur for shepherding me through the bureaucracy of book production, I offer my thanks. My former assistant Anoka Faruqee was tremendously helpful in transcribing texts and obtaining photos and permissions. A residency at the Yaddo Artists' Colony made it possible for me to concentrate on shaping this book in peace and comfort in the summer of 1998. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Diana Taylor and Jean Franco for lending a photograph of Jesusa Rodríguez; to Nelly Richard for also generously lending photos of Diamela Eltit and Carlos Leppe; and to Paul Foss of Art and Text, and Paul Dzus of MIT Press, for allowing me to reprint writings from their publications. I also thank all the artists and photographers who graciously provided me with photographs for this volume.

Finally I would like to close my introduction by offering thanks to some Latin Americans who helped to open my eyes to the power of performance art. The first person is my dear friend Leandro Katz, who, when I was his student nearly twenty years ago, first told me about his friend Hélio Oiticica, about his experiences working with Charles Ludlam, and who first took me to see *Chang in the Void Moon* at the Pyramid Club in the heyday of the East Village performance scene. The second is the Venezuelan artist known as the Black Prince, who I ran into at Documenta in 1987, and who tipped me off that he would create a surprise performance event at the opening press conference the following day. Sure enough, while European and American curators and critics were all congratulating themselves over the exhibition, Peña interrupted the conference to criticize them for ignoring the innovations of artists in Latin America, and began distributing tiny vials of crude oil with his signature on them. He was soon thereafter surrounded by throngs of journalists from all over the world, who would continue to raise the question of Latin American artists' contributions to cutting-edge artistic practices in their coverage of the event for years to come.

The third is not one single person but the residents of Tejadillo Street in Old Havana, where I performed in the spring of 1997 at a small gallery that Cuban artist Tania Bruguera runs out of her apartment. Tania and I decided to launch her gallery during the sixth Havana Bienal as part of a series of events taking place in a burgeoning circuit of galleries operating out of artists' homes. Tania was premiering her piece "The Burden of Guilt," which she describes in this book. I created a performance about the problem of repatriating the remains of Cuban exiles, "The Last Wish," which was based on the story of a woman who—after spending most of her life fighting her way out of poverty, a small town, a bad marriage, and finally her homeland—spent the last month of her life struggling unsuccessfully to return there to die. I was lying on the floor like a corpse set out for a country wake, but my eyes were open, and tears rolled out, one by one. The

radio played *Radio Reloj,* a monotonous news show in Cuba that disseminates official history and is used for telling the time.

Tania and I knew that we would be visited by dozens of foreign guests of the Bienal but we had no idea that the barrio would spring into action. Her next-door neighbor helped her kill the goat she needed for her piece. Neighborhood kids ran around whispering to their friends and relatives that we were making art and that everyone had to see it. Neighbors came, watched, and commented. The bartender across the street from the house provided drinks and cigarettes for all the guests. By the time the police arrived to find out what the ruckus was, we had finished our performances, and even had an official permission slip for a party which Tania had shrewdly procured in advance to circumvent any measures that might be taken to stop us. The next day Tania's neighbors stopped by to congratulate us and the bartender thanked us for the extra business. I was deeply moved by these people's enthusiasm, curiosity, respect, and support, which made this into the most beautiful experience of performing in a community I have ever known.

The last person I will thank shall remain nameless. Suffice to say that in 1997 I was invited to attend the ARCO art fair in Madrid and deliver a paper at a conference that was part of it. In addition to preparing a talk on Latin American performance, I decided to organize one with two Cuban artists, Juan Pablo Ballester and María Elena Escalona, who had emigrated to Spain some years before. The three of us were concerned about the radical discrepancy between the new embrace of Latin American art by the Spanish art market and the steadily increasing hostility toward Latin American immigrants in Spain. So we invented a company named *Sudaca* (Spanish slang for "dirty southerner"), and designed a T-shirt on the front text of which we compared and contrasted the cost of Latin American artworks and of renting space to exhibit work at the art fair with the amounts of money that immigrants and refugees paid in bribes to enter the country, purchase false papers, rent apartments, etc. We ended our list with the amount of money that the Spanish government quietly paid the family of a Dominican woman named Leticia, who had emigrated to Spain to work as a maid and who was shot and killed for no reason by Spanish police in a bar frequented by Dominicans. The sum her relatives received monthly was the equivalent of what her annual salary had been as a domestic.

Then we donned ski masks and Peruvian knit caps, stormed the art fair in disguise, and proceeded to exhibit and sell our T-shirts on the floor—old-fashioned *tianguis-style*. We did brisk business on the first day and even sold a couple of T-shirts to museums. We even had a friend of ours dressed up as a policeman to deter the guards. This worked for a little while, but we were soon removed, and spent the next two days working our way back in, arguing with guards about whether we had the right to be present in the fair space if we were wearing masks. Once we sold all the T-shirts, we paraded around the fair wearing the last of them as if we were ambulatory sculptures, so that visitors could read our text.

2. Juan Pablo Ballester, María Elena Escalona, and Coco Fusco

ARCO Art Fair, Madrid, 1997

Sudaca Enterprises, 1997

Ballester, Escalona, and Fusco set up an unauthorized stand at the first ARCO dedicated to Latin American art and sold "art" T-Shirts with detailed information comparing the costs involved in the sale of Latin American art to the costs of survival as an undocumented Latin American political or economic refugee in Spain. The photo shows Escalona in a ski mask and wool cap tending to customers.

There was a Mexican critic at the fair who had read a short piece I had written for the ARCO bulletin, in which I made a somewhat disparaging comment about a recent wave of what I saw as facile performance coming out of Mexico City, only to distinguish it from the work of Cesar Martinez, whose aesthetic proposals seemed much sounder to me. That critic sat in his room on the day of my arrival, so he could dial my number every half-hour. When I checked into the hotel, I was so jetlagged that I collapsed immediately. His phone call woke me, but his inexplicably accusatory tone and torrent of criticism made my body stiffen with shock. It seemed I had no right, first to be critical of anything Mexican at an art fair designed to promote Latin American art, and that, second, I should not be wasting space writing about performance. I soon gave up trying to discuss anything rationally with the critic, realizing that, whether I liked his method or not, he was doing the job he had been sent to do and I was too tired to fight. He was there to deliver a paper on the Mexican art being sold at the fair, in which he argued that there was no longer any need for Mexican artists to take up