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## Framing [Performance]

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Since the 1960s, artists have used their bodies to challenge regimes of power and social norms, placing the body **FRONT AND CENTER** in artistic practice—no longer the object depicted in paintings, or sculpture, or film, or photography but the living flesh and breath of the act itself. For some, performance refers to **PERFORMANCE ART** or **BODY ART** or **LIVE ART** or **ACTION ART**, terms that accentuate both the centrality of the living artist in the act of doing and the aesthetic dimension, “art.”



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Carmelita Tropicana (Cuba/U.S.) recognizes the transformative potential of performance: “Performance is KUNST (art) that is fluid, messy, a hybrid; an art that liberates the performer and spectator with the *cri de coeur* of the French Revolution: *liberté, égalité, homosexualité!*”

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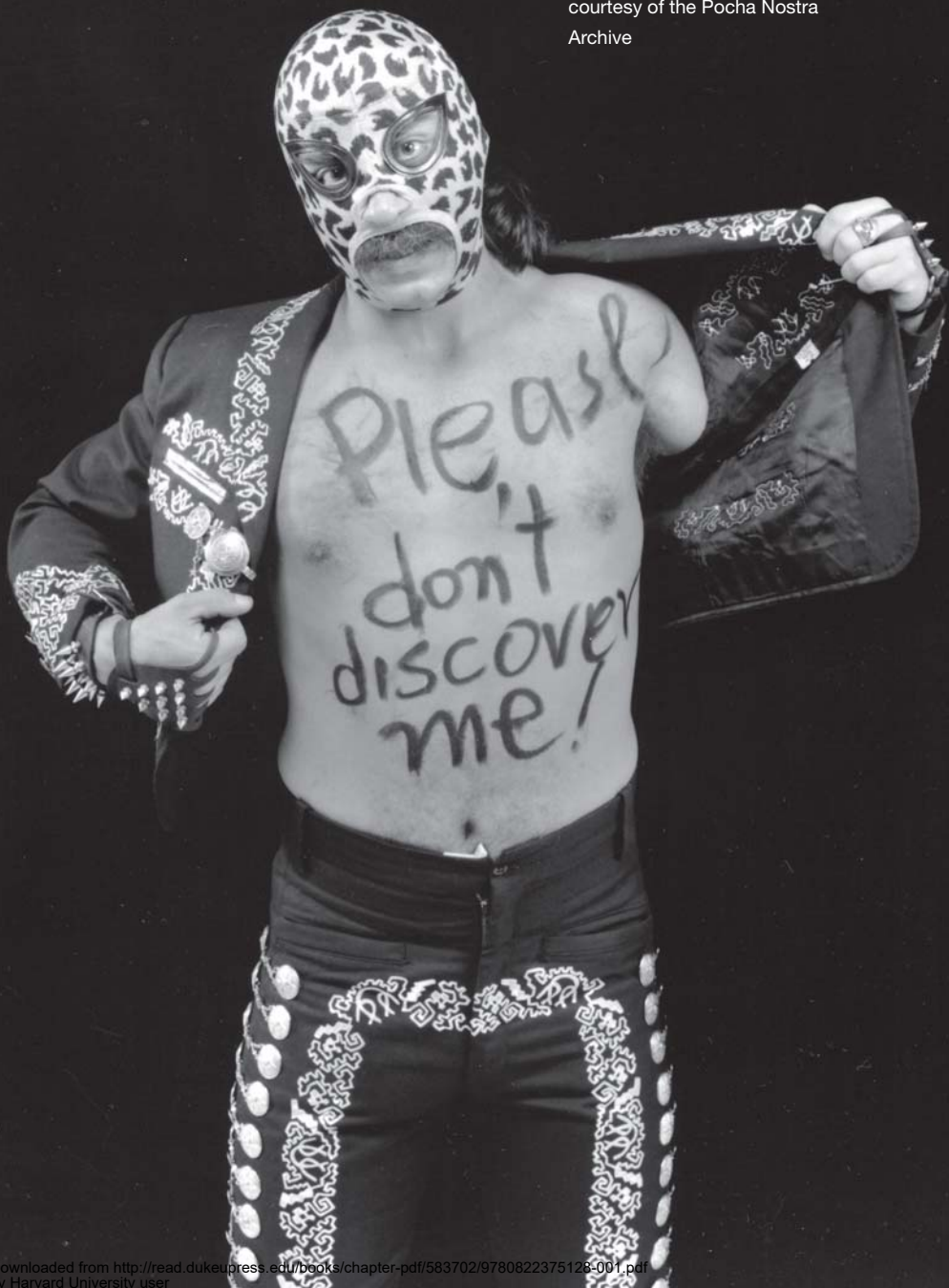
Guillermo Gómez-Peña (Mexico/U.S.) inhabits performance: “For me performance art is a conceptual ‘territory’ with fluctuating weather and borders; a place where contradiction, ambiguity, and paradox are not only tolerated, but also encouraged. The borders of our ‘performance country’ are open to nomads, migrants, hybrids, and outcasts.”<sup>1</sup>

Performance, for him, is not simply an act, or an action, but an existential condition. An **ONTOLOGY**. He says that the only difference between a performance artist and a madman is that a performance artist has an audience.<sup>2</sup>

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1.1 Carmelita Tropicana in her performance *Come as Your Favorite Virgin Night*, presented at the 2003 Hemispheric Institute Encuentro in New York. Photo: Marlène Ramírez-Cancio

1.2 Guillermo Gomez-Peña in  
*Warrior for Gringstroika*. Photo  
courtesy of the Pocha Nostra  
Archive



“The word performance,” says the woman in Diana Raznovich’s cartoon, “is itself a performance!”



1.3 Diana Taylor defining performance. Drawing by the humorist Diana Raznovich, 2010

**PERFORMANCE** is not always about art. It's a wide-ranging and difficult practice to define and holds many, at times conflicting, meanings and possibilities.

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**This book analyzes performance: what it is, but also, more important, what it does, what it allows us to see, to experience, and to theorize, and its complex relation to systems of power.** The term is used in the theatre, in anthropology and the visual arts, in business, sports, politics, and science. Across these fields, it signals a wide range of social behaviors. Sometimes “art,” sometimes political “actions,” sometimes business management, sometimes military prowess, performance aims to create effects and affects. Performance moves between the **AS IF** and the **IS**, between pretend and new constructions of the “real.”

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Many of the ideas, photographs, and images in this book come from the fifteen years of collaboration that have taken place through the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics ([hemisphericinstitute.org](http://hemisphericinstitute.org)). Artists, activists, and scholars from throughout the Americas meet regularly to share their practices and discuss how performance intervenes in society. Many have worked or continue to work in difficult circumstances—under military dictatorships or savage neoliberalism, in sexist, racist, and homophobic societies, some under conditions of poverty and social marginalization. One of the (many) challenges of working together across linguistic, political, economic, disciplinary, and aesthetic borders, however,

has been that the word “performance” does not exist in Spanish, Portuguese, or French. Negotiating the terms has been in itself an act of political and artistic translation.<sup>3</sup> As the word “performance” is increasingly accepted in Spanish, with its gendered pronouns, new issues arise about its “sex.” Is it *el* performance or *la* performance? Bi? Trans? Some would say “Both,” some would say “It depends” (in some cases the masculine is reserved for business and the feminine for artistic projects; sometimes it depends on the country). It’s a fascinating debate, and some artists play with it. Jesusa Rodríguez (Mexico) says life should be as fluid as *performance* and “leave behind its gender prejudices—what’s important is that spectators confront their own capacity for transformation, male, female, bird, witch, shoe, or whatever.” While I do not take up the specific language-based issues in this book, many of the examples and insights I offer come from this Americas-wide network. The concepts and practices, however, far exceed these geographical contours.

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The word “performance” in this broader transnational, trans-disciplinary, multilingual context has a wide range of meanings. Elin Diamond defines performance in the broadest sense: a doing, something done.<sup>4</sup>

This **DOING/DONE** lens allows us to understand performance across temporalities—present and past.

**DOING** captures the *now* of performance, always and only a living practice in the moment of its activation.

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In this sense, performance can be understood as *process*—as enactment, exertion, intervention, and expenditure.

William Pope.L, a New York-based artist, slowly crawls through city streets. “I am a fisherman of social absurdity, if you will. . . . I am more provocateur than activist. My focus is to politicize disenfranchisement, to make it neut, to reinvent what’s beneath us, to remind us where we all come from.”<sup>5</sup>

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1.4 William Pope.L, *The Great White Way, 22 miles, 9 years, 1 street* (2001–ongoing), New York. Photo: Lydia Grey, courtesy of the artist





1.5 Revisited excerpt of *This Pleasant and Grateful Asylum* (2013) at Performing the Archive, Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, NYU. First performed in collaboration with Charles Rice-González at the Point Community Development Center, Bronx, NY (1999). Pictured (from left to right): Video documentation of 1999 performance, Saúl Ulerio, and Arthur Aviles. Photo: Laura Bluher

It is **ALSO** a thing **DONE**, an *object* or *product* or accomplishment. In this sense, performance might be experienced or evaluated at some different time. It might be collected by museums, or preserved in archives. Artists, too, may chose to perform in front of an archival image or video of their work to emphasize changes and continuity between then and now.

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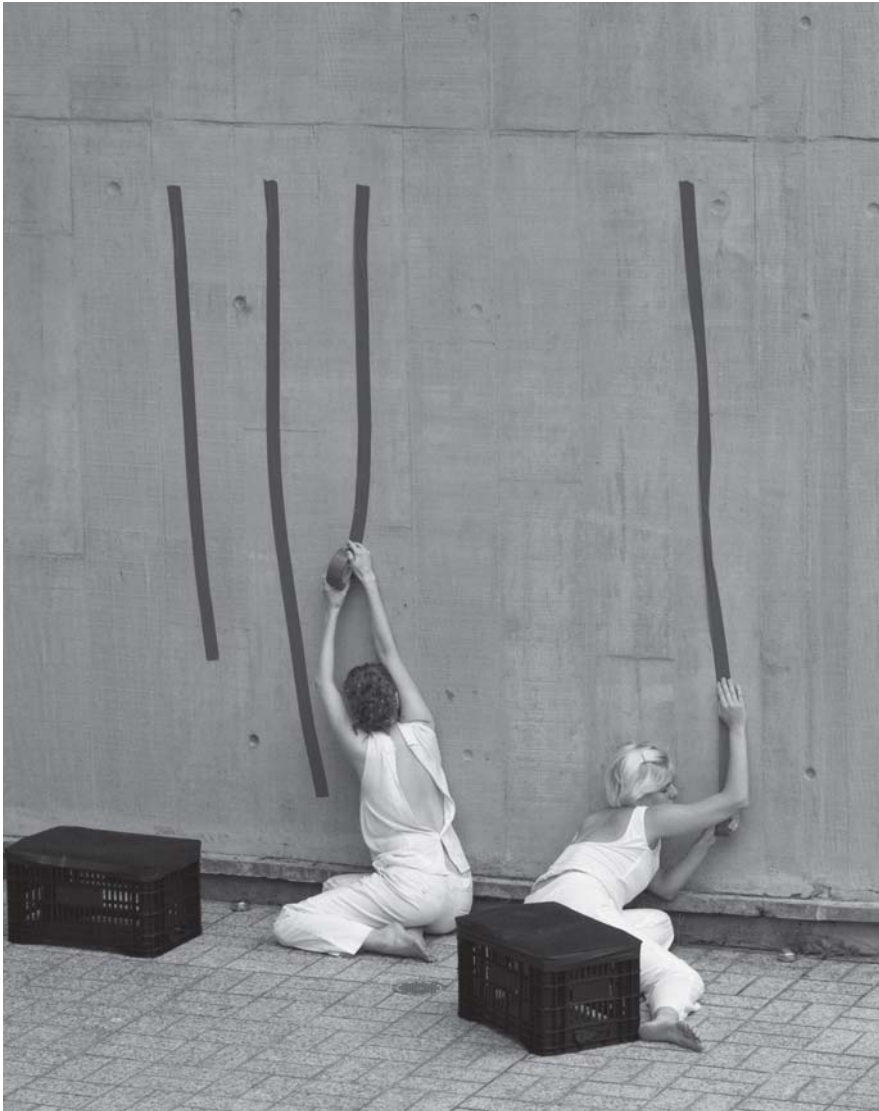
The tension between the **DOING** and **DONE**—present and past—is very productive. Performance has often been con-

sidered ephemeral, meaning “lasting only one day.” Theorists such as Peggy Phelan have posited that performance “disappears” even as it comes into being, that it resists the “laws of the reproductive economy.” It cannot be saved, she argues, or recorded or documented. When that happens, she maintains, it ceases to be performance and becomes something else.<sup>6</sup>

This, of course is true if we think about performance as only a discrete, singular act. But, we shall see, performance also works across time in intriguing and powerful ways. Instead of the once, the act that bursts on the scene only to vanish, we can also think of performance as an ongoing repertoire of gestures and behaviors that get reenacted or reactivated again and again, often without us being aware of them. If we learn and communicate through performed, embodied practice, it’s because the acts repeat themselves. We recognize a dance as a dance, even when the moves and rhythms change. In this sense, then, performance is about past, present, and future.

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On the first day the 2013 Hemispheric Institute Encuentro in São Paulo, Abigail Levine (U.S.) and two other dancers performed *Slow Falls* at entrance to the main theatre, leaving a record of their movements in tape on the building’s exterior. The performance lasted two hours, but for anyone walking by the following days, the lines that remained invoked the presence of the dancers’ bodies. Performances may take place, but do they entirely disappear, or do their effects endure? Large or small, visible or invisible, performances create change.



1.6 (continued overleaf) Abigail Levine, *Slow Falls*. Hemispheric Institute Encuentro, São Paulo, 2013. Photo: Francis Pollitt



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## Doing, done, redoing

*Doing* is fundamental for human beings who learn through imitation, repetition, and internalizing the actions of others. This central theory—that people absorb behaviors by doing, rehearsing, and performing them—is older than the Aristotelian theory of mimesis (imitation, acting) and as contemporary as theories of mirror neurons that suggest that mirroring, empathy, and intersubjectivity are fundamental for human survival.<sup>7</sup>

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Anna Deavere Smith (U.S.) often quotes her grandfather as remarking: “If you say a word often enough, it becomes you.”<sup>8</sup> The reenacted becomes “real.”

Although repetition and rehearsal is essential for human functioning, Maris Bustamante (one of Mexico’s foremost performance artists) alerts us to the conservative potential of mimesis:

“We human beings are born clinging to each other and fundamentally programmed to reproduce what we are taught. Submitted to this programming, in this sense, we are victims of what others have made of us. Or to put it another way, we are not ourselves, we are . . . them.”<sup>9</sup>

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1.7 Maris Bustamente, *Instrumento de Trabajo*. Critique of Freud's theory of penis envy. Three hundred sweaty masks to be used by event assistants. Performance with No Grupo at the event *Caliente! Caliente!* Museo de Arte Moderno, Escuela de San Carlos Xochimilco and Escuela de Artes Universidad, Xalapa, Veracruz. Photo: Rubén Valencia

Performance, however, is not limited to mimetic repetition. It also includes the possibility of change, critique, and creativity within frameworks of repetition. Diverse forms such as performance art, dance, and theatre, as well as sociopolitical and cultural practices such as sports, ritual, political protest, military parades, and funerals, all have reiterative elements that are reactualized in every new instantiation.

These practices usually have their own structures, conventions, and styles that clearly bracket and separate them from other social practices of daily life.

## **[performance]**

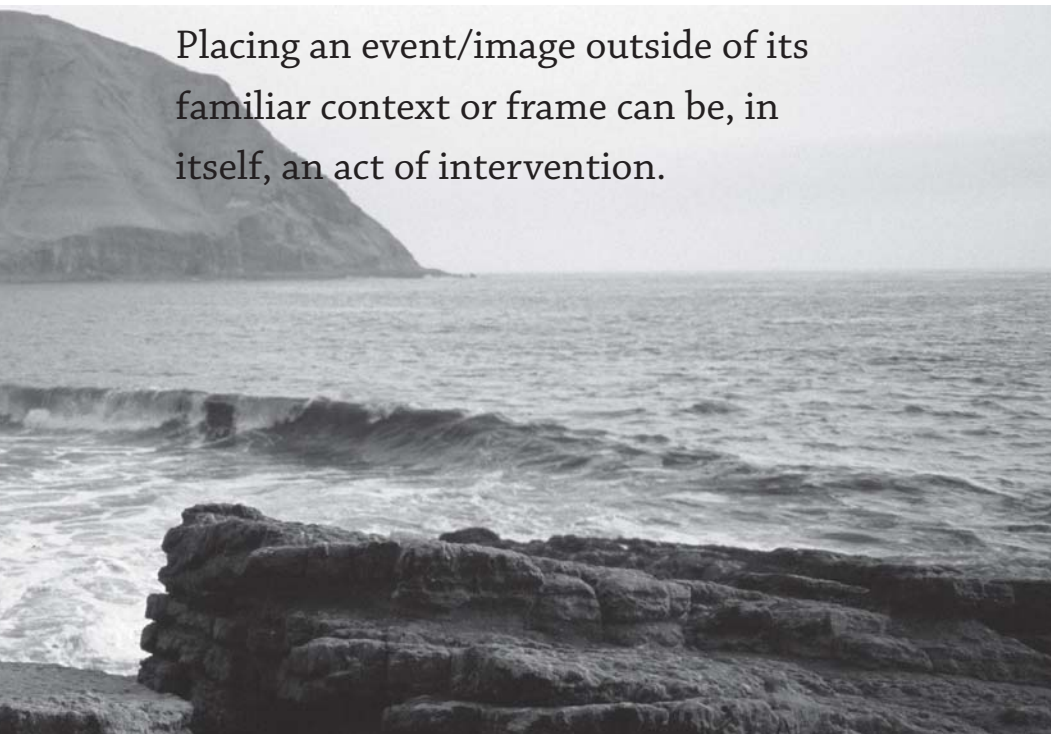
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1.8 Giuseppe Campuzano in his performance *Cortapelo*, Arequipa, part of the project Museo Travesti del Perú. Photo: Miguel Coaquira, 2006



Each performance takes place in a designated space and time. A soccer game is a demarcated act (with a start and end time, a defined space, with rules, and a referee to enforce them). A political protest, too, has a beginning and end, and distinguishes itself from other cultural practices. In other words, performance implies a set of meanings and conventions. A protest is not just any walk down a public street.

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Placing an event/image outside of its familiar context or frame can be, in itself, an act of intervention.



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A performance implies an audience or participants, even if that audience is a camera. Ana Mendieta's (Cuba/U.S.) work, for example, was not always staged directly for spectators. People can experience it only through film or photographs.

Other kinds of performances such as ritual might restrict participation to those initiated in certain practices. Participating in the ritual might help cement membership in the group, or further reinforce social subcategorizations, exclusions, and stereotypes—women belong over here, men there, some groups nowhere, and so on. **DOING** becomes a form of **BELONGING** in a very specific way.

A public act, on the other hand, can be seen by all those who happen to be present.

In all these scenarios, the (social) actors, initiates, and spectators follow the implicit rules of the event, governed as it is by conventions and norms. We all know how to behave at a play, a concert, a funeral, or a political protest. We've learned by doing. Social behaviors are rehearsed, repeated, and incorporated—everything from secret handshakes to putting on one's scarf in a holy place to taking off one's hat in the theatre. Participation in itself constitutes a social practice, the learning and sharing of codes, whether we're aware of it or not. Sometimes we do not even know we're watching a performance, as

1.9 Ana Mendieta featured at the Hemispheric Institute, New York.  
Photo courtesy of Franklin Furnace Archive, Inc.

in the “invisible” theatre that Brazilian practitioner Augusto Boal writes about, which “consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than a theatre, before people who are not spectators.”<sup>10</sup> A couple begins to argue in a subway car, and all of a sudden everyone in the car joins in.

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Some performances pass by in a flash, leaving nothing (apparently) but a memory.

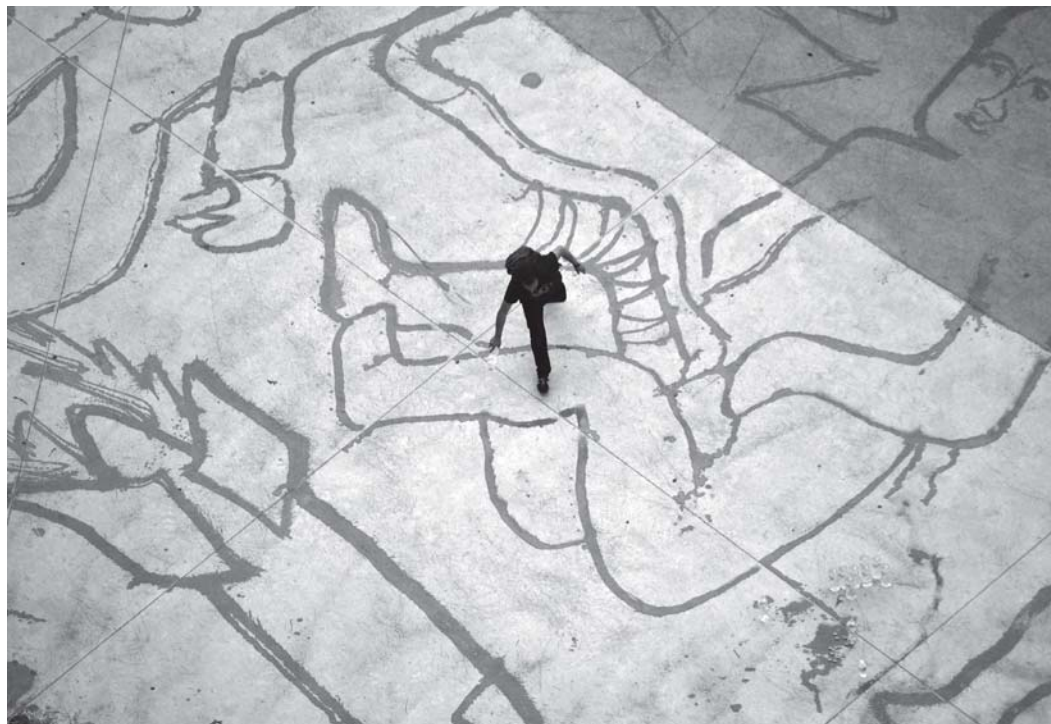
Bel Borba (Brazil) dashes around the Praça Roosevelt in São Paulo (2013) with water bottles, quickly drawing a massive water painting. Astronauts float in space, attached by an umbilical cord. Heads, faces, arms, bodies, all sorts of figures magically come into focus. The entire painting can be seen in its entirety for about half an hour before it evaporates.

### **What is the work of performance?**

The vanishing image? Or Borba’s rapid movements (labor)? Or does the work constitute the interruption into the quotidian? An invitation to interact with the environment? *Take a look*, his work shouts. *This is possible!* Or all at the same time? Borba’s interventions in the urban are not about changing it as much as showing that change is possible.

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In 2013 María José Contreras (Chile) sent out a call via Facebook asking 1,210 ordinary citizens to lie down, head to foot, along Santiago’s main avenue on the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the coup d’état on September 11, 1973—one person



1.10 Bel Borba, *Diário: Bel Borba Aquí São Paulo*. Hemispheric Institute Encuentro, São Paulo, 2013. Courtesy of the artist

for each disappeared person killed during the dictatorship. The performance, **#quererNOver** (*#wantNOTtosee*), lasted exactly eleven minutes. While fleeting, it served as a powerful, collective testimonial that made visible the line or scar that historical events in Chile have left on the social body.

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Other performances last for hours or days or even years.

Helene Vosters (Canada) fell one hundred times a day for an entire year, starting on Canada Day (July 1) of 2010—a meditation, she says, on the deaths in Afghanistan. The number of deaths kept creeping up, and she felt she couldn't feel, couldn't

1.11 Participants in performance of *#quererNOver* by María José Contreras, Santiago de Chile, September 10, 2014. Photo: Horacio Pérez





1.12 Helene Vosters falling in the snow in Christie Pits Park as part of Impact Afghanistan War. Photo: Shannon Scott

connect. The falling served as a sustained meditation. It made it impossible for her to go through a day without thinking about war. She had to organize her life around the falls: where she would be, safety, weather, clothing. A note to witnesses, written on a postcard of the Canadian flag, explains that her falls are her attempt to “reach beyond the numbness produced by abstract numbers, political debates, and media spectacularization.” On July 1, 2011, she closed the performance with a group fall.

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Durational performances, while reiterated or continuous, are not all of a piece. They evolve. They contain all sorts of interruptions, repetitions, episodes, and other short-lived acts

within a broad, ongoing structure. But they show something over time that cannot be known or captured at a glance.

Tehching Hsieh (Taiwanese-American) punched a time clock every hour on the hour for a year.

He and Linda Montano lived, tied to each other with an eight foot rope, for a year.

He lived on the streets of New York for a year.

He lived in solitary confinement in a cell for a year.

He lived without art for a year.

Each movement was taken out of context and ruthlessly stripped down to its most essential gesture until all the rhythms of daily life were turned on their head.

“Life is a life sentence,” he says. “Every minute, every minute is different. You cannot go back. Every time is different but we do the same thing.”<sup>11</sup>

The term “durational” can also help us understand certain forms of explicit ongoing political resistance. There are many examples. Hunger strikes are an excruciating example of “durational” performance of noncompliance by those who have lost control of everything except their bodies.<sup>12</sup> Every Thursday afternoon since the late 1970s, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have marched counterclockwise around the obelisk of Argentina’s central square, wearing white kerchiefs and

holding the photographs of their disappeared children. They have long struggled to make visible the dictatorship's crimes against humanity. They have left an indelible mark, not just on the plaza, but also in the awareness of the Argentinean people. The word "performance" does not suggest that their actions are not "real" or have no long-term consequences. It means that the mothers have used their bodies and their march ritually as a way of making political "disappearances" visible, nameable.

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Performances operate as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated actions.

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1.13 The white handkerchief of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo painted on the plaza. Photo: Lorie Novak, 2007



As Richard Schechner suggests, “performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the nth time.”

Performance is “twice-behaved behavior.”<sup>13</sup>

Performance—as reiterated corporeal behaviors—functions within a system of codes and conventions in which behaviors are reiterated, re-acted, reinvented, or relived. Performance is a constant state of again-ness.

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What does this do to the notion of the “original” as *foundational*, the *first* . . . as a cipher of creativity and as product . . . say, an original Picasso?

Or “authenticity”?

Is any act “original” and “authentic”?

Do these terms have meaning for performance outside the logic of the art market?

Recycling, rewording, and recontextualizing are the constants of most creative, and even scholarly, projects.

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The startling, bold, new intervention takes place **ONCE** within a system or set of conventions that makes the work “legible” or comprehensible. Chris Burden (U.S.) had himself shot in the arm once (*Shoot*, 1971). Is this an “original” and “authentic”

work? Again, the frame helps (the space: F Space; the context: a friend shot him). It situates this as a performance, a conceptual art piece, not a random act of street violence. Yes, *Shoot* is a signature piece by Burden. The frame takes the act out of the realm of the doing and places it in the past. **DONE**. It now belongs to history and the art world. It may be subject to copyright. Yet I am not convinced that words such as “original” or “authentic” help us understand what the piece *is* or *does* within this system of embodied practice (performance art) guided by the logic of pressing the limits of the body. Were he, or someone else, to restage *Shoot*, would that not too, in the discourse of the art world, be “authentic” and a new “original”? (More about this in chapter 7.)

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Schechner marks a distinction that is fundamental for understanding performance: the difference between something that **IS** performance (a dance, or a musical concert, or a theatrical production) versus something that can be studied or understood **AS** performance.<sup>14</sup> Almost anything can be analyzed **AS** performance: The nation-state is not a performance, but one may analyze the “staging” of the national, say in a State of the Union address. An election is not a performance, but it can certainly be understood as one!

But the slash in the **IS/AS** is slippery and changes with time and context. Are the following **IS** or **AS**?

Civil disobedience?

Resistance?



Ninguna  
mujer nace  
para puta.

ninguna  
mujer nace  
para puta.

Ninguna  
mujer nace  
para puta.

MUY BUENA  
PARA PUTA

MUY BUENA  
PARA PUTA

Citizenship?

Gender?

Race?

Ethnicity?

Sexual identity?

Or **BOTH**, at the same time?

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It depends on how we **frame** the event. We might say a theatrical production **IS** a performance, and limit ourselves to what happens onstage. But we might broaden the frame to include the audience—how do they dress, how much do they pay per ticket, what kind of neighborhood is the theatre located in, who has access to the theatre and who doesn't? In 1990, Chicano artist Daniel J. Martinez staged *Ignore the Dents: A Micro Urban Opera* in the Million Dollar Theatre in downtown Los Angeles so that white, middle-class audiences who could afford the tickets had to line up in a Latino, working-class section of town. The performance took place offstage in their interactions with local residents as well as in the theatre. The frame allows us to examine this event in terms of both **IS/AS** performance. Each gives us a different sense of the politics, aesthetics, and meaning of “performance.”

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1.14 *Mujeres Creando, Ninguna mujer nace para puta*, urban intervention, part of the 2007 Hemispheric Institute Encuentro in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Photo: Marlène Ramírez-Cancio

The framing itself may be designed to provoke a certain reaction. Kent Monkman (Cree/Canada) inserts images of queer indigenous men into the majestic landscapes painted by colonial artists, emphasizing what colonialism has attempted to efface.



1.15 Kent Monkman, presentation at Hemispheric Institute Encuentro, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2005. Photo: Julio Pantoja

1.16 (opposite) Gonzalo Rabanal in *A Being Said, to Be a Name*. Hemispheric Institute Encuentro, São Paulo, 2013. Photo: Marlène Ramírez-Cancio

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While embodied practices and attitudes are learned and enacted daily in the public realm, this does not mean that they are necessarily theatrical, put-on, “pretend,” or conscious acts.

Simple everyday acts such as cooking, planting and harvesting crops, singing, drumming, and driving the kids to soccer practice, can transmit memory and a sense of belonging, identity, and cultural values from one generation to another and one culture to another. This is extremely important, especially for societies that do not transmit knowledge primarily through writing.

Learning to write, and the entry into print culture, as Gonzalo Rabanal (Chile) and his father show, can entail violent disciplinary embodied acts.



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Beliefs and conventions are passed on through bodily practices, and so are all sorts of assumptions and presuppositions including how we understand *bodies*.

As Judith Butler explains, gender is not something we *have*, but something we *do*, a system of often invisibilized or normalized acts, product of a strict regime of socialization.<sup>15</sup> Pronouncing “It’s a girl!” during an ultrasound or at the birth, thus, is not simply a statement; it’s a discursive form of initiation into a entire way of acting and being. **PERFORMATIVITY**, she calls this, a concept we will return to later.

Sometimes we are not aware of the postures or routines that are associated with femininity or masculinity until a transvestite or an actor makes them apparent. “One isn’t born, but rather becomes, a woman,” Simone de Beauvoir told us in the 1940s. Gender is the product of discursive pronouncements and incorporated codes that are, in turn, acted out in the public sphere. Another way to recognize the conventions determining how gender gets performed is by examining how “women” look and act in different parts of the world or at different historical moments.

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1.17 Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver (Split Britches) in their performance *Retro Perspective / It's a small house and we've lived in it always* performed at the 2007 Encuentro in Buenos Aires. Photo: Julio Pantoja. <http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/000549155.html>

According to Julieta Paredes, an Aymara queer, feminist, artist-activist, member of *Mujeres Creando Comunidad* (Women Creating Community) in Bolivia:

“Pachamama has granted us a performance: our phenotype.”<sup>16</sup>

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In Mexico, eighteenth-century caste paintings demonstrate clearly how this phenotype was created and activated in service of racial classification and segregation. Categories, imposed by colonial law, distinguished clearly between racial groups: *mestizo* (a person born to an indigenous woman and a European man, known as a *criollo*) and “coyote” (child of a mestizo woman and an indigenous man), among many others. Physical features and skin color were insistently marked, as if the differences between groups were a natural biological fact rather than a product of control, social stratification, naming, and prejudice. The further those of “mixed race” were distanced from the white man, the closer the nomenclature (coyote, wolf) approached the animal world. In addition, their clothing and customs were depicted as dark and dangerous, creating the very sense of racial difference that the paintings claimed only to depict.

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Stereotypes reproduce and insist on certain structures of visibility.

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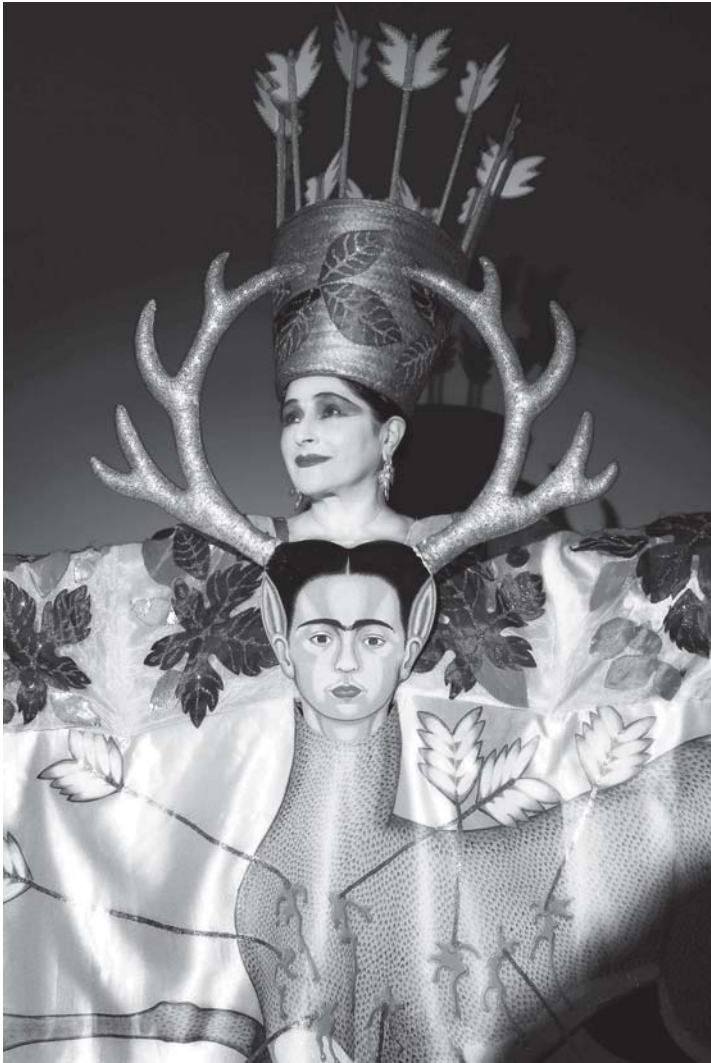
1.18 “De Español y de India, Mestisa” from *Colección particular, México*. In the upper right-hand corner is the signature “Mich. Cabrera pinxit, Mexici, Anno 1763.” Published in *Las castas mexicanas: Un género pictórico americano*, ed. María Concepción García Saíz (Milan: Olivetti, 1989)

Astrid Hadad (Mexico) has opted to work with quintessentially “Latin American” icons in order to reexamine them. Her work reproduces and plays with the stereotypical images that have become a model for sexual and ethnic identity of the Mexican woman: the Virgin of Guadalupe, Coatlicue (the Aztec mother of the gods), the butch who dresses in heels and spurs, the abused woman, the evil seductress. Hadad, with a refined irony, demonstrates the weight of iconographic accumulation and compulsive repetition. By producing ethnically overburdened images for public consumption, she calls attention to the delicate limits of cultural visibility in which the artist’s body is seen as just one more repetition. Latin America, suggests Hadad, is only visible through its clichés, through the nature of its performative repeats. Her work plays with the discomfort that hides behind these images, showing how stereotypes of cultural, racial, sexual, and ethnic difference are produced, reproduced, and consumed.

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Understanding these phenomena **is/as** performance suggests that performance functions not only as a condition or ontology, as Gómez-Peña proposes, but also as an **epistemology**, a form of knowing and understanding the world. In its character of corporeal practice and in relation to other cultural practices and discourses, **performance offers a way to transmit knowledge by means of the body.**

A simple example: what do we know about somebody by simply meeting them that we would not know by reading their CV, or hearing a recording, or seeing a photograph?



1.19 Astrid Hadad, *The Image of Frida and the Deer Dance*.  
Photo: Antonio Yussif



1.20 Alfredo Jaar, *A Logo for America*, 1987. Courtesy of the artist

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Having insisted on performance as embodied practice, I need to make clear that performance practices sometimes do not take place on bodies or involve the bodies of the artists or activists. Again, it depends on how we understand performance—what it is and what it does. Alfredo Jaar’s (Chile/U.S.) intervention in Times Square in New York City performs for us, the accidental audience.

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There are, as we see, multiple definitions and uses for the word “performance.”

Performance is a practice and an epistemology, a creative doing, a methodological lens, a way of transmitting memory and identity, and a way of understanding the world.

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These diverse uses point to the complex layers of referentiality that seem contradictory but in fact at times support each other. Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner bases his understanding of the term on its French etymological root, *parfournir*, which means “to complete” or “to bring to completion.” For Turner, as for other anthropologists writing during the 1960s and 1970s, performance revealed the deepest, most singular and genuine character of a culture. Guided by a belief in its universality and relative transparency, Turner proposed peoples and cultures could come to understand themselves through their performances.

“We will know one another better by entering one another’s performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies.”<sup>17</sup>

The key word here is *learning*.

Performances are neither universal nor transparent; their meanings change depending on the time and context and framing of their realization. Some may be decipherable to a small subgroup of initiates, and invisible or opaque to everyone else. The Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún complained about not understanding the indigenous dances and songs he encountered in sixteenth-century Mesoamerica. He complained that “only they themselves understood them (for being things of the devil).”<sup>18</sup>

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For others, performance means exactly the opposite: because it is a social construction, it indicates artificiality, simulation, or “staging,” the antithesis of the “real” or “true.” They refer to the linguistic roots of key terms as evidence: “art” is linguistically connected to “artifice”; “to make,” *facere* shares an etymological root with *fetiché* (something made); “mimesis” belongs to the etymological family of “imitate,” “mimic,” “mimicry.”

While in some cases, the emphasis on artificial aspects of performance as a socially constructed phenomenon reveals an antitheatrical prejudice, more complex readings recognize the constructed as a coparticipant of the “real.”

Although a dance, a ritual, or a protest requires a frame that differentiates it from other social practices into which it is inserted, this does not mean that these performances are not “real” or “true.” On the contrary, the idea that performance distills a truth that is “more true” than life, and that life itself is a stage, predates Aristotle, Shakespeare, Calderón de la Barca, and Artaud and continues into the present.

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**PERFORMANCE**, as we will continue to explore throughout, means and does many—at times paradoxical—things. It’s a **doing**, a **done**, and a **redoing**. It makes **visible**, and **invisible**; it **clarifies** and **obscures**; it’s **ephemeral** and **lasting**; **put-on**, yet **truer** than life itself. Performances can normalize behaviors, or shock and challenge the role of the spectator very frontally and directly. Neither true nor false, neither good nor bad, liberating or repressive, performance is radically unstable, dependent totally on its framing, on the *by whom* and *for whom*, on the why where when it comes into being.