

Preface

When I die, I want my headstone to read “It seemed like a good idea at the time.” Much of what I’ve done in life seems to fall into that category, including the first version of this book. It was 2009, during the Seventh International Encuentro (or ten-day conference/performance gathering) of the Hemispheric Institute, held that year in Bogotá, Colombia. Guido Indij, director of Asunto Impreso publishing house in Argentina, said to me: “Why don’t we make a little glossy book on performance. It can be short—say, forty or so pages of your text and images from the Hemispheric Institute’s archive?” It seemed like a good idea. While the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics has fifty institutional members throughout the Americas, artists, scholars, and students still do not share a common vocabulary. The little book was very glossy, pocket-sized, with wonderful production value. It even won a design award. It came to 176 pages, and took me forever to write in dialogue with the images I wanted to use. Marlène Ramírez-Cancio and Marcial Godoy-Anativia helped me write, edit, and review the manuscript, and Zoe Lukov helped find and organize the images.

When Ken Wissoker of Duke University Press and I discussed publishing it in English, that too seemed like a good idea. But a

small, high-production-value book on performance in English is a very different thing. The costs of publishing in the United States made the format almost prohibitive. And I couldn't simply put out the same book for an audience that was well rehearsed in the topic of "performance." This, then, was not simply a translation project, although I thank Abigail Levine for rendering the original Spanish text into English. I then rewrote it. So the little book went from being an introduction to a field to being part introduction and part reflection on some of the uses of performance that interest me most—the power of performance to enable individuals and collectives to reimagine and restage the social rules, codes, and conventions that prove most oppressive and damaging. While I am constantly inspired by the artists, activists, and scholars I work with, the limitations are only my own.

I dedicate this book to José Esteban Muñoz, my friend and colleague in Performance Studies at New York University. When I showed him the little glossy book right off the press, he looked at it and turned it over in his hands. His face was as impassive as only he could make it, and he flipped through the pages and turned the book this way and that. "Yes," he said, "it has pages, words, a front cover, a back cover . . ." He flipped through it again: "Yes, it's a book." José *querido*, this book is for you.