

BILL KELLEY JR. and GRANT H. KESTER, editors



COLLECTIVE
SITUATIONS
READINGS IN CONTEMPORARY
LATIN AMERICAN ART, 1995–2010

Collective Situations

Readings in Contemporary

Latin American Art 1995–2010

BILL KELLEY JR.

AND GRANT KESTER, EDITORS

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Durham and London • 2017

Contents

Introduction

GRANT KESTER AND BILL KELLEY JR.

Part I. (Un)Civil Disobedience

1. *Lava la Bandera*: The Colectivo Sociedad Civil and the Cultural Overthrow of the Fujimori-Montesinos Dictatorship 21
GUSTAVO BUNTINX
2. Interview with Caleb Duarte of EDELO Residencia 43
RAQUEL DE ANDA
3. Grupo Etcétera: Project Description 58
RODRIGO MARTÍ
An Interview with Etcétera 79
ETCÉTERA
4. Artistas en Resistencia: Project Description 79
KENCY CORNEJO
An Interview with Artistas en Resistencia 83
KENCY CORNEJO
5. A Long Way: Argentine Artistic Activism of the Last Decades 98
ANA LONGONI

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

Part II. Urbanism

6. Galatea/bulbo Collective: Project Description 117
MARIOLA V. ALVAREZ
“Participación” (2008) and Tijuaneados Anónimos
(2008–2009) 120
BULBO
7. Interview with Tranvía Cero 130
MARÍA FERNANDA CARTAGENA
8. Art Collectives and the Prestes Maia Occupation in São Paulo 149
GAVIN ADAMS
9. Frente 3 de Fevereiro: Project Description 165
RODRIGO MARTÍ
The Becoming World of Brazil 169
FRENTE 3 FEVEREIRO
10. Interview with Mauricio Brandão of BijaRi, October 9, 2011 186
MARIOLA V. ALVAREZ

Part III. Memory

11. Skins of Memory: Art, Civic Pedagogy, and Social
Reconstruction 203
PILAR RIAÑO ALCALÁ AND SUZANNE LACY
12. Some Frameworking Concepts for Art and Social Practices
in Colombia 220
DAVID GUTIÉRREZ CASTAÑEDA
13. Chemi Rosado-Seijo: Project Description 241
MARINA REYES FRANCO
An Interview with Chemi Rosado-Seijo 245
SOFÍA GALLISÁ MURIENTE, MARINA REYES FRANCO,
AND BEATRIZ SANTIAGO MUÑOZ

Part IV. Indigeneity

14. Ala Plastica: Project Description 259
FABIAN CEREJIDO
Otros-Nosotros: An Interview with Ala Plastica 261
GRANT KESTER
15. Interview with Pablo Sanaguano 279
MARIA FERNANDA CARTAGENA

16. The Empowerment Process of Community Communication in Ecuador 297	1 2
ALBERTO MUENALA	3 4
Part V. Migrations	5
17. Of Co-Investigations and Aesthetic Sustenance: A Conversation between Colectivo Situaciones and Electronic Disturbance Theater 309	6 7 8
B.A.N.G. LAB	9
18. How Three Artists Led the Queens Museum into Corona and Beyond 321	10 11
PRERANA REDDY	12 13
Part VI. Institutional Critique	14
19. Lurawi, Doing: An Anarchist Experience—Ch'ixi 343	15
LXS COLECTIVERXS	16
20. Con la Salud si se Juega: Project Description 367	17
FABIAN CEREJIDO	18
The Tournament: Nodes of a Network Made of Undisciplined Knowledge 369	19 20
JUAN CARLOS RODRÍGUEZ	21
21. La Lleca Colectiva: Project Description 388	22
ELIZE MAZADIEGO	23
Exodus to La Lleca: Exiting from “Art” and “Politics” in Mexico 391	24
LA LLECA	25
22. La Línea: Project Description 403	26
ELIZE MAZADIEGO	27
The Morras Project 406	28
INTERDISCIPLINARIO LA LÍNEA/LA LÍNEA INTERDISCIPLINARY GROUP: ABRIL CASTRO, ESMERALDA CEBALLOS, KARA LYNCH, LORENA MANCILLA, AND SAYAK VALENCIA-MIRIAM GARCÍA	29 30 31
Contributor, Editor, and Translator Biographies 413	32 33
Index 000	34 35 36 37 38 39

PROOF

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

Introduction

GRANT KESTER AND BILL KELLEY JR.

Injustice is not an accident.

GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ,
The Power of the Poor in History

This collection of essays, statements, interviews, and project descriptions provides a selective overview of collaborative, socially engaged art practice in Latin America between 1995 and 2010. Our goal is to introduce English-language readers to some of the most engaging new artists and critics currently working in Mexico and Central and South America.¹ Many of the projects presented here are little known in the United States and Europe, and a significant number of the essays and interviews have been translated into English for the first time, specifically for this anthology. We believe this material deserves a much wider audience. While some publications have focused on earlier periods (Katzenstein and Giunta’s *Listen Here Now*, for example, which includes material from Argentine artists active during the 1960s), this is the first book to present work from the most recent generation of artists working throughout the region.² This has been a remarkably fertile period of experimentation, with new forms of artistic production not just in Latin America, but globally. In particular, this period has witnessed a range of efforts to redefine conventional notions of aesthetic autonomy, as artistic practices began to overlap with and to parallel forms of cultural production in the realm of activism, urbanism, radical pedagogy, environmentalism, and other fields. Examples range from Park Fiction’s experiments with participatory planning in Hamburg to Ala

1 Plastica’s engagement with regional ecosystems in the Rio de la Plata basin
2 (discussed in this book), and from Huit Facette’s projects in the villages of
3 Senegal, to Tania Bruguera’s Immigrant Movement International in New
4 York.³

5 While a number of artists working in Latin America over the past fifteen
6 years have gained considerable fame in the established circuit of interna-
7 tional biennial and museum exhibitions (Francis Alÿs, Ernesto Neto, Ga-
8 briel Orozco, and Santiago Sierra, among others), their work will not be
9 the focus of our attention here. In fact, many of the artists and groups pre-
10 sented in the current study are relatively unknown in the mainstream art
11 world. This is due in part to the particular—some might say parochial—
12 interests of contemporary curators and critics, but it also reflects a consci-
13 ous decision by a number of these artists to locate their practice in
14 networks of validation and reception that are peripheral to the main-
15 stream art world and, by extension, to establish a different relationship
16 with the public. Rather than simply accepting the self-selecting audiences
17 and the arbitrary time constraints imposed by biennial commissions or
18 museum exhibitions, these artists seek to define new publics and new con-
19 stituencies for their practice, and to engage the broader field of variables
20 (of space and time, situation and subjectivity) that constitute the social
21 field of a given work. This act of secession also reflects a growing disillusion-
22 ment with the increasingly close integration between the institutional
23 mechanisms of the mainstream art world (the journals, curators, critics,
24 art fairs, biennials, museums, and galleries that provide the discursive and
25 intellectual validation for contemporary art) and the global auction mar-
26 ket, in which contemporary art alone generated almost five billion dollars
27 in sales in 2014.

28 Given the diversity and sheer size of the American continent, the rela-
29 tionship of the projects discussed here to the global art world cannot be
30 generalized. Some regions have little in the way of “art world” infra-
31 structure (galleries, museums, publications, and so on) while cities such
32 as Buenos Aires, Mexico City, or Rio de Janeiro rival the art centers of
33 Europe and North America. What seems to be consistent, as noted above,
34 is that these practices have, with a few exceptions, traditionally operated
35 outside the art world’s purview. Only very recently, in cities that have a
36 strong history of community-based art practice, such as Medellín or São
37 Paolo, has some effort been made to incorporate these projects into a
38 larger matrix of museological programming or art historical research and
39 publication. In terms of research, some of these developments are driven

by teams of national and international curators, as is the case with the São Paulo Biennial, while others are taken on by academic researchers and independent research teams, such as the Red Conceptualismos del Sur. Art historical studies focused on contemporary art have been relatively rare in Latin America. As such, it is often the case that the writers associated with this work were either educated abroad, or emerged from other disciplines, such as the social sciences. This further contributes to a situation in which community-based or socially engaged art practices are more fully and frequently examined in fields outside of art history or theory (e.g., visual anthropology, sociology, etc.).

In many cases these artists and collectives exist in relatively precarious circumstances, with little institutional support or recognition from the art world, and an often antagonistic relationship to formal state bodies (this is evident in the case of Colectivo Sociedad Civil in Peru, Grupo Etcétera in Argentina, and Artistas en Resistancia in Guatemala, for example). The contrast with the sumptuary economy on display at art fairs, galleries, and biennials could hardly be more striking. This contrast is paralleled by a key ideological difference. Where the default attitude toward political change within the mainstream art world involves a studied cynicism (as Santiago Sierra famously observed, “I can’t change anything . . . I don’t believe in the possibility of change”), the artists represented here are committed to the idea that change is not only possible but essential, and that they can play a role in bringing it about.⁴ At the same time, they have come of age in a region of the world where both the possibilities and the disappointments of political transformation are a subject of visceral, daily knowledge and lived historical experience. If there is a broader institutional context for this work, and a wider set of affiliations, it can be found in an improvisational network of activist and socially engaged artists and collectives scattered around the world, from Senegal, to Finland, to Myanmar, to Delhi and beyond, which are equally peripheral to the mainstream, Euro-American art world.

Site-specific art has conventionally operated through what might be described as a teleological orientation. While a given image, event, or idea may be generated in response to a particular context or situation, the artist’s relationship to site is largely appropriative, and the locus of creativity resides primarily at the level of autonomous conceptual ideation (e.g., the well-worn image of the artist working alone in his or her studio). The world, in turn, becomes a kind of reservoir from which the artist may draw at will in elaborating his or her particular vision.⁵ By and large, the

1 work presented in this collection has been produced through a situational
2 engagement with active sites of social or cultural resistance (the Prestes
3 Maia occupation in São Paulo, the ecosystem of Buenos Aires, the public
4 sphere of Medellín). In each case we see a concern with tactical knowledge
5 production and an extemporaneous relationship to incipient political for-
6 mations and social spaces—a form of *civic reimagining*.⁶ At the same time,
7 these individual sites of practice share certain commonalities, through
8 the influence of recent geopolitical shifts in Latin America, which we will
9 trace below.

10 **From the *Requerimiento* to the EZLN**

11 The violence of Spanish colonization constituted a social trauma that was
12 borne by the body politic of Latin America long after formal independence
13 from Spain was achieved. While the specific or local forms of domination
14 set in place by the Spanish colonizers were modified over time, in the case
15 of Latin America, the underlying structures (the repression of indigenous
16 languages and cultures; the hacienda system; forms of race-, caste-, and
17 class-based oppression; the dominance of an elite of planters and mer-
18 chants) remained largely intact, even as a new generation of neocolonial
19 actors came to power in the region in the mid- to late nineteenth century
20 (Great Britain and later the United States). In fact, the authority of the
21 aristocratic *latifundistas* in Latin America was actually strengthened after
22 independence due to the leading role they played in military resistance to
23 Spanish authority. The concentration of land ownership in large estates,
24 the appropriation of native lands, and the eradication of indigenous
25 communities continued, and even increased, in many countries, especially
26 during the late 1800s. As a result, neocolonial political movements retain
27 a contradictory character. On the one hand, the leaders of these move-
28 ments (Rafael Núñez during the regeneration period in Colombia, Juan
29 Manuel Rosas’s “populist” reforms in Buenos Aires, *La Reforma* in Mexico
30 under Benito Juárez) sought to encourage resistance to foreign economic
31 domination through appeals to a unified national identity. At the same
32 time, these movements were often led by, and designed to benefit, wealthy
33 landowners, traders, and industrialists at the expense of working-class,
34 mestizo, and indigenous populations.⁷

35
36 Colonial powers, from Spain in the sixteenth century to the colonial ad-
37 ventures of various European nations in Africa during the nineteenth and
38 twentieth centuries, have typically maintained their domination through
39 tactical alliances with local indigenous elites, which identify their interests

with the colonial power rather than with their own people. As a result, many of the conflicts that occurred in the countries of Latin America following liberation from Spain involved efforts by these same elites to retain control over the cultural and economic resources of their countries. The result was a cyclical process familiar to historians of the region, as a comprador class skimmed off a portion of the wealth exported from the country by foreign investors and corporations, in exchange for maintaining order and repressing organized resistance among the working class and indigenous populations.⁸ This model was, in the long run, untenable. Debt payment burdens, pressure toward monoculture economies, and periodic currency devaluation only exacerbated internal class divisions, leading to the rise of a cadre of autocratic caudillos and military dictators during the early to mid-twentieth century.

In the post-World War II period (roughly 1950–70), a series of new political movements emerged in Latin America that attempted to challenge long-standing internal class divisions, while also taking up a more oppositional relationship to foreign capital. Typically these involved socialist or quasi-socialist reforms (Jacobo Árbenz Guzman in Guatemala and Victor Paz Estenssoro in Bolivia in the early 1950s, Juan Velasco Alvarado’s nationalization of oil production in Peru in 1968, and the 1970 election of Salvador Allende in Chile) as well as open revolution, in the case of Cuba in 1959 and the overthrow of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua by the Sandinistas in 1979. Most of these endeavors were greeted by overt and covert attempts at subversion by the United States, including support for military coups, dictatorships, and political assassinations. During the 1960s the Alliance for Progress, a hemispheric plan developed by the Kennedy administration, played a leading role in this process, providing indoctrination and counterinsurgency training for both urban and rural guerrilla groups in the name of “fighting communism” in the region.

By the mid-1970s many countries in Central and South America had returned to a familiar pattern in which foreign investors and corporations worked in tandem with internal elites, whose power was frequently maintained by military repression (e.g., in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay).⁹ However, where previous client states had attempted to ameliorate some of the economic and social costs of dependence through spending on domestic social programs, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a gradual return to democratically elected governments and a transition to early neoliberal policies, imposed through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Under the so-called “Washington Consensus,”

1 these policies required debtor nations to reduce welfare and worker pro-
2 tectations, eliminate tariffs, and open internal markets to foreign invest-
3 ment. It is important to understand that neoliberalism does not involve
4 an absolute reduction of the state's power relative to the private sector.
5 Rather, neoliberalism involves a transition in state function, as the gov-
6 ernment abandons a market-regulating role (imposing controls over cor-
7 porate conduct, recognition of organized labor, etc.) and embraces instead
8 a market-*complementing* role in which any "public" obligation is subordinate
9 to the interests of corporate and financial elites.¹⁰

10 Neoliberal economic policies proved to be particularly well-suited to re-
11 pressive political regimes in Latin America, as the withdrawal of social
12 support systems (i.e., reductions in welfare, public education and health
13 benefits, and so on) only served to increase internal social tensions that,
14 in turn, were used to justify further social repression and violence. In re-
15 sponse a number of political leaders during the late 1990s attempted to
16 combine obedience to the fiscal discipline of neoliberal development with a
17 largely symbolic embrace of populist domestic policies (e.g., Carlos Menem
18 in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, and Patricio Aylwin and Eduardo
19 Frei in Chile). The failure of these efforts were epitomized by the fall of Fu-
20 jimori in 2000, the Argentine debt crisis of 1999–2002, and the coterminous
21 financial crisis in Brazil, which prompted a domino effect of monetary de-
22 valuations throughout the region. The result was the so-called "Pink Tide"
23 of the early 2000s, as a series of political leaders emerged in Central and
24 South America who were openly antagonistic to the neoliberal economic
25 discourse that had dominated the region since the 1970s.¹¹ This marked a
26 significant shift in Latin American politics, as these leaders came to power
27 through peaceful, democratic means, reflecting a region-wide frustration
28 with the social costs of globalization. At the same time, while heads of state
29 such as Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Rafael Correa, Hugo Chávez, and Evo Mo-
30 rales have been, or were, critical of neoliberal dogma, they also recognized
31 the tactical necessity of working to some extent within the international
32 economic community and the mechanisms of the global market.¹²

33 It is this final period, both utopian and pragmatic, that provides the po-
34 litical backdrop for many of the artistic experiments documented in this
35 collection. The time frame for this collection is significant, beginning as
36 it does in the mid-1990s, which witnessed both the passage of the North
37 American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), that penultimate expression of
38 neoliberal ideology, and the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, which
39 introduced a new paradigm of revolution. It is a period marked by a wide-

spread repudiation of the tenets of neoliberalism and structural adjustment, and an equally widespread disillusionment with traditional armed resistance.¹³ The gradual shift toward new forms of political organization in Latin America was signaled by the emergence of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) or Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas in 1994. “It is not our arms which make us radical,” the Zapatistas declared, “it is the new political practice which we propose . . . a political practice which does not seek the taking of power but the organization of society.”¹⁴ The Zapatistas deliberately sought to differentiate themselves from previous models of revolutionary insurrection. In an early interview Subcomandante Marcos stated:

We do not want a dictatorship of another kind, nor anything out of this world, not international Communism and all that. We want justice where there is now not even minimum subsistence. . . . We do not want to monopolize the vanguard or say that we are the light, the only alternative, or stingily claim the qualification of revolutionary for one or another current.¹⁵

The Zapatistas are emblematic of a broader desire in Latin America during this period to move beyond the traditional notion of revolution as a system for communicating the expertise of a vanguard party or mobilizing the quiescent masses through agitation or exemplary acts of violence. Some indication of the richness and diversity of these new approaches can be found in Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s “Reinventing Social Emancipation” initiative, which he launched in the early 2000s. This is an international research project that provides an overview of new forms of social struggle in the Global South. At the core of de Sousa Santos’s research is a differentiation between existing models of “representative” democracy, associated with the traditions of bourgeois liberalism, and incipient forms of participatory democracy in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, many of which have been catalyzed in response to neoliberal globalization. “The main thesis” of this research, as de Sousa Santos writes, “is that the hegemonic model of [liberal, representative] democracy . . . guarantees no more than low-intensity democracy, based on the privatization of public welfare by more or less restricted elites, on the increasing distance between representatives and the represented, and on an abstract political inclusion made of concrete social exclusion.”¹⁶

From Brazil’s MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra), to the *cocaleros* of Putumayo, to innovative forms of participatory budgeting

1 in Porto Allegro, de Sousa Santos identifies a “new emphasis on local
2 democracy and on the variations of the democratic form.”¹⁷ Taken in
3 the aggregate, these initiatives seek to expand democratic processes and
4 principles beyond the formal confines of representative politics to the
5 “lived temporality” of everyday life. They represent the struggle to “de-
6 democratize democracy,” in de Sousa Santos’s words, and mark a movement
7 toward a more experiential and pragmatic approach to social and political
8 transformation. This model of change implies neither a rejection of strate-
9 gic thinking nor a refusal to acknowledge the coordinated and systematic
10 nature of oppression today.¹⁸ It does, however, suggest that we must con-
11 tinually rediscover our relationship to practice: that consciousness does
12 not always precede action, and that action itself can produce a form of
13 knowledge that is both experiential and reflective. It is this same spirit
14 that animates many of the artistic practices presented here.

15 The imperative to democratize our knowledge as well as our politics has
16 also been addressed by the Chilean economist Manfred Max Neef. Accord-
17 ing to Max Neef, the current neoliberal economic model, often presented as
18 the only possible form of economic policy and almost universally supported
19 by Western universities and academics, fails to take account of “meaningful
20 human scale indicators.” Max Neef argues that conventionally educated
21 economists who study poverty do so from the abstracted critical distance
22 of “scientific” macroeconomic indicators (e.g., gross national product). As
23 a result, they never truly understand the nature of poverty, how it affects
24 people, or what local communities can do to improve their lives. He ar-
25 gues for a “barefoot economics” that would study issues such as poverty
26 through learned community experience and democratize the indicators of
27 development to include local ancestral knowledge and the impact on na-
28 ture in any cost–benefit analysis. This suggests an enriched intercultural
29 dialogue between histories and cultures analogous to what de Sousa San-
30 tos calls an “expanded ecology of knowledge.”¹⁹ De Sousa Santos and Max
31 Neef both seek to challenge the “cognitive injustice” that has paralleled the
32 economic and social injustice of the postcolonial period, as neoliberalism
33 ignores, or deliberately represses, alternative epistemologies and value
34 systems (whether of the indigenous, the poor and working class, or the
35 non-Western).²⁰

36 Progressive Latin American social theory since the 1950s has been char-
37 acterized by a concern with the rights of the oppressed and methodologies
38 that focus on local perspectives and initiatives. Thinkers such as Enrique
39 Dussel have remarked on the practical and theoretical foundation estab-

lished in great part by advocates of Liberation Theology and other liberatory pedagogical and community-driven practices during the 1960s. As Dussel notes, this work enabled the rise of a new generation of left-wing political leaders and perspectives in key regions of Latin America. Within the distinctly decolonizing discourse of Liberation Philosophy, Dussel cites mid-century populist movements, the theoretical implications of the Cuban revolution, and the Catholic Church’s work in developing local *comunidades de base* (base communities) that focus on the lives of the poor. Concurrently, the work of theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez insisted on turning theology away from abstract philosophy and toward criticality and the social sciences. Within this arena of study, one must also acknowledge the contributions of Paolo Freire and other pedagogical theorists whose ideas on popular education and the political and liberatory nature of collaborative and community work through art have been extraordinarily influential.

The second Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) in Medellín laid the groundwork and established the language of Liberation Theology in 1968. However, this was only one stage in a broader movement by Latin American activists and academics beginning in the 1960s to critique the Eurocentric foundations of Western theory and philosophy. Decolonial theoretical movements focused on revealing epistemological *exteriorities*—forms of knowledge and methodologies left aside and pushed beyond the scope of Eurocentric modernity in its drive toward modernization and capitalism. Decolonization, as a theoretical apparatus, is concerned with the contingency of a world-system that is defined by the centers of power. It seeks instead to recover forms of knowledge that *re-center* the frame on intercultural exchange and prioritize the cultural work of the Global South. Concepts such as *transmodernity*—seeing Euro-modernity and its economic forces “from the perspective of its *reverso*, its underside, its occluded other”—argue for the reevaluation of that same exteriority.²¹ The development of a Latin American philosophy centered on the decolonization of knowledge has played an instrumental role in questioning the relativity of postmodern thought, and in ascribing validity to local cognitive histories, knowledge, and methodologies. These positions are grounded in the political movements of the late 1960s, a period that was as much about the affirmation of Third World peoples’ autonomy, identity, will to freedom, and liberation as it was about the critique of imperialism, racism, and sexism within industrialized First World nations. Today these ideas not only provide the foundation for a historical understanding of

1 Latin American political thought; they continue to flourish in the hands
2 of thinkers such as de Sousa Santos, Max Neef, Dussel, and others, and
3 function as a theoretical framework for contemporary methodologies that
4 reverberate through many of the practices in this book.

6 **Otros-Nosotros**

7 The dramatic expansion of collaborative and community-based art practices
8 has been accompanied and framed by an emergent critical discourse that
9 remains largely Euro- and U.S.-centric in both its theoretical orientation
10 and its objects of study. The theoretical and methodological inheritances
11 of Latin America are as diverse as its people, yet the analysis of these art
12 practices within the intellectual centers of the West has tended to “trans-
13 late” Western critical theory and apply it to Latin American art with-
14 out recognizing or investigating local communities, contexts, histories,
15 and practices. Recent art-world debates around issues of art, collectivity,
16 and political change (Nicolas Bourriaud’s “relational” art, Claire Bishop’s
17 deployment of Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonism, Jacques Ranciere’s
18 framing of the ambiguous relationship between the aesthetic and the po-
19 litical, Miwon Kwon’s foregrounding of displacement, etc.) have focused
20 primarily on the work of more mainstream artists and have, in many
21 cases, expressed a congenital mistrust of communal or collective identi-
22 ties and action. Thus, the projects documented in this book may well be
23 viewed with some suspicion by mainstream art critics. From Ala Plastica’s
24 engagement with environmental policies in the Río de la Plata basin to
25 La Linea’s work with women’s shelters in Tijuana, these projects operate
26 both within and against the grain of existing civil society in Latin Amer-
27 ica. In each case we witness a willingness to work through civil and public
28 institutions (NGOs, governmental agencies, unions, etc.), combined with
29 a commitment to transforming these institutions through practical action
30 and resistance.

31 Notwithstanding the persistent skepticism about collaborative and col-
32 lective art practice among some critics and theorists, artists themselves
33 have shown an increasing willingness to explore the potentials offered by
34 this approach. As noted above, we are currently witnessing a heightened
35 interest in these practices in the mainstream art world. This has led, in
36 turn, to an inquiry into the place of collaborative and community-based
37 art practices within a larger history of Latin American art. This inquiry has
38 ranged from more general investigations into the history of the avant-garde
39 in Latin America to case studies focused on specific projects, such as the

actions of the Tucuman Arde group in Argentina during the 1960s.²² Thus, the drive to situate collaborative and collective art practices from Latin America within a larger canon has already begun. While the contemporary projects included in this book share certain commonalities with those earlier, historical practices, the methodologies employed by the artists presented here are distinctly transdisciplinary, placing greater emphasis on close community participation and dialogue. This marks an important departure from earlier models, in which the primary locus of creativity was often seen to reside within the authoring consciousness of a single artist. It suggests, as well, the need for a new set of analytic parameters that do not rely solely on the traditions of historical avant-garde art, but rather remain open to a broader range of influences, criteria, and intellectual contexts. Thus, projects like the memory recuperation initiatives created by Pablo Sanaguano or the community video network-building efforts of Alberto Muenala, both produced with indigenous groups in Ecuador, have closer ties to the traditions of radical pedagogy and the contemporary legislative efforts associated with the indigenous concept of Sumak Kawsay (translated as “good living” in Kichwa) than with the conventions of Western art history.²³

These projects also demonstrate a range of tactics for overcoming the pervasive historical amnesia in many Latin American countries regarding the violence of authoritarian regimes during the 1970s and 1980s. This is evident in Grupo Etcétera’s work in Buenos Aires, as well as memory and reconciliation projects in Colombia. Finally, we can observe new forms of protest and dissent in the cultural projects developed as part of the Prestes Maia occupations in São Paulo and Colectivo Sociedad Civil’s *Lava la bandera* performances in Lima. In each case, these projects are characterized by a receptive, improvisational approach; an openness to the insights generated through practice and action; and a desire to both learn from, and move beyond, the limitations of past narratives of political emancipation. And in each case the groups involved seek to address a public that is both receptive to claims of social justice and able to act upon them. This faith in the often-fragile mechanisms of participatory democracy is all the more remarkable given the recent history of state repression in Latin America.

Taken in the aggregate, what do these artists and collectives have to teach us? We can identify several recurring themes or motifs in their practices, notwithstanding the very wide range of locations, constituencies, and thematic concerns evident throughout this anthology. The first, as already noted, is a sustained and immersive relationship to specific sites and

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

1 locations, and a model of critique that is always rooted in specific institu-
2 tions, subjectivities, and political forces. This relationship entails a set of dis-
3 tinct methodologies (pragmatic forms of learning and research, interviews
4 and conversations, shared perambulations or performative actions, etc.)
5 and a heightened awareness of the complex interplay of the discursive,
6 the haptic, and the political that structures any given site of practice. This
7 work is, by and large, durationally extensive, unfolding over weeks, months,
8 and even years of engagement. This situational commitment is joined by a
9 strong connection to national and international networks of practitioners
10 and activists struggling with similar issues throughout Latin America and
11 around the world, from which many of these artists take inspiration and
12 with whom there are frequent and productive exchanges. Second, the proj-
13 ects presented here exhibit a consistent concern with the generative po-
14 tential of collaboration itself. In their essays, interviews, and statements
15 these artists repeatedly stress the necessity of learning from the experi-
16 ences and actions of their collaborators and interlocutors, of remaining
17 open and receptive to the transformative encounters across the bound-
18 aries of subjectivity and culture that characterize their work. Finally, we
19 encounter a shared recognition that existing models of both artistic prac-
20 tice and political resistance are changing, and a consequent willingness to
21 challenge the conventional boundaries between art and activism or aes-
22 thetics and politics.²⁴

23 We hope that this anthology can help facilitate a dialogue on, and
24 further an investigation into, these diverse forms of artistic practice.
25 The rapid growth of dialogical or collaborative forms of art making over
26 the past decade, not to mention the rich and largely unwritten history
27 of community-driven art practice makes a collection of this nature all the
28 more pertinent. Very little of this material is available in English, and we
29 believe these translations can help open up a productive exchange between
30 practitioners, critics, historians, and activists working in the United States
31 and Europe (who may be unaware of the remarkable range of art practices
32 developed in Latin America over the past twenty years) and their counter-
33 parts in Mexico and Central and South America. The selection of materials
34 is by no means exhaustive, but we have sought to provide a representa-
35 tive sample of regional efforts to rethink the boundaries between art
36 and activism and, by extension, the creative capacity of art. While many
37 significant studies and groups have been left out of this collection, due to
38 limitations of space and time, we feel the material we have been able to
39 include effectively highlights the diversity of practices in the region.

We have organized the thirty-one readings in this book, consisting of essays, interviews, manifestos, and conversations, into six parts: (Un)Civil Disobedience, Urbanism, Memory, Indigeneity, Migrations, and Institutional Critique. The organizational structure came about organically, as we began to identify the most relevant case studies and projects. Each chapter includes a brief introduction, and detailed project descriptions accompany several of the texts. The project descriptions serve to highlight basic information not covered in the central text and are included to facilitate further research, and to provide an additional contextual foundation for the essays themselves. From the beginning of the editorial process we decided against imposing fixed limits on the kinds of texts we would publish. We were open to whatever format the artists and authors felt was most effective in representing their work or their creative investigations. Most of the texts are new, but there are a few that have been republished from smaller or less accessible publications.

As is so often the case with projects of this nature, it is, at the time of its publication, already a historical document. Over the past five years a range of exciting new works have been developed in Latin America. Important research on memory, violence, and the history of military repression (and its toll on, and relationship to, artistic and activist practice) has been undertaken by groups such as La Red Conceptualismos del Sur, and across the hemisphere. There are active and vibrant gender equality movements involving artists and cultural producers in Bolivia, Argentina, Ecuador, and other countries. Many of the artist groups in São Paulo or Buenos Aires who took to the streets in the early 2000s are now active in building organizations, developing infrastructure to facilitate international collaborations, and forming new cultural alliances and strategies to continue their initial political struggle, while also redefining the role of the artist in society.²⁵

The ending date for this anthology, 2010, marked the moment that Lula da Silva stepped down as president of Brazil, to be replaced by his former chief of staff, Dilma Rousseff. Rousseff has become increasingly unpopular as inflation has increased dramatically, and her administration has been confronted with scandals over Petrobras, Brazil's state-run oil company. She is currently facing impeachment. By 2013 Hugo Chávez had died, replaced by his former vice president, Nicolás Maduro Moros. Maduro has also struggled, as falling oil prices have led to a growing economic crisis in Venezuela. Notwithstanding these shifts, Latin America remains one of the key regions in which new forms of resistance to the imperatives of

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

1 neoliberalism are sustained and at least partially encouraged at the state
 2 level (Rafael Correa and Evo Morales remain in power).²⁶ Moreover, 2010
 3 was also the year in which Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi im-
 4 molated himself in protest after the police prevented him from selling
 5 vegetables, marking the beginning of the Arab Spring. We are unable here
 6 to pursue the productive points of contact between the Arab Spring and
 7 the subsequent Occupy movement (which began in 2011) and the work
 8 developed in Latin America during the Pink Tide. It is evident, however,
 9 that in each case we can identify a significant relationship between politi-
 10 cal resistance, especially in response to neoliberalism and antidemocratic
 11 or authoritarian regimes, and artistic production (for example, the new
 12 forms of street art that proliferated in Tahrir Square as well as in the Oc-
 13 cupy movement). It is our hope that this collection will contribute to the
 14 ongoing dialogue around the nature of this relationship, as both artistic
 15 practice and political resistance continue to evolve, complicate, and chal-
 16 lenge each other.²⁷

Notes

17
 18
 19 Epigraph: Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis
 20 Books, 1983), 117.1.

- 21 1 While our primary focus is on work produced in Latin America, especially proj-
 22 ects that are less well known in the English-speaking world, we will also include
 23 some discussion of recent projects developed in diasporic communities in the
 24 United States (see “Of Co-investigations and Aesthetic Sustenance: A Conversa-
 25 tion between Colectivo Situaciones and Electronic Disturbance Theater/b.a.n.g.
 26 lab” and Prerana Reddy’s “How Three Artists Led the Queens Museum into Co-
 27 rona and Beyond,” chapters 17 and 18). Of course, these two essays can offer only
 28 a partial and incomplete picture of the diversity of artistic practices developed
 29 by Latino/a diasporic communities in North America. We would note here that
 30 contemporary artistic practices being produced by Latino/a artists and com-
 31 munities in the United States are already well represented in English-language
 32 sources and museum exhibitions. See, for example, the exhibition “Our America:
 33 The Latino Presence in American Art” at the Smithsonian Museum of American
 34 Art (October 25, 2013–March 2, 2014), which toured nationally and featured a
 35 major conference and accompanying catalog. In addition, one of our concerns, as
 36 noted in this introduction, was to focus on projects developed in the context of
 37 significant political shifts that occurred in Latin America, specifically during the
 38 late 1990s and early 2000s (the so-called “Pink Tide”).
- 39 2 Inés Katzenstein and Andrea Giunta, *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the
 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004).

- 3 This work has been described as the expression of a “dialogical” (Kester) or
 “relational” (Bourriaud) aesthetic, and as evidence of a “participatory” turn in con-
 temporary art. For recent studies, see Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*,
 translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of
 Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), Grant Kester, *Conversa-
 tion Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University
 of California Press, 2004) and *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative
 Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), Shannon
 Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge,
 2011), *Living as Form: Socially-Engaged Art from 1991–2011*, edited by Nato
 Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), and *What We Made: Conversa-
 tions on Art and Social Cooperation*, edited by Tom Finkelpearl (Durham, NC:
 Duke University Press, 2013). 1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10
 11
 12
- 4 The Sierra quote is from the catalog *Santiago Sierra: Works 2002–1990* (Birming-
 ham, UK: Ikon Gallery, 2002), 15. 13
 14
- 5 See Grant Kester, “Lessons in Futility: Francis Alÿs and the Legacy of May ’68,”
Third Text 23(4) (July 2009): 407–20. 15
 16
- 6 By “tactical” we refer to the effects of artistic and activist practices at specific
 sites and in specific situations (as opposed to “strategic” forms of action that
 involve the calculation of the long-term effects of cumulative practices). There
 is an implicit scalar distinction here, but also a temporal shift, in which tactical
 action allows for the immediate recalibration of a resistant practice in response
 to changes, breakthroughs, or counter-actions at a given site. The concept of a
 “civic reimaging” refers to the capacity of certain artistic practices to contrib-
 ute to a process of reframing the nature of public and civic space within a given
 social system. As with the *Lava la bandera* actions in Peru discussed by Gustavo
 Buntix (“*Lava la Bandera: The Colectivo Sociedad Civil and the Cultural Over-
 throw of the Fujimori-Montesinos Dictatorship*,” chapter 1), this often entails
 the ability to reclaim signifiers or symbols of political unity (e.g., the Peruvian
 flag). 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25
 26
 27
 28
- 7 As historians Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes argue: 29
 30
 31
 32
 33
 34
 35
 36
 37
 38
 39
- Populist reforms historically had united elites and subalterns under the ban-
 ner of nationalism because they promised social and political inclusion with-
 out fundamentally redistributing property and power. In the absence of such
 a radical transformation of existing social structures, however, populist re-
 forms had to be financed by high export prices, low-interest foreign loans or
 some combination of both.
- Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes, *A History of Latin America: Independ-
 ence to the Present*, vol. 2, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 498–99.
- 8 Originally deriving from the Portuguese word for “buyer,” associated specifi-
 cally with trade with China, “comprador” evolved in the Marxist tradition to
 identify a “native” manager of European colonial enterprises.

9 The overthrow of Anastasio Somoza by the Sandinistas in 1979 was an
 10 exception.

11 See *The State after Statism: New State Activities in the Age of Liberalization*,
 12 edited by Jonah D. Levy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

13 These include Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández in Argentina, Luiz Iná-
 14 cio Lula da Silva in Brazil, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Ricardo Lagos and Michelle
 15 Bachelet in Chile, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Mauricio Funes in El Salvador,
 16 Manuel Zelaya in Honduras, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Fernando Lugo in
 17 Paraguay, Tabaré Vázquez and José Mujica in Uruguay, and Hugo Chávez in
 18 Venezuela.

19 This is also a reflection of the loss of the USSR as a sponsor of state socialism
 20 in Latin America.

21 This period was also marked by the death of Jacobo Arenas of FARC (Revolu-
 22 tionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in Colombia in 1990 and the capture of
 23 Abimael Guzmán of Sendero Luminoso in Peru in 1992. FARC had come under
 24 increasing criticism for its reliance on kidnapping for revenue, and its recruit-
 25 ment of children as young as fifteen.

26 As Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos wrote in an open letter to “National and
 27 International Civil Society” in 1996:

28 We do not want others, more or less of the right, center or left, to decide
 29 for us. We want to participate directly in the decisions which concern us, to
 30 control those who govern us, without regard to their political affiliation,
 31 and oblige them to “rule by obeying.” We do not struggle to take power, we
 32 struggle for democracy, liberty, and justice. Our political proposal is the
 33 most radical in Mexico (perhaps in the world, but it is still too soon to say).
 34 It is so radical that all the traditional political spectrum (right, center left
 35 and those of one or the other extreme) criticize us and walk away from our
 36 delirium.

37 —Zapatista Army of National Liberation Mexico, “To National and Interna-
 38 tional Civil Society” (August 30, 1996), http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/marc_to_cs_se96.html.

39 In a communiqué released in response to the emergence of the EPR (Popular
 40 Revolutionary Army), which engaged in more traditional armed resistance, the
 41 EZLN responded:

42 You struggle for power. We struggle for democracy, liberty and justice. This
 43 is not the same thing. Though you may be successful and conquer power, we
 44 will continue struggling for democracy, liberty and justice. It does not matter
 45 who is in power, the Zapatistas are and have always struggled for democracy,
 46 liberty and justice.

47 —Zapatista Army of National Liberation Mexico, “To the Soldiers and Com-
 48 manders of the Popular Revolutionary Army” (August 29, 1996), http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/ezln_epr_se96.html.

- 16 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “General Introduction: Reinventing Social Emancipation: Toward New Manifestos,” in *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon*, edited by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (London: Verso, 2005), ix. 1
- 17 Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Leonardo Avritzer, “Introduction: Opening Up the Canon of Democracy,” in *Democratizing Democracy*, xxxvi. As de Sousa Santos and Avritzer continue, “The struggle for democracy is today above all a struggle for the democratization of democracy. Liberal democracy, the normative paradigm, confined democracy to the political realm. . . . This rendered the democratic process susceptible to constituting an island of democracy in a wide ocean of social despotism” (lxii). 2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
- 18 In fact, as de Sousa Santos writes, “in our time, social emancipation involves a dual movement of de-globalization of the local (vis-à-vis hegemonic globalization) and its re-globalization (as part of counter-hegemonic globalization).” *Democratizing Democracy*, xxxvi. 11
12
13
14
- 19 Max Neef, in reaffirming the importance of political agency in local human and economic development, defines the concept of “human scale development” as “focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the construction of organic articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with the state.” Manfred A. Max-Neef, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections* (New York: Apex Press, 1991), 8. 15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
- 20 Also see Raewyn W. Connell, *Southern Theory: Social Science and the Global Dynamics of Knowledge* (London: Polity Press, 2007) and, in the context of postcolonial Africa specifically, Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2012). 23
24
25
26
27
- 21 Eduardo Mendieta, in Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Ricoeur, Apel, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*, translated and edited by Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Humanities, 1996), xxii. 28
29
30
- 22 Maria Carmen Ramirez’s contribution in *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004) and Luis Camnitzer’s *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) are two popular and recent examples. 31
32
33
34
- 23 See Pablo Alonso González and Alfredo Macías Vázquez, “An Ontological Turn in the Debate on Buen Vivir—Sumak Kawsay in Ecuador: Ideology, Knowledge and the Common,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 10(1) (summer 2015): 1–20; Julien Vanhulst and Adrian E. Beling, “Buen Vivir: Emergent Discourse within or beyond Sustainable Development,” *Ecological Economics* 101 (2014): 54–63 and Sarah A. Radcliffe, “Development for a Postneoliberal 35
36
37
38
39

Era? Sumak Kawsay, Living Well and the Limits to Decolonisation in Ecuador,” *Geoforum* 43 (2012): 240–49.

- 24 Kester discusses this question in more depth in “On the Relationship between Theory and Practice in Socially Engaged Art,” in the *Blade of Grass* journal *Fertile Ground* on July 29, 2015 (<http://www.abladeofgrass.org/fertile-ground/between-theory-and-practice/>), and the editorial for issue #2 of *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* (fall 2015) (<http://field-journal.com/issue-2/kester-2>).
- 25 Examples of this shift would include Grupo Etcétera and Frente 3 de Fevereiro. Each group has evolved, more recently, to explore their respective social and political concerns through the building of regional and international cultural alliances, publishing, and curatorial work.
- 26 Morales himself has been accused of facilitating the “bureaucratic stagnation of the Bolivian revolution.” As Dinerstein has noted, in the post-Pink Tide period of retrenchment there are, among the grass roots, “divisions between those who support the governments and those who feel betrayed.” See Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 8.
- 27 For a useful study of the impact of the Occupy movement on artistic practice, see Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2016). The exhibition “Creative Dissent: Arts of the Arab World Uprisings” was on display at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, between November 8, 2013 and February 9, 2014. See <http://artsoftheArabWorldUprisings.com/>.

Some projects documented in this anthology were featured in exhibitions organized by coeditor Bill Kelley, Jr. Rather than see this as a source of editorial compromise, the author wishes to convey his belief that curatorial practice is one of the few ways in which it is possible for an independent researcher to gain direct, firsthand knowledge of these complex, long-term projects. This kind of field research is essential to a deeper critical, as well as curatorial, understanding of the work.

PROOF

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

Part III

Memory

The past decade has witnessed the emergence of new cultural institutions throughout Latin America dedicated to preserving the memory and histories of violent political pasts. Museums of memory have been established in Medellín, Santiago, Rosario, and Mexico City, while others, such as those in Guatemala City and Lima, have recently opened their doors. Truth commissions have been organized, often with international support, to conduct the delicate work of uncovering the harsh facts about these histories. At the same time, the perpetrators of those same atrocities are often protected from prosecution or are still in positions of power. Nevertheless, these reconciliation processes are vital not only to the historical record in a post-conflict democracy, but for the families still searching for justice. In the case of Colombia, these memory recuperation projects are ongoing while the violence and armed conflicts continue.

In the process of framing a future that must simultaneously reconcile with its past, many artists have found common interest with communities, alongside the governmental and nongovernmental agencies that support their work. This collaboration between artists and nongovernmental agencies is particularly relevant today in Colombia, where the violence of the 1990s led to a massive growth of what are known as *corporaciones*.¹

1 A common term for a local nonprofit group or NGO—literally translated
2 as incorporated—*corporaciones* are helping to transform contemporary
3 Colombia. Nonprofit advocacy groups such as Corporación Pasolini, fo-
4 cused on teaching skills and creating platforms for community video and
5 filmmaking, or Corporación Nuestra Gente, which is dedicated to bringing
6 performance and theater workshops to formerly violent neighborhoods
7 in Medellín, are examples of a collaborative labor that focuses on memory
8 recuperation, reconciliation, and civic reintegration.

9 Working through an active matrix of cultural and political agencies and
10 relationships, many of these groups are attempting to construct a new
11 civic discourse and a framework of public engagement in their commu-
12 nities through memory work and art. In 1989 Colombian anthropologist
13 Pilar Riaño Alcalá, along with Corporación Región, a group dedicated to
14 human rights issues, and other collaborators in Medellín, asked U.S. artist
15 Suzanne Lacy to work with them on a community-based retrieval of neigh-
16 borhood history called “The Skin of Memory” (*La Piel de la Memoria*). This
17 complex project incorporated the collecting and display of objects of mem-
18 ory (photographs, artifacts and other mementos) into a traveling com-
19 munity museum, and was expanded and revisited in 2011. Both projects
20 are discussed here in an essay titled “Skins of Memory: Art, Civic Ped-
21 agogy, and Social Reconstruction.” Colombian art historian David Gutierrez
22 Castañeda contributes an essay entitled “Some Frameworking Concepts
23 on Art and Social Practices in Colombia,” highlighting recent projects that
24 operate as hybrids of artistic practice, public policy initiative, university-
25 based research, nongovernmental organizations, or cultural centers. His-
26 torically important community-based theater projects, such as Heidi and
27 Rolf Abdelharden’s “C’úndua Project: Pact for Life,” which took place in Bo-
28 gotá, are considered alongside Lacy and Riaño’s “The Skin of Memory” to
29 provide a critical lens through which to understand community-based or
30 service-based learning in Colombia. Art practices operating in the sphere
31 of memory and historical legacies are not confined to the aftermath of po-
32 litical violence. In Latin America, many projects center on ongoing debates
33 over disparities in access to social and public spaces that continue to de-
34 fine the region. Puerto Rico-born artist Chemi Rosado-Seijo investigates
35 various sites and neighborhoods around San Juan through the history of
36 their use, focusing on the collective memory of place in the city. While
37 Rosado-Seijo cites Modernist painting and architecture as two important
38 influences in his artistic formation, his working practice is also clearly in-
39

formed by community organizing methodologies and a critical perspective on the inequalities and colonial legacies operating in Puerto Rico, both past and present.

Note

- 1 http://www.ngohandbook.org/index.php?title=Colombia_NGO_Sector.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

PROOF

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

Skins of Memory

Art, Civic Pedagogy, and Social Reconstruction¹

PILAR RIAÑO ALCALÁ AND SUZANNE LACY

In a country such as Colombia, which has endured a half-century, multilayered armed conflict, various social groups have great difficulties acknowledging the legacies of violent pasts and considering questions of societal reconciliation. This is not only a result of acute social conflicts that feed the wars; it is also related to the micro-politics of community making and mourning. In this complex scenario, we engaged in a public art project that grew from questions about how memory, ritual, and art may constitute dynamic media for recognizing social suffering and encouraging collective mourning. Moreover, we questioned how they can elicit a collective civic pedagogy that supports critical thinking about violence and the destruction of local social life, the sharp separation between bloody representations of violence and experiences of human suffering, and disruptive binary constructions (victim/perpetrator, violent/nonviolent) that disregard the complexities embedded in the experience of violence.

Throughout the 1990s, human rights activists, community leaders, artists, and public intellectuals in Medellín joined forces to work toward strengthening civil society. Several themes that are relevant to today emerged: the rise of youth cultures, including youth gangs and militias; the production of democratic and local processes by communities working with public intellectuals/activists; and the surfacing of memory work as a means for developing public voice and community capacity in the midst of ongoing armed conflict. “The Skin of Memory”

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

1 was positioned in the context of this vital movement in 1999 as a social labora-
 2 tory to explore art's potential for the production of a public pedagogy and as an
 3 active intervention in the everyday social world of Medellín's residents. An early
 4 work of community-activist public art in Colombia, the project grew out of, and
 5 subsequently was reabsorbed into, the ongoing production of a civil society in
 6 that country.

7 *"The Skin of Memory" began in 1998 when Pilar Riaño, a Colombian-Canadian*
 8 *anthropologist, and five local community-based organizations invited the U.S.*
 9 *artist Suzanne Lacy to work on developing a public artwork that drew upon*
 10 *Riaño's fieldwork research and supported ongoing local community reconstruc-*
 11 *tion processes. We worked between 1998 and 1999 in collaboration with local*
 12 *youth, women, and community leaders, with community workers from local*
 13 *nongovernmental and government organizations,² and with a multidisciplinary*
 14 *team of historians, social workers, educators, artists, and architects. "The Skin*
 15 *of Memory" consisted of a museum/installation of collected objects along with*
 16 *a final celebration. What follows is a reflexive account of the 1999 project and*
 17 *the processes it triggered, and a description of a subsequent artistic revisiting*
 18 *of the project and its legacy for the 2011 Encuentro Internacional de Medellín.*

20 "The Skin of Memory" (1999) [El Barrio Antioquia]

21 The barrio where "The Skin of Memory" project took place is situated in
 22 Medellín, the second largest city in Colombia. In the 1980s, Medellín be-
 23 came the strategic center for the operations of the powerful Medellín drug
 24 cartel, and underwent a dramatic social transformation. Youth, in par-
 25 ticular, joined gangs and became *sicarios* (hired assassins) or part of an
 26 underground network of illegal services for organized crime. By the time
 27 we started this project, over 40,000 youth had died in a period of twenty
 28 years. In these years, Colombia had become one of the most violent coun-
 29 tries in the world, reaching a yearly average of seventy-seven homicides
 30 per 100,000 people. In 1991, the situation in Medellín was even bleaker,
 31 with 381 homicides per 100,000 people (Corporación Región 1999).

32 Since the end of the 1980s, the proliferation and growth of the national
 33 leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary groups also had a major
 34 impact on the spread of violence in Medellín. Nationally, the two leftist
 35 guerrilla groups, the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colom-
 36 bia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (Ejército de
 37 Liberación Nacional, or National Liberation Army), were showing a steady
 38 growth in the number of combatants, controlled territories, and violent
 39 actions. The right-wing paramilitary groups united in the United Self-

Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia), financed by rich landowners and drug cartels and with direct links to the Colombian army, expanded through the national landscape, and spread terror through massacres, selective homicides, and forced displacement.

In the broader picture, Colombia, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, was undergoing large-scale political and social violence, which represented the most critical crisis affecting the continent, due to Colombia's strategic position at the gateway to South America (from the north), its rich resources, and its singular interlinking of guerrilla warfare, organized crime, the war on drugs, dirty wars, and everyday social violence. Colombia, the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid in those years, was at the center of competing international interests and forces (e.g., the United States' \$1.3 billion Colombia Plan, the Andean Regional Initiative). The repercussions of this multilayered conflict in the region were experienced in the threat to territorial borders, the destabilizing impact on markets, and the dramatic human costs of a war that was felt through massive internal displacement (2.5 million people internally displaced in the 1990s), an increase in death statistics (25,000 violent deaths per year), the large number of refugees crossing national borders or leaving the country (over a million in the last decade), and the highest kidnapping rates in the world (50 percent of the world total). When societies go through prolonged periods of violent conflict that drain away the taken-for-granted texture of everyday life, collective anxieties leave an emotional sediment that might turn into hate and vengeful actions which reaffirm the ideologies that sustain these behaviors. The social fabric gradually weakens, the intimate and ritual mechanisms for negotiating grief are blocked, and the debilitating impact of violence in the psychological, social, and cultural spheres intensifies.

Artifacts of memory, subjects of history

In barrio Antioquia, the conditions necessary for community reconciliation were fragile due to the intensity of neighborhood conflicts and the weakening of the basic local structures of solidarity. The terror generated by the territorial wars of several gangs, and the perception that even funerals constituted a target of violence, limited the possibilities for carrying out rituals that establish mechanisms to reconcile with the past. It was clear during our process of community-based retrieval of neighborhood history and visualization that "The Skin of Memory" project needed to animate a kind of collective engagement that confronts the past through

1 aesthetic experience, mourning, and storytelling. We understood that the
2 possibility of activating these processes of memory and mourning rested
3 in the location of the art project within a civic pedagogy process of com-
4 munity mourning and reconciliation.

5 The first part of the project addressed grief through the lending of a
6 meaningful object or artifact of memory from each family. A team of youth
7 and women from the barrio gathered five hundred objects symbolizing
8 personal, family, or neighborhood memories for the people of barrio An-
9 tioquia. The object collectors aimed at establishing close relationships that
10 allowed those being visited to share certain memories through the objects.
11 The collectors became, in the words of a local journalist, “archaeologists of
12 the everyday”: looking for objects and identifying their symbolic weight,
13 helping residents to establish a relationship between the object, the place
14 it occupies in their material world, and the ways in which it establishes
15 a link with the past. There, in the intimacy of the bedroom or the living
16 room, as the objects were being taken out of chests, off shelves, or from
17 walls or corners, the stories were told: a porcelain figure from a church, with
18 a crack in the bell tower and an angel playing the guitar, scented talcum
19 powder in a little black bottle made of white cardboard and plastic, with
20 silver flowers that was the last Mother’s Day gift that Nora received before
21 her son was killed. Once the subject disappears, the leftover clothes
22 become evidence of one’s being, as when the mother of El Negro gave Lili
23 a blue shirt that “he used to wear with white jeans and brown sneakers, and
24 he looked really sharp.” Or like the blue jeans that Omar was wearing when
25 he was murdered, which Mayerly and another friend kept “as a memory
26 of him, because there are so few reminders left.” Objects thus carry within
27 them aspects of the person who is no longer there, and that in daily life point
28 to a certain presence of someone now gone.³

29 The objects were infused with oral traditions, which had passed from
30 generation to generation, relating back to the origins of the neighborhood
31 or pointing to family histories: the coal irons with engraved handles, the
32 pots and pewter jars, the picture of the Holy Trinity which was there dur-
33 ing the first religious procession in the neighborhood in 1950, the plas-
34 tic Pinocchio figure that is seventy years old and has passed through four
35 generations, the hundred-year-old sewing machine in which “my great-
36 great-grandmother used to sew waistcoats and anything needed for breast
37 support.” Travelers’ objects that came back from the United States were
38 also included: radios in the form of a 1970s Cadillac, dollar bills, or gar-
39 ish decorative objects. There were articles that joined family histories to

life cycles, generational changes and kinship ties: birth, baptism, the first steps, religious ceremonies, and marriage.

Objects were emblematic of critical moments for their bearers. Sometimes these objects had been kept in secret, and at other times they had been kept to tell one's history many times over: sculptures or paintings that were created in jail, a newspaper clipping narrating the drama of a woman who was caught in the 1970s carrying drugs and sent to a U.S. prison, the letters a five-year-old girl wrote to her dead father, which she stores away carefully in a little plastic box, the cross made of bullets that the soldiers made during military service in 1928, the rope that saved many people during the flood, and the cutlery refinished in gold that Griselda Blanco, the "Queen of Cocaine," gave as a gift to one of the neighborhood grandmothers who had worked for her.

Once the team collected the significant objects and gathered the stories, our challenge as artists and educators was to transfer them to an appropriate context of representation. We chose a school bus to exhibit the objects because it could move freely between various sectors of the barrio and because at the time of the project there was no place in the neighborhood that the residents from every sector could safely visit. The transformation of a public transport bus into a museum also allowed us to interrelate its function of transporting people through the city (crossing territories) with the metaphor of a memory museum that crosses violent territorial divisions and traces a symbolic route for an encounter with memories. The bus offered a place for the transformation of the acts of looking and remembering into acts of recognizing. A receptacle of living and daily memory, it represented a sensorial texture, a *skin of memory*—seen, felt, and resymbolized for each one of its visitors.

The artist and the anthropologist in consultation with the historian and the youth reviewed the history of each object when it came time to arrange them in the bus. The aesthetic and narrative proposals that developed in earlier workshops led to our decision that each object should be set up so as to make evident the distinct value it held for its owner. We grouped objects according to visual narrative threads suggested by the stories, mindful of the ways in which the representative power of bloody violence can be counteracted through the respectful and artistic display of the object, as well as the ways in which alternative cultural images of death could trigger a reelaboration of memories of violence. The sequence of these objects, placed with care and creativity behind hundreds of small white lights, created a visual web of relationships and a candlelight aura of



11.1. “La Piel de la Memoria” (Skin of Memory), Barrio Antioquia, Medellín, 1998–1999.
 Courtesy of Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño Alcalá.

ritual underscoring the magnitude of loss. The links between the unknown owner of an object, the other objects, and the collective memory resulting from the installation produced a field of rich meanings that represented the conflictive nature of local memories and the diverse ways in which local histories recreate national histories.

Inside the bus: Meaningful gazes

After the museum opened its doors, the collectors turned into the guardians of the artwork. Over the next ten days they became literacy workers of memory who related the histories of the objects with the many visitors, listened to stories, shared grief, and collected written letters. Their labor was to bear witness to the powerful acts of remembering, the ways in which strangers trusted their intimate stories to them, and how people would recognize each other through this communication of shared emotion. Youth guardians witnessed how objects became bridges that connected material and human losses to the sentient body, and personal experience to other representations of loss and history in the museum.

The primary work for the visitors was in their gaze and acts of contemplation: reactivating the memory of those who visited, recognizing objects, finding pieces of history that dated back generations, looking at and recognizing the faces of so many who have died, silently contemplating, hurling forth quick commentaries that denote resentment or mistrust, inviting

dialogue and the sharing of emotions. The objects were recognized for their historical significance and as markers of important moments. In this subtle manner, links were drawn between local, regional, and national history: “The letters that came from the United States for a man who had already died, and all those nice messages that remember history, that is beautiful.”

Process is a vital element of this type of artistic intervention and civic pedagogy, understood as much in its temporal duration as in its dimension of social interaction, in which the experience of seeing and making art becomes a process of creating meanings and common references. The participation of a team of youth and women leaders, the collaboration and coproduction with the team of nongovernmental organizations, and the embedding of art within a wider process of community organization and civic pedagogy were processes crucial for establishing a community base from which to construct common meanings about the sense of loss and history. Relationships were established between the residents and their history, between the visitors and those who lent pieces, between the residents of the neighborhood and the outside visitors, between the owners of the objects and the ressignificance given to them through the museum installation. This journey of recognition that occurred in the bus facilitated acts of witnessing and engagement in a collective civic process of mourning. Art and memory activated a desire to recognize, to give testimony, to think individually and collectively about reconciliation. Among residents and visitors, but particularly within our team of community leaders, volunteers, community and cultural workers, this desire to recognize and give testimony grew stronger as the days went by.

Entries in the registration book make evident the diverse ways that the museum was *experienced*. Each person synthesized this in their own words: “very special,” “super cool,” “very organized,” “Heavy!,” “Fabulous,” “very *chimba* [beautiful, something that is liked],” “I love how the people of the neighborhood were kept in mind for the museum, everyone ended up being a Van Gogh.” The comments also evidenced the ways in which the personal and aesthetic experiences of facing the exhibit give a sense of ritual to emotions evoked by walking through the bus museum. They make reference to the power of memory for changing into an expressive medium through which individuals make sense of the past and resituate themselves in the present: “It’s something that we can use to bring back the memory of the disappeared . . . so many people.”

While in the museum, visitors were invited to leave a letter with a wish for an unknown resident, as well as a specific wish for the future of

1 barrio Antioquia. Nearly two thousand letters, written on thick white
 2 paper, were put inside large white envelopes and exhibited unopened, ob-
 3 jects of mystery in their own right. The acts of writing letters and registry
 4 book entries led to new avenues of expression and were central elements
 5 of our collective civic pedagogy. Writing and sending letters represented
 6 other relational acts, which, through written language, activated a visual-
 7 ization of the future. This type of process, anchored in visual, experiential,
 8 dialogic, and written tools, supports the view of a community reconciliation
 9 process as *collective acts of literacy*. The individual’s engagement within this
 10 relational field facilitated the consideration of alternative constructions
 11 of “the others” beyond the dichotomies of friend–enemy or good–bad,
 12 toward the locating of oneself within a common experience of living pain.
 13 For the local organizations involved, this was one of its most important
 14 social implications because it supported their vision of democratic citi-
 15 zenship. These organizations are part of a broader social movement that
 16 envisions Medellín as a *ciudad educadora*, a city that promotes a democratic
 17 culture, forms of solidary citizenship, and a city that values differences
 18 and seeks a negotiated resolution to its conflicts.

Movements of desire

21 The very fact that the bus opened its doors in every one of the sectors
 22 of the neighborhood without incident testifies to the recognition that the
 23 project received, despite taking place during one of the barrio’s worst pe-
 24 riods of armed confrontation. The fighting between two local gangs es-
 25 calated in the days leading up to the bus museum opening, and on two
 26 occasions these gangs disregarded the implicit agreement to respect com-
 27 munity events. We were afraid that bringing objects and photos of people
 28 involved in the conflict into the bus would make it a target of aggression.
 29 But this did not happen, and the bus crossed symbolic and physical territorial
 30 borders, actually creating another type of topography and movement. In
 31 part, this was facilitated by previous community work that local leaders
 32 had engaged in over the year in their sectors, educating people about the
 33 purpose of the project and its relationship to other community initiatives
 34 such as the annual festival Streets of Culture. The impact of a previous
 35 memory recuperation process, the substantive coverage by printed and
 36 electronic mass media, and the expectations that the bus museum created
 37 for the residents of the community also played a role. During the ten-day
 38 exhibit, we witnessed how the more than four thousand visitors from all
 39 over the city were transformed into promoters and disseminators, sharing

their reactions and descriptions of its purpose. This form of spreading news about the event was in itself a process of resignification and transmission: an act of literacy and communication.

The exhibit ended with a performance-celebration in which six carnivalesque troupes performed along the streets of the neighborhood. Recreational traditions of the region were recreated through mimes, music, stilt-walkers, dancing, and the procession itself. They wandered throughout the neighborhood, celebrating the museum installation and delivering a letter to each home in the area. Sixty mimes on bicycles—the common means of transportation in the neighborhood—delivered the letters in silence, with smiles, bowing as they handed the letter to residents in an act of reverence that drew attention to the powerful significance of the object being delivered. The team envisioned the final celebration as a festive act extending a bridge between the anonymous neighbor who wrote the letter and those who received and read it. The event built on the dynamic border-crossing itinerary of the bus museum with six processions that traveled independently through the various sectors of the neighborhood, taking over the streets of barrio Antioquia as expressive spaces and routes to be retraced, temporary neutral spaces establishing connections between the present and future, between sectors and among neighbors, between visitors and the visited, and through anonymous letters to neighbors. As the six processions moved toward each other, they converged into a final parade, which exploded with joy and optimism as it traveled exuberantly toward the neighborhood’s main street. Subsequently the bus was exhibited in the main center of Medellín, where it continued to attract national media attention. Once the project was finished, the group of women and youth leaders continued working on the community reconstruction with neighborhood children and youth. With enthusiasm and in the midst of great difficulties, this group fostered cultural and recreational activities and strengthened their roles as leaders and actors for peace.

A process in motion: Claims for justice and reparation

It would be naïve to think that the process unleashed through this project fundamentally changed the fabric of relationships and conflicts in barrio Antioquia. This process however, put in motion a series of possibilities for embracing aesthetic experience as well as the entangled universe of renewed cultural meaning for whoever was touched, in any way, by the art intervention. The universe of *actions*, resignified as acts of collective literacy by a process of social interaction through public art, illustrated the

1 trajectory and emotions that accompany the construction of viable peace
2 processes at the local level. At the level of the city, the large amount of
3 attention that the project received in the media attracted many people,
4 who, overcoming fears of a stigmatized neighborhood, crossed imaginary
5 borders and visited the museum, publicly recognizing the human and ma-
6 terial impact of violence as a common experience among all residents of
7 Medellín. The project placed the *local* (the barrio, the city) as the primary
8 social and spatial context for witnessing, and it suggested witnessing as
9 a way to recover qualities of trust and close relationships in the every-
10 day and to create a context for an engagement in broader acts of societal
11 reconciliation.

12 “The Skin of Memory” emphasized the importance of thinking about
13 social repair as a gradual process of civic literacy supported by cultural in-
14 terventions that reconstruct the bonds of neighborhood, of friendship,
15 or of family weakened by so many acts of violence. It demonstrated the
16 importance of a symbolic legitimation of the claims made by those who
17 suffer, and the ways in which historic memories have a decisive influence
18 on relationships that individuals have with the present. These elements
19 also play a central role in the national negotiation processes when they
20 are turned into one of the bases from which the diverse actors, including
21 the state, define and negotiate their positions. The use of art and memory
22 as fields of interaction and social witnessing allows us to think of the
23 processes of social repair that take place in the everyday and at the com-
24 munity level. As we saw in this project, these actions of repair mobilize a
25 desire to *face ourselves through the past*, rather than *an erasure of the past*.
26 This involves a return to the senses through recognition of pain and rela-
27 tional memory where experience and testimony intersect. The processes
28 of social repair provide a structure and a temporary framework to recog-
29 nize suffering, to deal with grief, and to face the destructuring of the so-
30 cial world by violence. This human, social, and cultural *process* creates a
31 space from which collectivities and individuals can be better equipped to
32 demand truth and justice.

33
34 “The Skin of Memory Revisited” (2011)

35 When national and international curators began planning for the 2011
36 Encuentro Internacional de Medellín (MDE11), with its focus on pedagogy
37 and activism through art, they discovered that “The Skin of Memory” lived
38 on as a referent in both local and national contexts, and was frequently
39 cited in aesthetic and political circles.⁴ Invited to present a new work, “The

Skin of Memory Revisited,” Lacy and Riaño worked with many of their original collaborators, taking advantage of the reflective space of the museum to consider the past decade through the lens of the present. MDE11 provided a space of creative and critical reflection to layer upon the original work the subsequent memories and reflections of participants in the project since 1999. The installation served as a strategic platform to create a new work, out of a deep fabric of relationality that continues today, and to examine the themes of MDE11—art, pedagogy, and community. It was also an opportunity to rethink dilemmas of representation and engagement in art and pedagogical practices when societies confront the divisions and erasures of memory that occur in the aftermath, or through the workings, of violence.

From the most basic questions—what happened to those who produced “The Skin of Memory”?—to the more complex—what has changed in the everyday lives of Medellín’s youth?—the 2011 project approached memory as a disputed and present terrain, and social change as a process of ongoing relationships, critical reflection, and ethical action. Our focus was not the 1999 work per se, but the intense relational fabric formed through the myriad relationships, actions, workshops, interventions, and person-to-person shared experiences across generational/geographic/background differences that constituted “The Skin of Memory.” “The Skin of Memory Revisited” consisted of an installation in the galleries of the Museo de Antioquia, the city’s long-established museum of historical and contemporary art, and a performance during the opening weekend of Aula Dialogica (Dialogic Classroom), a convening of local and international artists, curators, and critics.

The installation consisted of two video projections facing each other at opposite ends of the room. On one side of the room silent video footage from “The Skin of Memory”—street scenes, everyday life in the barrio, and the construction and exhibition of the bus of memories—was accompanied by popular music. On the opposite wall another video projection consisted of current interviews with eighteen former collaborators, whose voices commanded the space. Rather than discuss memories of “The Skin of Memory,” the former participants reflected on changes and continuities between past and present social conditions, in particular the advance of memory work and the continuing violence. What was left undone, and what does the future hold for civil society in Colombia? Why, today, are memory and art at the center of both local and national initiatives for social reconstruction? What is society’s responsibility for a violent past?

1 Both the country and its discourses on memory and reconciliation have
 2 changed profoundly in the past decade, and as Ruben Fernandez reflects,
 3 some of these changes are about naming the legacies of violence:
 4

5 [Now] there is an official recognition of an armed conflict in Colom-
 6 bia. The official discourse moved from what we had before (in the '90s
 7 and mid-2000s), a denial by decree of the existence of the conflict, to
 8 a recognition that there is a conflict. What does this mean? If there is
 9 conflict, there are victims and perpetrators. If there are victims, there is a
 10 need for the state to take action, as in many other parts of the world,
 11 toward reparation, to attend to people who have suffered the conse-
 12 quences of the War. . . . For the city, it ["The Skin of Memory"] was a
 13 pioneering work in the sense of acknowledging that memory matters,
 14 that memory and its processes, has to have a place.

15 Along the far wall of the darkened space, a glowing aluminum shelf
 16 with tiny clear bulbs connected the two opposing videos with a layered,
 17 twenty-five-foot-long narrative featuring fifty objects re-collected from
 18 those five hundred originally displayed in the bus. These bridge objects
 19 were once again reconstituted as dynamic and historical elements of a col-
 20 lective narrative that was now further complicated by the multiple narra-
 21 tives ensuing since the 1999 project. On this shelf, reimagined from those
 22 in the original bus, different kinds of stories and narratives were layered
 23 through opacities and transparencies of materiality, reflected in the light
 24 from the multiple bulbs. Past letters and current observations by former
 25 youth leaders were hand-inscribed on Plexiglas, and photos of original ob-
 26 jects from the bus were printed on Plexiglas, creating a spectral and non-
 27 linear presence of multiple memory narratives. In one reconstruction, a
 28 series of eight delicate drawings of maps on thick Plexiglas blocks (like
 29 those posted in the bus windows to announce stopping locations) could be
 30 seen twice, in the shadows projected on the wall and through a thick but
 31 transparent barrier of plastic, as if through time, with neighborhoods and
 32 territorial borders now changed or erased. The shadows, transparencies,
 33 fragilities, and reflections on the shelf in the darkened exhibition space
 34 created a glowing and compelling icon for a field of meanings produced
 35 by past and current "Skin of Memory" participants. Two archival vitrines
 36 documented and gave testimony to the dynamics of youth violence over
 37 time and as they were portrayed in news media, magazine chronicles, or
 38 academic texts. They also served as dynamic archives of the project's his-
 39 tory and its material traces: photos, letters, books, sketches, and index



11.2. “La Piel de la Memoria Revisitada” (Skin of Memory Revisited), Encuentro Internacional de Medellín, 2011. Courtesy of Bill Kelley, Jr.

cards of cataloged objects. In a series of small hand-stitched books whose texts, taken together, constituted an ongoing conversation between the artist and the anthropologist, Lacy and Riaño framed the key working themes of the conversation that led to this new work.

While this installation in the context of the Encuentro Internacional de Medellín received visitors from around the world, in a real sense the installation was envisioned as a second space—akin to the first created in the bus—for the performance of a localized set of relationships in the context of a shared set of histories, experiences, and current social conditions. In terms of our intentions, the installation must be considered together with the performance of community during the Aula Dialogica, on the evening of September 2, 2011, a community formed eleven years ago and now occupying the “center” of, and framed by, the Museum of Antioquia. The performance was an enactment of that former and continuing relationality as well as a platform to discuss the production of pedagogical space through art and community work. It began as a reunion of eighty members of the community constituted through the production, attendance, and subsequent evaluation of “The Skin of Memory.” In the South Plaza Atrium

1 of the museum, surrounded by fountains, lit with a soft wash of lights,
2 and accompanied by festive music, with a ten-foot round table covered
3 with flowers and food, a private reception paid tribute to those who made
4 up the complex community from the earlier project. It was held during
5 the Aula Dialogica, and artists and critics attending the conference wit-
6 nessed this community as it knowingly reconstituted itself to celebrate
7 and to claim their role as cultural producers within the museum itself.
8 On the surrounding balconies, video monitors played recent interviews
9 with reunion participants. Aula visitors and a few members of the pub-
10 lic could watch these or eavesdrop as the multiple conversations in the
11 atrium below merged into a single one led by Pilar Riaño and Hernando
12 Muñoz, one of the coordinators of “The Skin of Memory” production. For-
13 mer children now grown, public intellectuals now working internationally,
14 a youth leader who had gone to college to become a sociologist, another
15 who had started her own catering business, some with children of their
16 own, one recently murdered, a reporter who had become mayor, an electri-
17 cian who constructed the bus museum and a mime who gave out letters,
18 an NGO leader now the director of the government’s House of Memory
19 museum—all reflected on the changes, lessons, and legacies from the past
20 twelve years. Observers were invited to join the conversation, to move
21 from their position in the surrounding corridors to enter the conversa-
22 tional and learning space of “The Skin of Memory Revisited.”

23 We sought to explore how memory work through art had activated a
24 thick fabric of relations among civil society members and how these re-
25 lationships inform the present work of artists, anthropologists, and educa-
26 tors who explore questions on living through violence, truth-telling, and
27 reparation. The re-presentations of this relational fabric in both the atrium
28 and gallery spaces constituted acts of commemoration to the reconstruc-
29 tion of relationships in the face of the destruction of social ties produced
30 by war and armed conflict. Through the spaces created by this new work,

31 The reciprocal exchange between the site of memory and the commem-
32 orative event that is characteristic of any place of memorialization was
33 produced here not by formal commemorative rituals or the erection of
34 particular symbolic or material markers or speech performances, but by
35 bringing the community and those who join the commemoration into
36 an emplaced relationship.⁵

37
38 Inasmuch as the 2011 “The Skin of Memory Revisited” offered reflec-
39 tions on the intervening decade of cultural production in Medellín, it

also reflected developments in social practice art and memory work. In the self-conscious space of the museum, we deliberately reversed the social and everyday space of the earlier project, in the homes and streets of barrio Antioquia, converting it into a formalized commemorative space not unlike that in the bus. We also aimed to challenge the authority and scope of art in solidarity with what we posed as the currently embodied experiences and grounded knowledge of “The Skin of Memory” collaborators. Artists and audience members were invited to engage in a dialogue together with community members on the past and the future of the city.

The evolution of our concerns (as artist and anthropologist) with the ethics of representation and the very real possibility of provoking more violence through the work we had done led us to question now, in the framework of the museum, whose voices were those speaking on pedagogy and art. Who was looking and listening? Where did they “place” themselves within the field of memories we re-presented? What is it that transforms an observer into a witness? This concern with the responsibilities of witnessing is at the heart of our practices as anthropologist and artist, and “The Skin of Memory Revisited” continues a several-year conversation on the ethical and moral implications of our respective work with violence and oppression. *Emplaced witnessing*—as Pilar terms the plural, place-based imaginative strategies and embodied acts of transfer through which an individual or a collective creates a safer social space to give testimony of violence or resistance—places the observer/researcher in a shared and mutually accountable space.

Here the space of the museum was imagined as one of reflexive encounter and accountable looking. But how does that accountability exercise itself through the typical museum-goer’s encounter—in this case, their encounter with the community of participants who produced “The Skin of Memory” in 1999? It depends on who the museum-goer is and where she finds or places herself within the historical, political, and social context of Medellín and Colombia. Witnessing is not simply an act of looking. “The Skin of Memory Revisited” was open to the observations of all, but it was created with the idea of a specific audience of witnesses, one constituted of Medellín residents—people who live in a space of ongoing conflict and everyday violence, present-day actors whose community is inclusive of the one from the 1999 project.

The installation depended on this localized context and on the workings of a performance of inquiry to activate a looking that goes beyond

1 sympathy or empathic interest. By focusing on the *local* as a site that can
2 shelter diverse knowledges, and to the *practices* that mobilize alternative
3 and plural forms of testimony through storytelling, performance, art, and
4 the crossing of territorial and artistic borders, we aimed to problematize
5 our own witnessing practices and those taking place in the context of
6 the museum. We do not have a record of visitors' responses and cannot
7 make an informed conclusion on what took place inside the installation
8 space or during the reunion. Also, it remains to be seen how this project
9 joins with and supports the discourses of many other projects created in
10 Colombia that construct local spaces of memory and social reflection. For
11 us, however, "The Skin of Memory Revisited" engaged us with these ques-
12 tions by calling for a renewed commitment to work with the complexities
13 of memory, the multivocality of truth-telling, and the relational spaces
14 that a public art concerned with a pedagogy of social reconstruction can
15 render visible.

16 Notes

- 17 1 This text, up to the section "Skin of Memory Revisited," is excerpted (with
18 some revisions) from "Encounters with Memory and Mourning: Public Art as
19 a Collective Pedagogy of Reconciliation" by Pilar Riaño Alcalá, in *Public Acts:
20 Curriculum and Desires of Social Change*, edited by Erica Meiners and Francisco
21 Ibañez-Carrasco (in the "Re-Engaging the Public Sphere" series) (New York:
22 Routledge, 2004).
- 23 2 The members of the project's coordinating team and workers in the local organ-
24 izations were William Alvarez, Jorge García, Juan Vélez, and Angela Velásquez.
25 This team combined a wealth of educational and community work expertise
26 with their individual professional training as educators, psychologists, and his-
27 torians. Pilar Riaño was responsible for the overall coordination of the project,
28 Suzanne Lacy for its artistic vision, and the historian Mauricio Hoyos for its
29 production. The five organizations that supported and funded the project were
30 the Secretaría de Educación de Medellín (Education Secretariat of Medellín),
31 the Caja de Compensación Familiar (COMFENALCO), and two nongovernmental
32 organizations, Corporación Región and Presencia Colombo Suiza.
- 33 3 A. M. Reyes, "Horrific Beauty: Commemoration and the Aestheticization of
34 Violence in Contemporary Colombian Art," paper presented at the seminar
35 "New Perspectives in the Study of Social Conflict," Latin American, Caribbean,
36 and Iberian Studies Program, University of Wisconsin (Madison, March 23,
37 2001).
- 38 4 Lacy and Riaño's early conversations with MDE11 cocurator Bill Kelley Jr. on
39 the premise for revisiting "The Skin of Memory."

5 Pilar Riaño, “Encounters with Memory and Mourning: Public Art as Collective Pedagogy of Reconciliation,” in *Public Acts: Disruptive Readings on Making Curriculum Public*, edited by Francisco Ibanez-Carrasco and Erica Meiners (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 237–61. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

PROOF

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39