I grew up going to museums and galleries. My father taught painting in a small college in Ohio and art took us to Chicago or New York and a couple of times to Europe. On a few memorable occasions, contemporary art also brought exciting people to us. I have a distinct childhood memory of watching Andy Warhol standing in front of a projected image of one of his famous portraits of Mao. Years later, in college, I realized that what I understood best about history or politics or the individuals and communities who live them. It represents a cultural and intellectual history, written in many languages, materials, styles, and perspectives reaching from New York to London, Lagos, Harana, Beijing, and on around the globe. Artists’ power to reflect upon and affect the world around them depends on viewers who are able to comprehend specific details of both form and content. There are many ways to introduce the variety of practices and subjects found in the contemporary art world. One can create categories according to place of origin, media, subject matter, or chronology. Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary is fundamentally a chronological survey, but in the course of telling the story of the transformation of the contemporary art world it exhibits all of these methodologies. This narrative document regional productions, thematic concerns, and formal developments as they made their imprint on the history of art and it was written to be read from front to back. This story of the increased breadth and self-consciousness of the contemporary art world is, I believe, compelling. However, there are very good reasons to be skeptical of such narratives. Much of the art and theory discussed in the first third of this book challenges the impulse to weave thematic threads in and out of the chronology. One can trace the relationship of abstraction and representation across a wide variety of times and places, or compare the integration of mass culture into fine art in New York in the 1980s with similar experiments in Cuba or Europe at the same time, or China in the 1980s, or Japan in the 2000s, to name a few examples. The urgency of creating politically effective art is addressed across the scope of the book. Likewise, I have tried to highlight traditions of feminist and activist art, as well as art analyzing issues of class, warfare, and social injustice. While one might come across these moments as the chronology of the book unfolds, one might also use the book to teach in a very different way, calling attention to various themes within the text. Finally, it must be said that Art Since 1980 does not aspire to be an exhaustive study—there could be no such history of contemporary art; instead it is an introduction to many of the ideas and solutions that artists have pursued, and a series of examples of how one might engage with the art of our time.