

PREFACE

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This book is the third in Fado's *Canadian Performance Art Legends* publication series. Like the first two — *La Dragu: The Living Art of Margaret Dragu* (2002) and *Ironic to Iconic: The Performance Works of Tanya Mars* (2008) — it focuses on the career and contributions of a key Canadian artist in the realm of performance art, and includes digital documentation of a major work commissioned by Fado. Within the series, this book marks several "firsts": first bilingual publication; first featuring a Québécois artist; first featuring a male artist; first featuring an artist who does not identify his practice as performance art per se; and first featuring a selection of theoretical writings by the artist.

The production of a bilingual publication necessitated the invaluable assistance of Alexandra Liva as a co-editor; she has done a superb job overseeing the French texts. Numerous translators have also contributed to the coherence and clarity of the book, notably Terrance Keller, who is responsible for the bulk of the translations from French into English (excepting reprints of some texts by Alain-Martin Richard already available in English), and Simon Brown and Véronique Garneau-Allard, who provided French translations of the two texts originating in English. The scale of this project required Fado to partner with two co-publishers: Les Causes perdues in© and SAGAMIE édition d'art, and Avatar for the DVD. I must also acknowledge the incredible contribution of the featured artist, Alain-Martin Richard, whose clarity of vision and generous efforts on behalf of the project have been instrumental. This book attempts to negotiate and translate across not only a set of linguistic differences, but also cultural ones; in this respect, as the coordinating editor I have attempted to take my cue from Richard's work, which does not assume any given universality, but does leave room for the hopeful possibility that shared understanding might be attained through sensitive questioning and mutual experience.

From the beginning of this series, I have noted the important task of bringing wider attention to the sustained practices of certain deserving artists. More than canonizing their careers — though that may be one effect of such an effort — this is a way of highlighting the specific concerns and debates that drive these practices. *Canadian Performance Art Legends* uses artists' work to speak to important critical and theoretical

issues within contemporary art and, indeed, human culture. Thus, if one of the things this book highlights is Alain-Martin Richard's strategic attempts to erase his individuated role as "author" in many of the works that he has initiated, we must look beyond simple irony to consider what is instructive in his particular efforts and in the resulting works. I hope it is clear, then, that the intentions of this book are not to announce (or produce!) a certain type of genius or celebrity, but rather, to acknowledge and uncover some of the lessons made evident by what I would characterize as a subtle and carefully considered practice of philosophical inquiry that Richard has undertaken within the discourse of contemporary art.

Above all, Richard's work highlights how, in recent decades, contemporary art has moved into and concerned itself with social practice. There are many trajectories evident here, including Richard's ongoing interrogation of the role and functions of digital media, but perhaps the most striking dynamic mapped out in this book is an arc from theatre through performance art to the idea of the manoeuvre. While the term manoeuvre may be unfamiliar to many English readers, it has become an important marker in Quebec — and to some extent, Europe — to identify a series of practices in which actions within the everyday spheres of both public and private sociality become the material of art. I would argue that the uniquely Québécois formulation of the "manoeuvre" is as important and original within contemporary art as Allan Kaprow's idea of the "happening" was a half century ago. And, as will be evident from this book, Richard must be seen as one of its key theoreticians.

The book begins with a text by Guy Sioui Durand that maps out the breadth of Richard's career as a performance and media artist working in solo and collective configurations, as a curator and organizer, and as a writer, editor and theoretician. Durand's text situates Richard's contribution within the broad social, political and artistic contexts of Québec's recent history, providing a useful overview of the artist's activities and concerns over three decades. A trio of texts, by Paul Ouellet (with the participation of Marianne Trudel), Hélène La Roche and Nicolas Reeves respectively, considers the importance and impact of two contemporary art symposia organized by Richard as artist-curator: *Vingt mille*

lieues/lieux sur l'esker (Amos, 1997) and *Attention, le Mascaret ne siffle pas* (Moncton, 1999). To the extent that one can define performance art as a practice of creating situations, I would argue that these two monumental projects are indeed manifestations of Richard's performance practice. This accords with his own understanding of these projects as manoeuvres, which he elucidates in an interview with Clive Robertson, also included in the book. Two additional essays, one by me and one by Doyon-Demers, consider *The Route to Rosa* (2006). This is the work that was commissioned by Fado to familiarize Toronto audiences with Alain-Martin Richard's practice, and it provides a rich case study for analyzing the significance of the manoeuvre as an artistic practice. An accompanying DVD offers a single-channel video document of *The Route to Rosa*, which began as a manoeuvre with the working title *Strangers, étrangers, Fremde* and resulted in an interactive integrated media work that could be considered a trace or document of the manoeuvre. Interspersed throughout the book are several sidebars that highlight particular key areas of Richard's practice: significant solo works, major events, manoeuvres, lecture-demonstrations, collective performances, and installations/objects. A comprehensive chronology and bibliography are also included.

Of particular interest are nine reprinted texts written by Richard himself. These writings, finally collected in one volume and many of them translated into English for the first time, constitute a significant contribution to performance theory from a practitioner's perspective. One of the texts ("*Les 20 jours du théâtre à risque*") outlines a spectrum that places theatre at one end and performance at the other; it remains useful more than 20 years after it was first written for the ways in which it distinguishes performance art from theatre. The remaining texts go beyond this familiar concern, however, in order to define a particular set of artistic practices that fall under a new name; that is, the manoeuvre. With these articles, published over the course of two decades, we are able to witness an evolution in thought and action, as Richard develops a vocabulary that can explain and grapple with not one but a series of artistic strategies that share a common imperative. With the manoeuvre, art abandons its traditional institutional structures of production and display (studios, museums, galleries) as the artist takes on the role of social instigator, infiltrating daily life. This is not simply the notion of an art *in situ* that spills over into public streets or private dwellings; nor is it merely the recognition of a "relational aesthetics" that glorifies social interaction as a new mode of spectacle. Rather, it is the announcement of an art that intrudes into

everyday behaviour, claiming social action itself as a material. A manoeuvre is a situation, initiated by an artist and unfolding in time and space, constructed as a collective process that precludes the artist from controlling its ultimate outcome. This art "*takes shape at the exact moment in which the [artist's] proposal crystallizes into a shared act,*"¹ involving the onlookers as participants. The resulting "collective action" opens out into the social sphere so that "the onlooker becomes both the material and the 'object' of the manoeuvre,"² as well as its co-author. Crucially, the manoeuvre is concerned with "a need to create fissures in the social consensus."³

Here, the fundamental exchange between artist and audience is neither economic nor aesthetic; indeed, it may no longer be appropriate to think of the artistic exchange that takes place through such work in terms of the traditional binaries of artist-audience or sender-receiver at all. This, it seems to me, is a profound incursion of something radical — i.e., both fundamental and innovative — into contemporary art practice. If we are to see our way beyond the spectacle- and consumer-driven models of capitalism and globalization, a project of urgent concern to many, surely the manoeuvre offers an intriguing model for thinking through possible alternatives. At the very least, these practices claim an essential place for art in this difficult rethinking process.

If we tend to judge contemporary art in terms of a very specific results-based model — that is, in terms of the individual works an artist produces — certainly there is much to recommend Richard's practice. In this case, however, I believe we can find something even more remarkable if we look deeper, to both the questions being asked and the methodologies being proposed by the artist to confront those questions. For Richard, one of the most important aspects of the manoeuvre is its ability to create communities with shared intentionality — even if the individuals who make up those communities are unaware of each other. It is my hope that this book can do something similar, by drawing readers together in a shared appreciation of a vital engagement with the challenges of our shared human existence.

1 RICHARD, Alain-Martin, "Art as Non-Place," 2005, p. 82 (emphasis in the original).

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, p. 83.