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# PREFACE

This book functions like a test drive into the first decade of a new century. It brings together writings from 2000 to early 2011; in a sense, it's a thermometer of the world and art practices and issues as they have arisen during those challenging years. The essays were written along the way, responding to different circumstances: some are assemblages of my editorials for *PARACHUTE*—the magazine I was editor and publisher of until 2007—some are lectures or texts published in other magazines and catalogues. Each one was written for a different context—a magazine, an exhibition, a biennial, a symposium. This ends up being quite different than if I had written these essays with a book already in mind. The texts do not have that particular autonomy, nor are they restricted by any preconceived theory, theme, or idea. Rather, they are a response to the times we live in, an attempt to make sense of an era that is particularly troubled, through different manifestations and contexts as they come up in the field of art. In that sense, each text ventures out to test ideas as they inhabit art and art thinking at a certain point in time.

The decade started out with 9/11. By then, I had already been very much involved as a curator and editor in the question of “the common.” In 2000, I published a book related to this question: *Communauté et gestes* (Community and Gestures). This book was also comprised of essays written here and there, lectures, exhibition projects, and so forth. One can say it was contextual as well and linked to my practice, bringing together some of the texts that had resulted from my interest since the mid-1990s in questions of community per se, based on my observations of new artistic practices.

In those years, I had transformed the international dance festival FIND, an organization in Montreal that I cofounded in 1985 following several performance events and festivals I had set up toward the end of the 1970s. At the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, FIND served its purpose, legitimizing the rise of new dance in different countries where it emerged strongly during those years—France, Belgium, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and Canada, especially in Montreal where dance developed immensely in this short period. This accent on emerging scenes was no longer necessary when it became obvious that new contemporary dance could and was emerging all over the world. In the 1999 FIND biennial, the focus on Africa signaled a new era, one in which globalization had taken over, when contemporary art finally reached the most remote outposts and “contemporaneity” was no longer the distinct domain of the Americas or Europe. I also felt that the ‘90s brought about new practices, which were changing the ecology of the medium. In 2001, I transformed FIND into the *grand labo*, a laboratory for body movement, sound, and image.

The ecology was transformed not only within the discipline but also in dealing with the spectator or the public. A new sense of community was appearing in dance, performance, and visual arts. This “new sense” of the common has become a sociopolitical issue of prime importance, as we witnessed with the Occupy movements that occurred at the end of the last decade. I believe they acted as a culmination of sorts regarding economic and social disarray. Already after 2010, changes of a wider and deeper scope are happening and determining a new world agenda that governments are having difficulty dealing with: unbalanced economies throughout the world, including Europe and the Americas, territorial conflicts such as those in the Middle East, the emergence of superpowers such as China and India, the clash of values between old worlds and new ones, for individuals as well as peoples.

In the last years of the previous century, the world could be felt changing in a major way. Cultural hybridity was on the rise and artists from regions all over the world could delve into the past, the present, and the future using materials and concepts from everywhere, put at their disposal largely through galloping information technologies. But

globalization, accompanied by its many pros and cons that affected social life, also provoked other ways of looking at art and of making art. When the time came to plan *PARACHUTE*'s one hundredth issue, which would appear in the midst of the year 2000, the common came up as the most important subject to work on. The crisis of values the world was going through—due to new economic challenges and cultural hybridization—meant that particular attention had to be paid to being-with-one-another and being-in-the-world. No longer secured by local traditions anywhere, one has to invent new modes of being, a concept Bruno Latour has dealt with at length.<sup>1</sup> It is these “inventions” that are mapped out in artistic practices and that were outlined at the end of the first three issues that *PARACHUTE* brought out in 2000 and 2001 on the idea of community. As much as the common had become an issue for FIND, which in those years shifted from a traditionally formatted festival more or less content with displaying dance pieces, film and video, talks, and sometimes exhibitions, to a “laboratory” of research and experimentation, it also animated my editorial activity with *PARACHUTE*. From 2000 on, we produced a new *PARACHUTE*, new in size and design, newly formatted content-wise in order to better cater to dealing with ideas that, past the three inaugural issues, would dig deeper into the tropes of the common, with issues on anonymity, autofictions, economy, democracy, resistance, borders, violence, image shifts, digital screens, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, design, but also on “cities of emergence,” places in the world that were quickly becoming important centers for research and development in art under the impact of globalization. Hence, the post-2000 series had issues on Mexico City, Beirut, Shanghai, São Paulo, and Havana, put together with guest editors, authors, and artists living in the respective cities.

Researching contemporaneity—that which characterizes the present times, lies at the heart of a certain era and singularizes it—became a quest for meaning, and for making sense out of our collective being. Convinced that contemporary art can transform our view of the world,

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1. See most recently Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, trans. Cathy Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).



Yang Fudong  
still from *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest – Part 1*, 2003

I have always been confident that observation and analysis of works makes theory, and not the reverse. In my mind, putting theoretical precepts in the foreground when discussing art is not the most adequate approach, although I have always welcomed theory from philosophy and the social sciences in order to enlighten my understanding of an artist's work, or of shifts or seismic cracks in art practices. This research filters through the texts that are assembled here. I believe that there is a fruitful sway from reality to art making, and that indulging in the in-between is a necessary attitude. The in-between is full of uncertainty and doubt, but plowing through it as a thinker and a writer can bring about new perspectives on life and on being-in-the-world.<sup>2</sup>

I have continued to develop these ideas. My work is based on trying to understand contemporaneity, not as a fixed entity as one could say about modernism or postmodernism, but as a flow, a performative being. My first book of collected essays in 1998 was called *Fragments critiques* because I strongly believe we can only have a fragmentary, flowing view of the world, as space-time is never fixed and should not be fixated. Writing accompanies this flow: the internal flow of the writer coincides momentarily with the flow of the world. Artistic practices are devices that capture the flow and succeed if they do not entrap the work in any theoretical edifice. Criticism in my mind is not a mathematical equation (nor a judgmental enterprise). A work always escapes writing's entrapments. Looking back, I see this more clearly now as I seek to evaluate the coherence of the procedures and insights put to play in writing.

My interest in the "other" slid very naturally from the exploration of the more bilateral condition we experienced in the 1970s and 1980s (America versus Europe) to a situation affected by an expanding globalization. I went from one medium to the other in the artists I chose to write about. My main objective, in hindsight, was trying to take each artist's work as a case study for understanding how contemporary art

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2. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Merleau-Ponty was confident that by following philosophy's shortcomings in understanding the world, the future of philosophy could eventually be greatly inspired by art.

could have a link to contemporaneity, our current condition of being-in-the-world, and the impact of and on the political and the economic. The place of the body is always of concern—the body as thermometer of the world being lived in, lived with, in a dynamics of change and sharing. Hence I wrote texts on Björk, Claire Fontaine, Johan Creten, João Fiadeiro, Michel François, Dora García, Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, Ion Grigorescu, Massimo Guerrera, Carsten Höller, Mike Kelley, Sigalit Landau, Rabih Mroué, Yvonne Rainer, and Anri Sala. These monographic texts deal with the questions and issues that also come up in the essays. The perspectives I have gained in the course of writing the texts in this anthology are laid out in the three sections of this book.

The first, "The Idea of Community," brings together a text condensing my editorials on the subject of the common in *PARACHUTE*, a lengthy interview with Jean-Luc Nancy (who suggested the phrase "the idea of community" for the title of the series as being more appropriate than the initial one I had wanted to use that came from Giorgio Agamben, "the community to come"), and other related texts describing the "practice" of linking art and the common, such as in the 1966 event *9 Evenings* (a piece I wrote for documenta 12).

The second, "Globalization: The Common and the Singular at Large," is linked to reflections I developed concurrent with the series of *PARACHUTE* in the first half of the 2000s on the cities of emergence—cities in the world that have come to bear a tremendous impact on the world's ecology (politics, economy, and environment) as well as on artistic practices. These were very profound experiences as the issues were made from inside these cities with the artists and writers in their midst. Inspired by these experiences, I developed the concept of "tectonica": these cities acted as tectonic plates—when one moved, the whole world did as well. This is what the state of the art world is now, animated by constant shifts surging from all points of the globe. In other texts in the section, I address particular situations or events that relate to globalization. The section closes with a text on violence as a world issue and how art deals with it (taking inspiration from Mathieu Beauséjour, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Teresa Margolles, and Rabih Mroué). Also included is a response to Judith Butler and her thinking on violence

and the circulation of information about violence, based on commentary on the works of Rodney Graham and Harun Farocki. Sigalit Landau, Ion Grigorescu, and Yael Bartana gave me the impetus to work further on questions of border and territories, be they political or geographical.

The third, "Expanded Consciousness: Art beyond Borders," is a collection of texts that deal with questions that have always preoccupied me—those of expanding mediums and disciplines beyond their confines, and the question of interdisciplinarity. Crossovers and in-betweens have been my main focus. I believe that these are the spaces in art that enable us to rethink issues, movements, and currents in the relationship that art entertains with the world (and with our times, with what is the contemporary). Being-with-time. Being-in-time. My writings here explore the opening of limits and borders in dance, performance, sound, image making, "low" and "high" art, documentary, and the moving image. I also discuss art writing, or criticism, and place it in the context of thoughts on judgment and its relationship to democracy (with commentary on Jeff Wall, Jana Sterbak, Boris Charmatz, Pierre Huyghe, and Rabih Mroué). Again, the place of the other is an underlying concern. Shifts in art practices are endemic to a constant reevaluation of this question of alterity, or how one negotiates the private and the public.



**THE IDEA**

**OF COMMUNITY**