“Exhibiting Poetry Today”

Collaboration and Politics in Thomas Hirschhorn and Manuel Joseph

Eric Lynch

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/fixxion/586>

DOI: 10.4000/fixxion.586

ISSN: 2295-9106

Publisher

Ghent University

Electronic reference

Eric Lynch, “Exhibiting Poetry Today”, *Revue critique de fiction française contemporaine* [Online], 20 | 2020, Online since 15 June 2020, connection on 17 May 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/fixxion/586> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/fixxion.586>

This text was automatically generated on 17 May 2022.

Les contenus de la *Revue critique de fiction française contemporaine* sont mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

"Exhibiting Poetry Today"

Collaboration and Politics in Thomas Hirschhorn and Manuel Joseph

Eric Lynch

- 1 Radical politics are at the forefront of the work of contemporary poet Manuel Joseph, informing his treatment of issues such as surveillance, Middle Eastern politics, mass media, and consumerist culture. Examining this contestatory stance, critics Christophe Hanna and Olivier Quintyn interpret the politically charged use of montage in Joseph's book, *Heroes are Heroes are*, according to pragmatist philosophy¹. *Heroes are Heroes are* juxtaposes appropriated text from a George H. W. Bush Gulf War speech, spy novels, pornography mail-order catalogs, NTM lyrics, and other sources, to reveal shared rhetorical strategies, or Wittgensteinian "family resemblances". This poetry seeks to denaturalize mass media discourses through the transcription and montage of textual fragments, or *Morçals*, as another series of texts are entitled². By enacting the decontextualization and recontextualization of appropriated materials, Joseph achieves radical politique critique and gestures towards a means of exiting routinized modes of thinking. If criticism has richly examined this pragmatist orientation of Joseph's poetry, little has been said about the visual art context from which much of his writing has emerged. From his first publications in the 1990s onward, Joseph has regularly collaborated with contemporary artists like Jean-Luc Moulène, Anri Sala, and especially Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn. Like Joseph, Hirschhorn applies techniques of collage for the critical dislocation of mass media discourses. This same attention to the propagandistic effects of mass media and popular culture informs Joseph's engagement with the visual arts, while his writing simultaneously emerges off the page towards a variety of experimental frameworks.
- 2 Hirschhorn and Joseph's collaboration has moved literature from the space of the book to a range of other media, including a newspaper (*Bataille Monument*), impromptu stages (*Théâtre précaire*), and installations (*Chalet Lost History*, *Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph*, and *Flamme éternelle*). Hirschhorn initially identified sculpture as his favored artistic practice, yet his work wholly reassesses the orthodox properties of the art, such as monumentality and site-specificity³. Instead, Hirschhorn overloads his sculptures with an excess of cheap, disposable materials, such as scotch tape, cardboard,

aluminum foil, and magazine cutouts, which are not constrained to a specific display site; indeed, many works, such as *Jemand kümmert sich um meine Arbeit* (*Someone is Taking Care of my Work*, 1992) or his altars, were deliberately exposed to the precarious conditions of public space, where they could have been damaged or stolen. Inspired in part by Joseph Beuys's notion of social sculpture, Hirschhorn also creates "presence and production" pieces, in which the artist works with economically disadvantaged, minority communities to create a local art event, a "monument", in honor of figures such as Bataille and Deleuze. Differing from utopian notions of participation, such as those espoused by Nicolas Bourriaud's "esthétique relationnelle", these "presence and production" works require the artist's association with the residents of a given community through both positive and negative experiences (including fires and thefts), as he lives and works on-site for the duration of the project⁴. For Hirschhorn, practicing art politically implies the creation of a form that incites political thought within what he names a "non-exclusive" public, spectators from all walks of life as opposed to those of the art world. Manuel Joseph, as well as writers like Christophe Fiat and Jean-Charles Massera, have consistently collaborated on Hirschhorn's works by contributing texts, giving performances, leading writing workshops, and directing theater pieces. Seeking to provoke reflection on art and politics within a non-exclusive audience, these projects transpose literary activity from the book to a series of other practices within the larger context of the presence and production artworks.

"Abjets" and Integrated Texts

- 3 Despite working in different art forms, the question of materials provides an initial correspondence between the visual artist and the poet. Opposing notions of inspired authorship, Joseph often makes use of cut-up writing, a practice popularized in the 1980s and 1990s in France by poets like Christian Prigent and Olivier Cadiot. Joseph's poetry redistributes and manipulates found texts that are conceived of as "abjets", an expression evoking both the objectivist, appropriated nature of these texts and their "object", non-literary origins in sources like newspaper articles and legal documentation. Speaking of his texts as scanned images in an interview with Jean-Charles Massera, Joseph likens them to Hirschhorn's poor, quotidian materials:

mes textes effectivement, ceux que j'appelle mes abjets, parce qu'il y a les textes scannés, sont des images ; ce dont on ne s'aperçoit absolument pas parce qu'ils sont imprimés à 100%. Ce n'est pas un objet, ce n'est pas un texte... Je suis très attiré par les artistes dont Thomas Hirschhorn qui travaillent d'une autre manière que moi sur l'indigence du matériau, des matériaux pauvres : carton, scotch, collage ; à partir de Paris Match, Der Spiegel, de n'importe quoi, de n'importe quel morceau qui traîne... pour moi c'est ça et c'est une régression. Mais c'est une régression qui dénonce la régression que nous vivons.⁵

- 4 Neither wholly an object nor wholly writing, the scanned abjet occupies an undecidable space. Joseph insists on its picture-like nature when discussing his process of composition from cut and pasted sources. While a reader only intuitively grasps the sources of this material in scans, this, his writing does possess an image-like quality in and of itself: certain texts are instantly comprehensible (for example, repeating segments serving as refrains) while others allow one to skim over dense passages (technical details, legal documents). The recognition of these forms of text induces a mode of reading focused on image-language or allegory⁶. Moreover, this poor, abject textual material is gleaned

from what Joseph describes as the "regressive" discourses of contemporary culture, serving as a literary equivalent to Hirschhorn's cardboard, tape, and other crude materials. These precarious, readymade components become the raw material to be manipulated and juxtaposed in montages. If both creators employ neighboring techniques, they also work together in a collaborative mode Hirschhorn names "unshared responsibility"⁷. This loose form of collaboration allows for a range of artistic, literary, philosophical, and curatorial activities to cohabitate without either party directly intervening in the other's art form. Unshared responsibility preserves the autonomy of the other's artistic practice while also accepting accountability for his or her creation.

- 5 The concept of unshared responsibility has informed a range of collaborations, such as those involving integrated texts, a literary piece presented as a component of a work of visual art⁸. Joseph's *La tête au carré* features the section *Flat Red Flag* which originally appeared as an integrated text within Hirschhorn's 2008 exhibition, *Das Auge* (The Eye)⁹. *Das Auge* applied principles of collage to an installation space by conceiving of a gaze only capable of seeing red, whereby the red stains of an anti-fur protest, red Disney characters, bloody war photography, and red-dominated national flags are brought together in a densely packed exhibition. Consistent with this theme of vision, Joseph's *Flat Red Flag* centers on Elsa, a controversial police drone equipped with an infrared camera. Following a pop sensibility, Elsa is anthropomorphized as a brutal and erotic female assassin. The text is printed in bright red ink to attach it to the exhibit, and while thematizing sight like *Das Auge*, it displaces the question of vision to one of surveillance. For Hirschhorn, the role of Joseph's work is not to explicate his artwork but rather to offer a second artistic lens with which to confront spectators¹⁰. The text prolongs the experience of the work temporally as readers often engage with it after leaving the art space. The literary work continues a series of reflections instigated by the artwork within a second medium and over an extended duration. As a literary object, *Flat Red Flag* has a complex status; not only is the work reprinted in red within *La tête au carré* and its role in *Das Auge* explained, but an excerpt in black ink also appears in Joseph's subsequent work, *La sécurité des personnes et des biens : drame social*¹¹. Joseph's text performs its own series of decontextualization and recontextualization operations, moving from Hirschhorn's exhibition and its use of parallel, yet unrelated themes, to *La tête au carré*, where Elsa appears at length, and to *La sécurité des personnes et des biens*, which presents concrete social narrative, as demonstrated by a fragile first-person narrator and documentary photography by Myr Muratet. Like the manipulation of verbal material at the level of the text, Joseph engineers displacements and reiterations of works throughout his *œuvre*.
- 6 In *Flat Red Flag*, Joseph manipulates a series of abjets to tease out shared logics of control. Portions of an article describing the augmentation of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) staff are juxtaposed with an account of the selection process for an elite airborne military force. The FDA's role of evaluating the safety of imported medicines is highlighted by excerpts on the contamination of the drug heparin, which is put into relation with the larger theme of aerial surveillance as evoked by the airborne division and police drones. Joseph's text reprints, and through satirical additions, sabotages a text on Elsa, one such French surveillance drone:

l'acronyme ELSA (Engin léger pour la surveillance aérienne) tient la vedette sur le stand de la police de France de la responsabilité française de la sécurité de la France au salon « Milipol » consacré à la sécurité intérieure [...] ELSA, c'est avant tout un

petit drone, muni d'une caméra à infrarouges, pas plus lourd qu'une bouteille d'eau ou une canette de « Kro© », qui pourra équiper à terme la police nationale française responsable de la sécurité des valeurs et des biens des personnes physiques du pays de la France afin de surveiller à distance de proximité et vitesse réelle, *id est* temps réel / direct, villes, cités et quartiers fragilisés¹²

- 7 Centering on surveillance and seeing, *Flat Red Flag* deploys red text in the same way as Hirschhorn's exhibit privileges red imagery, with red flags suggesting, for example, that states are founded on armed conflict and bloodshed. Joseph privileges Elsa's red sight, figuring at once the notion of seeing red and that of infrared vision, thus shifting from the bloody origins of nation-states to the violence exerted by surveillance technologies. The work continues Joseph's interest in themes of surveillance and facial recognition technology as explored in the "Annexe Données biométriques" of his earlier book, *Amilka aime Pessoa*¹³. These documents from the Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés (CNIL) debate innovations in surveillance technologies and accompanying societal consequences. By reproducing these documents, Joseph explores the capacity of drone surveillance to generate biometric data and the complex legalities of these apparatuses of control.
- 8 In *Flat Red Flag*, Joseph overloads found texts, stretching and disturbing syntax. There is a formal resemblance to Hirschhorn's packed installation spaces, which resist the capacity of the gaze to rest on any one image as though in possession of it. Similarly, these unstable and bloated sentences work against a transparent signifier-signified relationship, functioning instead by circular reiteration and serpentine turns. In a text concerned with borders and demarcation, this language resists the circumscribed mapping of conventional grammar as it simultaneously critiques the map of Israel and of the Palestinian Territories:

(Carte psychique seulement, un pays qui n'est défini par aucune frontière sinon les siennes frontières que cet État dans son état parlementaire parle les yeux dans les yeux et considère siennes la terre et l'univers car KNESSET UND TSAHAL qui se meuvent, la courbe du serpent qui clignote dans les yeux du serpent du Livre de la jungle de 'Mougli' et si t'arrives pas à traduire c'est de nouveau une question encore de frontière mais moi je m'en fous contre ma carte psychique qui s'en contrefout.)¹⁴

- 9 The manipulation of borders and the complicity of civilian government with the military are juxtaposed with the deceitful gaze of the serpent in *The Jungle Book*. Kipling's work is "protonazi" for Joseph, who comments on its role in organizing the boy scouts and laying the foundation for an authoritarian worldview. As *Flat Red Flag* explicates, *The Jungle Book* serves as an imaginary setting for the indoctrination of children between the ages of 8 and 12 years old. Different coordinators in the scouts correspond to characters in the book so as to teach the "law of the jungle". Joseph draws a parallel between a literary work structuring the imagination of children, the militarized aspects of societies in the Middle East and the West, and the ease with which these same societies welcome surveillance technologies within police practices. As an integrated text, *Flat Red Flag* complements *Das Auge* by extending the political critique within Hirschhorn's exhibit to a series of neighboring issues, such as government monitoring of the public.

Exhibiting Poetry

- 10 In Hirschhorn's 2003 work *Chalet Lost History*, poetry no longer preserved its autonomy vis-à-vis artwork, as in *Das Auge*, but rather was entirely subsumed within the exhibition space. Instead of extending his work temporally with external text, Hirschhorn highlighted the commodified nature of literature by purchasing Joseph's novel *L'amélioration* and exhibiting shrunken, blown up, altered, and truncated passages within his piece. No textual archeology can restore coherency to this "lost history", as words were scattered throughout the exhibition space. Significantly, the work responded to the 2003 looting of the Iraq Museum, where tens of thousands of art objects were ransacked during the American invasion. Visually rendering this loss, an empty sarcophagus contained photos of Saddam Hussein and a UNESCO text on the protection of cultural heritage in wartime. Further, Hirschhorn mirrored the looting of the Iraq Museum by "pillaging" *L'amélioration*, while also doubling the textual appropriation practiced by Joseph, whose *Heroes are Heroes* are featured textual artifacts from the Gulf War, such as George H. W. Bush's address to the nation of January 16, 1991. By refusing a complete version of Joseph's novel to spectators, Hirschhorn sought to place them in the role of looters as well, as he described in a hastily written letter in French:

Je veux qu'il y a des mots isolées, des phrases amputés, des morceaux de textes éparpillés [sic]. Je veux que les textes ne sont pas pour amener. Mais les textes sont à lire dans le chalet. Par bribes, par morceaux, entièrement. Mais le lecteur ne peut pas les amener [sic]. Seulement dans son cerveaux [sic]. Seulement en morceaux. Comme le pillleur.¹⁵

- 11 If *Chalet Lost History* functioned by depriving the spectator of full access to Joseph's text, the work nevertheless proposes alternative methods of reading. Excerpts from *L'amélioration* were affixed as captions to a series of objects, including orientalist bric-a-brac, pyramids constructed of beer cans and cigarette packets, archeology magazines, dildos, and other objects. Joseph's work was fragmented and spread throughout the chalet with the same phrases even being used at times to describe different objects. Yet, certain connections could be made even if a global meaning of the text remains inaccessible. As Géraldine Bloch notes, a broken Egyptian stele was labeled "la cible à abattre" and garlands of tape carrying fake banknotes stretched between elements of the work to link them¹⁶. Through these points of contact, Hirschhorn suggested possibilities for an archeological reconstruction of meaning even if this effort is necessarily incomplete. Playing on the sustained interest in archeology in Hirschhorn's work, *Chalet Lost History* deconstructed Joseph's novel to figure the fragility of signification.
- 12 In 2010 and 2011, Hirschhorn devoted an artistic tribute to the poet in *Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph*, transposing his poetry from the page to gallery space. Like in *Chalet Lost History*, Hirschhorn conceived of Joseph's poetry in three dimensions in a move intended to upset the preeminence of the book. Yet, in this homage to his collaborator, Hirschhorn no longer wished to displace meaning or truncate Joseph's words, but rather to expand definitions of his poetic activity. The artist has a well-established practice of tributes to artists and writers that often incorporate the formal vocabulary of fan culture, such as homemade signs, candles, and soccer scarves. Hirschhorn has developed a typology of his "fan" tributes: *altars*, outdoor pieces taking their model from spontaneous memorials to victims of car crashes or other tragedies

(for Raymond Carver, Piet Mondrian, Otto Freundlich, Ingeborg Bachmann); *kiosks*, small rooms dedicated to a figure for a six-month period (Robert Walser, Emmanuel Bove, Fernand Léger); and *monuments*, community "presence and production" projects devoted to four major philosophers (Spinoza, Deleuze, Bataille, and Gramsci). Yet, Hirschhorn's tribute to Manuel Joseph lies outside of this constellation of projects for several reasons. First, it is devoted to a living figure and a collaborator instead of an artistic or philosophic precursor. Secondly, as attested to by the collection of objects on display, the emotional impetus at the origins of these homages was personal as well as "fan"-based in the case of Joseph; numerous notes, letters, postcards, and other materials documented close friendship as much as artistic exchange. In the book accompanying the exhibition, Hirschhorn proposes poetic practice as investing all media from advertisements, emails, and drafts of poems to readymade objects:

Aujourd'hui, le travail de la poésie ne se limite pas à écrire des poèmes et à les publier. Produire de la poésie n'est pas simplement produire un livre [...] [Joseph] produit beaucoup et – même s'il publie peu – manifeste cette production depuis des années par une écriture sur tous supports qu'il adresse à ses ami(e)s.¹⁷

- 13 By emphasizing the importance of unpublished materials, Hirschhorn advances a concept of literature as a practice extending beyond the sacrosanct form of the book. Significantly, the act of appropriation is not limited to found texts. Instead, Joseph's use of readymade objects, whether text-based or otherwise, is understood as a form of literary activity as well – or rather, the distinction between literary and visual art practices loses its pertinence for Hirschhorn. Further, the reader is also shown the development of certain texts through drafts and emails regarding publications, emphasizing the elaboration of a project rather than the closed, finished work.
- 14 If the term "abjet" initially refers to the regressive or numbing quality of consumer society, a more dire sense of the abject was brought to the forefront in certain works shown in *Exhibiting Poetry Today*. Recalling Hirschhorn's artist book *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques*, Joseph sometimes used magic marker on cardboard to evoke the signs of the homeless. By imitating a form used by those in desperate need, Joseph opted for a material manifestation of the downtrodden. In other publications, Joseph adopts infirmed narrators, such as abused children, the intellectually disabled, or the mentally ill¹⁸. Another work in *Exhibiting Poetry Today* put forth an ironic pro-war message on a cardboard sign while on the reverse side it displayed packaging from consumer products, drawing a parallel between poverty and the military enterprises of capitalist societies. Other works by Joseph employed the readymade to highlight correspondences between consumer objects and imperialist ideology. Providing a sarcastically jingoistic message, "Hurry up next war!", Joseph highlighted the militarized look of a paintball helmet. Following from techniques of textual montage, Joseph made connections between the formal qualities of disparate objects¹⁹. The exposed mechanical components of a remote control were offered in parallel to the debris of medicine packaging with its rows of button-like compartments for pills²⁰. Products of the entertainment industry, such as the CD presented with the pill packaging, would act as opiates in a similar manner as pharmaceutical drugs. Finally, a haphazard taping together of each item suggested them as refuse. Pharmaceuticals are a motif throughout Joseph's work, from lists of drugs like Stilnox, Xanax, and Diazepam in *Amilka aime Pessoa* to poisoned heparin in *Flat Red Flag*. Both junk texts listing drug information and the actual refuse of pill packaging suggest a biopolitics of pharmaceutical consumption. In working through the abject, Joseph establishes a

correspondence between the textual and physical forms consumed by vulnerable populations, from the homeless to patients using any number of pharmaceutical products.

Presence and Production

- 15 Of all Hirschhorn's artwork, criticism has perhaps most fully explored the political dimensions of his "presence and production" pieces²¹. These works displace artwork from art institutions to public space by engaging disfavored communities in the creation of participatory art projects. The series of monuments, such as the *Bataille Monument* of *documenta11*, propose lectures, theatre, writing workshops, events for children, and a temporary library and café. *Bataille Monument* took place not in the prescribed festival space in the center of Kassel, Germany but rather in a working-class, largely Turkish neighborhood at the periphery of the city. Hirschhorn created his work for and with a non-exclusive public and required *documenta* attendees to cross class and social boundaries to view it. By emphasizing makeshift construction, the work also followed Bataille's opposition towards architecture and monumentality as reinforcing institutionalized power. Similarly, refusing art's traditional reification of beauty, the piece prioritized energy in participation over quality of production. While celebrating a series of thinkers, Hirschhorn privileges enthusiasm with their philosophy in the mode of a fan tribute over the pedagogical goal of intellectual mastery. As Claire Bishop remarks with respect to the *Bijlmer-Spinoza Festival*, these projects do not aim to transmit philosophical ideas in a straightforward manner, but act instead like "a machine, whose meaning lay in everyone's continual production and collective presence, and only secondarily in the content of what was being produced; it was not unlike endurance-based performance art"²². Essential to this performative dimension of the work is the intervention of poets, most notably Joseph, Christophe Fiat, and Jean-Charles Massera, as well as philosophers, such as Martin Steinweg. Their role is not to reiterate or vulgarize texts by Bataille or Deleuze so much as to introduce literary and philosophical elements into the collective performance work. Broadening the scope of presence and production pieces, these literary actions create non-exclusive intellectual communities around a series of concepts suggested by Hirschhorn's interventions.
- 16 As a preliminary work for the monument, Fiat, who wrote a book on Bataille, created a map of the author's essential concepts with Hirschhorn. He also visited a number of sites with the artist, such as Lascaux and Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where Bataille lived with his lover, Laure (Colette Peignot), and founded the Acéphale secret society²³. Pursuing this exploration of Bataille's life and relationships, Joseph's *De la sculpture considérée comme une tauromachie* is a set of fake letters exchanged between Laure, Bataille, as well as figures such as Michel Leiris and André Masson²⁴. Echoing Hirschhorn's displacement of his work from institutional art spaces, Joseph favored an alternative form of distribution for his letters outside of conventional literary publication venues. Thus, a letter was included within the German newspaper, *Hessische Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, for the length of *documenta11*. The creation of counterfeit letters presents a secondary mode of appropriative writing, where Joseph annexes the style and biographical context if not the actual words of his subjects. This literary performativity is likened to a form of prostitution: "Une moitié[é] moins un) [un]e] salop\e\défloré[e]". Salope grosse de l'impoture : textes tronqués et défaussés

comme aux cartes quand on a peur de perdre mais qu'on gagne"²⁵. Joseph's fakes traffic Bataillon eroticism by enlisting the style of the author of *Le Bleu du ciel*. This performative "bluff", as Joseph terms his work, also references the erotic companionship onto death that characterized the relationship between Bataille and Laure. Paradoxically, it is through imposture, or by feigning commitment like that of the Acéphale community, that Joseph evokes these themes for an epoch skeptical of such notions. Alluding to Leiris' metaphor of bullfighting for the high stakes of literature, *De la sculpture considérée comme une tauromachie* elicits a similar tonality of profound engagement, even if it does so through counterfeit letters. The texts complement Hirschhorn's commitment to privileging energy, performativity, and engagement over quality or originality.

- 17 Another presence and production piece, Musée précaire Albinet, brought seminal works of 20th-century art by Malevitch, Duchamp, Warhol, and Beuys from the Pompidou to a temporary museum in the Albinet HLM of Aubervilliers. Like the act of situating the Bataille Monument at the periphery of documenta11, this work interrogated class hierarchies that dictate access to art institutions such as museums. Accompanying museum events like philosophical lectures and cultural field trips, Manuel Joseph and Christophe Fiat organized writing workshops by inviting female authors like Camille Laurens and Tiphaine Samoyault to Albinet. This choice of female writers reflected both a desire to widen the breadth of the piece, since Hirschhorn selected exclusively male artists to exhibit, as well as a challenge to the male-dominated atmosphere of the neighborhood²⁶. These interventions introduced the question of male and female relations in addition to that of access to culture and the arts. If marginalized populations are widely excluded from art establishments, Fiat and Joseph argued that women often face the additional difficulty of navigating public space itself.
- 18 By questioning class and gender hierarchies, Musée précaire Albinet reclaimed the label of precariousness, enlisting instability and uncertainty as aesthetic and political principles. If the "précarariat", those facing underemployment, lack of benefits, and an unsure future, has become the norm in France and other wealthy nations in the early 21st-century, this condition of indetermination simultaneously provides opportunities for free adaptation not available to those protected by existing social structures. Precarity designates a horizon of hazard and possibility born of what Joseph names "la tolérance révocable"²⁷. As he explains, the precarious condition implies entreaty of provisional authorization from a stronger party, where no guarantee of continuity exists. Within the work, the notion referenced the temporary nature of the project, its use of makeshift construction, as well as the political modality of the work, where the unpredictable, potentially perilous act of exhibiting masterpieces in the Albinet HLM also created the conditions for new experiences of public art to take form.
- 19 Other collaborative works also explore the concept of precariousness, such as *Théâtre précaire* and *Théâtre précaire 2*, which were included in the 2010 Les Ateliers de Rennes - Contemporary Art Biennial. These works enlisted members of the *Gros-chêne* district of Rennes as actors in Joseph's play *La restitution*. Illustrating the hazards of working in public space, *Théâtre précaire* suffered arson and had to be reconstructed in a second iteration. The presence and production works necessitate adaptability even to the point of recreating a destroyed piece. The content of the play negotiates borders and social barriers by projecting current divisions between the economically secure and the

precariously employed into the future. Joseph proposes a reversal of social positions between the center and the periphery, where those who enjoy the privileges of full citizenship seek to flee towards the intensity and fuller self-authorization at the margins. *La restitution* imagines humanity strategically moving towards a mobile, adaptable state like that of the *précarariat*. On stage, Hirschhorn made use of mannequins to provide a form for the invisible other subjected to precariousness. Referred to as "subjecters", the mannequins evoked both the power of others to subject the individual and the decentralized subjectivity of the community. The subjecters accompanied the community actors on the hybrid exhibition space/stage as a means of challenging borders between self and other, as well as between actors and spectators. As Hirschhorn remarks, "It was quite overwhelming to observe the extent to which the confusion between actor, Subjecter-dummy, and spectator led those present to question themselves about their own role"²⁸. Through the subjecters, Hirschhorn sought to disrupt prescribed social positions as other forms challenge the territorial aspects of class hierarchies.

- 20 The ambiguous position of the actors mimics the unraveling of the class hierarchy in the play: "I've had it up to here with holding back the impulses of the goddamn 'zitizens.' They're all ready to join the 'preckies' and in doing so sully what's left of civilization"²⁹. Joseph posits those within the city as being drawn to the dynamic indeterminacy of the margins, even as institutionalized power structures repress these impulses. Further, uncertainty in the distribution of speaking and silent bodies in exhibition space corresponds to the visibility and invisibility of the written sign within the play. The preckies organize themselves and transmit messages through graffiti, yet the zitizens find an intelligent, mobile material capable of erasing the tags, effectively censoring the lower classes. Echoing earlier references to drugs and police surveillance, the "Blue Ritaline hybrid module" is an intelligent, pharmaceutical material:

The thing appeared to be subcutaneous, embedded a few millimeters under the surface – covered with soft dull gray metallic skin – yet capable of moving underneath; an intelligent material, an intelligent sub-layer between the juxtapositions of hybrids. And the spots moved towards the tags and started eating them up.³⁰

- 21 In response to this intelligent police material designed to repress information, the preckies create their own intelligent tag. This technology is promptly used to make a manifesto on precariousness visible in public space. Demonstrating the performativity of this militant discourse, the play culminates in a call to action: "The Precarious are on a war footing and mean to win by means of great tinnitus attacks"³¹. In an interview, Joseph evokes this auditory phenomenon of buzzing or ringing with respect to the experience of political prisoners in solitary confinement³². Relegated to prison-like conditions outside the city, the preckies seek to harness the distorted sounds of their confinement as a means of expression. The tinnitus attack redistributes the powers of language from dominant discourses to the minor form of a malleable, aural graffiti. This intelligent tag also recalls Joseph's preoccupation with prison tattoos in his short text, *Le bleu du ciel dans la peau*³³. Figuring fragile script due to the lack of tattooing equipment, the work displays sections of print expanding and warping as if the page were soaked through with ink. Both the tinnitus attack and the improvised prison tattoo leverage symbolic powers to write back against power even in the most vulnerable of positions. Joseph posits modes of precarious expression that would promote convergence between 'zitizens and preckies in a manner that is not unlike

Hirschhorn's attempts to figure the public space for such an encounter in his presence and production pieces. These efforts to imagine new modalities of the sign and of public space advance radically dehierarchized regimes of speech, thought, and artmaking, whereby a non-exclusive public participates fully in political life.

- 22 As Joseph posits, the political force of precariousness is derived from its potential for greater independence and fervency in experience. An exchange between Hirschhorn and Jacques Rancière discusses additional opportunities afforded by integrating precariousness within the formal structure of a work of art. If presence and production works clearly question access to artistic and public space, Rancière also identifies the political stakes of experimenting with alternative temporalities:

c'est la porosité de la ligne de partage, le fait de circuler entre le temps occupé et le temps désœuvré qui définit un type d'expérience qui était largement présent dans l'univers prolétaire d'hier mais que toutes les formes actuelles de précarité et d'intermittence rendent plus sensible. La « Présence » de l'artiste, accompagnant sa « Production » ce serait alors une manière d'épouser cette temporalité oscillante en confrontant à la fois son travail à d'autres expériences du travail et son temps disponible à d'autres temps disponibles. Que différents temps s'égalisent, c'est, de fait, la condition pour qu'un espace public – c'est-à-dire un espace d'affirmation de la capacité de n'importe qui à voir, produire et penser – se crée.³⁴

- 23 Hirschhorn's emphasis on continual productivity and his uninterrupted presence on-site positions these public art pieces as interrogations of working time. As Rancière notes, the contemporary system of precariousness destabilizes the categories of work and leisure that once structured proletarian existence. Because of extreme pressures on time, involuntarily unorganized for some, highly regimented for others, access to public space has become heavily indexed to time. Rancière highlights this experimentation with working time as the essential political action accomplished in these works beyond the act of mobilizing, teaching, or provoking an audience. The convergence between different experiences of time and labor would allow for a public space that affirms the capacity for expression and thought in each individual. To advance such a paradigm of public space, Hirschhorn must make his own availability on-site as extensive as possible, even at the risk of having no spectators for certain segments of the work. This is an additional reason for the importance of his collaborators, like Joseph, who provide labor hours in fields beyond Hirschhorn's domains of expertise. Indeed, Joseph not only theorizes precariousness but also negotiates the implementation of non-exclusive literary activities (plays, readings, workshops, lectures) on-site. For Hirschhorn and Joseph, presence implies engagement with those strongly affected by precariousness. In addition to the art world, the participants in workshops and lectures include populations, like the unemployed, the underemployed, the handicapped, etc., whose experience of fluctuating temporalities is the most acute. The performative dimension of these works, characterized by the continuous presence of artists who engage with variable experiences of time and work, asserts public art as a space for thought and creation for a non-exclusive public.

- 24 Thomas Hirschhorn and Manuel Joseph not only explore political critique thematically but also practice art and literature politically by experimenting with participatory art forms. Joseph's interventions within presence and production works, including readings, plays, creative writing workshops, and invitations to authors for workshops and debates, all serve the participatory, performative dimension of the pieces. Literary content provides an additional facet to these works in their marathon-like

performativity, contributing to the goal of probing precarious experiences of time, production, and subjectivity. By encouraging a non-exclusive audience to attend and actively take part in the creation of these pieces, Hirschhorn and Joseph propose a radically egalitarian vision of public art. Insisting on a utopian horizon for art, these projects seek to create a space that affirms the capacity of all to think, feel, and create.

ENDNOTES

1. Christophe Hanna, *Nos dispositifs poétiques*, Paris, Questions théoriques, 2010. Manuel Joseph, *Heroes are Heroes are*, Paris, POL, 1994. Olivier Quintyn, *Dispositifs-dislocations*, Paris, Al Dante/Questions théoriques, 2007.
2. The *Morçals* appear in a number of sources, most prominently in *Revue de littérature générale*. Pierre Alferi, Oliver Cadiot (eds.), Paris, P.O.L., 1995.
3. Benjamin Buchloh, "An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn", *October*, n°113, 2005, p. 77-100.
4. Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October*, n°110, 2004, p. 51-79. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Dijon, Les Presses du réel, 1998.
5. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph*, Paris, X. Barral, 2010, p. 176.
6. Robert Fitterman, Vanessa Place, *Notes on Conceptualisms*, Brooklyn, NY, Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009.
7. Thomas Hirschhorn, Hal Foster, Lisa Lee, *Critical Laboratory: The Writing of Thomas Hirschhorn*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2013, p. 70.
8. Integrated texts by other writers have worked similarly. For example, Jean-Charles Massera's integrated texts were included in Hirschhorn's *Archeology of Engagement* and have since been reprinted in Jean-Charles Massera, *A Cauchemar is Born*, Paris, Verticales, 2007.
9. Manuel Joseph, *La tête au carré*, Paris, POL, 2010.
10. "Lecture: Thomas Hirschhorn on Das Auge (The Eye)/24 February 2011", url : <<https://vimeo.com/22258270>> (accessed Nov. 1, 2019).
11. Manuel Joseph, Myr Muratet, *La sécurité des personnes et des biens : drame social*, Paris, POL, 2010.
12. Manuel Joseph, *La tête au carré*, op. cit., unpaginated.
13. Manuel Joseph, *Amilka aime Pessoa*. Paris, POL, 2002.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Thomas Hirschhorn, "Chalet Lost History", url : <<http://www.thomashirschhorn.com/chalet-lost-history/>> (accessed Nov. 2, 2019). I have not corrected grammar or spelling errors.
16. Géraldine Bloch, "Chalet Lost History", url : <<https://www.paris-art.com/chalet-lost-history-2/>> (accessed Oct. 30, 2019).
17. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph*, op. cit., p. 6.
18. Cf. *Amilka aime Pessoa* and Manuel Joseph, Cyrille Clément, *Ça ne m'a même pas fait mal*, Romainville, Éd. Al Dante, 2001.
19. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph*, op. cit., p. 190.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 338-339.
21. Thomas Hirschhorn et al., *Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a Critical Corpus*, Bern, Swiss Federal Office of Culture, 2011.

22. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso Books, 2012, p. 264.
23. Éric Valentin, *Thomas Hirschhorn et Georges Bataille : La foudre et les flammes*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2018, p. 16.
24. Manuel Joseph, *De la sculpture considérée comme une tauromachie*, Paris, Al Dante, 2003.
25. *Ibid.* p. 93.
26. Christophe Fiat, "Des écrivains invités au Musée Précaire Albinet", *Thomas Hirschhorn, Musée Précaire Albinet, quartier du Landy, Aubervilliers, 2004*, Paris, Ed. Xavier Barral, 2005, unpaginated.
27. Hal Foster, "Towards a Grammar of Emergency", in *Thomas Hirschhorn et al., op. cit.*, p. 165.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
29. Manuel Joseph "Restitution", in *Thomas Hirschhorn et al., op. cit.*, p. 240.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
32. "Interview par Jean-Charles Massera", in *Thomas Hirschhorn, Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph, op. cit.*, p. 182.
33. Manuel Joseph, *Le bleu du ciel dans la peau*, Paris, Dissonances/Pôle graphisme de la Ville de Chaumont, 2009.
34. Thomas Hirschhorn, Jacques Rancière, "Entretien : Présupposition de l'égalité des intelligences et amour de l'infinitude de la pensée", *OP-4.4, 2009-2010*, p. 128-35, url : <http://www.thomashirschhorn.com/entretien-avec-jacques-ranciere-2009-2010/> (accessed October, 26, 2019).

ABSTRACTS

La politique radicale est au cœur de l'œuvre du poète contemporain Manuel Joseph, et oriente son traitement des questions telles que la surveillance, la politique au Moyen Orient, les médias, et la société de consommation. Joseph collabore régulièrement avec des artistes contemporains tels que le Suisse Thomas Hirschhorn. Comme Joseph, Hirschhorn emploie la technique du collage afin d'opérer la dislocation critique des discours des médias. La collaboration entre Hirschhorn et Joseph transpose la littérature de l'espace du livre vers d'autres supports, tels que le journal (*Bataille Monument*), des scènes ad hoc (*Théâtre précaire*), et des installations (*Chalet Lost History*, *Exhibiting Poetry Today : Manuel Joseph*, and *Flamme éternelle*). Hirschhorn crée également ce qu'il appelle des œuvres "présence et production", dans lesquelles l'artiste collabore avec des communautés économiquement défavorisées et minoritaires pour créer des projets artistiques locaux, des "monuments" en l'honneur d'intellectuels comme Bataille et Deleuze. Pour Hirschhorn, pratiquer l'art politiquement implique la création d'une forme qui incite un public "non-exclusif", composé de toutes les couches de la société, à réfléchir sur la politique. Manuel Joseph collabore souvent aux œuvres d'Hirschhorn ; il contribue avec des textes, donne des performances, anime des ateliers d'écriture et met en scène des pièces de théâtre. Visant à stimuler la réflexion politique et artistique chez une audience non-exclusive, ces projets transposent l'activité littéraire du livre vers une série d'autres pratiques dans le contexte global des œuvres "présence et production".

INDEX

Mots-clés: politique, art contemporain, poésie, surveillance

AUTHORS

ERIC LYNCH

Midwestern State University