

Thomas Hirschhorn

*Made in Tunnel of Politics*

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In 2009, Thomas Hirschhorn traveled to Santiago, Chile, in the context of the *Dislocación* project. He decided to make a sculpture that entailed altering the function of a red vehicle that was, although second-hand, in perfect condition. The automobile's wheeled structure would be modified by mechanics from the neighborhood. After analyzing the local scene and having numerous discussions with Ingrid Wildi Merino and his hosts in Santiago, Hirschhorn formulated a hypothesis of "institutional dislocation." That is, rather than placing the work in a mainstream art space, he constructed it in a site of social friction in the city, specifically the Galería Metropolitana, an art space at the limits of art. This gallery entails an eccentric project as it sets out to activate the memory of the working class. This is a case, then, where an initial analytic gesture became a major political act.

*Made in Tunnel of Politics* epitomizes Ingrid Wildi Merino's project; it consists of the exhibition of a double-cabin Ford Ranger pick-up that has been cut in half and then reassembled, its chassis moved forty centimeters from its original axis and then "stuck back together" with packing tape.

Thomas Hirschhorn's piece responds to the gallery's implicit status as a stand-in for a mechanic's shop for art. A mechanic's shop in a working-class neighborhood operates as a *de facto* cultural center: there are often a good many vernacular graphics like images of engines, advertisements for lubricants, and reproductions of photographs of scantily clad women in provocative poses taken from popular magazines and newspapers. In occupying a site like

this, the gallery skews the effect of art practices and produces revealing fictions that affect the daily life of the local inhabitants.

Thomas Hirschhorn has a background in graphic art; he studied at the Grafikfachklasse der Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich. Thus, he is well aware of the expandable limits of edition as the task of art. Indeed, his art as a whole can be understood as rigorous editorial effort. Thus, in Santiago he uses the metaphor of “editing a sculpture“ by means of a procedure that facilitates the transference of knowledge that includes reduction and its register. By effecting a cut on the body of the Ford Ranger, Thomas Hirschhorn ventures an analysis of local art and its spaces through a *mise en abyme* of the model of political production that sustains those spaces. The use of adhesive tape in the vehicle’s area of critical connection defines the urgency of the temporal cohesion of unstable signs that reproduce the disturbance of a functional unit. The space of the cabin has two uses, one for the family and one for work. The double cabin of the Ford Ranger entails a hybrid edition of the transportation cubicle that declares the difference between the place of the driver (boss) and the place of the laborers. On the weekends, the space is used to transport the family, rather than workers. The double cabin effects a simple edition of the distribution of power in the micro-political order. It also entails certain considerations that shake up the semantic basin of local history. In the media-informed lexicon of our generation that emerged on the political scene in the late-seventies, the word “ranger” is associated with two major anti-imperialist operations: the “rangers” were the soldiers who ravaged Vietnamese villages as they carried out cleansing operations; “rangers” was also the name of the military group that, in the same era, decimated Ché Guevara’s column in Bolivia.

Starting in the eighties, a Ford Ranger pickup came to signify the efficacy of the internal social cleansing with which the name “ranger” was already associated. But, insofar as the reversion of signs redefines the force field of history, the re/semantization of opposition

politics during the dictatorship in Chile made it possible to cleanse a descriptive model associated with the name Ford. That model even includes the operations effected by soft imperialism to recompose the methodological model—through the Ford Foundation— in the field of the social sciences, rendered devices for the production of the new governability as a consequence of the de/Marxification of discourse.

The neo-liberal democracy of the nineties was nothing more than the assemblage of the constitutive dislocation of the discourses that forged pacts of simulation, forgetting, and the management of social vulnerabilities. And that is what *Made in Tunnel of Politics*, Thomas Hirschhorn's work in Santiago, Chile, is about.