

VLATKA HORVAT

PARTS BODY PARTS

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Simply reading the categories on Vlatka Horvat's website, through which one can encounter her impressive body of work, is like encountering a performative sentence. Please read it aloud: "photo-based sculptural performance video works-on-paper". Doesn't it sound more like a score or instruction for what should happen with those works-on-paper than a series of entries leading to exhaustive lists of works?

Vlatka Horvat's background in theatre and performance studies is felt throughout her work - especially in her understanding of the photographic process as a profoundly performative one. Her photographic work can be seen as an ongoing exploration of what and who is being put into a frame, an investigation of the problem of exposure that is continually being rehearsed even while in the process of becoming. The visibility of the subject in a photographic image typically hinges on the presence of a body in front of the camera, or on stage during a performance, but what Horvat is essentially interested in

is the contingency of that visibility, especially as understood from its negative, opposite side. Hiding, obstructing, undoing a body, obliterating it from one's vision, while at the same time insisting that this same body with full self-awareness fails to hide or disappear fully, are amongst the main economical, ethical and aesthetical dispositifs that Horvat works with.

Her early works already began to define the way Horvat understands the body in space and in the photographic frame, and set out to tackle the difficulty of occupying that space. Many of the works approach the question of representation itself: how and what does one mean when one owns and presents a body in the presence of another subject, another body, another human being. The photographic series *Hiding* (2004) and *Searching* (2004) were her first attempts to both occupy the space of exposure and at the same time escape from being exposed. In the artist's own words, it is about "staging yourself not being there". Both series were produced through a game-like



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series of simple self-imposed rules, whereby Horvat set her photo-camera on a tripod, defined and then entered the frame having set the shutter release on the 10-second-timer to trigger the making of an image. Running into the frame in order to hide in it, Horvat's actions serve to both stage and conceal her - for the *Hiding* series she attempts (unsuccessfully) to hide behind objects she has found in the space (a chair, a fire extinguisher, a door), while in *Searching* she sticks her head into most unlikely openings, cracks and holes (industrial pipes, a bucket), appearing to search for something, with an unnamed purpose. The results of these endeavours are collections of comic and yet silently violent images, in which the slapstick-like repetitions underline the violence and tragedy of the repetitive process itself and of the subject's predicament in it. On the other hand, by going through these repetitions herself, moving from the space behind and in front of the camera, Horvat makes her working method a

visible part of making of the work, situating her decision-making in both the position of the image maker and that of the subject.

Borne out of the artist's fascination with the idea of taking a body apart in front of the camera, fragmentation became one of the prevailing elements in Horvat's recent work as she turned her attention towards the body parts, their autonomy and their role in larger compositions. *Parts Work* (2007) is a set of six photo-collages, each using one and the same photograph of a female figure which has been cut and pasted together in a variety of sometimes extremely comic positions, forming in the process a dissected and imperfect body whose features are nonetheless still recognisable. In the ornamental forms of *Anatomies* (2008), a series of 30 collages, photographed and cut-out limbs interact with their own mirror image to form occasionally mandala-like assemblies. At a certain point, when she first became drawn to collage, Horvat began to work within a specific economy of her



own image distribution and usage. Many of her photographs from previous photo series, or images found in her studio as elements of unfinished works or compositions, became source material for her collages. Thus, in *For Example (Folded Out)* and *For Example (Folded Over)* (2009), as well as in *To Go On (Around)* (2010), the same image that the artist shot for her above-mentioned photographic series *Hiding*, is revisited in a different medium – removed from the context of a photo series, cut out and rearranged, folded in and out, cut through in different ways. This ecological economy gives space to yet another repetition-lead process marked by repositioning and recontextualising of images which the artist herself has previously produced for other purposes.

Horvat's performances show similar simple and restrictive economies and her preoccupation with the body concealed and fragmented in relation to objects and landscape. In *Unhinged*, a durational performance from 2010,

which looks like a "dance with a door", there is no delineation between the figures that are formed as the artist partially hides her body behind a full-size door she is holding in her hands, while in one of her first videos, *Restless* (2003), she is seen manically changing her location in a theatre auditorium as if searching for correct place. Similarly, during the durational performance *This Here and That There* (2007-2010), the artist rearranges chairs in a body of water for eight hours, creating countless structures and figures which seem to invite meetings, gatherings and performances of different kinds.

Although Horvat's own image is prominently fragmented, absent, obstructed or hidden within her photographic series or performances, it is not so much that the artist's subjectivity or even biography is being staged or exposed in these works. The transitory states which her work brings about through repetition and mapping of variations



reveal common feelings of doubt, anxiety, violence and sadness. While in her earlier works this relationship was being played out between a body and its surroundings, most often a body and an object, Horvat has increasingly been working through dissociating and intensely objectifying the body, evoking through this practice "fundamental traumas of the female body, whose dilemmas oscillate between the lifeless generic body and the hidden, enigmatic face that resists direct encounter".

1. WW: "The Vulnerable Body Object", in *Vlatka Horvat: In Other Words In Other's Words And Other Words* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall 2011), 9.

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PF.370-374: *Hiding*, 2004. C-Prints (a set of 10 photographs) Courtesy the artist.

