

# Mergers, Removals, Evacuations:

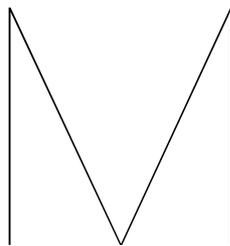
## Reordering and Reconstituting Image in Collage

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01 Chris Townsend describes a set of images that Francesca Woodman took of a professional model employed at RISD while she was a student there. On one of the portraits, titled *Charlie the Model #1*, she wrote: "Charlie has been a model at R.I.S.D. for 19 years, I guess he knows a lot about being flattened to fit the paper." Another image from the same series, *Charlie the Model #4*, in which the model is shown holding a big sheet of white paper next to his naked body, is accompanied by Woodman's note that says, "There is the paper and then there is the person." In Chris Townsend, *Francesca Woodman: Scattered in Space and Time* (London: Phaidon Press, 2006), 24.



y work across different media – performance, video, photography, collage, sculpture, and installation – often deals with the precarious relationship between a human body and a set of objects, space, landscape or built environment. In this paper I will zoom in on a very small and specific area of the work, focusing on the dissolution and discombobulation of the figure as it is enacted and performed in my image-based collage works, discussing how collage perform this disassembly, and re-assembly, of body-as-object / body-as-image differently than the photographic works.

In broad terms, my work largely tends to revolve around the problem of embodying and capturing or representing various kinds of contradictory experiences: inconsistent and impossible strivings, irresolvable conflicts of intention and desire, uneasy or dysfunctional relational dynamics between bodies, objects and space.... Or to put it differently, the work tries to find ways to speak of various kinds of failures, stucknesses and excesses, of a general "too-muchness" of experience, especially in relation to 2-D modes of representation, which have to squeeze and compress lived experience with all of its complexities and contradictions and make them "fit the paper?"<sup>01</sup>

Time and again, one of the central concerns of mine in regards to the body is the problem of presence – from quite concrete, specific questions of how body occupies space, how it relates to other objects, how it negotiates

being there,... all the way to the wider, more abstracted questions of having a body in the first place and making sense of its physical nature, its objecthood, its limits and possibilities. The body in my work always appears fragmented or altered, depicted in various stages of being discombobulated or multiplied, partly or entirely evacuated from the staging area of the image, or caught in some form of transformation – either in the midst of transformation; or on its brink, or in its aftermath.

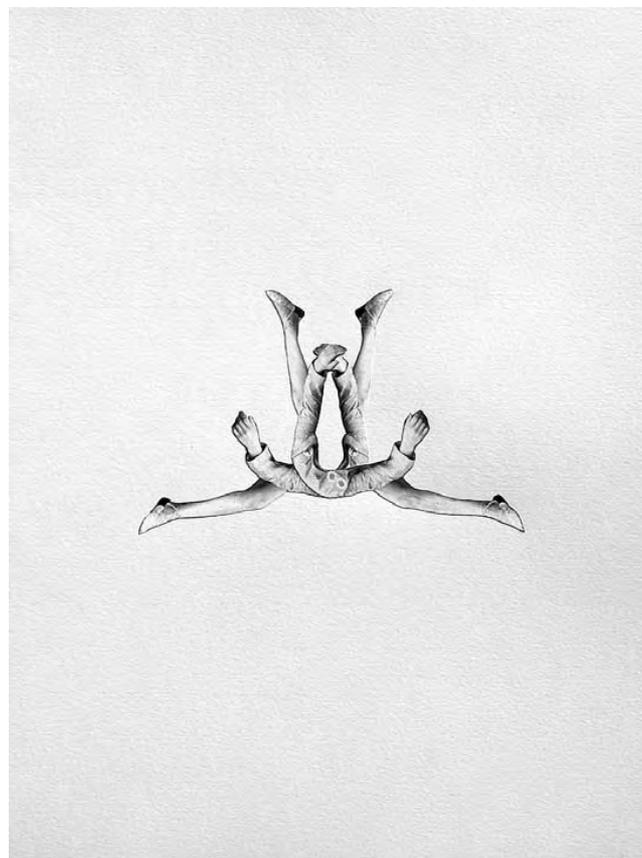
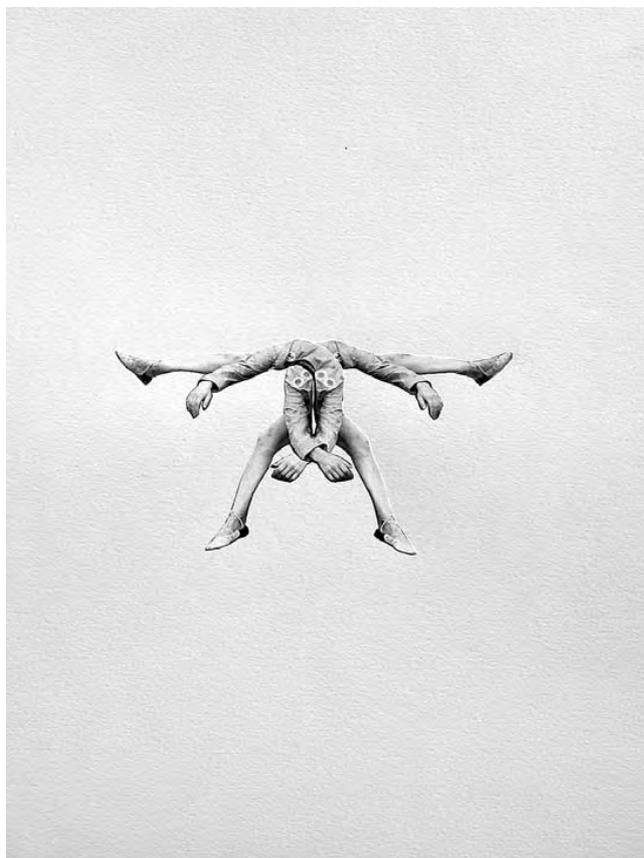
### Second Life: Reuse and Recycling

I turned to collage when in my process of working with video and photography, I felt I was coming up against certain restrictions in regards to the body. Working in a way that is performance based, the range of possibilities for what you can deal with in photography, is always going to be bound by what an actual body in actual space can do. Consequently, what can be represented in photography is limited by what is possible for the body to enact, and more so – what a *particular* body (my own) is able to enact. In collage the category of “what is possible” is ripped open because what can be shown is not restricted by what a body can do, or by the limitations of time and space and the laws of physics. As a form, collage offers a kind of freedom that photography cannot provide. So my works on paper initially emerged from a practical problem of trying to get around the limitations of the body as a physical object.

For *Hybrids*, one of my earliest collage works, I re-used fragments of the body from my existing photographic projects and combined them with images of objects and elements of the built space, resulting in representations of amalgamated creatures. All my subsequent image-based collage works<sup>02</sup> essentially employ the same approach – using reprints, photocopies, cut-outs of parts of my photographic images. Rather than drawing from the vast and inexhaustible sea of images we are surrounded with in the culture, I chose early on to limit the universe of source material at my disposal by only mining the pool of images I had taken myself. Almost always, these images have had a prior life (as photographic images or videos), though some of them are outtakes, selections that didn’t “make the cut” the first time. In a way, this working method and the self-imposed restriction of what resources are available can be seen as a form of deliberate exercise in restraint, working with a limited economy of means, and at the same time, as a programmatic performance of self-recycling.

By starting with something that is already a representation and then degrading it further (often printing out photographs at low resolution and then photocopying them), the works on paper – broadly speaking – draw attention to the very inadequacy of representation in translating lived experience into image. The image in collage confronts you with a different set of questions than the figurative photographic image proper: it is no longer about “what the image is” (document of time past, trace or a residue of an event, an index of something live), but about “what it can get at.” The investigation gets explicitly framed as an investigation into possibilities and limitations of representation; of what can be shown, what can be known, what can be known about the body and through the body. Concretely, the investigation shifts away from testing and mapping out the possibilities and limitation of action and encounter between body and space, towards teasing out the possibilities of performance *of* and *in* image itself.

<sup>02</sup>I’m making this distinction here as a growing body of my recent work includes collages that are text based or that re-work the blank pieces of paper, which don’t contain any images or text.



Vlatka Horvat, *Anatomies (03), (05)*, 2008. Collage on paper. Images courtesy the artist.

Vlatka Horvat, *Anatomije (03), (05)*, 2008., kolaž na papiru, ljubaznošću autorice.

### Some Bits: Collision and Violence of Collage

Broadly speaking, collage, by its very virtue of merging and compositing of multiple images into one, can be said to engender a sense of discord and disagreement. Image rendered in collage will physically – literally that is – embody multiple images of which it consists, so it is always going to be a thing in-between: between (at least) two things, between at least two surfaces, at least two planes. The severed images or image fragments that are the source material for the collage tend to point to the original context from which they had been taken, making palpable their displacement, relocation and the fact of their having been re-contextualised.

Containing elements of images brought from another place or from multiple other places, collage typically functions as a cacophony of references by maintaining a precarious link to these *other* places and their sets of associations: associations offered by the originating images themselves, associations produced by the fact of the original image's displacement and severing, and associations conjured by the amalgamation itself. Image produced by collage is a bit of one thing and a bit of another, but none fully or completely. Or else, it is a "new" thing altogether, composed of severed elements of existing things. Steaming from, and pointing to, several places at once, the collage presents itself as a fitting form for an investigation of states of in-betweenness – of incomprehensible and irresolvable conditions, feelings, impulses, strivings – the representation of which, as I said at the start, has been one of ongoing and central concerns in my practice.

When trying to represent such experiences – strained presence, multiple and conflicting desire, doubt, stuckness – a mode of representation further detached from lived experience then seems to me to be *better* suited, paradoxically perhaps, to speak about those experiences, than the mode of representation positioned closer to something lived, i.e. photography. These un-representable aspects of lived experience, as I'm calling them here, are often linked to the problems of materiality of the physical world and, concretely, the problem of the body: body unable to be in two places at once, unable to do something *and* its opposite at the same time, unable to physically contain or be in control of its own impulses, sensations and experiences. At least doubly removed from what we understand as 'life', collage doesn't try to represent *anything* in a direct way – by mirroring, reflecting or simulating what it supposedly *sees*. Photography, by contrast – even when it tries to acknowledge its own inability to deliver truth, authenticity and evidence of something "real" (as in apparently *staged* photographs for instance) – still to a large degree relies on semblance, appearance or desire for equivalence with that which it depicts. Described by a conceptual artist Douglas Huebler as a "dumb copying device,"<sup>03</sup> photography as a medium, with its vocabulary and the tools inherent to it, does not lend itself to rupturing the supposed correlation of what is represented to what can be seen, to exposing the fiction of representation. Collage on the other hand, goes about representation in fundamentally different ways – ways that derive from its very nature as a composite and its basis in merging disparate things together. In collage, "reality is represented as always constructed in representation."<sup>04</sup>

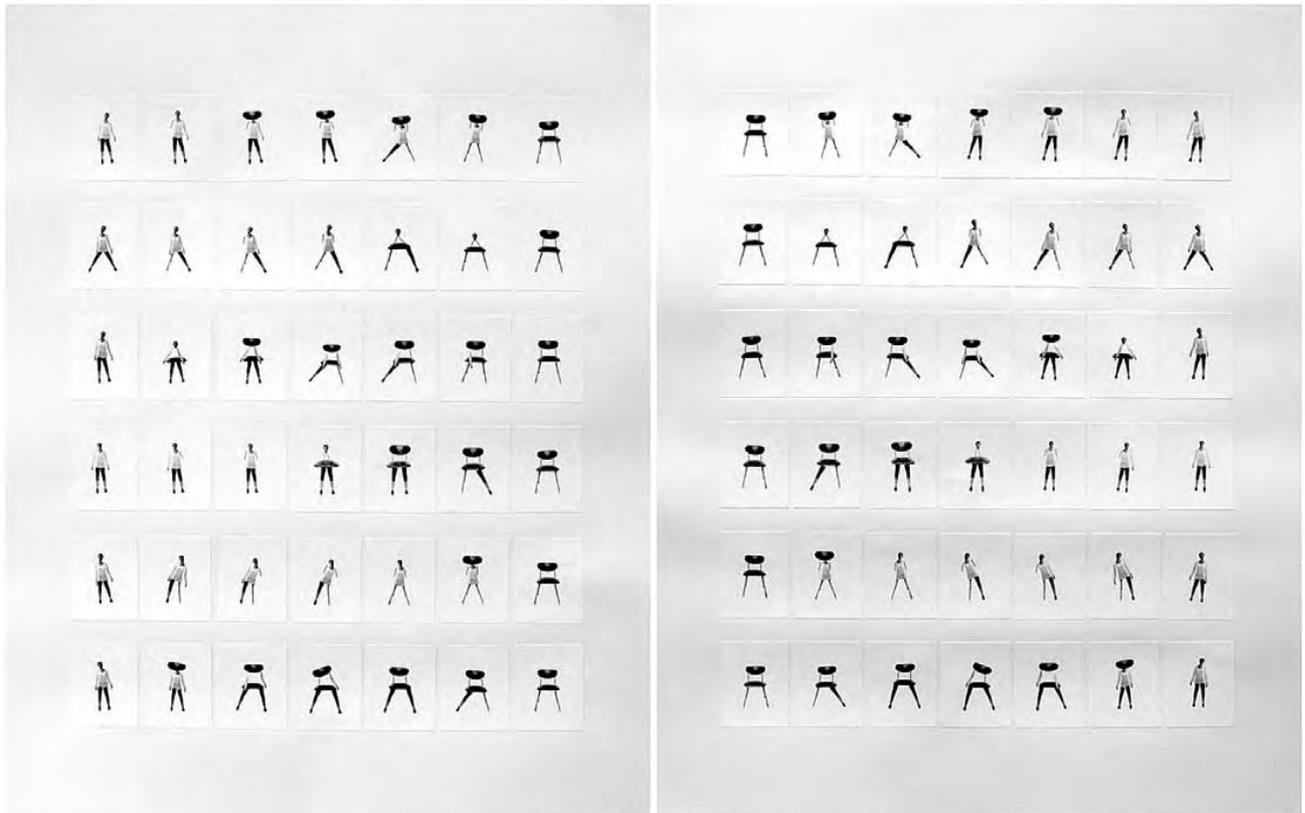
Object rendered in collage form, and collage itself as object, undermines in a very visible and tangible sense a myth of wholeness. Even in its simplest incarnation, as a single cut-out glued onto a paper, collage will always be "one thing on top of another" – a play of multiple foregrounds and backgrounds. The points where one piece protrudes over another, or where two pieces overlap on the surface of the page, or where incisions, cuts, folds, and tears are evident on the surface of a paper can be experienced with both visual and tactile senses. The seams and cuts on its face are discernable as visually perceptible lines where elements and parts can be seen as conjoined or connected – or else, where they appear to have *failed* to connect "properly." These cut lines appear to have a corporeality that can be experienced as tactile experience – even if the sense of touch is only conjured in the mind's eye. Interrupted in multiple places, where one thing crosses another, interspersed with jagged edges of one thing over another, collage is revealed as an uneven, serrated landscape of indentations, furrows and grooves. A territory that does not "come together" in a seamless and happy-to-be-integrated kind of way, but that is instead a busy intersection, a rugged zone where parts compete for space, stomping over one another, and getting stomped on, as layers of assertion on top of assertion are compounded on its plane. There is a roughness to the materiality of collage, a violence that emanates from its coarse physicality and the crowded referential jumble coexisting on its surface. Associations and signs are brought together here from multiple other places, from which they had been violently removed (cut and torn) and glued down to sit together – conjoined, but disjointed.

Literally a collision of parts, faces, surfaces and references, collage both epitomises and summons a state of chaos. "Grounded on excess and composed of irretrievable fragments and hovering signs,"<sup>05</sup> collage arranges

03 Quoted in Kate Bush, "The Latest Picture," in Fogle, *The Last Picture Show*, 262.

04 Bush, "The Latest Picture," 265.

05 Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Depicting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), back cover copy.



**Vlatka Horvat, *Body Chair (Charts)*, 2009., Collage on paper (a set of 2). Images courtesy the artist.**

**Vlatka Horvat, *Tijelo stolica (mapa)*, 2009. kolaž na papiru (set od 2), ljubaznošću autorice.**

disparate elements into a bedlam where unrest and disquiet are the order of the day. Even when consisting of cuts only – for instance when a single image has been physically intervened on without being merged or joined with elements of another image – a visible physical intervention of collage will always imply an act of rupture and disruption, or else an act of attempting to fix a rupture / to undo the disruption.

Gestures central to collage as a medium suggest a certain violence: the tearing and the cutting, the re-placing and the re-mixing. Even gluing and sticking, which might in a different economy be associated with care and repair, here take on a kind of a brutality as different “bits” are assigned their place and fixed there, under a forceful insistence that they should stay where they have been put – which often means in a “wrong place” or in an incongruous relationships with other parts they might not have anything in common with. Even at a glance, in a “purely visual” way, collage asserts itself as a kind of confrontation.

The key to reading my move from photography to collage is to take into account that all my source material consists of my own photographs. Some of this material has been used before in other work, i.e. it exists as work; some I might shoot specifically to use in works on paper. Further, all of my works on paper use the same image in multiple incarnations, and many use only a *single* image over and over again as its source material. There is a real reduction in the visual vocabulary affected as a result – a visual poverty borne out of my use of a single image and out of the methods of multiplying it: photocopying or printing on a black-and-white inkjet printer. It could be said that the “full potential” of collage as a medium evoked earlier gets deliberately underutilised in my works on paper – in the sense that there is

no cacophony of references pointing to different contexts, no effort to bring together incongruent fragments from disparate sources. Instead, the foundation of each of my series of collages is a single image depicting the same body, which repeatedly gets copied, doubled, multiplied and re-arranged, creating a discord out of a single source.

### **Copies: Degraded, Further Removed**

Re-photographs, copies, reproductions are all re-presentations of another image, and as such will be imbued with whatever their source image is imbued with also. But because images copied, re-printed and re-represented in my work are *my own* images, there is no need to free them from their one-time references in quite the same way. My own images evoke no other context, apart from the context of my practice. As source images, they are not culturally loaded, or coded, in the same ways as images appropriated from advertising or film are, for instance. Without the burden of other cultural associations to contend with, what is brought to the foreground in my collages are the very gestures the image of the body is being subjected to: the copying, the severing, the alteration, the recombining, the multiplying; as well as the consequences of those gestures, which the images both engender and depict: obliteration, defamiliarising, stripping, displacement.

By being re-photographed or re-printed, the image of the body is in a sense being continually re-cycled and re-employed over and over in the work. Re-photographing, as artist Michal Rovner suggests, functions as a “a strategy of removing something away from its identity, its locality, or specificity.”<sup>6</sup> It is worth pointing out that the photographs I re-photograph and reuse as source material for collage tend to *already* depict some gesture of obliteration: hand covering the eyes, objects held in front of the face, something in the way, etc. In that sense, the identity / locality / specificity that Rovner speaks about has already been made blank, anonymous, non-specific the “first” time around – in the photograph proper. The gesture of re-photographing images depicting such gestures then might be understood as adding an additional layer of obliteration. The process of progressive obliteration and degradation of an image further strips an image of the particularities of what it may have referred to in specific terms, turning it into a model of sorts. Comprising parts that are copies, re-photographs or re-prints of other images – less-than-faithful replicas of previous representation – collaged images can only ever function as a degraded and obliterated reduction of something supposedly more “proper.” But because my photographs already point to a particular failure of photography to depict or properly show subjects (since they are hiding in front of the camera when its demand is for them to be exposed), we actually cannot speak of something more “proper.” My collages can then only ever be revealed as an inadequate representation of something already inadequate. A re-photograph clearly acknowledges that it is not trying to copy anything it might think is real; it already knows that such a thing would be impossible. There is a certain mockery of the photographic apparatus inherent in the act of re-photographing and re-printing, in copying what is already a copy. Re-photograph holds a distorting mirror to its (deluded) source version by exposing the inadequacy and the failure of the copy it is copying.

We could perhaps say that the process of copying and re-copying in my work – removal and further removal – operates as a kind of layering (or

<sup>6</sup>Michal Rovner and John Tusa, BBC Radio 3 interview, transcript at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/rovner\\_transcript.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/rovner_transcript.shtml)

Vlatka Horvat, *Doubles Stitched* (06), 2011. Folded inkjet prints sewn, mounted on archival bookbinding board. Image courtesy the artist.

Vlatka Horvat, *Dvojnici vezani* (06), 2011., Presavijeni šivani inkjet printovi na arhivskom kartonu za uveze, ljubaznošću autorice.



peeling off) of multiple layers of inauthenticity, “undermin[ing] the appearance of a seamless reality” and disclosing what Douglas Crimp calls the fiction of “the supposed autonomous and unitary self” in order to reveal this fiction as “nothing other than a discontinuous series of representations, copies, fakes.”<sup>07</sup> In another sense, the accentuating of layers of inauthenticity (and layers of degradation, obliteration) might be seen in terms of framing experience as, “not the real thing,” but as possibility – to evoke Heidegger’s idea of inauthenticity as a fundamental characteristic of being human, framing the notion of human existence as “a scene of possibility.”<sup>08</sup>

<sup>07</sup>Crimp, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” 207.

<sup>08</sup>Curtis Bowman, “Heidegger, the Uncanny, and Jacques Tourner’s Horror Films,” in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Lanham, Maryland and Oxford: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2003), 72.

A re-representation of inadequate representation, because of its self-awareness of being a copy, is freed from the burden of having to be faithful to a likeness of something purporting to be the “real thing.” As opposed to photography, with its penchant for illusion and its affectation to depict things “as they really are,” or even “as they are really seen” – collage wears its own inadequacy as representation of something “whole,” “authentic” or “real” readily on its face, by flaunting its patches, cuts and sutures, its weathered and degraded appearance, and its austerity and second-rate status as a copy. The less an image tries to be *like* something real, the less it



Vlatka Horvat, *Hiding*, 2004.  
C-Prints (a set of 10). Images  
courtesy the artist.

Vlatka Horvat, *Skrivanje*, c-printovi  
(komplet od 10), ljubaznošću  
autorice.

concerns itself with the appearances resembling other appearances – that which it puts forward becomes, paradoxically perhaps, plausible as a proposition.

To invoke Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum, "the image no longer corresponds to reality, but becomes a kind of reality in and of itself."<sup>09</sup> No longer a copy of the real, but a simulation of something which does not – and never has / never can – exist. We can perhaps say that the collage in general functions as a simulation of "something that never was," but because it announces its representational obviousness and the transparency of its gestures, it is simultaneously enacting its own destruction of the simulated image. In my work then, the simulation always seems to be a degraded, rather than an improved, picture of something. So whereas the simulation does present itself as a kind of a factual reality-in-image, it is also unabashedly announcing itself as "less than" rather than "more than." I should point out also that this "less than real" simulation doesn't position itself as "less than real" in order to convince anyone that that which it is *not* (simulating properly) is real by contrast. Quite the contrary – the collage simulates something in a "less than" way so as to expose the inauthenticity or the unattainability of the ("properly") simulated picture itself.

The chimerical, machinistic, severed, multiplied or augmented creatures inhabiting the pages of my collages are offered there as facts, in that there is no negotiation or process that would – even on the level of projection, fantasy or conjecture – release them from their predicament. They are fixed in an image, fixed as images, as opposed to the figure in the photographs, whose predicaments can at least be imagined as having a way out. A hint of possible return to normalcy persists in the photograph precisely because of its connection to an actual body and an actual event – even if that event is understood to be inauthentic, staged or fictional. Presumably, what a body can enact, it can also get out of. In contrast, in collage, the physically impossible multiplication of body/parts, cutting of body/parts, fusion of body and object, distortion of scale, reversal and confusion of figure and ground, front and back, top and bottom are all irreversible – once glued, stuck (or in the case of this work, sewn) in place, the propositions cannot be undone, except by destroying the image in the process. There is no returning the body or indeed the image to some fixed notion of "how it was before". The body, the objects and the space/surface of the page are all locked in a permanent state of dislocation.

<sup>09</sup>Fogle, *The Last Picture Show*, 17.



In that sense, we could say that the works on paper do not depict things, but rather *make* or *stage* them.<sup>10</sup> Image in collage isn't 'like something;' it 'is something' and furthermore, it 'does something.'

### Running Close, Falling Flat: Photography and Collage, and Lived Experience

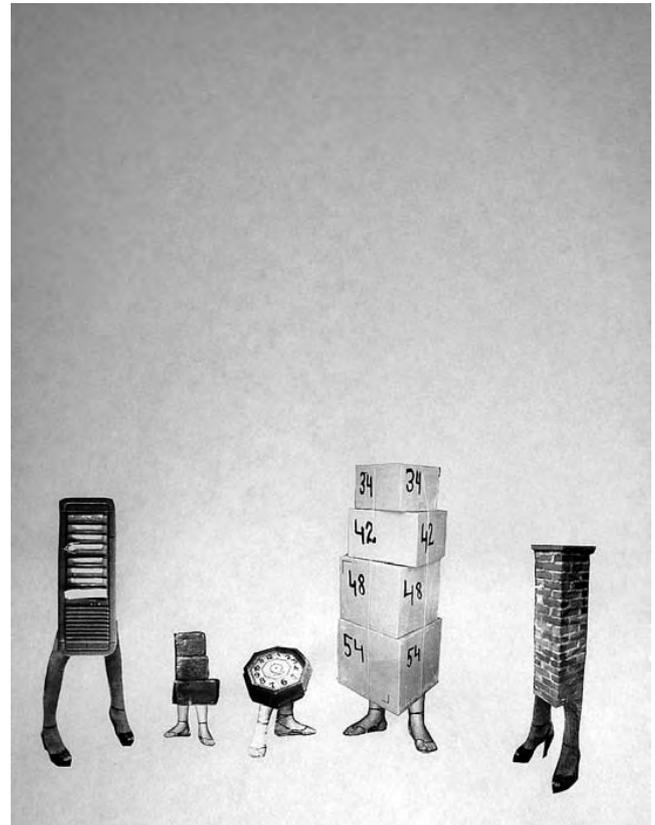
Looking at my photographs again, I would say that because of their proximity to the live event, my photographs – on one level at least – stage research into action, into representational possibilities of body in space. Collage, on the other hand, stages research explicitly into representational possibilities of *image*, and in particular possibilities of image of the *body*. Or to frame it slightly differently – in the photos, I engage an inquiry into a process of discombobulating the figure by depicting activities in which the body interacts with spaces and objects in it in particular ways. Because I do not use Photoshop to enact changes to the body but focus instead on what can be done using improvisation, trial and error, etc., the effect of the body appearing chopped up, interrupted, decapitated and otherwise dismantled or violated is a result of the framing, spatial relations, play of perspective, optical effects, etc. In *Searching*, for instance, the body appears “decapitated,” but in fact the figure’s head is inserted in the pipe / bucket / hedge. And in *Obstructed*, the body is obscured by the pillar and the detached shadow which does not “belong” to the body is an illusion produced by the combination of the camera’s position in a particular place and the play of light in the space. As grotesque or disconcerting as some of these images may be, the effect produced can always be “explained” in simple, non-violent terms. In photography, you simply cannot break up the body much more than it has been done in *Obstructed*. In collage, on the other hand, the same process of dismantling the image of the body takes place, but I am able to take it further because of the freedom afforded by the medium. The body can here be discombobulated in much more severe ways: torn and severed, cut off and shredded, rearranged and merged with other objects, skewed in terms of scale, multiplied, crossed out. The violence in collage can be employed in quite a literal way as gestures of cutting and severing are not just conjured or simulated the way they are in the photos, but are enacted in a tangible, direct way – with a pair of scissors and an utility knife.

<sup>10</sup> Koerner, “Bosch’s Equipment,” 57.

Because it is clear that an optical illusion of the body's dismemberment is operating in the photographs, it is possible for these works to invite the question, "Where is the rest?" – not in a psychological sense, but in a visual sense, as in: "Where (in the image) did the rest of the body go?," or "How did you do this?" There is a sense that the body is there *somewhere* although it is unseen by the camera. In collage by contrast, the image of the body was never "whole"-but-obscured; it is always already a cut-out to begin with. Even image in collage that has not been chopped up into pieces exudes a certain brutality. There is violence, carelessness and recklessness inherent in the textual and visual qualities of the medium – in its provisional homemade aesthetic, in its containment and re-contextualisation of degraded or appropriated images. An image of the body can accidentally lose an ear, or a heel, or a side of an arm. There is a violence in the separation alone, in the act of removal of an image – of *any* image – from the background, from the page. Because a surface of an image is a play between multiple levels of backgrounds and foregrounds, contingent on the relational dynamics of acts of perception, it is impossible to distinguish in an image where one thing ends and another one begins, where the "edges" between object or figure and ground may be, and therefore also impossible to determine the "wholeness" of any image or figure being removed from a larger image.

In terms of the consequence the above insights might have for the viewer – there is a difference between how we read a figure, parts of whom have been obscured by objects or landscape, but whose image maintains a connection to the supposed wholeness or realness of the (performer's) body; and how we read or construct a "figure" that is not and never was represented as "whole," or "authentic," or "original." In the photographic work, the image of the body tends to still conjure up a "body-as-we-know-it" because of the direct link a photograph maintains to the event which produced the representation. Looking at the photographs, we are – to some extent at least – aware of the present-but-hidden "whole" figure, in that we presume that the rest of it is *there* somewhere, behind the pillar for instance, or inside the bucket, or in the box, or under the coat. In collage, on the other hand, what we could refer to as the "figure" is always already going to be an arrangement of parts, a set of fragments, a copy, a re-production, a composite of leftovers. It is always going to refer only to its own status as a proposition. When we read the figure thus presented, we are "making someone" (or something!) as it has been "made" previously only in representation.

When examining my move from photography to collage, the following question might emerge from this discussion: Why didn't *Obstructed* send me to Photoshop? Why move to collage instead? Whereas it would certainly be possible to enact the same kinds of gestures upon an image of the body using Photoshop as it is using collage (and much more!), a crucial aspect of collage that sets it apart from Photoshop – and which is what draws me to it – is that collage *flaunts* its unrealistic intervention. It is not illusionistic in the way Photoshop often is and it doesn't strive to deceive, convince or manipulate the viewer into believing that you are looking at something *other* than what you are looking at – that is, an intervention upon an image. Contrary to Photoshop, collage performs its "I tore the world" relation very



Vlatka Horvat, *Hybrids (08), (10)*, 2008. Collage on paper. Images courtesy the artist

Vlatka Horvat, *Hibridi (08), (10)*, 2008., kolaž na papiru, ljubaznošću autorice.

loudly. We could say that collage owns up to its act by displaying its intentions on its very face. A strong sense of agency is manifest in collage's destructive or horrid reshuffling of the visual order, which is played out here in a very different way than in Photoshop. There is an obviousness to the gesture in collage, a self-awareness of inadequacy of representation that the medium not only readily acknowledges, but blatantly underscores.

Not only does collage perform its agency by overtly and confrontationally asserting its intervention upon the image, or perform its poor-and-degraded "images of images, representations of representations" status,<sup>11</sup> but its gestures also imply a different level of investment, or vulnerability, than those conjured by photography. In the making of the photographic series, there is a body being employed, being "handled," being put in a place. Something is at stake in that process – a sense of someone putting herself on the line. By contrast, the implication in collage is that someone sat at a table with scissors and enacted a cut after a cut; someone exercised power, played god.

To reframe this point in terms of my own agency – in enacting the photos, I put myself on a line: I squeeze into spaces that are too small for my body; I get packaged in all manner of containers and wraps; I hang off of tress, goal posts and ladders; I dive head-first into piles of hay, openings in buckets and pipes. These enactments garner an added element of unease, embarrassment and vulnerability, considering that many of these awkward feats are undertaken in public places. Working in collage, on the other hand, I make decisions from a distance and enact them rashly on my body's unfortunate paper avatar. There is something rather crueller or more crude at least, less subtle, in this process and consequently more confronting or more

<sup>11</sup> Bush, "The Latest Picture," 262.

disconcerting. Because of the double removal from the actual body-doing-things and the "avatar quality" of the image – its representational obviousness – you can do things to the image that you could never do with the body or to the body. You can subject an image to indignities that you yourself might prefer to avoid. Consequently, there is (*has to be*) a level of care implicit in the photos, a regard towards the body, emerging precisely from an invocation of an actual body that was used as a tool, a material in the images' production. There is no care – and it is not needed – in the collages, but a botchedness and a sense of haste. The fact that it is a re-photograph, a degraded re-print or a poor copy lends it a certain throwaway quality; the fact that it is only paper means you can rip it; the fact that it is only *image* of the body means that you can cut it up into pieces.

When it comes to the way the body is treated in my work, there are always two distinct types of gestures employed simultaneously: cutting up / chopping off / severance on the one side, and recombining / multiplying / reconfiguring on the other. Each of these methods conjures up a very different sets of options for what we are looking at. With that in mind, I would suggest that as much as the body and the physical world get framed in my work as sites of delusion, collapse, failure, fragmentation, obsessiveness – such as in the work titled *To Nothing* which depicts a gradual and systematic removal of one body part at a time until there is nothing – they are also simultaneously invoked as sites of repair, renewal, resistance, fantasy, possibility, play, imagination – as in *Body Chair (Charts)*, which starts with same source image as *To Nothing* and employs much of the same visual economy, but its logic of removal of body parts is combined with an additional gesture of replacement of body parts with chair parts, leading to a very different end. The process of employing these seemingly contradictory propositions (cutting and merging, or removing and adding) alongside one another unsettles the categories of fractured / complete, unstable / permanent, irreversible / unfixable, while at once disrupting the clear-cut lines that supposedly separate human from not human, real from not real, alive from not alive.

### **Another and Another: Seriality and Repetition, Ways and Versions**

Most of my works in photography and collage are manifested in a serial form, as catalogues of sorts of the multiple versions of the same thing, as examples, lists of possible ways to do the same thing. Within that framework, the individual items in each series become framed as multiple iterations of "what if," as demonstrations of potential interactions, rather than documentation of *bona fide* encounters. In the context of a series, each image, or version, functions as "another way," "another example," "another instance," "another attempt" – none given a status of being final or fixed or "done."

When considered from the perspective of a series, these collages can then be said to perform the *possibility* of something being enactable, while simultaneously attesting that no *definitive* representation of such actions is possible, only possible re-presentations. This affect resonates from performance-based photography as well, I think, but in collage it operates in particularly effective ways. I claimed earlier that my collages function as blatant matter-of-fact propositions, as un-negotiable and in many ways brutal assertions. While I maintain that there is violence and crudeness both

Vlatka Horvat, *Obstructed (I)*  
(detail), 2007. C-Prints. Image  
courtesy the artist.

Vlatka Horvat, *Opstruirano (I)*  
(detalj), 2007., c-print, ljubaznošću  
autorice.



in the collage's gestures and in the objectness of its iterations, I would suggest that when these crude and violent gesture are performed over and over again, generating series of blatant propositions, there is also a certain fragility to the process of – repeated and in effect, arbitrary – cutting and sticking of X to Y. A provisionality that speaks of an improvised set of solutions, of a process of "making do," which could not produce any other kind of image or a proposition than one that is ostentatiously temporary.

In that sense, when the collage asserts, as it does in *Hybrids* for instance, "I stuck the window on the head," and then follows it with, "I stuck the wheel on the head," and then with, "I stuck the faucet on the head," each new assertion intimates more and more a sense of possibility that the window, or the wheel, or the faucet could have been stuck elsewhere, or that

Vlatka Horvat, *One on One: Goal*, 2008. C-Print. Image courtesy the artist.

Vlatka Horvat, *Jedan na jedan: gol*, 2008., c-print, ljubaznošću autorice.



the window, the wheel, or the faucet might have been a brick, or a TV, or a hammer. On one level, the arbitrariness and the listing evoke a sense of possibility and multiplicity, as one arrangement conjures up the availability of other possible ways it might have been done, speaks of other equally strange or inexplicable combinations that *might be*. On another level, the apparent arbitrariness of decisions whereby things are merged together signals a disregard of a certain kind, which is a source of the collage's violence, as claimed previously; but is in my view a source of a sense of sadness, or brittleness as well – not only brittleness of the floated propositions themselves, but also of the act of repeated enactments of a gesture that insists on its violence.

I would suggest that there is an element of shock produced in the viewer's encounter with collage – any collage in fact – but for me, that response emerges “in two parts,” from two distinct moments of realisation: Firstly, a realisation of the body having been discombobulated or torn apart and then re-arranged: an unexpectedness of encountering a particular intervention, a shock (as well as pleasure perhaps) that someone would do *that*, think *that*, propose *that*; and secondly, a recognition of the arbitrariness of the intervention – the mounting feeling, as one moves down the line, that the re-arrangement of the body could have been done in myriad other ways. The first of these realisations – “the body had been taken apart and messed with” – produces perhaps a relatively minor sense of uncanniness – precisely because over the course of a series, the same gesture is repeatedly enacted upon the image of the body, and consequently, that particular gesture becomes normalised – as a *de facto* condition operating in the world of the work. It is the second realisation – related to a sense of infinity of possible ways and alternatives for such a gesture, as well as a sense of arbitrariness of these alternatives, compounded over the course of a series – that carries the potential to produce more resounding responses of dismay and horror.

Vlatka Horvat, *Out Lined (Figure)*  
*III*, 2011. Work on paper. Image  
courtesy the artist.

Vlatka Horvat, *Obrubljena (figura)*  
*III*, 2011., rad na papiru,  
ljubaznošću autorice.



Perhaps we can say that the effect produced here is not necessarily arising from what we can see or what is shown in the work, but from the sense it generates that there is something which is not, could not be shown, but which nonetheless lurks as a possibility.

What sorts of consequences might this sense of arbitrariness and listing of possibilities have for the viewer? We could say that the work hereby suggests that the world can be re-arranged and, in performing one brazen re-arrangement after another, it floats a frightening possibility that *other* – un-representable and perhaps unimaginable – re-arrangements are viable, or even inevitable. Perhaps the repetition of this ostentatious gesture also indicates that once you start rupturing the world, once you start making cuts in the paper, replacing heads with bushes, taking things apart and taking things away – that it is not possible to stop. That the dismantling of the world, or the dismantling of sense, of appearance, of *anything* – is endless and inexorable; the availability of endless permutations and possibilities producing an unstoppable momentum. To be clear – I'm not suggesting that

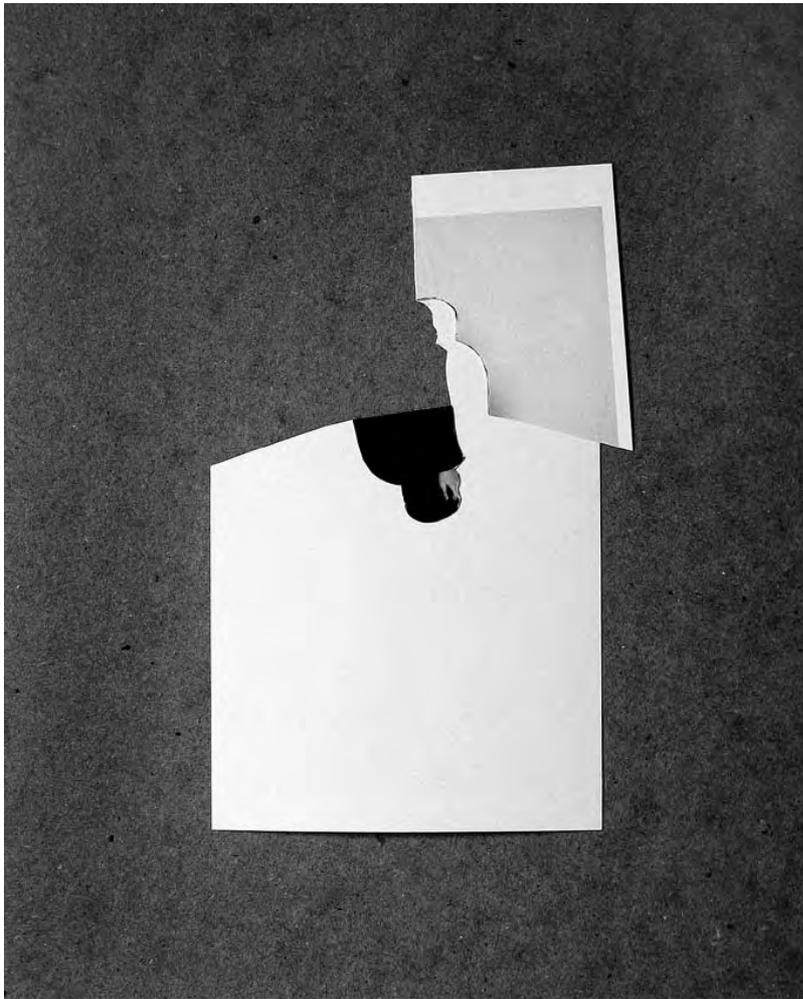


**Vlatka Horvat: *Rad dijelova* (detail), 2007., kolaž na papiru (set od 6), ljubaznošću autorice.**

**Vlatka Horvat, *Parts Work* (detail), 2007. Collage on paper (a set of 6). Images courtesy the artist.**

the possibilities I'm floating here are necessarily to be taken as singularly dystopian telltale signs, as there is in my view both excitement and terror emanating from the sense of endless and unstoppable possibilities for reconfiguration and change. The examples I conjured above might be seen as implicating various contexts of social, cultural and political activity – bringing to mind revolutions and upheavals, transformations of political systems and of social order, scientific, technological, medical and other kinds of experimentation and intervention, especially upon the body and life forms – all of them complex and intricate as movements / practices / dynamics, and all of them accompanied with contentious and jarring questions and consequences.

Perhaps all this is just to say that the collages stage a temporary, self-conscious cutting / joining / re-ordering / collision of parts and objects, images, planes and surfaces and present their "results" or propositions both as "facts" – a woman with a head that is a one-way street sign, or a head that is her own arm, or a head that is the "thing" itself; and as a kind of flaunting performance – a rupture, a rift that opens up multiplication of possibility. There is something grotesque and perhaps overly fecund emerging from the collages, which I don't think is resident in the photographs in quite the same way. For me, looking at the works on paper, *Anatomies* in particular, produces a particular unfathomable tension that is borne out of overly fecund multiplication *and* its incessant repetition: a tension between a sense of pleasure and a sense of horrific possibility. I find that there is something simultaneously exciting and captivating, as well as gruesome and frightening in the multiplication of arms and legs, in the infinity of options that are flagged but not exhausted, and in the suggestion of the seemingly endless possibilities of bodily transformation: beauty, playfulness, fecundity, life and horror of that, conjured all at once.



Vlatka Horvat, *To Go On (Around) (I) (detail)*, 2010. Collage mounted on archival book binding board (a set of 10). Image courtesy the artist.

Vlatka Horvat, *Nastaviti (zaobilazno) (I) (detalj)*, 2010. kolaž na arhivskom kartonu za uveze (komplet od 10), ljubaznošću autorice.

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