Vlatka Horvat
By the Means at Hand

For her project for the Croatian Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale, Vlatka Horvat has devised a structure of exchange between her and a large group of artist friends, who, like Vlatka, are "foreigners" in the places where they live. She asked each of them to contribute a small-scale artwork that reflects in some way on their experience of living in diaspora. In exchange, Vlatka sends them a new work made while in residence at the Croatian Pavilion, which doubles as the artist's temporary studio in Venice for the duration of the biennale. What nuances this exchange is that all the artworks travel via informal transport networks; instead of relying on official postal or shipping services, the contributing artists ask friends and acquaintances (and sometimes even strangers or social media contacts) to become informal couriers for the project. The artworks travel to and from Venice by piggybacking on existing journeys. They might arrive packed in someone's hand luggage, folded into suitcases, or carried in someone's hand.

As an extension of the spirit of the project, we invited ten writers and one collective working across art, literature, anthropology, performance, and political theory to each write a short text for this reader. Contributors were asked to think about the project with us, to find their own angle and focus for their text, and to reflect in whatever way they wanted on the themes or concerns *By the Means at Hand* raises for them. Some chose to write closer to the project itself, speaking to a particular feature of its structure or Vlatka's past work; others ventured a bit further away, to think through some aspect of their own practice or their ongoing preoccupations.

We are grateful for the breadth of their approaches and the diversity of their voices.

Vlatka Horvat, Antonia Majaca, and Kate Sutton, editors

by the means at hand

vlatka horvat

Door to Door (detail), 2012

Reclaimed doors

Installation view: "Good Life," the 53rd October Salon, at the former Geodetic Institute, Belgrade, Serbia

The Means at Hand are the Hands of Others

Vlatka Horvat and Antonia Majaca in conversation

As the artist and the curator of this project, both living in diaspora, we have each in our own practices been working through some of the concerns raised by this project. By the Means at Hand *is a new articulation of our ongoing investigations into systems of interaction and new relational economies between people, objects, and protocols. The following edited conversation arises from the long dialogue we had throughout the production process.*

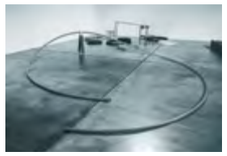
A. M. Vlatka, I'd like to start with a question posed by the title of your project: what are "the means at hand"? How does an interest in the economy of means play out not only in this project but in your practice in general?

V. H. I often work with what's at hand, in terms of what is around in a physical sense: reclaimed materials, found objects, detritus of urban or industrial processes, leftovers of my own previous projects. For me there's a politics in this—an ecological impulse, if you like. There's a tendency to recycle, to engage remains and residues. Alongside this ecological aspect, I often use the recycling of materials from a site as a way of shoring up or guaranteeing a dialogue with a context. For the October Salon in Belgrade in 2012, for example, I made an installation that reused detritus and materials salvaged from or around the exhibition venue, a former Geodetic Institute. Similarly, for the 11th Istanbul Biennale, I used materials found on site within a former school building; in Portland, Oregon, in a disused bowling alley; and for Malta Festival in Poznan, Poland, I staged a durational performance in what used to be a slaughterhouse.

Around About (detail), 2012

Various found objects and materials

What is "at hand" for me can mean what is already there physically, but it can also mean what is already happening in terms of systems or social structures. I often go back to Georges Perec's proposal from his *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (1974) that one should force oneself to look more closely—"more stupidly" he calls it—at the world. And to look again at any situation or material, even if you think you've seen it already. It's about stepping out of habitual modes of looking, getting past the kind of snow-blindness we can have to the world around us.



And Other Claims (detail), 2013

Various found objects and materials

Going into projects I often tell myself that all the information I need to make a work is already there if I look closely enough. Not that I'm already in the possession of that information, but quite the opposite, that it will have to be derived from the things in front of me. I need to make myself look and look again in order to get to the ideas I want to deal with. There's a process of excavation from my encounters with sites, places, objects, systems, or structures, as if each circumstance or element is a question I am first trying to form and then trying to answer.

Often, I am looking for "what can be done" in a particular situation, what demands to be done. I'm also thinking (particularly in relation to objects and architecture) what might things or sites want to happen or be done there. My process is a form of listening. Foregrounding or rearranging what's already there in a context becomes a way for me to think about transforming or questioning a place and its assumptions, using spatial reorganisation and intervention to make new propositions in response to what I have found, or to rethink social relations that might be inscribed or assumed in a place.

When I was first thinking about this particular project and a title, what I had in mind with "the means at hand" were these improvised methods of transporting artworks: the way the works have to piggyback onto other journeys. Now, a few months in, I think it can also refer to people, and not just infrastructures. The means at hand are the hands of others: the many hands involved in making works, and in delivering drawings to and from Venice.

The means at hand also invoke the feminist praxis of working with what is there, not being precious about working with broken tools, and "swinging it" in different ways, often against all odds... I guess this also has to do with salvaging, mending, repairing, and not least by the means of institutionalised friendship.

Working with what is at hand and coming up with improvised solutions is linked to conditions of precarity and scarcity: making things happen with limited resources. I'm interested in the reality of the restriction but also in the metaphorical potential of it, that idea of doing lots with little.

There's certainly a political inflection to my choices across my practice, in terms of materials, approaches, and forms. And I do think about this work, and my work in general, as feminist. In the sense of using the biennale not as a platform to articulate a single-author position, but instead to create an invitational, cooperative frame. The decision to create a network, a conversation. Also, in the sense that it privileges the quotidian, the idea of human-scale contact and dialogue over and above monumentality. In the sense that it fills a national pavilion with works of artists from all over the world. In the sense that it de-centres, taking or making a different kind of space and time. In the sense that the work is an evolving process rather than an object. In the sense that it has concerns with sustainability and recycling and with small-scale acts of making do, and in the sense that it deals with reciprocation, with one-to-one exchange.

At this point, we know a lot and, at the same time, very little about the project we are talking about. You are setting up a framework and inviting others to join you in making it happen, so there are a lot of known unknowns and unknown unknowns. You often use this methodology of devising rules and structures that host different forms of improvisation. In this case, however, there seems to be more at stake, not only in terms of the scale of the project but also in terms of an unprecedented trust in the collective effort, solidarity, and mutual support...?

As a form of social exchange, *By the Means at Hand* absolutely connects to ideas around trustfulness, solidarity, and mutual support; it relies on these structures for its realisation. The project activates small-scale human connections to achieve its goals, tapping into the daily lives and travels of many people who are currently unknown to me: friends of friends, strangers to me, who will act as couriers, bringing work by hand to the pavilion. In this way the project connects to the capacity humans have for making do. It's something that foreigners are often forced to do, to find informal ways to achieve objectives, circumventing official systems in favour of makeshift ones that operate through the goodwill and generosity of others.

Often my performative and installation works take the form of improvisations within structures or processes I've established in advance. I'm drawn to working in this way. There's a proposition made, a set of rules for how things might work or for how to inhabit the structure—and then, there's a leap in the dark....

For me the interest is always in the ways in which improvisation—innovating in response to restriction—produces new possibilities, the unexpected. I'm looking for the articulation, insight, or knowledge that one might not have been capable of reaching any other way. For some projects, I'm the one inhabiting and navigating these frameworks, playing and pushing to investigate what can be done; other times, I invite others to participate or contribute in different ways.

In a sense, the work happens in the zone between what's been defined and what's been left open, and I try to create a dynamic balance between these things. I don't want the structures I use to be too tight, so that what transpires is overly prescribed or redundant, but nor do I want a chaotic free-for-all. The cohesion and the pleasure of the work comes from a dance with the restrictions. The idea holds, the frame holds... but its presence permits and demands invention.

When I'm working alone (on performative projects like *This Here and That There*, 2007-2018 and *Unhinged*, 2010, for example) I often set quite severe restrictions or frames. I like the limits, not as a prison, but because they create a space in which I can be free. A space in which I can lean into particular questions and ideas. Even in this project there is a quite severe restriction for me in producing this large body of A4 collage/drawings—interventions made into printouts of photos of Venice I take with my phone. I know that these limitations will probably frustrate me as the months go on, but I trust that the frustration will occasion discoveries, new approaches. The limit and the zone of possibility are intimately linked.

It seems to me that this approach to limitations echoes in your openness to fragility, a quality at the very heart of *By the Means at Hand.*

Fragility is an important part of my practice. Many of my sculptural works, installations, and collages look provisionally assembled, like they're only temporarily held together. In some works, I invoke fragility by placing objects in precarious relation to each other or to their environments—balancing things on top of each other or on the edges of physical structures, places from which they might easily fall and break. My interest in fragility has to do with the material properties of objects and spaces, but it also works on a metaphorical register, as an index of the fragility of the world, of our presence in it.

Balance Beam #0715, 2015

Wooden chairs, wooden beam, various round and tubular objects

What interests me as well is that fragility or precariousness in the work makes for a dynamic performative relation with the viewer. Encountering works like *Balance Beam*, 2015-2020, or *Peripheral Awareness*, 2014, produces a tangibly different quality of movement from viewers, where the anxiety of the object in peril transfers to the spectator.

Other times in my work the fragility is manifested through the construction of these loose structures for encounter. I have realised several projects over the years that take the form of invitational frameworks, and there is always an element of chance or unpredictability built into the system for them. These set in motion different dialogic processes, but don't try to police the ways in which those processes will play out. The structures are fragile in the sense that they rely on the people inhabiting them to make decisions that somehow "look after" the structure, that keep it from collapsing or fragmenting too much.

By the Means at Hand is indeed a tenuous proposition, and its realisation in Venice depends entirely on artists accepting my invitation. And of course, beyond that, there are all kinds of external factors that will affect how the project will unfold. There are so many contingencies when it comes to journeys, to moving objects and bodies across distances and across borders.

Talking about moving objects and bodies across distances, we should touch upon the ecological aspects of using the means at hand. In the context of contemporary art, the means (including the ecological ramifications of international exhibition making) are often foreclosed. In your project not only is the ecological footprint of moving objects across distances subsumed by the movement of bodies that are already on the move, but their trajectories and logistics are fully exposed and given central stage in the project.

We do not use any shipping or freighting for the works in *By the Means at Hand*; all of our transport is parasitic. But the fact that we can realise this project with works coming to Venice from all over the world serves to underline the large amount of international travel that happens around a biennial such as this. We're all aware how entangled things are; even though our project doesn't generate any additional shipping, it still sits in a carbon-heavy context. What's important to us is that through its modus operandi, *By the Means at Hand* tries to encourage people to think creatively about sustainable, alternative solutions to logistics and production challenges.

One of the aspects of your work that I have always been fascinated with is how it is permeated with joy and humour alongside a sense of struggle, in different ways and forms of coming together. Could you speak about the role of humour in your work and how it informs and plays out in this project?

Reinforcements (detail), 2016-23

Wooden sticks, found objects, tape

Ground Coil (detail), 2011

Corrugated cardboard strips, electrical tape

Humour in my work often comes from the solutions or responses to difficult situations or limits I've set up. The restrictions I establish can be brutal in their way, and the means I give myself to work with are often deliberately impoverished. The humour and the pleasure come from the unlikely innovative solution offered into an unpromising situation, as well as from following a logic to its end. For instance, the unruly sticks taped together to "support" the ceiling in my work *Reinforcements*, 2016-23. Or my cardboard installation *Ground Coil*, 2011, which creates a dense spiral on the floor. As a sculptural intervention, it follows its own logic, spiralling out from the centre of a room until there is no floor-space left. In the process, it transforms from a circular form to a rectilinear one, an act of adjusting to or parasiting on the architectural container. There's a visual delight in the excessive presence of this floor-based construction. But it also presents gallery visitors with a problem, forcing them to the edges of the room, challenging the utility of the space. People standing around the sculpture have to move around it in a circle whenever someone wants to leave the room. The work—even though it is a static object—choreographs the movement of those standing around it, whose circling around the work in turn perceptually activates the spiralling form.

Thinking about *By the Means at Hand*, there is a foolhardiness to the project, and with it a form of playful irreverence towards more established or straightforward ways and means. Having to find someone who is already going to Venice in order to ask them to take a drawing with them in their luggage is arguably not the most efficient or expedient way of getting work delivered for an exhibition! But the roundabout alternative methodology in the project offers a critique of the normative; the everyday insistence on the efficient, the utilitarian, or the convenient is replaced by something at once more baroque and more human-scale. The project draws attention to, and celebrates, another way of being in the world—one that has or makes time, one that takes an interest in the company of the road and the pleasure of the diversion as much as in finding the quickest route to a destination.

And there is joy of course that comes from getting something done in spite of, or in dialogue with, obstacles and the Venice work plays to that.

One thing I think is important to note here is that the alternative forms of logistics that the project uses are already in operation around the world. The improvised transport methods at the heart of our project are established vernacular practices that people often use to get things to their friends and relatives living in cities or countries far away.

They are historically established practices born out of social dispersal, migration, and displacement, which typically happen for economic reasons or for social mobility. In this sense my work is about recognising an existing form of practice—something that already operates in a particular set of circumstances—and relocating it, applying it to a new context, in a spirit of mischief and upheaval. This act of relocation is another source of humour in this project, I think, in that its ways and means, as familiar as we are with them, are deployed in the wrong place. We're using the wrong tool for the job, the wrong method for the context. Where works typically arrive for the Venice Biennale via the expensive machinery of art handlers and dedicated shippers, there's a quiet subversion in the insistence that the works will arrive tucked in the hand luggage of someone's sister, aunt, ex-boyfriend, or work colleague who happens to be visiting for a few days. The improvised practice lacks the requisite seriousness and efficiency for the context of Venice, one of the most visible contemporary art exhibitions in the world. It's as if the project misunderstands the situation, and, as ever, there's a comic, subversive force to that quite deliberate misunderstanding. Earlier we spoke about the transport of works for the project as acts of repurposing, but for me they are also acts of "mispurposing"—which become a source of humour and joy, as well as small instances of resistance. Using wrongness as a strategy also serves to highlight the expectations and demands inherent in a situation. The "incorrect" approach to a situation produces tensions, which can help us see the ridiculous and sometimes violent assumptions that are often hidden in the habitual uses of a space or system.

The intricate spatial and temporal arrangements of many of your sculptural works strike me as a still shot of a choreography enfolding in time, a captured movement. Could this project be similarly read? The enfolding of *By the Means of Hand* is choreographed from both up close and afar: from the ultra-local Cannaregio area of Venice to wherever the contributing artists happen to be. Could you talk about the choreographic aspects of the project and how they translate into the formal elements in the exhibition space?

I've been thinking about choreography a lot in relation to this project. There's choreography of movement over geographic distances. Each drawing makes a journey, a trajectory from A to B, or from A to B to C, and it's tempting to imagine these journeys as lines on the map. I'm enjoying visualising these large sweeping movements: drawings and people coming from many different locations to a temporary focal point that is Venice, and from there going outward again, back to all the originating points. A two-way sequence.

Standing Wave, 2024

Used aluminium printing plates, stones

Then there are choreographies of bodies and objects moving together through transport networks, traveling together on trains, planes, boats, accompanying each other on their journeys to a shared destination. I'm thinking how people who have agreed to take works to Venice have taken on a dual role as courier and as temporary custodian. This morning I met with an artist who brought a drawing to London on the train to give to me to take to Venice. As we parted, she said, "I'm so relieved now that I've handed it you; it's now your responsibility." She'd been holding the drawing in her hand the whole train journey as she didn't want to risk losing it. I like imagining people clutching these flat objects they are transporting, moving across distances in this way as a body/object coupling, as strange dance partners. These hybrid human-objects are reminders of some of my earliest works, collages and photographs which showed figures (often my own body) merged with objects or elements of landscape. In the pavilion itself, we're working with a different type of choreography. I've asked all the participating artists to take a photo of their hands as they hand their artwork over to their courier. These images form a kind of a landscape of hands: hands interacting with other hands, always captured in the moment of passing packages between them.

These hands printouts are displayed on thin plywood zig-zag forms. I have for some time been working with what I'm calling "forms of ongoingness," sculptural forms that conjure a sense of continuous motion and that are associated with a transfer of energy

Wave Form I, II, 2023

Wool felt, thread

or information. In my research I have been looking at wave formations, visualisations of radio frequencies and abstracted representations of handwriting. As well as looking like a cartoonish spatial drawing of the sea, the zig-zag forms created for the pavilion also embody the dynamics of up and down, back and forth, coming and going, call and response. With their invocation of infinite unfolding, and of tides, they reflect the processes at the heart of this project while also expressing something about the experience of social migration, whereby leaving and returning, arriving and departing can be ongoing, concurrent processes that are sometimes hard to tell apart. (Though for some folks there is no going back.)

We can also of course talk about choreography in terms of the processes of facilitating social relations: the exchange of drawings being a mechanism that prompts meetings, that brings people together (in a physical sense at least). This aspect of the project is important to me. One can think about routes, trajectories, lines, and journeys, but there's a level of abstraction in this overview or logistics perspective. But the encounters between people are on another level: intimate, human-scale, unknowable. These kinds of conversations and meetings are inside the project but also exceed and escape it. The project does not try to capture or represent them.

What is the relation between the process and the different iterations of the exhibition one actually encounters in the space of the pavilion? Because in effect, you could say that *By the Means at Hand* also functions as a series of group exhibitions, as you will be selecting objects and presenting artworks from what, over time, not only will constitute an archive of the exchanges of artworks that took place, but will also eventually become an art collection (albeit, one created "laterally," by means at hand, with no money capital beyond the costs of securing logistics and storage.) You have insisted from the beginning that you view this eventual collection as primarily a remainder of a social exchange. Could you say more on that?

To my mind, we're not setting out to build a collection, but a kind of collection will emerge along the way as an outcome of the process. Works that invited artists send to me in Venice will be a central component of the exhibition in the pavilion. Over time they will form a growing archive reflecting on diasporic experience. That's important to me. But this assembly of artworks is not an articulated end in and of itself. My interest is also in the process: the conversation with and between artists, the meetings of artists and couriers, the journeys of the works.

The exhibition in the pavilion brings together different traces of these performative exchanges. It's envisioned as a continually evolving dynamic install. I will be arranging and rearranging the components as the project unfolds: as I make new work on site, as works by other artists arrive, and as my works in turn are sent out. This work is not a single static object, but rather a system in performative flux, subject to shifts in tone and content, accelerations and slowdowns produced by the ongoing operation of the project.

The gesture of rearranging of course arises from spatial restriction. It's a practical solution but one that I think has broader resonance. The rearrangement for me is linked to a rejection of the idea that things (relations, systems, situations) are ever finished or locked. It works instead with a conviction that the world—social space in particular—is reconfigurable.

The project produces an exhibition, an artwork made of artworks, but it's also on this other level an emerging network, a social sculpture. There is a form of togetherness in this, a small form of mutuality. It's not a political upheaval, but it is a dispersed activation of collective energy. As an artwork, the project doesn't describe this mutuality so much as manifest it, bringing it into material form in social space.

In a way, *By the Means at Hand* is itself a fluctuating form of alternating dematerialisation and rematerialisation not so much of an art object but of an artwork as an art exhibition, thus perhaps resonating less with the classic repertoire of themes and tactics of the 1960s and 1970s artistic practice, but rather continuing the lineage of institutional critique "by other means"?

I certainly have questions about the framework of the national pavilions, built as it is on the principle that belonging to "nations" is what rules our freedom, identities, and rights as well as on the idea that an artist can somehow "represent" a country. As you say, there's also a form of institutional critique developed in the project "by other means," linked to its insistence on process rather than product. In a high-stakes context like the Venice Biennale, one might expect an exhibition to be finished and complete at the moment of opening, and to stay fixed throughout the duration of the show. Instead, we have a process of continual flux; a fragile, unstable, ongoing exchange.

One of the things I've been thinking about in recent days is how, over the course of the biennale, this exhibition is both forming and coming undone. Works by others are arriving throughout and I'm continually making new works while in residence at the pavilion, and as each work by another artist arrives, I send one of my works back to them. So each arrival prompts a departure.

In a move that reverses the flow of works to Venice, I'm asking each artist to display the drawing I send to them somewhere in their city, however briefly, however informally. I'm thinking of works placed in the windows of houses or apartments facing the street, in the windshields of parked cars, on neighbourhood noticeboards, or on the doors of offices and workspaces. In another take on my fascination with unfinishedness, I'm thinking of the works I'm sending to people as echoes of the project that will crop up in other cities, out of context, dispersing the Croatian Pavilion and the exhibition to many geographic locations. I'm also asking artists to photograph my works as they present them in these disparate, remote locations, and to send me the images so that I can also document this dispersal in the pavilion itself. I do think of the whole project in terms of these calls and responses, actions and echoes across geographical and temporal distance.

I'm very much drawn to the idea of an exhibition as an unstable object. I like making exhibitions and works that change over time, that respond to the conditions in the room, that are affected by the passing of time. I guess I'm drawn to exhibitions and objects that require maintenance, that want you to check in on them, that need an amount of looking after... Perhaps it's because these processes make palpable the need for our presence. I tend to think of it also as a small way of shifting the power dynamics between me as a maker, someone with agency, and the exhibition as a "thing," an object of my doing and manipulation. Making an exhibition that will continually "want" something from you gives it agency; it places me as the artist and *it* as an entity into a dialogic relation, co-present in a shared situation. I'm reminded here of a line by the writer Donald Barthelme who describes the writer as "the work's way of getting itself written." It's a beautiful idea that shifts us away from an understanding of an artist as someone with all the agency and intentionality, and instead invites us to understand the process of making as one of listening, of creating as a form of call and response. I like the idea of the artist in service of the work, rather than the other way around.

I want to talk a bit about that invisible iceberg of actual labour of creating the structures and dealing with restrictions—in other words, about that which remains mostly hidden behind the joyful interface of spontaneity and improvisational immediacy. There is certainly the aspect of simply showing up every day, to receive and process the arriving works, to make your own collages that you will be sending to the artists abroad. There is also the labour of cataloguing, indexing, meeting couriers... How do you see the relationship of your own labour to the greater constellation of objects and processes that the pavilion hosts? You seem to be wilfully transcending clearly defined roles of artist, archivist, caretaker, invigilator...?

To See Stars over Mountains (01 January 2021, 27 January 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

As I said, I often work with rule-based frameworks and with durational structures, and those are often based on routines and discipline and a commitment, stubbornness even, to seeing something through. In a sense, *By the Means at Hand* can be seen as a durational performance unfolding slowly over the course of seven months. In this aspect it relates to my work *To See Stars over Mountains*, which was a year-long project in 2021 whereby I made one work per day for every day of the year. There isn't a regularity to the schedule here, though. The daily rhythms will be determined to a large degree by what happens: who comes in, what they bring. How many of my works I need to be making as the project goes along will directly depend on how many drawings by others I receive. The same goes for these other tasks: cataloguing, logging, tracing, printing, arranging, and rearranging. I imagine there will be periods when I will be quite busy with all the jobs, and some other periods when things will be slow.

Since I'm living in the pavilion for the length of the show, it will be interesting to see how the processes of making new work and of looking after the exhibition relate to the daily routine, to the rhythms of waking up, of going to sleep, of making food, of sitting in the garden. Of course, I know what it is to be making work at home, intertwined and entangled with everyday life, but this will be the first time I will be living around the clock inside and alongside an exhibition. I'm very much looking forward to the kinds of repeated looking this coexistence will allow for.

With more "static" exhibitions, which present more or less finished objects or artefacts, the preparatory work can be happily left out of the picture. It's interesting but not essential to know how a painting or a sculpture gets shipped! But in a project like this one, the preparatory work is part of the work itself. The system by which the works arrive and are exchanged is not an invisible back-room process; it is made explicitly visible. In this sense, *By the Means at Hand* is focused not just on arriving artworks, but also on the prompts, invitations, processes, encounters, exchanges, and journeys that get them there.

In 2023, for a project at the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, you selected artworks from the museum's collection and arranged them based on their formal properties to question, as you write in the accompanying text, "the affinity and belonging, order and disorder, and the criteria and framing involved in any act of grouping, organising, and connecting in the world we inhabit." You named the project *Good Company.* Your work for the Venice Biennale brings different "objects" into the room, but this assembly also includes original artworks by other artists. These objects are, in a way, subordinate to the vulnerable dynamic of their coming together, subtly destabilising their ontological stability and social status as autonomous artworks.

I've been thinking about these things a lot as I've been trying to answer some of the practical questions related to how the works are displayed in the room.

All the works that invited artists are sending to me are part of a constellation, but they are also present in the pavilion as individual artworks which visitors will engage with on their own terms. I don't think that individual works will be subsumed by the frame. I think they might rather gain something by being placed in this space of dialogue and relation. All works brought together become part of a conversation, one that explores

different people's experience of foreignness. It's true that the smaller conversations between different works sharing space with each other will probably affect how we see them, and that in different company, they might be read differently, but I think each will also retain its own resonance.

My work always in one way or another constructs and rearranges relations between things sharing space. Spatial relations have consequences for social relations; reorganising one impacts on the other. All acts of assembly in my work are interested in what happens when different voices, narratives, presences, histories, etc., are brought together and encountered alongside one another—whether we are talking about bringing together human participants or else, objects, materials, texts, images. These are questions about the sharing of space, but they are also questions of community, of belonging, of being together—and therefore social and political questions.

We have both been living as foreigners in different lands and different circumstances for decades. This is also true of the artists contributing to the project, as well as many of the writers in this publication. While experiencing foreignness is far from anthropologically universal, there are shared or at least relatable tools, tactics of survival, modes of living and joy in situations when "there is always somewhere else": when our daily life is determined by states of loose belonging, of being terminally liminal, temporary, transitional. I am wondering how these states might end up reflecting in the objects sent from different places in the world that will finally form this assembly. What are your expectations regarding the works other artists will send you?

In my correspondence with the artists, I've sent them a list of questions to try to anticipate those they might have about the project. In a way, these reflected my own questions—the things I felt needed specific clarity and nuance as I was developing the project—and one of them was precisely this: What do you mean by "diaspora experience"? My initial impulse was not to answer this question in any kind of concrete way. I didn't want to overdetermine what I might get from people, so I only sent a line or two, leaving things open to interpretation. But when pressed further (I pressed myself!), I made a list of some of the things I'm thinking when I think "diaspora experience," and I sent this list to the artists who wanted additional prompts:

Assembly Line, 2013-15

Various found objects and materials

> *I'm thinking about "foreignness." About migrations. About journeys. About leaving and returning. About the "ongoingness" of going that is part of the immigrant experience. About different reasons and different circumstances around going / leaving / returning / not returning. About ideas of home. Multiple homes. About social dispersal and family dispersal. About belonging and nonbelonging. About immigration and visas. About navigating structures and systems. About improvisation and making do. About borders and obstacles. About language. About translation. About invisibility and hyper visibility. About passing. About memory and forgetting. About displacement, about acts of repositioning, about everyday life. Thinking about solidarity, and about informal support structures. About limited resources, and about inventing ways to get by. Thinking about victories, big and small, and about failures. About giving up and about persisting. About lostness. I could also be thinking about the ways in which this thing of "being a foreigner" overlaps with other things: race, gender, sexuality, religion, class, age, cultural history, etc.*

One of the artists I met the other day said that she liked receiving this list because for many of the things it includes, it also includes their opposite. I think a lot about that space between a thing and its opposite—not in terms of dichotomies, but in terms of the vast space in between that they contain, that liminal space that we are trying to talk about with this project.

I'm heartened by the generous responses to my invitation by so many artists and excited to see the works people will send. I know they'll open our thinking about this project and its processes in ways we can't predict. I'm also mindful that the pavilion will gather a dense collection of works by artists who have very diverse lived experiences and perspectives. I'm looking forward to spending time with the insights and the thinking that will come from this dispersed conversation.

Hybrids (05), 2008

Collage on paper

It is important to me is that the artists I've invited to participate in the project come from different places. *By the Means at Hand* is a project for the Croatian Pavilion, but the logic whereby different people, their narratives, experiences, and works have been brought together to share space doesn't follow categories of national identity or belonging. Instead, we want to focus on friendship, solidarity, mutual support, and shared struggle as principles that bring (and hold) people together. As diverse as all the artists and their experiences are bound to be, they can all belong here to an extent, together and alongside one another in whatever states of similarity, difference, accord, and discord. I said earlier that this project is a fragile proposition because it depends entirely on people coming through. But for that same reason I think it's also a solid proposition because at the end of the day, what we can rely on is other people, and *By the Means at Hand* embodies that faith in the strength and steadfastness of human connection.

Standing Wave (detail), 2024

Used aluminium printing plates, stones

Installation view: "Only Ruins to Be Found" at Sainte-Monique Chapel, Carthage, Tunisia

like everyone who tries to leave forever

Anne Boyer

Alice Notley said “No one lives in a country,” so I said *take the chairs, take the books, take the house*. I was leaving America. Everyone came over then—took my lamps, my thrift store coats, drove off in my old car. The house plants that went away were taller than men. The country I was leaving had never been real. It was a Hollywood movie and/or an eternal war. *Everything is violence and everything else is money* and this is what we all had always known and said to each other. That we live is not an endorsement of life’s arena. We were there by necessity and law and the bonds of love and yet another twisted plot devised by the author otherwise known as fate.

We made altars to forgetfulness. We forgot where we put the altars. We put poppies on the altars. The poppies forgot themselves. Their petals fell off, then their seeds.

Goodbye, I waved, at the airport, to nothing in particular, like everyone who tries to leave forever.

In the file labeled “But what was my country?” the first sentence was “where we wanted for carrier pigeons, telepathy, messages beamed to each other in every form of light.”

It isn’t just love that teaches the pain of the fiction of the nation. This place I was from wasn’t so much a country as the opposite of Oz, a stand-in for rural misery. It (Kansas) was a sorry state of things or it was Kafka’s Nature Theatre of Oklahoma—an unfinished text of the sight unseen. *Amerika*, or, another euphemism for nowhere. “Kansas! Kansas!” wrote Ginsberg, “Shuddering at last!”

For years I engaged in a personal project of sitting cross-legged on a sofa trying to hold an aerial concept of empire’s internal ravages. I’d close my eyes and pretend to float over it, encompassing home in a warm and viscous light. I’d illuminate the gas stations, the gun stores, the graveyards. The bullet holes were aglow with my wishful thinking. So were the neighbors.

Then I went away and they went away with my garden shovels and spice jars. *Take it, take it*, is all I said. *Here is a bed for your daughter. Here is a bike for your cousin.* Take, too, the horizontal grins and eagerness, the fatal borders, the dazzling hustle of the dispossessed. Every vote is a vote for war. I was always a discontented child there, unwilling or incapable of acting like a citizen. “On my American plains,” Blake wrote in his Prophecy, “I feel the struggling afflictions / endur’d by roots that writhe their arms…”

My hands had memorized clingfilm, aerosol sprays, doll hair, soda cans, plastics. I’d hung around the libraries, growing inexorably alien. I’d written poems with the words “geography is not weeping.” But there was geography again, totally sad, its details forbidding cosmopolitanism. Mountains make claims for cool aridity. The plains ask difficult questions about grandeur. The coasts make their plea with salty air. Places only exist in particular.

No one lives in a country, but everyone lives in a texture. So we touch the moss and spy on the color of the estuary. To do so isn’t so much taking up with another country as trying to evade the idea altogether. The nation is an inhospitable surface. Borders

are the scars that war leaves on the earth. Logistics is mostly people, like my friend who drove me to the airport to witness my abstract farewell. We move, and we move things with us, and although I had grown suspicious of self-congratulatory softness, we needed the softness of these handovers so that we might endure. And though I had also grown suspicious of endurance’s valorization, to endure was required by all positive propositions of existence.

In the *particular*, the estuary is a solemn blue, the daylight turns to gloaming. A single smoker stands in shame and solitude on the cobbled street. I am always looking out of a high up window onto a city where no one knows me. My old friends send me photos of my old jars filled with new grain.

I can’t even imagine what it was like when anyone believed in the old future. In its place is the next place over, not time.

There is so much we cannot carry. The pang of missing a place is like a light bulb flickering. It should not mean much, only the death of that light.

Maybe a life could be like fluid poured from one cup to the other, as indifferent to country as wine to the stemware, as water is to shore. I was already only half-embodied and amnesiac. To move me should have been like moving a faint idea or a ghost.

I left. Then the wars came back, come back again. They don’t go away for anyone, only fade in and out of the spectacle. They are never not in some way American. They were my first memories and will probably be my last and in between it is never not 1990 with the desert beige tanks rolling on trains through the train tracks in my family’s backyard. Most of what I see when I close my eyes is the world’s gray ruin, *or* America, in abstract, always posing that question. How to leave what cannot be left.

To See Stars over Mountains (01 March 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

Deep Routes

Lara Pawson

The first I heard of Vlatka Horvat's idea for the Croatian Pavilion was, appropriately, through someone else. They'd bumped into her at a gig in central London by Australia's avant-garde jazz trio, the Necks. They explained how she was going to invite artists from across the world to send a work of art to her in Venice, only the art could not be transported by an international parcel-delivery service or a fleet of corporate couriers. It had to piggyback on the journeys of friends and friends of friends, neighbours, relatives, or anyone else the artists could trust. Hearing about this felt uncanny: I had just been a node in a similar network myself.

A few months earlier, I had been sitting beside the River Lea in north London with my friend Reginaldo. We were drinking strong coffee and chatting in a mash-up of French and Portuguese peppered with the odd word of English. "Do you know anyone in Cuba?" he asked. "Someone who might be coming to London, who wouldn't mind bringing a small box of cigars?"

My mind immediately turned to the only Cuban I'd ever known in any deep sense. He was a doctor who had worked in Angola in the late 1970s as part of the Cuban international-solidarity movement. He was sent to the northeast corner of the country to work in a small hospital. When a power struggle erupted within Angola's ruling party, he was forced, at gunpoint, to sign death certificates for political prisoners before they were shot and thrown into a mass grave. Their cause of death was recorded as "road accident." He watched as men and women—some, his colleagues—were executed. It broke his heart and his political faith. Whenever I hear mention of Cuba, I think of this man.

But that's another story.

Reginaldo, who'd left Angola in the late 1970s for France and later the UK, explained that he had an old friend who rolled cigars in a small factory in Havana. He and Disney had met several years earlier when they were living as neighbours in another corner of north London (the same corner, as it turns out, in which Vlatka lives). When Disney returned to Cuba, he told Reginaldo that he would send him cigars if they could find someone to deliver them.

Reginaldo winked at me. "This is why I am asking you, Lara! You know lots of people. You must know someone who is travelling from Havana to London."

The two of us burst out laughing—Reginaldo does suit a cigar—and I really liked the idea of being part of this impromptu scheme. I would do my best.

As the days passed, I found myself imagining Disney rolling his cigars in Havana. I'd never met the man, but I could see his nimble fingers and agile hands, his muscular forearms and soft elbows. I could smell the heat of the sun warming the building where he works. I could hear his colleagues laughing and chatting and the distinct sound of music from Mali coming from someone's phone, the flute inflected with a Cuban rhythm. I saw Disney smiling, remembering his friend back in London.
I asked around.

Within a couple of weeks, I'd discovered that a friend of mine had a friend who had a friend who lived in Havana. He was a Welshman. He was always flying back and forth to London. He might be able to help.

Questions ensued.

"What are the cigars called?"

"What did you say his name was? Elvis? That can't be right."

"Perhaps it would be easier if you just gave me the brand name and I bought some before I left—or does your friend only want the ones made by Elvis?"

"And, forgive me, but why's he called Elvis?"

"Oh, I see. I got muddled. Sorry. So why's he called Disney?"

"And how will I know that Disney hasn't accidentally put some weed inside the cigars?"

"How do I know if I can trust the three of you?"

I suggested he trust his instinct instead: "Go meet Disney and decide for yourself."

Two weeks later, the cigars arrived. We all agreed that the handover would take place at a cafe in London's Soho district. Reginaldo and I were early. We chose a table by the window, from which we could try to spot the Welshman. As it was, he wasn't what we'd been expecting, although come to think of it, I'm not sure what we had been expecting. He was tall and slim. He wore a turquoise pullover and was holding a thick brown paper bag in both hands. He placed the package on the table between our coffees and the glossy pastries on plates. Reginaldo immediately lifted it and held it above the table, bouncing it in his fingers, as if he were trying to establish the weight of a newborn grandchild. Then he put the package on his lap and opened the bag. Inside, he found a dozen fat cigars rolled in a page torn from *Granma*, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. Unwrapped, they looked to me like a bundle of dynamite, the sort you might see in a Walt Disney cartoon. Reginaldo was delighted. I think we all were.

The shared achievement felt rare. It had created a moment that we could all enjoy, a sense that—despite the immense cruelty of the world, the greed, the individualism, the fact we are facing a future that looks more dystopian by the day—we could rely on one another. There was a joy in being part of something so informal, something that didn't require any official stamp of approval or certified guarantee. We hadn't had to sign any forms or pay a fee to a government body or contribute to corporate profit. We hadn't had to exploit anyone else to pull it off. All we needed was trust and generosity, to be willing to help someone else and to meet a stranger halfway. It felt liberating and fun. I dislike this word, but the truth is, it also felt empowering.

* * * *

Kish-ee-kee-la! Kish-ee-kee-la!

I first learned about *quixiquila* in Luanda. It was 1999. I was in the air-conditioned office of a North American man. He was sitting behind a large desk, but he looked like a folk

This Here and That There (Poznan), 2015

8-hour performance in the Old Slaughterhouse for Malta Festival, Poznan, Poland

Photo: Tim Etchells

singer or a priest. He had a tidy beard and introduced himself as a socialist. After hesitating, he said he was a developmental economist. Most people would probably have deemed him an aide worker. I remember thinking that he probably wasn't much of a dancer and that he had very kind eyes. He appeared to be comfortable at his desk, which stretched between us like a vast American plain.

He told me that he came to Angola after Portugal's Carnation Revolution. He said he'd always wanted to be part of the movement for liberation. "I wanted to be useful," he said.

He spoke slowly and softly, and he did not stop. He talked and talked, and I was mesmerised. He was trying to help me understand how some of the poorest people in the country were managing to survive. This is how we came to *quixiquila*.

No matter how bad the situation, he explained, no matter how bad the war, the economy, the heat of the sun and the strength of the rains, no matter the sheer insecurity of life here, the market traders—all women—can keep going because of *quixiquila*.

This is how it works. A group of people, probably no more than a dozen, agree to pool their money. Each month, everyone chips in a little. Each month, one member of the group gets all the cash. They take it in turns. There are no guarantees, no receipts or "due diligence." *Quixiquila* is about sharing the struggle and sharing the survival, too. It is informal, and it is improvised. It is risky. It embodies trust and friendship.

Whenever I say the word *quixiquila*, I feel galvanised. It brings to mind all those Angolan women working in the markets, day in, day out, their pyramids of fruit and vegetables and dried fish and slices of soap. Even at the height of the civil war, in the most perilous of places, like Malanje, being bombed every day, the shells landing, killing and maiming, you could still go to the market in the centre of town and buy enough grains of coffee, rolled into a small ball in clingfilm, to start your day with the necessary kick.

The funny thing is, I had been reminded of Malanje the very first time I encountered Vlatka's art, which was long before this Biennale. As I recall, I was online scrolling through photographs of her work when I was struck by a particular series of images from a performance in Poznan, western Poland, titled *This Here and That There*, 2015.

These images show a woman striding across the stone floor of an old slaughterhouse. It has huge white walls stretching up to a roof made of tin. The woman wears a black dress. Her arms are swinging and her legs are bare. She is wearing a sliver of a shoe on either foot. She seems to be in a state of total absorption. She is walking up an aisle between two rows of chairs. They are the sort of chairs you see in lecture halls and press conferences, in dentists' waiting rooms and public libraries, in nail bars, pharmacies, cafes, coach stations, and banks. They are the sort of chairs you sit on outside the toilets of local authority buildings; which, as a child, you stacked at the back of your school assembly hall. But in this photograph, the chairs look like they are standing to attention. They appear to be showing their respect to the woman. She could be their god, their heavenly guide here on Earth.

In another image, hilarious and raw, four chairs are humping one another, bareback style, one on top of the other. These are writhing, sliding, fucking chairs.

In another, the woman coaxes the chairs into a spiral. Her long locks are swinging with the movement of her body. Everything seems to be in harmony. What is she whispering into their secret chair ears?

In yet another image, the chairs are spread out around the sides of a building. They are all facing the wall. There appears to have been a disagreement, an almighty falling

out, a complete breakdown in communication. The woman is standing at the far end of the space, her right hand covering half her face. She looks exasperated. She looks as if she no longer knows what to do.

In another image, some of the chairs are lying on their sides, some of them still standing but completely exhausted, some leaning on one another to stop themselves collapsing to the floor. These are chairs after a brawl. In another, the chairs are paired, face to face. I can't make up my mind if they are competing in a game of chess or participating in a speed-dating night. Perhaps they are trying to reach some sort of truce?

In another, the chairs are queuing patiently in a long line. At first, I wonder if they are waiting to vote, but the longer I look at them, the more I start to see starving chairs that are waiting for food. I notice the stains of damp spreading across the walls. I see the huge petals of peeling paint. There is plenty of graffiti too. But the woman—Vlatka—is always there, arranging and rearranging her chairs.

When I initially encountered these images some seven or eight years ago, I was reminded of a warehouse in Malanje during the final phase of Angola's civil war. The building was packed with starving people. There were dozens of women with tiny babies clinging to their sides, some of them pulling on their mothers' flat, empty breasts. I remember an elderly man who had propped himself up on a broken branch. There were children still with the energy to play, some of them chasing a wheel with a stick, spinning it across the warehouse floor. I was there to gather information about the conflict. I was there to ask questions of these people, who had fled their homes and their land, who had seen much of death. I was there to make notes to try to understand the impact of the war. But looking at these images today, observing Vlatka arranging and rearranging dozens of chairs over eight hours inside this old slaughterhouse, I feel encouraged to believe that that we might yet find ways to arrange the world differently.

* * * *

To See Stars over Mountains (04 May 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

It seems to me that *By the Means at Hand* expands Vlatka's radical determination to create works of art that not only disrupt the way we understand the world, but shake our perception of what we see as we move through it. We are living in a moment in which we know that the world is warming at an alarming speed. We know that environmental destruction is accelerating. We know that more and more people's lives are at risk and that more and more species are facing extinction. Tension is everywhere. We are in conflict with ourselves and with the planet. There is no escape.

This is precisely the strength of Vlatka's work. Her art explodes our imagination, allowing us to envisage a different future. Two years ago, she produced an astonishing visual diary, *To See Stars over Mountains*. She created it during lockdown in 2021, generating one image for each day. These were photographs with a twist. Mainly depicting her London neighbourhood of Tottenham—the one where Disney and Reginaldo met—she began by taking photographs of humdrum blocks of flats, tarmac roads, playing fields, streams, a canal. But each photo had then been doctored: drawn on, sliced into, glued on, disfigured. They invited dreaming, laughing, imagining. Sometimes they suggested fragility, sometimes apocalypse. Sometimes they offered hope. Most striking, for me, was their long-term effect. These pictures opened new paths in my mind. Wherever I go, I still see orange curls coming out of trees, curious mirrors on roads, cutups and foldouts that don't really exist. Except, now, they do.

By the Means at Hand suits the spirit of our time. As with much of Vlatka's work, the project comes with a kind of built-in precariousness. It could fail. No doubt not all of the hundred-plus artists she has invited to participate in this project will manage to get their work to Venice. There will be delays and there will be no-shows. There will be

To See Stars over Mountains (08 June 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

works torn by baggage handlers or perhaps impounded by customs officials. A drawing here or there might be spoiled by a burst bottle of shampoo in a suitcase or simply be forgotten and left behind on someone's sofa.

For every work that does make it to Venice, Vlatka will send one back via the same network. Again, things might not go as planned! Riffing on *To See Stars over Mountains*, she will be snapping and then remaking images of Venice. My imagination has already started dreaming up all kinds of things I might expect to see erupting from the city's canals, its ancient buildings and myriad islands, after they have been chopped into and coloured on and turned upside down under the artist's inventive eye.

Once, Venice was the most powerful city in Europe, its navy crossing the sea back and forth to the Middle East and Asia. With ships and trade came many different people and cultures. The history of Venice contradicts the story so many politicians try to sell us, that Africans should stay in Africa and Muslims stay in the Middle East and west Asia, that Europe is for Europeans alone. But people have always crossed the seas for trade and war and survival, blending cultures all around the Mediterranean.

When I think about this project, I find it impossible not to think of the people trying to reach Europe, fleeing conflict and climate disaster, desperately chasing their hopes for a better life. I find it impossible to unsee the people who are willing to risk their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas in overcrowded boats. Some of these people will never make it. Some will get held up by border guards or picked up by maritime authorities and sent back to the last country they passed through. Some of them will never reach the sea but die of thirst and hunger in the Sahara, be sold into slavery in Libya, or get shot by border police as they are wading through rivers along national frontiers or throwing themselves at exceptionally high barbed-wire fences.

By the Means at Hand insists on the belief that migration is reciprocal. One work of art comes in, another work of art goes out. Each piece is created by an artist who is living as a "foreigner" somewhere around the world. Vlatka's own history feeds into this idea. Venice is just a hundred kilometres across the sea from Croatia, where she was born and grew up. But her journey to this Biennale has been far less direct, taking in the United States, where she went to live as a teenager, and London, where she now lives with her British partner. On the journey, she has been an artist for almost two decades. If that makes this migrant artist sound rootless, her work for the Biennale shows just how strong her roots are, how far they reach, and how warmly they wrap around the world.

This Here and That There (Poznan), 2015

8-hour performance in the Old Slaughterhouse for Malta Festival, Poznan, Poland

Photo: Tim Etchells

This Here and That There (Los Angeles), 2010

8-hour performance in the Los Angeles River, Outpost for Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Photo: Vincent Alpino

Above Us Only Sky

What, How & for Whom / WHW

Vlatka Horvat's work often begins with an everyday object or, at least, objects that might at first glance seem ordinary. Sometimes she photographs these elements as they are; more often she exhibits them in arrangements as sculpture or installation, constellations that unsettle each item in some way. By means of these subtle spatial manipulations, Vlatka draws fragile yet consistent lines of connection between the objects, the space(s) they inhabit, and the social, physical, and discursive architectures that surround them.

Vlatka's interventions are careful and playful at the same time, exploring ways to transform her materials. She brings elements together, reuses them, or disrupts them to open them up to their contexts in new ways or break them free from their previous modes of being. Within her process, the things she works with take on a kind of auxiliary life, moving beyond their utility to undergo an almost alchemical transformation in status and purpose. Objects find meaning not in the generic identity they carry with them into a situation, but rather through a renewed or reinvented relation to the viewer that expresses a poetic underlying potential. Meaning in these works is elusive, and there is often a feeling that something is still emerging, yet to be fully realized. There is also often a sense of aspiration, as if the objects themselves might be reaching toward something—a state of being or becoming, something just out of reach, something that is *not*, or *not yet*. Through assembly, the artist makes objects support one another—leaning them against or propping them atop one another—and through these new spatial relations, we view them in another light, even if just for a moment. Her art can be seen as a way of both accepting and refusing what things are, perhaps also a way of both accepting and refusing what people are or what situations in which they find themselves are. It is this double move of treating things as being both true to themselves and totally transformed at the same time that makes the work so unique.

On the Up Down, 2013

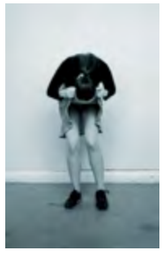
Reclaimed wooden planks, various found objects

There is humor in Vlatka's practice, sometimes even a little absurdity, but the core seems to us to lie in its openness to the potential in things that already are. In a time when the idea of the new is more tired than ever, and when the act of producing even useful objects must be weighed against the cost to the planet and all its life-forms, a focus on the tolerance and transformation of what already exists is something to be celebrated in an artist. Vlatka's ability to draw new possibilities from the context and material conditions of the world imbues her practice with relevance for both the current moment and the foreseeable future. Beyond her extensive dialogue with objects in sculpture and installation, her work seamlessly bridges the performative, the photographic, and the videographic, bringing together the personal and the political. Across these formats, there is a simplicity of gesture and composition that is in harmony with this idea of tolerance and transformation. Vlatka redefines social and physical constraints as fragile advantages and opportunities of sorts for invention and change. In project after project, she sidesteps or rises above the misery of frustration and (self-)exclusion that can sometimes overwhelm the relation many people have to the world around them.

Out on a Limb, 2003

Video loop

As curators, we have been lucky to be in dialogue with Vlatka for more than two decades. Our collaboration has followed a meandering path, like so many of the choreographies of objects and bodies in the artist's own practice. We have maintained a stubborn contact, sometimes varying in intensity and passing through different stages. This journey has found us battling obstacles and circumstances together in international biennales, in shows in our home in Zagreb, and elsewhere. The work and experiences



Hiding (detail), 2004

C-Print

we have shared, though full of gaps and fragilities, have always returned and renewed our energy for the struggle ahead. Every one of our now many meetings has been a source of exchange and support, and often—again as with her work—the outcome was not obvious from the beginning, as the results were both tangible and intangible.

Our first collaborations took place within the modest circumstances of our early years in Gallery Nova, a city-owned space in Zagreb. This is also where Vlatka had her first solo exhibition in 2005. Titled "Wrong Way," it showcased the wide scope of her practice, comprising sculpture, drawing, performance, photography, video, and writing. To accompany the exhibition, we produced a small booklet of her photo series *Hiding*, in which the artist depicted her own body in unexpected relations—placed behind or sometimes almost merged with different objects in her studio. Already at this early stage, the contradictory, doubled logic of her work was fully present, the act of hiding becoming an act of self-exposure.

For Example (detail), 2009

Photographs, drawings, collages

Through all these years of collaboration, we have witnessed how the artist's approach in both gallery and nongallery spaces continually generates unexpected and dynamic situations. For the 11th International Istanbul Biennial, which we curated in 2009, Vlatka made a set of interventions in a classroom of a former Greek school that had been closed when much of the Greek population was driven out of the city in the 1960s. Vlatka brought an aspect of that heavy history to life by focusing on what remained—the space of the classroom—which she emphasized through a repetition of some of its formal elements and architectural motifs. For her room-size installation For Example, she deconstructed other objects related to the classroom's former use, deploying cheap materials—pieces of foam, wood, cardboard, and glass—shaped into sculpturally striking compositions that evoked what might have been. Throughout 2016, amid a brief but destructively harsh period of right-wing rule in Croatia's ministry of culture, we collaborated for a series of exhibitions called "Your Country Doesn't Exist." Within this framework, Vlatka showed different versions of *Balance Beam*, a mesmerizing, tense sculpture consisting of a wooden beam laid horizontally over the backs of two chairs to form a makeshift bridge between them. On top of the beam, the artist placed various round and tubular objects—a ball, marbles, a glass bottle, a globe, a camera lens, etc.—in a precarious balance, a precious state of equilibrium that threatens to collapse at any moment. This apparent tenuousness lent a performative aspect to the installation, requiring viewers to be mindful of their own presence in space, as even a slight tremor might precipitate a minor disaster. The viewers therefore became intensely aware of their own actions and the potential consequences. If any of the objects were to roll off the beam, however, the gallery invigilator would have simply picked the elements up and put them back where they belonged, "repairing" the work without drama or blame. In that sense, *Balance Beam* is a work that—like many of Vlatka's recent sculptural pieces—requires ongoing maintenance and attention.

Who Come to Stand, 2018

8-hour performance at the 3rd May shipyard in Rijeka for "On the Shoulders of Fallen Giants," the 2nd Industrial Art Biennial, Istria, Croatia

Photo: Hrvoje Skočić

In 2018, we produced an exhibition for Croatia's Industrial Art Biennial called "On the Shoulders of Fallen Giants." For this project, Vlatka realized *Who Come to Stand*, a beautiful site-specific performance set at the entrance to 25 Maj, a former shipyard in Rijeka that had been corruptly privatized (was there ever a noncorrupt privatization?) and then asset-stripped until it was forced to close. The artist herself kept watch over the facility's proud, monumental statue of a strong shipyard worker holding a model boat in his hands. Vlatka imitated his pose, standing with a bundle of sticks that she had collected at a nearby building site. Over the course of eight hours (a frequent duration of the artist's performances in public space), the audience members were invited to bring objects whose personal or social significance they wanted to mark in public space and join Vlatka in standing to honor the memory of the workers. This vigil produced moving encounters with former employees of the shipyard who joined the performance, standing alongside the artist and the statue in a show of solidarity among bodies and objects in the past and today.

Ways Across (detail), 2022

Giclée prints on Hahnemühle Photo Rag

To See Stars over Mountains (27 February 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

Until the Last of Our Labours Is Done, 2021

4K video, 24 min

An aspect of Vlatka's work that has grown more explicit in recent years is her exploration of the generative possibilities of limitations, whether self-imposed or inherent to specific contexts, environments, circumstances, or ecologies. By amplifying existing elements already present in a site or a social setting, Vlatka draws attention to current conditions while suggesting the possibility of alternative outcomes. Her works invite viewers to scrutinize the relationships between different agents, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. In the context of the ongoing ecosocial crisis, Vlatka's approach to developing her own artistic ecologies is particularly intriguing. The term *artistic ecologies* refers to the "ecology of practice," as defined by Isabelle Stengers: a tool for thinking through what is happening that is inherently non-neutral. This concept resonates within our own practice, most overtly in recent exhibitions at Gallery Nova such as "Artistic Ecologies Every Day", as well as in our educational initiative WHW Akademija, for which Vlatka has served as a professor. In her own work, these new tools for ecologically led action and thought manifest in the micro-actions she has performed near daily over the past few years. These actions, which take the form of small gestures, personal rituals, and self-imposed tasks, become provisional tools and strategies relevant to a broader understanding of how artistic production can adopt a more ecological stance. Recent examples include the project *Ways Across*, 2022–, an ongoing series of photographs documenting makeshift bridges constructed from found sticks and planks the artist encountered during daily walks in a small stretch of woods, which she started during the pandemic. The result is a diary of sorts that records the traces of other humans with whom she shares the space of the city. Her ambitious 2021 work *To See Stars over Mountains*, which comprises 365 works on paper created daily over a year, and her video *Until the Last of Our Labours Is Done*, 2021, each explore in different ways the interaction of human beings, objects, and the natural world. Both works delve into the process of journeying, revealing it as an impossible endeavor with an unknown and seemingly unattainable destination.

However, the idea of unattainable destinations is not how we would finish this brief account of our collective relationship with Vlatka's work. If anything, the artist manifests an optimistic persistence and a sometimes almost obsessive drive to circumvent whatever obstacles she encounters with attentiveness, humor, and care. This relentlessly positive attitude is embodied by the piece she realized at the very beginning of our program at Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna in 2019, just before the pandemic shutdown. She installed a fragile ladder made of foam beneath a high glass ceiling in the main gallery's staircase, an obscure but appropriate place to try to attempt an escape. The title of the sculpture was *Above Us Only Sky,* and despite being unreachable and obviously too frail to support a human body, the improvised ladder leading upward seemed to signal that desire in her work to amplify, transform, and evade the numerous frameworks and structures that economy, society, and identity impose on us, so often obstructing a perspective that might include the sky. Just as in so many of her works, the sculpture created conditions to contemplate the possibilities of escape—from the exhibition, from the institution, from the confines of built space more generally—but also to consider the gallery in a different way: no longer as a site for the realization of individual artistic dreams, but as the shared imaginative exit/opening to something much more profound. In this way, and throughout the years, Vlatka's work continues to be an inspiration for us: always looking for the possibility to transcend limitations, seeking out the means of a sublime, poetic escape.

Restless, 2003

Video, 8 min

Balance Beam #0616 (detail), 2016

Wooden chairs, wooden beam, various round and tubular objects

Installation view: "Your Country Does Not Exist" at Galerija Nova, Zagreb, Croatia

Underwater Art

Massimiliano Mollona

In 1942, the German Jew Curt Bloch started an underground magazine from a tiny loft in the Dutch city of Enschede, where he was living in hiding from the Nazi police. Called *Het Onderwater Cabaret*—"Underwater Cabaret"—after an anti-Fascist radio broadcast of the time, the magazine used satirical poems, songs, and photomontages to poke fun at Nazi propaganda while capturing the brutish essence of the regime. Bertus and Aleida Menneken, the members of a local resistance organization that sheltered Bloch, smuggled into their home the necessary supplies for *Het Onderwater Cabaret*. Sourcing this material was difficult and dangerous and relied on an informal network of art suppliers, rubbish collectors, intellectuals, and artists who were sympathetic to the project. Each issue consisted of just one handwritten original copy; its small format enabled it to be passed around easily, handed over in secrecy, and carried in the pockets of jackets, raincoats, or handbags of its readers. During the two years he spent in hiding, Bloch produced ninety-five booklets, which circulated widely, each according to its own timeline, but eventually all returned to their author at the end of their "life cycle."

There are three extraordinary aspects to the story of *Het Onderwater Cabaret*. First, the value of the project rested not just in its artistic content or form but in its relational process: it created an expanded, informal, and underground network of suppliers, distributors, and readers who shared a common political agenda and whose roles fluidly changed and overlapped. Secondly, there was the sustainability of the circular economy on which the publication relied. Recalling the gift economy observed by anthropologist Marcel Mauss, the magazine inverted the logic of bourgeois art production. Its aim was not to produce an "object" with some economic or artistic value, but to develop solidarity and social connectivity at a time marked by brutality and violence. So, despite having very little or no economic value—a few pencils, pens, and second-hand magazines—*Het Onderwater Cabaret* ended up having a significant readership, precisely because, as with the "primitive gift," its value as an object derived from the connections it made possible and not on quantifiable or monetary standards. The third extraordinary aspect of *Het Onderwater Cabaret* is its affective register, particularly its satirical and comedic tone and epigrammatic form, which seem to clash with the historical experience of war and the Holocaust. Take, for instance, Bloch's poem "The Way to Truth," which suggests how to deal with Goebbels's propaganda:

> *If he writes straight, read it crooked.*
> *If he writes crooked, read it straight.*
> *Yes, just turn his writings around.*
> *In all his useful words, harm is found.*

I see this satirical register as a specific political position, a way of creating some distance from the tragic experience of oppression, through which the oppressors are seen for what they really are: a debased—banal, Hannah Arendt would say—form of humanity, rather than an unstoppable and superhuman force.

By the Means at Hand offers a similar vision of art as an undercommons: that is, as a space for the socialization of resources and imagination based on resilient and invisible networks of mutual exchange that operate at the fringes or under the surface of the mainstream art world.

Horvat's main installation will continuously transform, incorporating performative exchanges with a network of diasporic artists in which the artwork (as well as various other materials, such as documents, letters, and journals) will circulate by improvised means. Horvat will rearrange and catalogue the photos, drawings, and myriad other fragments of this extended conversation, together with her own drawings and collages, into an ever-expanding living archive embodying the diasporic experience.

To See Stars over Mountains (11 January 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

By the Means at Hand challenges several principles of bourgeois art. First, it replaces the figure of the artist as sole author with a loose collective of as-yet unknown artists whose identities and nationalities are unspecified but who share a common diasporic condition, thus going against the national(ist) framework of the Venice Biennale. Secondly, it subverts the standard temporalities and geographies of art production by proposing a process of art-making that fluidly unfolds across different possible locations and temporalities. Here, the artwork acquires a life of its own and even its own diasporic identity, traveling to Venice but also away from it, across different countries, to be seen not just in museums or art galleries but also "by improvised means": on the windows of the artists' homes, on their cars, or on the local notice boards. Thirdly, it sets up an alternative economic circuit whereby the pavilion becomes the epicenter of an expanded circular trade not just of artwork, but also of messages, letters, and documents, thus entangling the economy of art production within the economy of the gift and contaminating the bourgeois logic of art and profit with different kinds of attachments, made in the name of love, friendship, or political solidarity.

By the Means at Hand is an invitation to make art that responds to the urgencies and contingencies of our time, a time of war, ecological collapse, and deep economic inequality. But the invitation comes in a subtly irreverent register that opens a space of collective action by playfully decentering the rules of the art "industry." In this regard, *By the Means at Hand* reflects Horvat's own practice, in which she often assumes the role of mediator or bricoleur—the term French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss used to describe someone who performs the labor of the anthropologist.[1] She pieces together fragments of incommensurable lives in a makeshift and improvised way, forging a community that, mirroring the soft movements of the Venetian lagoon, coalesces around mobility and flow.

[1] Claude Lévi-Straus, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962.)

It is no coincidence that Horvat's practice often revolves around collage, particularly in her compelling work *To See Stars over Mountain*s, 2021. Indeed, for French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, the collage and the photomontage perfectly embody the experience of exile, displacement, and "freedom in transit."[2] As Curt Bloch was at work on *Het Onderwater Cabaret,* the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, traveling in exile across Europe, and unable to produce art that could speak directly to the brutality of Nazism, turned to these techniques, interspersed with epigrammatic comments, for a journal of his own, which he imagined as *Kriegsschauplatz*—a "theater of war." Used by the Dadaist to mock the propaganda peddled by mainstream media, the photomontage treated documentary evidence with a degree of skepticism, reminding the beholder that the brutality of war defied standard modes of representation. Or, to put it differently, that a mass of unrepresented subjects—often subjects living in resistance—existed at the edge or outside the representational frame.

[2] Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), 16.

Like Brecht's journal, Horvat's installation is a space of images in movement. It takes an intermediate position—not too close and tragic, not too distant and rational—at a time when generalized violence seems to stem from primordial and essentializing forms of cultural (racial, sexual, or ethnic) identification, if not from some other economic calculus.

By the Means at Hand responds not just to Brazilian curator Adriano Pedrosa's call to reflect on our common condition of being foreigners—as well as on the heavy colonial heritage associated with the national framework of the Venice Biennale—but also to the

material conditions of late capitalism, particularly as they are experienced in Venice, a city that is literally collapsing underwater, lashed by the waves of the megaferries, frozen by the capital of foreign oligarchs, weighted down by crowds of visiting tourists, and poisoned by the chemicals of nearby industries.

Beyond a playful reenactment of diasporic relationalities and ways of making, *By the Means at Hand*, as I see it, is a prefiguration of the slow process of human migration underwater, of the reckoning with the damaged political ecology of our Earth and the "heaviness" of our seas,[3] as well as an opening to new, more-than-human horizons, new potential alliances and lines of solidarity in times of permanent war, when it feels there is no ground left to stand on.

[3] See Elizabeth Deloughrey, "Heavy Waters: Waste and Atlantic Modernity," *PMLA* 125, no. 3 [May 2010], 703–712.

Reinforcements, 2016-23

Wooden sticks, found objects, tape

Installation view: "We Are the Center..." at Hessel Museum of Art at Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, USA

Ground Coil (detail), 2011

Corrugated cardboard strips, electrical tape

Installation view: "Vlatka Horvat: Beside Itself" at Zak|Branicka, Berlin, Germany

Anything Is Possible, Anything Is Still Possible...

Ivana Bago

What does it mean to do something by employing the means at hand, as the title of Vlatka Horvat's project suggests? If I wanted to write this text in such a way, would this be an easy task? Could I simply bend over slightly and lazily reach out toward the next thing that presents itself, the nearest cue that flashes its random signal at my exhausted mind? Or maybe it is the exhausted body; I am never sure what comes first. And what does come first? What is this thing at hand, and who's going to hand it to me?

Now I sound like a stereotypical lonesome writer with no friends, no one to lend a hand or point to something handy. It is true, I am a bit jealous of all the colleagues and friends who will take part in the execution of the artist's work, who will take photos of their hands, the same hands that will make the drawings and make sure they get safely to Venice, where they will become part of an installation that maps out the economic, social and geopolitical relations underpinning the project. But I am also relieved because, as a writer, I insist on being left alone so that I can nurture in secret my yearning for collective action, usually mediated by my longstanding commitment to researching the history of socialist Yugoslavia and its abandoned promises of equality and solidarity. In fact, I cannot even think about Horvat's project without thinking, too, of some hallmark products of Yugoslav culture that promoted collective ingenuity. The 1976 children's film *Vlak u snijegu* (The Train in the Snow), for example, tells the story of a group of rural children whose train gets stuck in snow on its way back from the city of Zagreb. Grown-ups prove useless in resolving the situation, as the children self-organize, collect and redistribute the remaining food resources, and use their bare hands to clear out the snow and free the train. The sung and rhymed refrain at the film's end sends out a clear message about the invincible power of joined—versus selfish and privatizing—hands: *"Kad se male ruke slože, sve se može, sve se može"* (When little hands unite, anything is possible, anything is possible).

Even if Horvat is not one of those artists invested in the reopened archives of the history of Yugoslavia and, more generally, socialism, her project for the Croatian Pavilion of the Venice Biennale activates some of the core principles inherent in the political and artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century: transnationalism, self-organization, alternative economies, responsible use (and reuse) of resources, the defetishization of art. It revives the neo-avant-garde strategies tested by artists and curators during the 1960s and '70s, when they attempted to transform the bourgeois institution of culture, to democratize art and free it from its dependence on national(ist) state building and the capitalist market. Ironic scholarly evaluations of this era have proposed that Conceptual artists—contrary to slogans about the dematerialization of art—never really wished to get rid of the commodity status of art and the art market.[1] This may (or may not) hold true in the West, but in Yugoslavia artists, critics and curators took the promises and premises of the "new art" seriously, which often led to disappointment, followed by boycotts or even abandonments of art.

Curator Želimir Koščević, for example, refused in 1972 to show in Zagreb the traveling exhibition of mail art, which premiered at the 1971 Paris Biennale, exhibiting instead only the unopened crate in which the works arrived, together with a statement against the further commodification and biennalization of Conceptual art.[2] In 1979, Belgrade artist Goran Đorđević tried to initiate an international strike of artists but received

[1] Alexander Alberro, Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 4.

[2] See Ivana Bago, "Dematerialization and Politicization of the Exhibition: Curation as Institutional Critique in Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s," *Museum and Curatorial Studies Review 2*, no. 1 (2014): 8–37.

mostly jaded responses, some labeling his idea as naive.[3] A more unusual strike—one *against* artists—was launched by Zagreb curator Ida Biard in 1976, when she informed a group of artists that her Galerie des Locataires (Tenants' Gallery), an independent space based in Biard's rented Paris apartment, would no longer collaborate with the alleged Conceptualist avant-garde because they had succumbed to the lure of money and the art market.[4]

Until the declaration of a strike, Tenants' Gallery operated almost completely outside the system of existing art institutions, using Biard's own living space and the streets as exhibition venues and international post-office boxes as a means for the transport of ideas and art. As many of the artists she had worked with—including Daniel Buren, Annette Messager, and Christian Boltanski—achieved institutional and commercial success, the labor and enthusiasm invested in creating an autonomous network for the production and distribution of art seemed to have only contributed to the mainstreaming of what had appeared to be avant-garde and transformative practices.

Expectations of a different turn of events could be labeled as naive, and this naïveté related to what could be called a specific Yugoslav position shared by the protagonists of these boycotts and strikes. Just as Yugoslavia tried to build its own brand of socialism by embracing a form of market economy that included Western capital, products, and aid, Yugoslav Conceptual artists embraced the postwar neo-avant-garde trends emerging in the West while ignoring—at least initially—their constituent and historical links to bourgeois art history and the capitalist market and expecting them to fit in with the different institutional structures and radically different visions of the role of art in socialist society. In his work *Sunday Painting*, 1974, which humorously merged Conceptualist practice with the folkloric tradition of naive painting, Zagreb-based artist Goran Trbuljak came up with the term "naive Conceptual artist," which could be expanded to theorize this "Yugoslav" contradiction as a kind of *naive Conceptualism*.

The irresolvable dialectic between the naive and Conceptual—to lazily reach out to a text I have already written—marks the opposite poles of the beginning and end of art; it marries "a childish belief in the magic powers of art" with "the hangover of the morning after, the languid sobriety and distanced superiority of knowing it all, a been-there-done-that-ness, an already-seen-that-ness, an it-is-what-it-is-ness," an intellectualist deconstruction of art's impotence that "cannot tolerate anything but meta-positions, art as the definition of art."[5] Similarly, Branislav Dimitrijević interprets Đorđević's international strike of artists as an act of both agony and anarchy in which Đorđević is simultaneously self-ironic and consciously naive, never even expecting the strike to succeed while at the same time organizing it with full conviction.[6]

This oxymoronic naive-Conceptualist structure, however, not only is constitutive of the practices of Conceptual artists in Yugoslavia during the 1970s, but could be said to mark the situation in which art practitioners who still choose to inherit the radical ideas of the past find themselves today. Everything has been seen and heard, the exuberant flapping of yet another pair of wings followed by their desperate, crackling burn. On the planet drowning behind the illusory backsplash of human genius and historical progress, we still call upon the same old "progressive" art to save the day and praise artists who heed the call. We identify the lesser evil of maintaining the same old institutions we know our avant-garde ancestors wished to burn. Would giving up on this naive-Conceptual insistence, and the claim that art does indeed hold a limited power and significance in at least some people's lives, amount to a healthy reality check or just pure cynicism?

Horvat's project makes me think about these questions precisely because it seems to be devoid of any cynicism. It embraces the heritage of naive Conceptualism—being aware of the limits of art yet insisting on its continued social value—which is not endemic

[3] See Branislav Dimitrijević, "Attitudes Against Art: Goran Đorđević until 1985," in Subjektívne história. Seba-historizácia ako umelecká prax v stredovýchodnej Európe (Subjective Histories. Self-historicisation as Artistic Practice in Central-East Europe), ed. Daniel Grúň (Bratislava, Slovakia: VEDA, 2020).

[4] See Ivana Bago, "A Window and a Basement: Negotiating Hospitality At La Galerie Des Locataires and Podroom—the Working Community of Artists," ARTMargins 1, nos. 2–3 (2012): 116–46.

[5] Ivana Bago, "Mono. Looking. Glass. Door. Hole: Naive Conceptual Artist as the Gatekeeper of Art," in *Goran Trbuljak: Before and After* Retrospective, ed. Tevž Logar (Berlin: gurgur editions, 2018), 216.

[6] Branislav Dimitrijević, "(Ne) mogući umetnik. O nestvaralačkim istraživanjima G.Đ." ([Im]possible artist. On non-creative research by G.Đ.), in *Protiv umetnosti. Goran Đorđević: kopije 1979–1985* (Against Art. Goran Đorđević: Copies 1979–1985), eds. Jelena Vesić, Branislav Dimitrijević, and Dejan Sretenović (Belgrade, Serbia: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014), 44.

to socialist Yugoslavia but which nonetheless emerged with a particularly clear outline precisely there. Like Biard in her rented Paris apartment in the early 1970s (where she lived as a Yugoslav immigrant), Horvat in *By the Means at Hand* takes on the role of a tenant, merging life and work while maintaining her daily presence at the exhibition space, tending to people and objects that find their temporary place there. Also like Biard, she uses alternative networks to bring these people and objects together in a temporary home, while gesturing toward their originary homelessness and, by extension, a world in which we are all no more than tenants, even if the law tries to convince us that we are owners (or, in the case of artistic labor, authors). And while the project's title—or, rather, my opportunistic reading of it at the beginning of this text—gives the impression that all of this is just playful, handy, and easy, the realization of *By the Means at Hand* necessitates an ongoing commitment to a labor of attention, affection, and care. The kind of work that our societies depend upon but that is rarely acknowledged or rewarded: "maintenance art," as artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles aptly called it, a genre historically assigned to women. Biard's Galerie des Locataires was again another example of this.

Biard did this work while creating a self-organized, transnational, autonomous space, avoiding the reach of both the state and the market, as well as high visibility and the (art) crowd. Horvat, by contrast, takes an even greater leap of faith by choosing to do this work at the national pavilion of the Venice Biennale—an antiquated institution whose skeleton can be examined to find proof of almost everything that is wrong with the world today, not least the reaffirmation of geopolitical borders, war, and nationalism. There is more than some irony in this, as there is in the accidental fact that the artist's last name itself—*Horvat*, an older version of *Hrvat*, which is Croatian for "Croat"—is a form of national representation, marking her simultaneously as an "ideal" representative of Croatia, where she no longer lives, and as a foreigner in her current home of London. But all these ironies and contradictions are, again, countered by the genuine attempt to test the possibility of doing this kind of project in the place that seems the most unfit for it. It remains to be seen what monstrous and wondrous stuff comes out of it all!

Twos (detail), 2023

Various objects

Installation view: "Vlatka Horvat | Simon Callery" at annex14, Zurich, Switzerland

With the Sky on Their Shoulders (01), 2011

Inkjet photo collage

A Crowded Room

Giulia Palladini

For almost a century now, Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) has offered a powerful meditation on authorship, directed at someone who is read by the world—who finds a voice within it—as a female subject: someone historically destined to venture surreptitiously into the uncertain space of creation, someone whose place at a desk or in the studio was never granted in advance.

We shall call this someone a woman, although "woman," here, is simply the name we give to a subject affected by the long-standing historical complex of social circumstances that has made it less easy for certain bodies to close a door, to be unavailable to the world for a while, to inhabit with no guilt the pleasurable idleness and inspired solitude in which creation may occur. Or at least, someone less likely to consistently exercise the "sheer egoism" that, according to George Orwell, is an essential quality for an artist. Sheer egoism, inspired solitude—this is the grammar of authorship we have inherited from centuries of male writers. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* issues a direct challenge to this closed model of creation, insisting that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice."[1]

[1] *Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1935), 97.

We have evoked *A Room of One's Own* with our pens in the moments that we have dared to put our thoughts in writing or ink onto paper; to put creation at the center of our labors, closing the door and dedicating ourselves to production in whatever form it ends up taking. And yet the reality has often been that acts of creation have happened not in a room of one's own, but rather in a condition of crowded solitude.

Indeed, if we look, we find creative labor to be intertwined with the mess of life itself: broken relationships, broken languages, broken pipes in the bathroom; precarious jobs and rent to be paid; pregnancies to be avoided, the upheaval of the arrival of a child, miscarriages one needs to carry to term, then purge from one's body; things to be washed and washed again; struggles to find "a room of one's own," as if we humans had a right to solitude. The labor of creation, in other words, has never been separate from the continuous attending to the impossible demands that life makes of everyone, let alone women, who have historically happened to bear the heaviest burden within patriarchal societies.

If Woolf's argument deals primarily with authorship's specific material conditions—in order to write, a woman needs money and a room with a lock on its door—she also suggests throughout that authorship should by no means be the product of "a damned egotistical self."[2] Taking seriously her invitation means questioning whether a room of one's own is still an appropriate image for the experience of authorship in the current moment, let alone one we want to pass on to the future. What if the very capacity to write from within crowded rooms was in fact not a predicament but a resource for thinking authorship alongside, and in a tender entanglement with, the burdens and delights of social reproduction? What if it is in a crowded room, rather than in a room of one's own, that we decide that authorship is more livable, more porous, more like the life we want to have and bring about in our work?

[2] *Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harvest Books, Harcourt, 1973), 23.

Maybe some creative labors have been sustained by acts of others: looking over the translation of texts; lending us a computer when ours had broken minutes before a deadline; allowing us to sleep in their flat when we were in need of housing; preparing us breakfast after a night of work; buying us paracetamol when we are feeling sick; agreeing to help transport an object from one place to another as informal couriers. These labors have been interrupted and informed by knocks at the door; by friends' comments or complaints; by little noises, both familiar and strange. They have become entangled with the reproduction of a world, which has affected us and was affected by us in turn.

I imagine this embodied experience of authorship somehow nesting within Vlatka's studio: the place in which she first plotted the contours of the room she will take as her own in Venice for the Biennale. Even within that solitude, she could not help but wish to bring inside all the burdens and the delights, the wonder and the fatigue of living and working in crowded rooms. More than that: she decided to build a room that is crowded not only with work by her friends and colleagues, but also with their gestures of proximity at a distance. This creative interweaving of relations is the very substance of Vlatka's authorial gesture.

Authorship acquires a different aspect if thought in relation to its hidden, yet vital, etymological link to the verb *augere*, which means to augment, to increase. Increasing is not quite the same as reproducing. It describes an enhancing of, an adding to the world. It could also mean making space, through creative practice, for the world's plural imagination of itself. The image of a crowded room is not just a representation of the conditions in which creative practices take place. It is also a reminder that the places in which authorship can be exercised—for a woman, for someone who has no room to sit in—are very often not cordoned-off spaces but human environments. The crowded room is the suggestion that one may dare to think of oneself as an author even when there is no room to rely upon, let alone a lock to secure one's autonomous creative time.

When I think of the crowded room as a possible horizon for the territory of authorship, I think of a sixteen-year-old girl in a hijab and a long dress decorated with flowers. She is standing in the dust of a camp beside white tents and a line of clothes hung to dry. She is called Nour Alnaji. She appears on the screen of my phone, but she is in Gaza. She has been displaced from her house and managed to bring only her notebooks with her, abandoning most of her books. Every day, she reads her poetry and she sings, recording and broadcasting herself to the world. She describes her struggle to be a writer in a moment when her people are being exterminated, when all the rooms she had once dreamt of inhabiting have been destroyed. She reaches me in a crowded digital room. She is not within reach. Yet I wonder whether it is the crowded room of which I am part, following her from afar, that makes it possible for her to keep daring to be an author, even amid all this death and destruction. Her capacity to write on the ruins makes me wonder whether we still need locks for our doors. Maybe, instead, we should recognize the possibility of authorship as a technology for increasing the world: transforming ourselves into chambers of resonances for the crowds that surround us.

Gathering (detail), 2023

Assorted furniture, assorted textiles, cotton twine

Installation view: "Vlatka Horvat: Drawn Close" at Phoinix, Bratislava, Slovakia

Celestial Connections

Aleksandar Hemon

In January 1992, I left my hometown of Sarajevo for a trip to the United States. I was supposed to return on May 2 of that same year, but that was the day the siege fully closed around the city. I did not fly out of Chicago and started my next life there. I watched the war and the siege on TV or received the news by word of mouth, or in random calls from a satellite phone some of my friends had access to, or via letters bearing stamps from France, Italy, or the United States that had been smuggled out by the foreigners who could travel. Every instance of communication with a friend under the siege could've been the last. A few occasions, I sent packages with some journalists or people going back in through the Tunnel, the sole lifeline for the besieged city, though there was always the possibility that the package would not arrive in time. The war lasted through early 1996. I returned to Sarajevo in the spring of 1997, but I would never live there again. My life was now fully split into the irretrievable before and the diasporic after.

In the before, I had a band called Strajder, which I started with Goran Marković. We had been friends since first grade. Music had always been our strongest bond. The band dissolved after I discovered the many benefits of having a girlfriend, not least the regular sex. During the subsequent three decades in America, I did not play or make any music, save for the occasional Beatles' song strummed on an acoustic guitar for my daughters. Goran ended up in California, where he kept up his guitar playing and performed with some jam bands and friends from work. We were in touch off and on; we talked on the phone, and I would see him on my West Coast book tours, but we never talked much about music, let alone made any together. Simple state-of-life conversations were the order of the day. It seemed that in the after—after we'd stopped playing music—our friendship lapsed into a kind of dormancy. I was a full-time author and professor now, listening to music nonstop but no longer making it.

But then came 2020. I was teaching at Princeton University, which had emptied out with the arrival of the coronavirus. My career as an author was indefinitely suspended—no travel, no readings, no conferences, all readers preoccupied with the new disaster, which was fully compounded by the advance of violent trumpism. An ocean of anxious time stretched itself before me. And so I acquired an electric guitar, an amp, and three pedals. At first, I would just sit in the bedroom with headphones on and improvise over looped riffs, which provide little comfort or relief. Then I developed an urge to start recording tracks. I did not understand it then, but now it is clear to me that the hunger for producing music was my way of dealing with my separation from other people. Aware that the unfolding catastrophe was splitting time into a new before and after, I needed to make something for that after, assuming that we—or at least *someone*—would survive to see it.

While the common (bourgeois) concept of literature is that of the writer's isolated mind communicating with the reader's solitary mind, music is inescapably communal, perpetually generating its own networks of experience, collaboration, influence, and signification. It is biologically determined as well, since the human body naturally produces sounds and beats—there is no culture in the world without music. Moreover, like all art, it implies and necessitates the presence of other people in the world. Music is always made for others, and/or with others; even if you're playing alone in your bedroom, music creates space for the presence of other people, presupposing a future in which they might be able to engage with it in a communion of shared experience. I believe that the roots of music lie in the human practices of prayer and dance, both of which

can carry people down the path of transcendence. All art is inherently utopian, as it is always addressed to a time when the present limits—be they loneliness, displacement, suffering, mortality—are surpassed. Though no one who knows me would describe me as hopeful or optimistic, whenever I produced music, I'd have a vision of people dancing—bodies in the same space, inhabiting the joy—in some post-pandemic, post-trump time.

And so I set out to learn how to produce music on my computer. Some of it I gleaned from YouTube videos, but I learned the most from a former Bosnian refugee who now works as a psychiatrist in Washington, DC, and was producing music in his basement "for his own soul" (as the Bosnian idiom goes), which evidently needed to connect to other souls, mine included. Out of the blue, I contacted Goran and asked if he wanted to join my hopeful and hopeless (financially, professionally) music project. He and I had always had rather different musical taste, but there was enough overlapping for us to share a referential field and exciting arguments. While he was never particularly fond of dance music, he still said yes to my invitation instantly, and our dormant friendship snapped into full wakefulness. I sent him the demo I had ready, and at his home in Seaside, California, he recorded the guitar parts for a track called *Howdy, Hand of God!* The title refers to a story about Beethoven conducting his Ninth Symphony. After a triumphant performance, the crowd gave a standing ovation, but Beethoven, by then completely deaf, could not hear any of it, so a singer (a soprano, I imagine) touched him to turn him around and face his exhilarated audience. I believe that touch was holy—the first and the most intense contact between the ecstatic space of music and the audience, the others. *Howdy, Hand of God!* was the first single Cielo Hemon—as I decided to call my music act—released. On the cover, there was a picture of a nuclear explosion: precisely the kind of divine touch that splits the world into a before and after.

From there, Cielo's musical network grew, spreading to co-opt a sound engineer in Sarajevo; cover-design artists in California, Illinois, and Switzerland; and visual artists who produced music videos in Bosnia, Germany, New Mexico, Missouri, and Japan. In the before, music could be made only with the people who were in the same room as you—that's how Strajder, my before band, had worked. What has changed in the after is not only that a technology has emerged that allows one to be in real-time creative communication with others across continents, but also, and more importantly, that the displaced people—the ever-expanding diasporas—could now synchronously experience the joy of music or art that related to their (dis)position in the fractured world. Today, after four years of producing music, Cielo has forged not only quite a few beats, grooves and sounds, but also a vast network of friends and collaborators, some of whom I have still met only on Zoom. There are even some listeners spread around the globe: Sarajevo, Chicago, Hanoi, Karachi, Lima, New York, Milano, Budapest, Cologne, etc. The true triumph, however, is in the communal process of making something out of nothing, in constructing and maintaining a network bound by the music. Together, we strive to emerge from the before by way of the music made for those who will live in the after, perhaps even for us, in a different, hopefully better world.

To See Stars over Mountains (13 November 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

Mesh of Relations

Harun Morrison

Certain strategies and tactics emerge as creative counterpoints integral to particular communities' survival in grey and black economies, postwar economies, cities where state or municipal infrastructures have collapsed to the point of nonusability, and places that are systematically exclusionary of certain ethnicities and socioeconomic groups.

Many such tactics may be used in less urgent contexts, within more day-to-day logics of getting by. But what happens when one dislocates these tactics from the streets to the realm of contemporary art?

Vlatka Horvat's playful invitation calls for artists living outside their home countries to share artworks in exchange for her own. These artworks are ferried across a network of participants by hand. Contributions from so-called "foreigners" find a home in Croatia's national pavilion, while Vlatka's body of work is intentionally distributed across multiple countries and time zones far beyond Venice. The pavilion puts on display not only the objects it contains but also processes of exchange and transfer that veer from the standards of the most commercialised zone of the art market (i.e., professional art handling and logistics firms and high-value object insurance). That this dispersal is coordinated for an exhibition context—a context that typically centralises artist and their own work—is exemplary of Vlatka's practice at large.

To pass something from hand to hand in an age of barcoded packaging, online ordering, and Amazon lockers at petrol stations is to wilfully swim against the tide of smooth, semiautomated, monitored and surveilled distribution. I say "semiautomated" here only to recognise efforts of the human Deliveroo driver or Uber courier. That is not to say these individuals are outside of the computerised. They *are* in the program but outside the software, albeit subject to its protocols. In other words, they give up their agency for prescribed periods of times (i.e., their shifts) to function in certain mandated ways.

The techno-solutionist city aspires to be a smart phone, or if it can't become a phone, then at least an Apple Park campus. Smoothness is the presiding quality of the fantasy of the "smart" future city: a fantasy of objects and people in automated Teslas circulating with the dreamy ease of a finger gliding across the glass of a touchscreen.

At the same time, the movement of smaller artworks (works that cannot be read as such at customs and border control because of the everydayness of their constituent parts, or that can be believably labelled as something else considered to be of less value) through such hand-to-hand exchanges has long been part of the informal circulation of work for artists without the financial means to circulate them otherwise. Like other forms of unpaid or low-paid labour (including self-exploitation) in the art world, these countermanoeuvres are a product of the financial unsustainability of many artists' practices. Perversely, such countermanoeuvres in turn are what allow many institutions to be sustainable, or at least enhance their capacity to function.

*

While new cities and corporate districts are being constructed with an eye toward this frictionless phantasia, there are also cities that defy it and specific communities that are excluded from its promises. In his 2004 essay "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg," the urbanist AbdouMaliq Simone writes of cities that are

"characterised by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These intersections, particularly in the last two decades, have depended on the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure—a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city."[1] In this context, he goes on to outline the notion of "people-as-infrastructure": "which emphasises economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life." Although Simone's reference point is the Johannesburg of twenty years ago, we can draw parallels between his description of these intercity logistics (rather than the demographics and geography) and his articulation of people-as-infrastructure and the circuits animated by Vlatka's artwork: not the discrete artworks being passed around by hand, but the mesh of relations itself. This exhibition context enables us to abstract and scrutinize the notion of people-as-infrastructure, decoupled from questions of livelihood.

[1] AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg." *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407-8.

*

Demodernisation is typically theorised as happening in specific places: say, across industrial towns in the post-Soviet landscape or among the collapsed factories and their interdependent workforces in cities like Detroit. It is the violent reaction to extractive growth elsewhere. There is a point where the hand-to-hand distribution tactics used by groups navigating the demodernised urban spaces across Europe begins to mirror the tactics of the informal socioeconomic cityscapes of Havana (I'm thinking here of *el paquete semanal*, Cuba's offline digital-media-circulation system, based on in-person file sharing, which was introduced to me by Nestor Siré) or the Johannesburg that Simone describes. At the same time, there are many kinds of precariat, and they shouldn't be confused. While the displaced artist can experience conditions of making do similar to those of an unregistered migrant worker, they can also potentially have different levels of agency and access, even within the same cities.

By the Means at Hand shares conceptual space with *Feral Trade*, 2003–, an informal trade network initiated by artist and economist Kate Rich. Whereas this project initially focused on the movement of consumable goods distributed based on the multiple addresses of those in this network, *By the Means at Hand* has the Croatian Pavilion function as a centralising, a kind of temporary port city within the historic port city that is Venice. In this context, the functionality of a project like *Feral Trade* is replaced with a set of ludic exchanges and as yet unknown outcomes. This brings to light the value of indirectness. We are being asked to deprioritise and efficiency so as to be open to other values that come with taking the long route home. This can extend to the structure of a text.

*

Many years ago, a friend made a small maquette for me, about the size of a cake. Rushing to leave a taxi, I left this maquette in the boot of the car. The taxi circulated the artwork around the city for several hours. Eventually, I was able to contact the taxi controller, who contacted the driver, and the work was returned. Through this small mishap, an adventure had been visited on the life of this object to which I will never be privy. This, of course, does not change the formal qualities of the sculpture, but it did affect how I felt about some experience of the object had been locked away from me, kept to itself. *By the Means at Hand* pries open our imagination around an object's biography before its arrival to us. This is all the more poetic in the age of the trackable or self-tracking object, of objects without privacy.

Vlatka Horvat instigates or collectively conjures an artwork through inconvenient means. Inconvenience is a necessary by-product of degrowth; it urges one to find

a different value in the difficulty and duration of processes, rather than consuming energy and producing waste unthinkingly. *By the Means at Hand* constitutes itself slowly, as a plurality of movements, of hands, of exchanges, of cities, of friendships that coconstitute the eventual material outcomes, objects laden with stories of their own arrival. This choreography of many hands reminds us of the wonder contained in the simplest of questions: How did these particular things come to be side by side in this room? Vlatka's work gifts visuality to a set of clandestine or less observable actions and networks. Here materials are gathered by refusing the shortest distance between two points. *By the Means at Hand* incorporates nonlinearity, cultivates happenstance, rejects totalising and courts the unpredictable... What could go wrong?

And Counting (Five), 2011

Modified clock, modified wooden rulers

Peripheral Awareness, 2014

Wooden table, various round and tubular objects

Installation view: "Vlatka Horvat: According to Plan" at MMC Luka, Pula, Croatia

Correspondances (notes for a minor choreographic)

Noémie Solomon

I

Dear Vlatka,

As I write to you, I begin noticing the hands moving across the keyboard. The leaps and coordinated actions of a group of fingers working in concert to form a word or a sentence; the stutters and long hesitations of a phalanx trailing behind; the pulsing of a tendon under repetitious daily strain. These hands dance as they write. Or, not quite dancing nor writing, these hands are dancing-writing. Whatever they can signify is predicated on the indeterminacy of their motions, their singular rhythmic and improvisational logic, their pragmatic yet speculative trajectories. These hands gesture to you. They sound out a way, intuit a mode of passing sense and sensation, dream of new modes of correspondence. These hands are not mine. In this movement toward you, they estrange themselves from the body. Or rather, what they signal is the body's perpetual motion away from itself, its becoming foreign in the act of address, of commoning. These hands usually go unnoticed. They are negligible, barely legible; some might call them flimsy, others unpredictable. And yet coursing through the shadow of writing and of dancing, these hands might be said to erode, however slightly and imperceptibly, the structural and normative tendencies of those two registers. These hands gesture toward a minor choreographic.

II

Choreography—a term coined under the regime of Louis XIV for a codified system of dance notation—was first challenged for its inability to represent the movements of the upper body, particularly the hands. Despite putting forth significant formal and technical innovations, Raoul Auger Feuillet's tome *Choreography or the Art of Describing Dance* (1700)—which outlined what is now known as the Beauchamp-Feuillet system—is tied to Baroque dance's specificities and as such depicts the intricate motions of legs and feet at the expense of the head, shoulders, arms, or hands. The only hand in sight, one might suggest, is that of the male choreographer, abstracted yet omnipresent, that writes down the dances to be performed. As such, the system appears as a potent technology for the capitalist and colonialist regimes, one that can efficiently disseminate a distinct aesthetic, equating bodily difference with technical lack and thus shaping a homogeneous, standardised, and normative political body.

A quarter of a century later, Pierre Rameau's *Dancing Master* (1725) sought to supplement *Choreography*'s lacunae. It plotted how the dancing body should be positioned and held, and insisted throughout that the hands always be "neither open nor closed" and "above all without affectation."[1] Hands, the author argues, are central yet overlooked "details." Particularly, they are that which signal and determine the social function of choreography: through them, the dancing body gestures toward, touches, holds another. And so Rameau engages in countless meticulous descriptions, half writing, half drawing, of how hands should be presented, how they should meet each other or make an exit. What begins as a logical treatise slowly unravels, bifurcating in poetic—almost schizophrenic—meditations, as words become drawings become lines become circles become ellipses. In other words, what the hands are meant to do and

[1] Pierre Rameau, *Le maître à danser, Qui enseigne la manière de faire tous les différens pas de Danse dans toute la régularité de l'Art, & de conduire les Bras à chaque pas* (Paris: 1725), 42.

look like becomes less and less legible as the writing progresses, as if this heightened attention to their manifold back-and-forth motions led to a disintegration of the subject.

A page spread from Pierre Rameau, *Le maître à danser, Qui enseigne la manière de faire tous les différens pas de Danse dans toute la régularité de l'Art, & de conduire les Bras à chaque pas* (Paris: 1725), 88.

Take that *Figure of the lady holding the right hand and going all the way around and leave the hand*...One follows the writing-drawing in spirals, trying to decipher and speculate on one hand's grasp and motion. Is the hand dancing or writing? Where does one trajectory end and another begin? Amid dizziness and disorientation, meaning is unmoored, representation blurred, and subjectivity uprooted, as if to mark the impossibility for the nascent discipline of choreography to fulfill its totalising promise of bodily capture. Other scenarios start to emerge at the edge of legibility: a collection of poetic, excessive hand dances that diverge from and refigure the able and neurotypical body.

III

Anatomies (07), 2008

Collage on paper

I began to be moved at the sight of two hands holding each other—you holding me holding you. Or, rather, two hands gesturing at their reflection, moving simultaneously toward and away from themselves. A minute puncture in symmetry. The body composed in your *Anatomie*s, 2008—two sets of arms and legs cut off and rearranged in space across thirty collages on paper—unfolds in a series of minor variations, slightly diverging patterns in space. A body that cannot reproduce itself in its own image. A body becoming fractals, bursting open into new geometries as many abstract yet affective diagrams, improbable scores for an intimate dance of self-foreignness.

In *Anatomies*, I see the hands—your hands, estranged—as the punctum: the small, poignant details through which the work turns into haptic choreography. I follow their orientation, composition, and entanglement. I am touched by their invitation, subtle and eerie, which recasts a field of relations. This is their "minor gesture." The "minor," Erin Manning reminds us, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is "a force that courses through [the major], unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards."[2] The minor gesture, then, emphasises a practice in strangeness, a study of that which is unstable and unpredictable yet operative and affirmative, capable of activating a difference in register, a shift in tone. If choreography is that which captures, depicts, and reproduces bodies in relation to dominant forms and knowledges, then

[2] Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

Anatomies stages a minor choreographic: It unravels the body—whole, able, stable—in favor of a mobile, empathetic, indeterminate physical force.

IV

I began noticing my insistence to return to the archive to look for a trace I knew didn't exist. Investigating the intersection of sexual economies and feminist practices in late-nineteenth century dance, I combed through various papers at the Paris Opéra library—administrative notes, artistic statements, letters to and from influential supporters of the art—in search of writings by women dancers. This quest was somewhat doomed from the start, misguided by predetermined notions of value and agency. I had to go through a great deal of materials to really understand the scarcity of what I was looking for, but the recognition of this scarcity allowed me to perceive other registers and modalities at work. A brief note I read early on resurfaced: "Dear monsieur Laquonie, with other danseuses we write to you to ask for one hundred francs for a young danseuse at the Opéra whose father is seriously injured. Emma Sandrini." This short missive, signed by a danseuse étoile, acknowledges a collective endeavor and an act of care. It recasts a hierarchical field as relational, infused with solidarity. I started to imagine hands holding each other across the ranks imposed by the institution, from the *corps de ballet* to the soloists: an assembly of hands dancing-writing this letter in common. The feminist work of dance made manifest through and as a myriad of imperceptible gestures, occurring beneath and beyond the dancing onstage or the writing in the archive.

Another document came back to haunt me: a small photograph of a Paris Opéra dancer and courtesan/sex worker, Constance Quéniaux, who was recently "discovered" as the model of Gustave Courbet's infamous *Origin of the World*, 1866.[3] Courbet's painting depicts a vulva, a naked torso cut off from its limbs. A body reified yet fragmented, like a remnant of a statue, motionless, its history and imaginary stripped from the flesh. In the small image captured by Eugène Disdéri (who is known for the invention and popularization of the carte de visite photograph), Quéniaux is offering her back to the camera, her front kept from view, in what is known as an *effacé* position. The body here "erases" itself as it dances, as it writes. This image is uncanny: Its composition appears unfinished, lacking the poise of the usual ballet portraits of the time. She is off balance, on her way somewhere, her right hand reaching beyond yet severed by the frame. Her fingers enacting a slight puncture in representation. A gesture of refusal and excess, a rehearsal for a performance, for another life, perhaps. Historians have suggested that her identity as the model of Courbet's painting was kept secret because, by the time it was exposed, Quéniaux was becoming a widely influential and respected figure in the Parisian art and literary society. She created a rich life in which she lived of men but *with* women, whilst spending her later days in a villa she had bought in Normandy to support orphans and disabled people. And I am drawn back to the hand in the photograph—her hand, the haptic register it makes manifest. Who is it gesturing toward, what is it smuggling into the future? What are the relations it invents, the minor choreographies it holds? [4]

V

I began remembering *Once Over*, a performance you and I did in New York City in 2009, in the frame of your solo exhibition "Or Some Other Time" at the Kitchen. Sitting across from each other at a small square table wrapped in white paper, our hands gestured to and away from each other, negotiating together a series of shapes, moves, patterns, and rhythms. We experimented with different registers of gestures—across the narrative, the ordinary, and the abstract realms—using various compositional strategies: repetition, transformation, call-and-response.

[3] The historian Claude Schopp made the find by stumbling on a sentence in a letter by Alexandre Dumas fils to George Sand in which Dumas expresses his opposition to Courbet's political views and aesthetic choices: "One does not paint the most delicate and the most sonorous interior of Miss Queniault (sic) of the Opera." *C.f. L'origine du monde. Vie du modèle* (Paris: Phébus, 2018).

[4] Constance Quéniaux photographed by Eugène Disdéri, department of prints and photography, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1862.

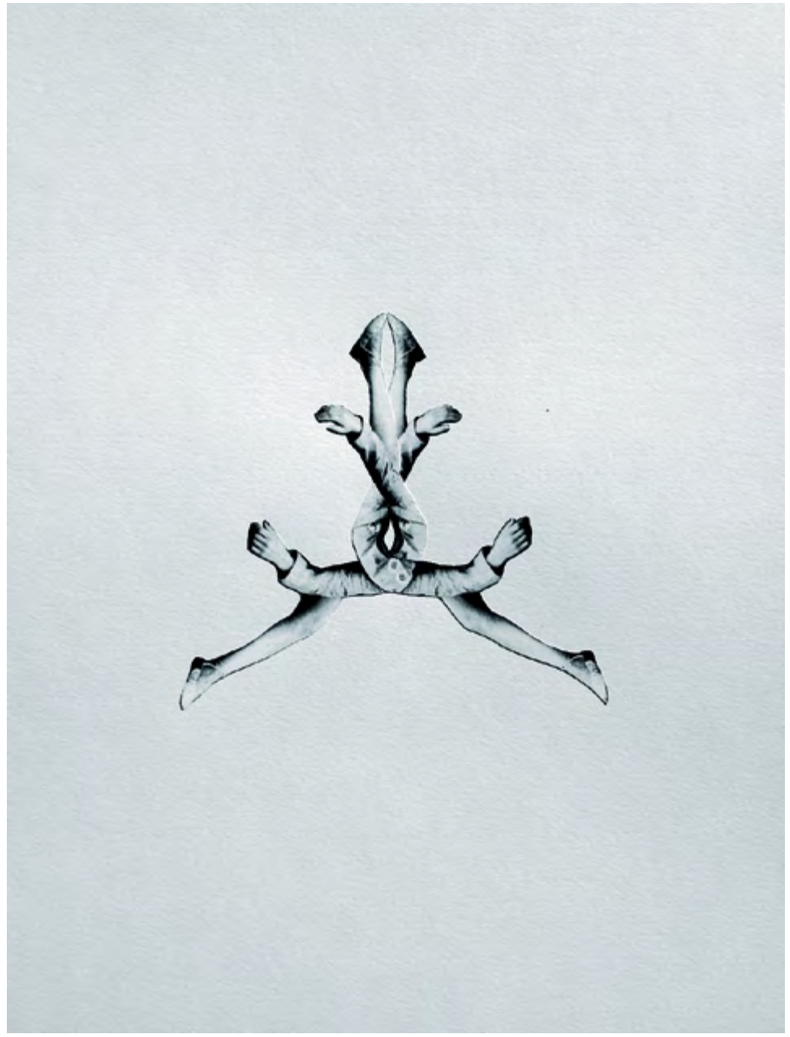
We performed in a black-box theatre in front of an audience while the action and its resultant soundscape were recorded by a suspended camera and microphone and projected as a live feed onto a large screen hanging behind us on the stage. There, the dislocated and disembodied hands appeared either as fully fledged protagonists plotting a story without resolution or as a slowly moving landscape composed of fragmented yet autonomous bodies. At once a plane of inscription and a microstage, the table offered a ground on which to write and dance, to write-dance, to choreo-graph. It became a field of actions: an artificial device for framing and intensifying encounters as the coming together and dispersal of bodies. I recall that our hands never touched. Yet across the intimate distance of the table, they carried in common an affective if uncertain choreography: an investigation of correspondence as the delicate holding together of the unknown.

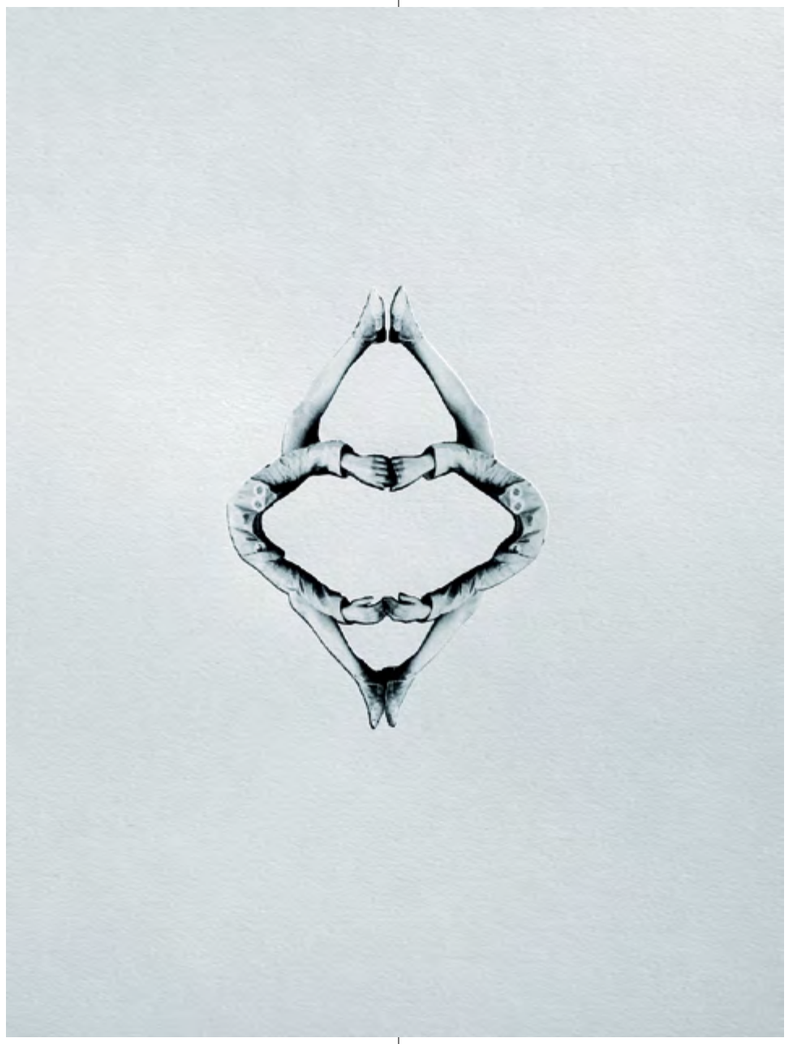
Once Over, 2009

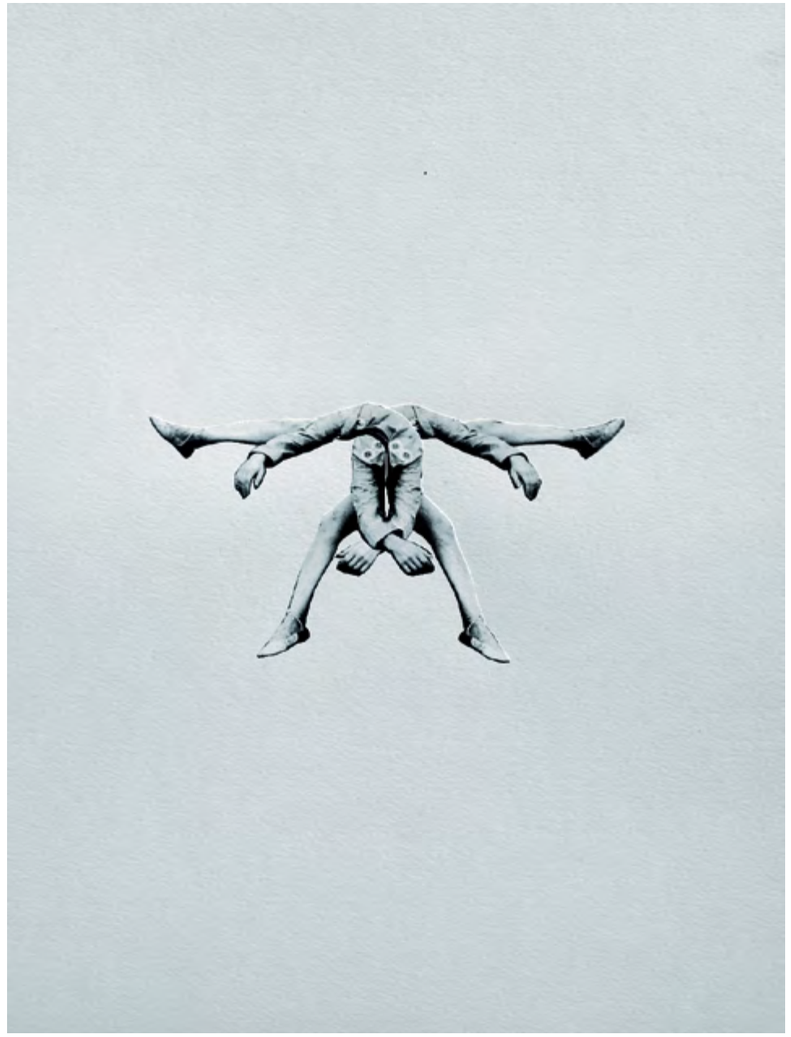
Performance at the Kitchen, New York City, NY, USA

Trying to grasp the contours of *By the Means at Hand*—the expanded scene it assembles—I picture again an assembly of hands: this time, hands of artists, foreigners meeting across different locations and exchanging artworks be carried to Venice. In the "catalogue of hands," the photographs of the disembodied hands figure a series of impersonal transactions, ones that reflect on and imagine their own logics of exchange and circulation, forge alternative means and pathways, smuggle art and sense otherwise. They score a minor choreography, one that courses through a major art network and organization (the Venice Biennale) to inflect variation through a multiplicity of works, practices, voices, and experiences that fold the peripheries within. *By the Means at Hand* can be said to be sustained between bodies in movement, through complex choreographies of gathering and dispersal, as many foreign lives in the making. It lives across and by those hands that carry and hold in common. As such, it is a work of commoning, one that enacts a nonextractive logic and can unsettle—however slightly and imperceptibly—the sedimented materialities and hierarchies of objecthood and authorship in art economies. Its spectral assembly of sustenance makes manifest what passes from hand to hand: an invisible gestural presence, the force of collectivity.

In that spirit, with love,
Noémie







Anatomies (01, 02, 04),
2008

Collage on paper

After the Reveille

Season Butler

Latvia, will you have me?
Poland, Finland, I'm like you,
will you have me?
My eyes are small like yours,
will you have me?
I'm all fight and no muscle
I'm mouth and no language
All work and all horizon
I have to rest I'm
tired please

As though I've lived for generations with my eyes closed,
I know there are others like me who lived like this.
When the world lurches, we'll find each other and cling,
A tribe and then a nation,
One of those nations made eclectic by constant trampling,
A down, brown ethnicity
of tender skin and small eyes
Small eyes and erratic etiquette,
Cities of only pageantry and slums,
Sacrosanct sabbaticals and razorsharp deadlines
or nothing would ever get done.

Remade to Measure (Yellow), 2014-16

Broken wooden builder's ruler, rubber bands

Unhinged (Lisbon) 05, 2010

8-hour performance for "House Without a Maid," Alkantara festival, Lisbon, Portugal

Photo: Tim Etchells

A Waiting Game

Tim Etchells

Unhinged (Lisbon), 2010

8-hour performance for "House Without a Maid," Alkantara festival, Lisbon, Portugal

Photo: Tim Etchells

I

I want to start with your hands.

They are bending sheets of aluminium as you kneel or squat on the floor of a stone building in Tunis in January 2024. Or typing notes for a project into a phone. Dragging a battered folding measure as you walk, so that the end scores a line through the mud of a path. They are tearing paper, fabric, or card, your hands. They are cutting plastic. They are carrying planks or a single heavy wooden door for eight solid hours.

In this last case, I was there, in Lisbon in 2010, taking photographs of the performance. All I could see of you most of the day, my love, was the tips of your feet and your hands. You as a hybrid creature, door-woman or woman-door, a kind of mobile question, wandering the building, a free-to-roam portal stripped of function and specific architectural context. A door floating free, neither denying nor granting access to any part of the space, since one could always easily walk past or around it. A door that could follow a person, that could offer a momentary prospect of escape, that could become a temporary barricade, that could sit down to rest. I remember your hands as they held the door from behind, the force of their grip bonding human and object. A door-woman or woman-door in some daylong process of becoming or unbecoming.

Hands. With residues of paint, ink, marker, rust, glue, graphite, glitter, charcoal, blood, grime, earth. With tenderness, with certainty, with hesitation. With paper cuts, grazes, cat scratches, splinters, callouses.

One on One: Tree, 2008

C-Print

Your hands holding the weight of your body as you hang suspended in the centre of a football goal, an action by which, through your own exertions, you make yourself a target. Or your hands limp as you hang over the largest branch of a tree, an abject rag-doll form, or as you hang once again, arms and legs splayed this time, body thrown over an archery target.

Or your hands guiding a pen to copy the form of the Japanese characters meaning "person," "street," "drink," or "dog" in our performance at the Aichi Triennale. I think that was the time, in Japan in 2010, when you had some kind of leg injury—I seem to remember strange journeys in the city where you couldn't walk but could ride a bike . . . ? That doesn't seem right, but it's what I remember.

Your hands. Moving things from one place to another. Balancing one thing on top of another. Using one thing to hold another in place. Placing one object alongside, around, or behind another. Placing objects to support other objects, to lean on other objects, to prop, crush or balance one another.

Or your hands, their movement in the zone between deliberation and speculation, stranding objects on a table's edge, a precarious moment staged with delighted yet anxious expectation of their fall. I love the mixture of mischief and violence in this work, and I'm reminded how often your arrangement of objects places them in implicit danger, where stillness is an anticipation of, or call to, disaster: your romance with the dynamic potential of imbalance.

Here to Stay (05), 2008

C-Print

This Here and That There (Berlin), 2007

8-hour performance for "nomadic new york" festival, HKW – Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany

Photo: Hugo Glendinning

Hands. Arranging leaves on a sidewalk in a small town in upstate New York in 2008 to spell the words HERE TO STAY. Later in the day, and on subsequent days, you will return repeatedly to photograph what remains of these arrangements, and again I am thinking about precariousness, about the fragility of your labour, the labour of your hands, and how this work, like so many of your other projects, is doomed already to disappearance.

Or your hands lifting a chair from out of knee-deep water. Or lifting the phone to take a picture of the landscape, the sky, the horizon, an abandoned mirror, a wrecked piece of furniture discarded in the street.

Or your hands clutching for eight hours a bunch of roughly sawn sticks that have been bundled together with dirty rope, as you stand by a statue at the side of the road in 2018. People come and go: curious onlookers, informal collaborators, friends. Cars pass, their drivers occasionally honking. This statue you keep vigil with—at the entrance to the shipyard 3. Maj in Rijeka—presents a larger-than-life-size heroic male figure, a titan who cradles a huge model ship in his own oversize hands. Through the hours you're standing there together, a dialogue of sorts emerges between the model ship the statue-man carries and the items and materials you and your sometime visitors have chosen to hold aloft in this place. His ship speaks, perhaps, to the work of the port and the labour of the hands, while the burden of your own hands, that clumsy bundle of wooden sticks or slats you are holding, is either raw material or unidentified detritus. His stone hands carry a "thing," while yours—your hands—carry only "stuff": an idea, a dream of something, a state of potential. Or an echo, an aftermath. A "what will be," or a "what has been."

One of your hands, rested on the table in front of you, the index finger hooked around a pencil, the point of which is placed on a sheet of large paper. There's also my hand, touching the same pencil, my finger wrapped around it from the other side—the counterbalanced pull of our digits keeping the pencil upright, albeit in a fluid, unsteady state. As the balance of our energies and impulses changes over the next hour, the pencil moves across the paper to create a ragged meandering line, its trace a seismographic record of our copresence, our interaction and exchange, as we work to keep the pencil steady and making marks at Aichi Triennale.

Hands. Wielding scissors, knives, blades, needles. Touching your face. Moulding clay. Stitching paper, mending a tear in the page that the same hands have just made—the stitches marking a neat line of black thread, suturing the surface, rejoining it by means of a cartoon surgical scar. Breaking and mending. Ripping and fixing.

Your hands. Moving in the air as you speak as part of a discursive panel or talk event somewhere, or here chatting in the kitchen or the bedroom, searching the space and the time between spoken words. As you talk, your hands are caressing, cutting, compacting, slicing, sieving, probing, holding, parting, pinching, weaving, and weighing the air, searching and sifting it for doubts and promises and, above all, for possibilities. Speaking, but also listening and waiting, things that are also an important part of speaking.

To See Stars over Mountains (15 March 2021), 2021

Collage on inkjet photo print

II

I am thinking about the studio table you worked at in 2021—the blue Formica table upon which you were making the 365 daily collages that would eventually comprise the project *To See Stars over Mountains*. Over the course of the year, this table slowly accrued a thousand fragments of discarded cut and torn materials, papers, images, threads, fabrics, ribbons: a thick landscape of detritus from which it was always nonetheless possible that you might salvage something at any moment, picking out a leftover element for use in one of the works.

To Still the Eye (detail), 2018

Acrylic on Arches watercolour paper

With the Sky on Their Shoulders (15, 29), 2011

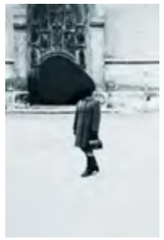
Inkjet photo collage

I'm thinking also about the many PDFs you've sent me over the years, your end-of-install-day photographs that summarise the perspectives or approaches you have tried during a period of making and installing in some faraway city. You have a tirelessness in that kind of iterative process—a commitment to the poetics and semantics of arranging things—not making or building or even combining things necessarily so much as distributing them in a given space to create new articulations. What strikes me is that for every show or work you've produced in this way, there are always multiple abandoned versions, ghost arrangements, buried possibilities that are generated and photographed but never shown—arrangements that haunt the room unseen, their presence felt only in negative, since of course only because those other versions are not here do we see the version that is present. Indeed, we see the work that is presented with a clarity, a dynamic or particular spatial energy that is made possible only by the experiment (relative "failure" and rejection) of those earlier incarnations. All dated, the PDFs I am speaking of typically comprise phone pictures of several different installation solutions for a show, rearrangements as well as multiple possible versions of works or combinations of works. Looking at them might serve as a kind of time-lapse of your process, which, in late night calls, I'm sometimes asked to comment or even vote on. I like this part of the work, even if—by definition—I don't always understand what you are doing or what you are looking for, my role (such as it is) being limited to offering thoughts, sentences, questions, throwing language at what you are doing in some provisional attempt (shared with you) to make or put a frame around the emerging work or to create a ground upon which that work might be seen with more clarity. Sometimes these conversations between us seem to bear direct fruit in the work itself, but just as often the progress and direction of the work appears fully independent of any discussions we might have—pursuing its own agenda, so to speak, in its own language, as the discourse rumbles on in the background. That's just as it should be, I think. However much we are talking about ideas, however much we are drawn to framing structures, conceptual approaches, and so on, we are both firm believers in the material aspects of our work—in the eloquence of actual arrangements or constructions and how they sit in, occupy, or develop in space and time. The ideas are nothing without the articulacy of the objects, processes, and events. "No ideas," the poet William Carlos Williams says, "but in things."

There are also the mental images I have of you here in the house, testing the properties of materials or the behaviours and presences of various objects. The living-room floor covered in drawings you made with your feet, the kitchen table a precarious playground of sticks, tape, foam, and small round objects, the space outside the front door inhabited for months by objects collected in the park for some later possible project, a holding zone in which numerous scuffed, deflated footballs, a bent metal fork, a large wooden cable drum, or the separated legs of a number of chairs might be found.

III

Hands again, using a knife to cut into photographs of your father and his besuited work colleagues, taken in the 1970s or '80s during socialism. Guiding the blade carefully around the figure of your father, your one hand grasps the paper while the fingers of the other pull his head forward, bending that part of his form out of the image and folding it downward. This gesture conceals his face, revealing in its place the hole in the paper's surface (that hole in the image where his head used to be) and the back side of the paper (the other side, so to speak, of his head, of the image). Or else you are cutting around the whole group of your father and his colleagues, treating them as a single object, mass, or group shape, meanwhile folding the paper away from them. It's an action in which the context of your dad and his friends or coworkers is effectively removed or erased, replaced by the back side of the paper, the figures themselves obliterated or disfigured in the process.



Under a Tide I, II (details), 2011

India ink on inkjet prints

Everything (Red), 2011

Watercolor on polypropylene dry mounted on inkjet print

These gestures, and others like them in your collage or drawing works, are comical proposals, pieces of carefully improvised mischief. But they are also more than that, since as often as not, with all their cuttings-out and foldings-in of and around the human figure, they double as instances of totemic cruelty, enactments of displacements, transformations, destructions, or erasures of context.

For another work, your hands carefully use a paint brush and ink to alter the image of your mother on a photograph that shows her as a young woman, a university student. Here again you are somehow erasing the setting in which she's been photographed. The ink you apply is a form of mandated forgetting, akin to that which history has already enacted on the Yugoslav socialist era, its social structures and values. The black fluid you apply is a shadow on a brain scan, a dark, floodlike memory loss or ocean of forgetting, a spilled oil in some pervasive slick, rendering the surroundings to zero, blanking out everything it touches—context, human figures. FORGET EVERYTHING / FORGE EVERYTHING, one of your text works says, and I often wonder if these repeated gestures—of erasure, of bodily rearrangement, of figurative decontextualization—speak in some way to your own experience of displacement, actual and psychic.

IV

When you went to America on a high-school exchange program in 1991, you did so as a citizen of Yugoslavia, arriving in the US as a foreigner in that sense (of nationality), as well as in a second sense (that of economic system), since anyone born and raised outside of capitalism will always be a foreigner in it, where being a foreigner means having access to another frame of reference or another realm of possibility for the organization of society and relations. When Yugoslavia dissolved and the country that formed you ceased to exist as such, the pages of your then passport defaulted to their material status as mere paper—to co-opt a phrase from Mladen Stilinović. Stilinović wrote that just as a gallery is a room, so money is paper—or maybe he says it the other way around—although of course money is not paper anymore. Money is just numbers now. Or data.

Over the twenty years you lived in America, you might have become a kind of a foreigner at home, too, the way people do over time, as their senses of belonging and nonbelonging become multiple, shifting, confused, compounded, or overwritten.

Perhaps foreignness is always doubling or complexifying in this way. In recent years, you switched from being a foreigner in America to being a foreigner in the UK, arriving here on a visa in your American passport. With your move, you got geographically closer to your parents and to Croatia, which soon after joined the EU. But Brexit swiftly underscored your foreignness again. These days, you're at home here as an EU citizen through what the UK calls "settled status/leave to remain."

There is a double reading of this phrase "leave to remain." For the bureaucracy—and in terms of the practicalities—you have leave (permission) to remain. But there's also the implication (unintentional, one assumes) that a person might have to leave (in order) to remain. Leaving and remaining are either simple or extremely complicated. You have to leave in order to remain. But leave what, or where. And remain what.

No one can go home because the world knots itself around home or flips it out of existence. Or because home is always relational, a spatial but also temporal construction, and time has always passed, will always pass, will keep passing.

v

I am thinking now about a particular project of yours, an installation you made in Rotterdam in 2016 called *Means and Ends*. It's a work I never saw in real life, though I might well have seen in-progress PDFs as you were out there working.

In any case, I admire the simplicity. It takes only a moment to see the principle that guides the work. There is an unruly collection of planks, sticks, lengths of wood, and other materials, each of them arranged so that one end rests on the gallery floor while the other is propped up against the wall using an object to raise it up. This gesture of trying to gain height is then repeated in roughly twenty self-evidently improvised iterations. These forms are positioned, informally if at more or less regular intervals, around the edges of the gallery.

Means and Ends (detail), 2016

Wooden planks, various objects and materials

It's important that none of the materials used in the work appear new. All of the planks and sticks leaned against the wall bear diverse though unspectacular signs of discolouration from use and wear and tear, while the propping objects for these makeshift ramps are evidently recycled, an unruly collection, more so even than the planks and sticks themselves. Among these "props" are sundry blocks or lengths of wood, a bucket, an old chair, a discarded bicycle tyre, etc. All are the kinds of things that are often left lying about—urban, workshop, or domestic detritus. Some items (blocks, pieces of wood, foam) are more or less abstract—if not "useless," then at least without an apparent specific function. Others, meanwhile, suggest a clearer intended use (bucket, box, chair, bicycle tyre). In any case, the two classifications of objects (those with a specific purpose and those without one) are effectively rendered equivalent in your work because everything here is confined to, or asked to demonstrate, only a single form of utility: namely, the ability to hold another thing off the ground. The arrangements—twinned objects, balanced in symbiotic relation—seem to vary in terms of their stability: some look relatively solid, others entirely precarious.

The space for this installation is a rather pristine white room accessed via a single staircase, the diagonal swath of which appears to prefigure or invite the numerous diagonals of the installation itself. Descending the staircase one sees, in effect, a series of crude alternative "stairways" below, none viable: mere echoes of the functional structure one has already begun to descend.

At the very top of the walls on each long side of this room is a line of small windows, serving to let natural light into the space, the light a sign of the world outside—an *up* and *out there*—that otherwise remains unseen. In this context, the repeated gesture of the ramps, more or less all of them "reaching" ineffectively for the windows, offers itself as an essay on escaping, on the thwarted desire to climb out made manifest by these improvised constructions. Here and there, though, we see a few exceptions to the "rule" that otherwise appears to govern the work—in one place a swath of foam runs along the floor, meets the wall, and runs up it for a while, its partial route out unsupported by any propping object. Elsewhere, in a couple of places, planks or sticks point away from the wall, leveraged back into the space to lean instead against its pillars. In yet another place, an almost vertical plank leaned against a pillar provides a precarious propping point for a second plank, which then runs back to the outer wall, reaching it at the giddy height of the window.

An essay on the possibility of escaping. A work and at the same time an abandoned experiment or construction site. Like many of your works, it gives off such contradictory signals. On the one hand, one senses immediately its improvisational quality, its apparent arbitrariness, its apparent engagement with whatever was as hand—the materials, the space itself. It's easy to imagine that the things you made use of were lying around, here or hereabouts, before your act of salvage pulled them into the

Means and Ends (detail), 2016

Wooden planks, various objects and materials

informal economy of your project. It's also easy to imagine that the whole scene we are looking at could have been otherwise. That changing it would be simple. There are no specialist processes at work in what we see, no "fabrication," no skills beyond the quotidian—its creation is clearly a matter of simple arrangement rather than of construction. It's evident that the large foam block could have supported a different stick, that the long brown plank could have gone higher or reached toward a different window were it so arranged. One can also imagine—if one's prone to telling stories—that the arrangement we discover in the gallery might in fact all be different tomorrow. Or that it was all different yesterday or the day before. One can think that these works are fluid, somehow temporary iterations. Waypoints or gestures in an ongoing process or exploration.

At the same time, however, it is emphatically a work. A kind of still life. An experiment in which there has been a temporary or permanent suspension. It's possible to imagine it otherwise, but one is struck nonetheless by its particularity. By the state in which this system has come to rest. By the specific qualities of the arrangement we are presented with. These particular twinnings of materials and objects we see, these particular balancing acts, these particular attempts to scale the walls. This particular sequence of elements one encounters when navigating the room.

I said I admire the simplicity, but what I mean really is that I admire the complexity. The way you open the space between the two.

I appreciate also that this work, as with so much of what you do, rests between a kind of simple sculptural materialism and metaphor. In the first sense, we can say that *it is what it is what it is*: around forty items of certain kinds placed, balanced in pairs, in relation to an architectural space. Not more than that, really. And not less. And yet metaphors are always calling to us from the materials, their arrangement, and their relation to space. This idea of escape, of the ramp, of the "reach" for the light, the window, the outside world. And with it, the idea of the objects acting in temporary combination or collaboration with one another, as if together they might reach out further and with more stability, as if together they might form an actual pathway, or else together prototype a route toward the outside world. Or the idea of failure suggested by the work: your invocation of a desire—to make a way out—that lacks appropriate means (materials and tools), and that perhaps lacks the requisite understanding of the physics, the engineering principles necessary to craft an actual stairway or exit ramp. Or perhaps the work speaks of yet another human impulse—that of mimicry—such that the structures making up your work all seem to offer a kind of inadequate distorted mirror of the staircase itself. An investigation of its visual code, or of its spirit rather than its functionality.

And then there's the metaphoric force—present in so much of your work—of the act of repurposing itself. We sense that just as these objects have had another life before this installation, they may well pick that life up again once the exhibition is over. The air-bed pump. The paint can. The bucket. Even the various planks could so easily reclaim a former utility once released from their sojourn in the realm of art. It speaks—this repurposing—to a shift in priorities or necessities. A sophisticated object like an air-bed pump is not needed in the situation you have concocted, except insofar as it may be used to lean a plank on. Likewise a pot of paint. Or a length of four-inch-wide timber. In this situation you have made, these objects, these items, are asked to do new things, their generally acknowledged properties ignored in favour of a set of apparently more-urgent qualifications.

The repurposing seems to speak of several things. There is indeed an urgency—a changed situation, an expediency, let's say. A change in the world or circumstances that appears to demand immediate innovations to the use of things in it, changes to

one's action. There is a playful, wrongheaded energy to some of these constructions, as if—as well as escape—this were a small essay on human resourcefulness, on our ability to find ways and means: means to connect one point in space or location to another, means to get out, perhaps, to dream a way of escaping our predicament.

VI

Final hand.

It is in the end sequence of your film *Until the Last of Our Labours Is Done*, 2021. Your hand is at the height of your hips, and your fingers hold one end of a short length of ribbon, letting the wind in what we call "the big field" of the nearby park take the tattered miniature sail of the material.

The ribbon moves, and as it moves, it performs a makeshift reading of the weather, a test of its own materiality, and an act, perhaps, of clairvoyance. We are watching a collaboration of object, body, and forces. Your hand feels the ribbon's motion in the wind, its twists and turns, its flutterings and tremblings, its bending back now and then upon itself, its self-caresses, its tentative unfurlings and almost knottings.

You have set up a simple situation—a performance, if you like: to stand with this ribbon as you stood with the statue and a bundle of sticks in Rijeka, with the unhinged door in Lisbon. And in this situation, you are listening. Not more than that, really; not less. A kind of waiting game. You are listening with your body, with your hand holding the ribbon. Waiting to see and feel what will happen (to it, to you). What will come. Waiting (as you must in Venice) to see what will arrive, to see who will come to the door, to see what message or signal or call will come in on the wind.

Standing in the field, you are attending to the materials and their behaviour. Waiting. Seeing what they do, how they do in relation to the wind. I think the movement of the ribbon in the wind is war and peace. It is excitement and hesitation, ecstasy and agony, thought and sleep, change and steadiness. It is doubt, it is certainty, it is abandon and apparent collapse, and it is resilience.

Means and Ends (detail), 2016

Wooden planks, various objects and materials

Installation view: Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Until the Last of Our Labours Is Done, 2021

4K video, 24 min

Contributors

Ivana Bago is an independent scholar, writer, and curator based in Zagreb. She holds a PhD in Art History and Visual Culture from Duke University and is the co-founder (with Antonia Majaca) of Delve | Institute for Duration, Location and Variables. Her writings on (post) Yugoslav art, contemporary art and theory have been published in academic journals and exhibition catalogues, as well as magazines such as *e-flux journal* and *Artforum*. She is on the editorial board of the journal *ARTMargins*. She has given invited lectures in venues such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; American University Beirut; Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm; and the Royal College of Art in London. She has taught at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna, Academy of Fine Arts Zagreb, and WHW Akademija. She is the recipient of the Igor Zabel Award Grant for 2020. Her curatorial projects include "Moving Forwards, Counting Backwards," at Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City; "Where Everything is Yet to Happen," for the Spaport Biennale in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina; "The Orange Dog and Other Tales," at Kontejner in Zagreb; "Stalking with Stories," at Apexart in New York City; and "Meeting Points: Documents in the Making 1968-1982" as part of "Works of Heart (1970-2023)," Sanja Iveković's retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. She is currently developing a research and publishing project on Iveković's work and personal archive, as well as working on her book manuscript *Yugoslav Aesthetics: Monuments to History's Bare Bones, 1908–2018*.

Anne Boyer is a critically-acclaimed poet and essayist whose work explores embodiment, truth, beauty, ephemerality, and history. Her works include *The Undying: Pain, vulnerability, mortality, medicine, art, time, dreams, data, exhaustion, cancer, and care* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), *Garments Against Women* (Penguin, 2019), and *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018). Her books have been translated into over a dozen languages, and her honors include a Pulitzer Prize, the Windham-Cambell prize in nonfiction, the inaugural Cy Twombly Award for Poetry from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and a Whiting Award in both poetry and non-fiction. Originally from the United States, she moved to Edinburgh in 2023. She now teaches poetry and poetics at the University of St. Andrews.

Season Butler is a writer, artist, and dramaturg. She thinks a lot about youth and old age; solitude and community; negotiations with hope and what it means to look forward to an increasingly wily future. Her recent artwork has appeared in the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, UK; Tate Exchange in London; the Latvian National Museum in Riga; and Hotel Maria Kapel in Hoorn, the Netherlands. Her debut novel, *Cygnet* (Harper, 2019) won the 2020 Writers' Guild Award for Best First Novel. She lives in Berlin and is currently developing a new piece of fiction with the support of the Berlin Artistic Research Grant Programme (2022–2023).

Tim Etchells is a UK-based artist and writer whose work shifts between performance, visual art, and writing. Living and working in London and Sheffield, he has produced major commissions for public spaces and has exhibited in museums, galleries, and biennials in many international contexts. Etchells is the leader of the world-renowned performance group Forced Entertainment, with whom he has been making work since 1984. He has also collaborated with a wide range of musicians, artists, and performance makers, including Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods, Marino Formenti, Tony Buck, Taus Mahakacheva, Vlatka Horvat, Ant Hampton, Aisha Orazbayeva, Hugo Glendinning, and Elmgreen & Dragset. Etchells' monograph on contemporary performance and Forced Entertainment, *Certain Fragments* (Routledge, 1999) is widely acclaimed, and his publications include *Endland* (And Other Stories, 2019), *While You Are With Us Here Tonight* (LADA/Tate, 2013), *Vacuum Days* (Storythings, 2012), *The Broken World* (Heinemann, 2008), and *Let's Pretend None of This Ever Happened* (Spector, 2023), a monograph focused on his neon installations and text works. He won the Manchester Fiction Prize in 2019 and his experimental writing pamphlet *Amends* was published by Monitor Books in 2023. Etchells was a recipient of The Live Art Development Agency/Tate Research *Legacy: Thinker In Residence Award* in 2008, Artist of the City of Lisbon in 2014, and the prestigious Spalding Gray Award in February 2016. Under his leadership, Forced Entertainment were awarded the International Ibsen Award 2016 for their ground-breaking contribution to the field of contemporary theatre and performance.

Aleksandar Hemon is the author of novels including *The Lazarus Project* (Riverhead, 2008) and *The World and All That It Holds* (MCD, 2023); a selection of essays, *The Book of My Lives* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013); the script for *The Matrix Resurrections* (2021); as well as three books of short stories: *The Question of Bruno* (Picador, 2000); *Nowhere Man* (Nan A. Talese, 2002); and *Love and Obstacles* (Riverhead Books, 2009.) He is also a DJ and music producer, working under the name Cielo Hemon. Born and raised in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, he left in 1992 for a short visit to the United States, and has now lived there for most of his long life. He teaches at Princeton University.

Vlatka Horvat is an artist working across a wide range of forms from sculpture, installation, drawing, collage, and photography to performance, video, writing, and publishing. Reconfiguring space and social relations at play in it, her projects often rework the precarious relationship between bodies, objects, materials, the built environment, and landscape. She has had exhibitions at a wide range of international institutions, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb; PEER London; Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna; Hessel Museum — Bard Center for Curatorial Studies in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; MARTa Herford Museum, Herford; Stroom, The Hague; Bergen Kunsthall; the Kitchen and MoMA PS1, both in New York City. Her work has been shown at the Aichi Triennale in Nagoya, the 11th Istanbul Biennale, and the 16th Architecture Biennale in Venice. Her performances have been commissioned and presented internationally by venues including HAU Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin; LIFT — London International Festival of Theatre; PACT Zollverein in Essen; Kaaitheater in Brussels; KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen in Hannover; and the Fondation Cartier in Paris, among others. Her recent fiction has been published by Nightjar Press, Vassar Review, and minor literature(s); and her artist's book *To See Stars over Mountains*, which gathers 365 works on paper produced one per day over the course of a year, was published in 2022. Born in Croatia, she moved to the United States as a teenager and spent twenty years there. She lives in London, UK.

Antonia Majaca is an art historian, curator, and writer based between Venice and Berlin, whose work incorporates art history, political theory, epistemology, and intellectual history. She was one of the curators of "Parapolitics — Cultural Freedom and the Cold War" at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in 2017 and is the author of the itinerant project "Feminist Takes." She was the principal researcher of "The Incomputable" at IZK — Institute for Contemporary Art of the Graz University of Technology, and is the editor of *Incomputable Earth: Digital Technologies and the Anthropocene* (Bloomsbury, 2024).

Massimiliano (Mao) Mollona is a writer, filmmaker, and anthropologist. He is currently an associate professor at the Department of the Arts at the University of Bologna. He has a multidisciplinary background in economics, anthropology, and visual art, and his work focuses on the relationship between art and the political economy, with a specific focus on work, class, and post-capitalist politics. He is a co-founder and member of the Institute of Radical Imagination (IRI) and the Laboratory for the Urban Commons, (LUC) Athens.

Harun Morrison is an artist and writer living on the UK inland waterways. He is currentlyan associate artist with Greenpeace UK. His forthcoming novel, *The Escape Artist* will be published by Book Works. Recent group exhibitions include "Sonic Acts 2024: The Spell of The Sensuous" in Amsterdam; "Chronic Hunger, Chronic Desire" in Timișoara, Romania; and "Storm Warning: What does climate change mean for coastal communities?" at Focal Point / Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange in Penzance, UK. Recent solo exhibitions include "Dolphin Head Mountain" at the Horniman Museum in London; "Mark The Spark" at Nieuwe Vide project space in Haarlem, Netherlands; and "Experiments with Everyday Objects" at Eastside Projects in Birmingham, UK. Morrison is currently co-developing community gardens in Merseyside for Bootle Library and Mind Sheffield, a mental health support service, as part of the Arts Catalyst research project, "Emergent Ecologies."

Giulia Palladini is a writer and critical theorist. Her work moves between different languages and fields of knowledge, exploring practices of production and reproduction in art and social life. She writes about pleasure and labour, domestics and politics, archives and political resistance. She is an Alexander von Humboldt alumna, worked as Senior Lecturer at the University of Roehampton in London, and at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee in Germany. She has presented her work in various international contexts, and was Visiting Professor at the National University of Colombia, the University of Cuenca, and Bern University of the Arts. She has collaborated in critical and artistic projects with various artists, including Mapa Teatro, Tara Irani, and Forced Entertainment. She is the author of *The Scene of Foreplay: Theater, Labor and Leisure in 1960s New York* (Northwestern University Press, 2017) and co-editor (with Marco Pustianaz) of *Lexicon for an Affective Archive* (Intellect, 2017). In 2021, she led the international research cluster "Feminismos Antipatriarcales and Poetic Disobedience." In 2024, she will curate "Antidotes: encounters to think live arts in the political landscape" at Centro de Cultura Digital in Mexico City and "Rumbos de vida," as part of "Stills of Peace" at the Fondazione Aria, in Atri, Italy.

Lara Pawson lives on the edge of London, as close as she can get to the forest. She is the author of three books, including *Spent Light* (CB editions, 2024), which was published in January. It is a hybrid work of fiction, memoir, and history, and has been widely celebrated by the critics. *This Is the Place to Be* (CB editions, 2016) was her acclaimed memoir about her life as a journalist in Angola and Ivory Coast during both countries' civil wars. *In the Name of the People* (IB Tauris, 2014) is a work of investigative journalism about a massacre in Angola that was covered up by the authorities with the help of a number of foreign correspondents. Between 1996 and 2007, Pawson was a foreign correspondent for the BBC in several African countries, as well as a senior broadcast journalist in the BBC Africa Service in London. She speaks Portuguese, English, and rusty French.

Noémie Solomon works as a writer, teacher, dramaturg, translator, and curator around questions of movement histories and notations, ecologies of performance, and experimental choreography. She holds a PhD from New York University and has taught dance and performance theory at NYU, McGill University, Brown University, Wesleyan University, and Hollins University. She edited the anthology *DANSE* (Presses du réel, 2014) that translated and presented key texts on the somatic and linguistic trades between francophone and North American choreographic cultures. Her curatorial projects include "Dance on Time" at iDANS in Istanbul; "Solos and Solitudes" at Danspace Project in New York City; "Dancing is talking / Talking is dancing" at MoMA PS1 in New York City, and "Rituals of Care" at Gropius Bau in Berlin. Solomon is director of the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance.

Kate Sutton is a writer based in Zagreb, Croatia, after nearly a decade in Russia, where she helped found the non-profit art space Baibakov Art Projects. As a curator, she helped bring artists like Paul Pfeiffer, Cyprien Gaillard, Latifa Echakhch, Wade Guyton, and Luc Tuymans to Moscow, while also showcasing Russian artists including Ira Korina, Olga Chernysheva, and Valery Chtak. She has written for magazines including *Artforum, Bookforum, Bidoun*, *Frieze*, *Ibraaz*, and *LEAP*, and penned catalogue essays for the artists Emilija Škarnulytė, Nilbar Güreş, Aslı Çavuşoğlu, Monica Bonvicini, Dorian Gaudin, Basim Magdy, Stefan Sava, and Martin Roth, among other. From 2018 until 2023, she served as the international editor for *Artforum*, helping the magazine to expand its representation and take on new voices. For 2019-2020, she was a resident professor of the WHW Akademija, in collaboration with David Maljković and is currently a resident professor for the program's 2024 edition.

What, How & for Whom/WHW is a curatorial collective formed in 1999 in Zagreb, based in Berlin, Vienna, and Zagreb. Its founding members are curators Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić, and Sabina Sabolović, and designer and publicist Dejan Kršić. What, how and for whom, the three basic questions of every economic organisation, concern the planning, concept, and realisation of exhibitions as well as the production and distribution of artworks and the artist's position in the labour market. These questions formed the title of WHW's first project dedicated to the 152nd anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, in 2000 in Zagreb, and became the motto of WHW's work and the title of the collective. Over the years, WHW developed projects in different geographical and cultural contexts and on different institutional scales, inspired by queer-feminist, anti-fascist and decolonising ideas and with a goal to set impulses for aesthetic and ideological debates in the field of contemporary art. From 2003 to 2023, the WHW collective ran a program at the city-owned gallery Gallery Nova at Teslina 7 in Zagreb. Currently the Gallery is operating without a permanent base, relying on being hosted by various local cultural organisations. While searching for a new address, Gallery's program is exploring possibilities of a gallery as mental and nomadic space, as well as contingencies of its own unfinished institutionalisation. In 2018, WHW launched a new international study program for emerging artists called WHW Akademija, based in Zagreb. From 2019 to 2024, Ivet Ćurlin, Nataša Ilić, and Sabina Sabolović have been working as artistic directors of Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna, while activities in Zagreb have continued under leadership of Ana Dević.

Fractions,
2017

Found doorstoppers

Installation view:
"Vlatka Horvat:
Surroundings" at
Renata Fabbri, Milan,
Italy

End in Sight (07),
2017

Giclée print collage
on Hahnemühle
Photo Rag

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To friends and fellow travellers

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