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V –

Here is my text. It seems strange to be sending it to you via email as you are sitting on the other side of the kitchen table. As I said, I found it impossible to pick a single work but have instead concentrated on the room pieces which combine 2D and 3D works – those pieces are what's staying in my mind very strongly. Perhaps it's related to the experience of seeing you 'at work' so often – with fragments and layers of visual and sculptural material scattered and piled all around you, in the studio, in the house... I hope you like the text – the formal voice and all. The distance it enacts has its uses I think. Tx

Room Pieces

In a number of new collages exhibited in Škuc Gallery in Ljubljana at the end of 2010, Vlatka Horvat layered groups of A4 inkjet sheets from which a silhouette of her own figure had been cut out and removed. Placed one on top of the other, these excavated pages – remnants in fact of the work process from a previous collage series – showed glimpses of the remaining image, a nondescript frame of wooden floor and white studio wall, whilst drawing attention to the emptied centre, a space whose parameters shift and overlap through the successive and unevenly placed layers of the work. In one sense, the impression is that of an absent figure whose boundaries are debatable, a ghost summoned by the stacked pages from which she is otherwise emphatically absent. At the same time, the work stages absence itself as an opening, pointing through the space of the human figure to the contexts of both depicted physical landscape (room) and the material space of the stacked pages.

These collages might serve as a micro-index of a change in Horvat's work which arguably began with *Or Some Other Time* – her solo show at The Kitchen in New York in 2009 – a turning point which saw her move from the essentially two-dimensional staging ground of the page (explored in her photographic and collage series) to the presentation of a series of complex linked or intertwined works and parallel interventions in physical space. Whilst one can separate Horvat's work for The Kitchen (and the projects which follow it for the 11th Istanbul Biennial, *Greater New York* and Škuc) into arrangements of distinct pieces comprising both works on paper and sculptural installations, many with their own individual titles – doing so risks missing the way that each of these shows functions as a whole room-based installation or environment. These room projects are not so much collections of works as they are constellations of material, whose meaning lies not in the separate consideration of the parts, but in the ways that those parts echo and layer each other in the three-

dimensional space of our encounter with them. Indeed, in each of these exhibitions, the space is organised through a complex play of layers and counterpoints that combine to engage, and make a problem of, the fact of our presence. Following *The Kitchen*, both Horvat's *For Example* in Istanbul Biennial and *To Go On* in the context of *Greater New York* repeatedly explore the play between two-dimensional works on paper evincing a problematic desire for three-dimensionality, and three-dimensional sculptural interventions which declare their instability, incompleteness and capacity for hybridity in ways that constantly take issue with the situated and decidedly embodied observer.

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In *Or Some Other Time* at *The Kitchen*, we encounter a constellation of objects that appear to have been severed – a landscape of half-chairs sinking into floors, walls and mirrors; an impractically positioned escape ladder that has been cut in two vertically, its two halves installed on opposite sides of a room-partitioning wall; whilst in the centre we find a wooden table almost fully bisected by an image of a forest mounted on a hardboard frame. Elsewhere in the space a number of small-scale videos are projected, each depicting a crude animation of a pair of human legs which pace back and forth within the frame, marking the limit of their rectangular world – the already cut or severed female figure further fragmented by means of Perspex sheets which interrupt the projection, reflecting and refracting the image to new locations and onto different surfaces in the gallery. Most confrontationally perhaps, on entrance to the space we encounter Horvat's *Wall Fan*, a hybrid object or interrupted element of landscape, for which it appears that either a wall has been constructed around an industrial ceiling fan, or that a fan has somehow carved its place into a pre-existing wall. Approaching *Wall Fan* almost inevitably implicates the viewer in an act of imaginary mutilation, since to step into the spinning blades would imply a severing at the top of the thighs, an event which would render the viewer as incomplete and partial as so many of the objects in the landscape of the room. Encountering the space of the installation as a whole is to entertain a form of physical and psychic dispersal, a bewildering fall into the space of potential and abjection between materiality and image.

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This kind of blurring is extended and developed in Horvat's subsequent room installations for the 11th Istanbul Biennial and *Greater New York 2010*, where once again the artist works the space between image, object and environment. Here, the collage pieces which might have once been two-dimensional are cut and folded to produce emphatically three-dimensional objects, which test the borders between inkjet self-portrait and blank reverse of paper, between image and frame, figure and ground. While the images threaten to become objects – bending back on themselves, opening space in the pages, provisionally attached

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to cardboard templates with rubber bands – many of the objects and physical fixtures in Horvat's Istanbul room seem to aspire to cross the border in the other direction – to become images. The frame structure of the painted-over windows to one side of the space is mirrored by Horvat in a makeshift assemblage of strips of cut cardboard, the shadow-frame she creates hanging loose from the window at one corner and arcing down into the space, as though the window's structure were somehow shedding a layer of skin. Elsewhere, small marks or items in the room are also mirrored by Horvat, who has draped foam strips to echo and multiply the vertical lines of the radiators, or in other places laid lines of foam to follow and extend the trace of existing water drips on the walls.

As viewers we are certainly encountering distinctive works in each of these spaces, but we're doing so in environments which, thanks to Horvat's interventions, significantly doubt, double and redraw their own materiality. In *To Go On* for *Greater New York*, Horvat pulls us again into an unsettling spatial and representational *mis-en-abyme*, in which a series of forms (human figure, globe, box, chair) are crudely made, remade and refigured, displayed in lines or sequences that unsettle our perception of their status. We cannot be sure exactly what we are looking at and even the ground we stand on to make an assessment is in doubt as Horvat roughly echoes the structure of the parquet tiles using cardboard strips, turning the floor into a doubled surface – floor and picture of floor, floor and ghost or shadow of floor.

Finally, in *To Go On* as in each of the other room works, we're also pulled into an uncertainty about our own status and presence as observers. The end wall of Horvat's *To Go On* installation creates a line-up of rudimentary figures, whose fluctuating degrees of representational crudeness and complexity – paired "legs" of foam and timber, proto-human tangles of tape or coiled cable, a partially opened zipper – lead the viewer to both recognition and identification on the one hand, and a hallucinatory yet tangible feeling of self-unmaking, on the other.

Tim Etchells