

~~In Other Words~~

~~~~In Other's Words~~~~

And Other Words

Vlatka Horvat

Nuit Banai, Emma Cocker, Tim Etchells, Naomi Fry,  
Hugo Glendinning, Matt Keegan, Tevž Logar, Matthew Lyons,  
Solveig Øvstebø, Graham Parker, November Paynter,  
Christian Rattemeyer, Jovana Stokić, WHW

---

## To Bring Down a House

pp. 81-84

*To Bring Down a House* is a collaboration between Tim Etchells and Vlatka Horvat presented twice to date: first in 2006 in the context of the show *Protections* at Kunsthau Graz, and subsequently in 2008 at Sfeir-Semler Gallery in Beirut, as part of the line-up for Home Works IV festival. This project effectively comprised a growing archive of proposals, each suggesting a different way to destroy or attack a house. The various drawings, instructions and collages – some visual, some text-based – accumulated in the gallery over the course of each show, delivered via a fax machine installed on the gallery floor. Once received, these faxed proposals were pinned to the gallery walls, presenting a range of ways to physically and psychically unravel this domestic terrain.

The shift in context from Graz to Beirut provided a new set of terms with which to consider the space between 'house' and 'home'. How are ownership and territory determined, and who gets to decide on their definitions, borders, rights? Horvat and Etchells' project did not attempt to answer such questions. Instead, both exhibition venues were treated like empty inboxes that gradually amassed messages of deconstruction. The contentious questions of who was deploying these faxes and whose houses were to be destroyed moved the prompts from playful to ominous, especially in the latter incarnation of the project, as the actions of Beirut's southern neighbour, Israel, perpetually redefining Palestine's borders, resound strongly in this context. Horvat's home country of Croatia had gone through major social/political change too within the last twenty years, which included acts of renaming and

remapping – a fact difficult to disregard when considering this project.

In Vlatka Horvat's best known collage- and drawing-based works, she tends to be present through her absence. In many of her works, Horvat has physically removed herself from photos, re-assembled herself using an incomplete set of disjointed body parts, in which her face/identity is not included (for example *Parts Work* and *Anatomies*), or she is seen partially obscured by columns and other architectural elements or objects, as is the case in her series *Obstructed*. This game of hide-and-seek is perpetually placed in the hands of the viewer, whose expectation is filtered and manipulated through the use of simple and familiar forms of image-making and an image-set that generates its own language.

pp. 39-42, 47-48

This strategy of staging for an audience is just as applicable to Horvat and Etchells' *To Bring Down a House*. 'Staging' is an appropriate word here, as Etchells has worked extensively within experimental theatre, while Horvat's works on paper conjure the presence of an actress who has just left the stage or who is waiting for a cue to return or re-assemble. *To Bring Down a House* could be considered as a script being written in real time, across the span of four to five weeks, and directed simultaneously from two different sites – in this case, New York and Sheffield; Horvat and Etchells' respective home bases.

The 1989 film *The War of the Roses* provides a humorous and related script against which a differently skewed reading of this project can emerge. The story involves a married couple played by Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas who fall out of love with one another while residing in their dream house purchased jointly at an earlier and happier time in their marriage. After filing for divorce, they each attempt to do everything to get the other to move out, while destroying their home in the process. I have not mentioned yet that Etchells and Horvat are partners; both in crime and in life. Like the Danny DeVito-directed film, their co-production provides its own absurdity, black comedy and collaboratively curated destruction.

As I write this, the United States, where I reside, moves into its third year of a deep financial recession. The words 'sub-prime loans' seem to be on an endlessly faxed loop in ever-increasing font sizes and perpetually bold-faced type. Even cast members of *The Real Housewives of New York* and *New Jersey* had to downsize their homes and reconsider their pre-recessional plans for expansion and renovation. The vacillation between the real, 'the real' and the scripted – inherent in the reality TV format – can be seen to be in keeping with the rhythm and logic that Horvat and Etchells set up within their collaboration. The tired

old phrase of "truth is stranger than fiction" is as applicable to *To Bring Down a House* as it is to these unintentional self-parodies of ambition, progress and success, and the inevitable doomed-for-collapse fate that is certain to befall these protagonists at some point in their televised existence. The lengths to which one is willing to go in order to claim territory, or destroy or damage that of their neighbours (or spouse), can extend in unexpectedly comedic and tragic ways. As the walls of the exhibition spaces in Graz and Beirut became more and more covered with proposals for undermining or destabilising a house – both as a structure and as an idea of a safe, protected space – there was always room left for the viewers to come up with their own destructive proposals that may be even more absurd or sinister than those launched by the artists.

Matt Keegan