Chapter 5

utter matter

julieanna preston
Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 expose the use of an affirmative feminist agency to emancipate seemingly inert interior finishing materials from an oppression I attribute to building construction systems, patriarchal paradigms and political economies promulgating neutralization, homogeneity and uniformity. Chapter 1: *The Yield Principle* introduces the wedge/shim as a conceptual, methodological and physical tool capable of liberating material expression suppressed by standardized industrial manufacturing processes. Chapter 2: *Voice Lessons* pries open the power of oration and do-it-yourself renovation to expose the political bias of neutrality, including neutral colours. Chapter 3: *IN wildness* tampers with phenomenal and conceptual states of transparency to move beyond the interior as a bounded, domesticated and private territory. Chapter 4: *making note(s) OF surface* articulates ‘surface’ as a relational encounter catalyzed by material and spatial forces. Building on the trajectory of these texts and the creative works presented within them, this chapter, *utter matter*, tracks a significant shift in the intellectual and practical concerns of my project; I change from a researcher who seeks to liberate interior materials to one who engages with materials (and objects) as like matter. This adjustment to the project’s emphasis was probed in a performative installation entitled *BALE* where an interior space (Snowhite Gallery), a bale of greasy wool (identified by the sack it arrived in as Tenderden Downs 49) and I inhabited for three days. *BALE* was an experiment that extended Luce Irigaray’s notion of respectful engagement between women and men enunciated in her essay “I love to you” to material objects. I sought to find wildness, the animal and the animate in material objects, and in me, through the interaction that brings to bear the kind of democracy that Bruno Latour suggests lies beyond the subject-object/ figure-background/ nature-culture binaries that assert power over that which is fluid, connected and relational. Without a prescribed set of outcomes, *BALE* eventuated as a sequence of spatial and material encounters that collectively called into play Joseph Beuys’ 1974 installation *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, Francis Ponge’s prosems “The Voice of Things” and Jane Bennett’s advocacy for vibrant materiality.
What follows is a text that reflects on the performative installation *BALE* as it imagines what might happen if the script was not a prescribed set of directions but instead, a catalyst to set things in motion. *utter matter* considers *BALE* in more than an after-the-fact description and visual representation; listening-to rather than looking-at, *utter matter* registers a metamorphosis in my understanding of what it might take to engaged all things material—humans, animals, vegetation and objects—with respect for their specific energies and constitutions.\(^4\) *BALE* revealed to me how challenging it was/is to cast off ingrained and habitualised assumptions, behaviors, gestures and language riddled with human domination including a privilege granted to thinking over feeling or sensing. It follows that, *utter matter* is an attempt to expose the pedagogical underbelly of *BALE*.

At the same time, *utter matter* is a script to a play that could happen, a script that might assemble a cohort of actors and prompt a range of interior surface encounters, effectively, or rather, affecting, a performance of actor-network theory (ANT). The script’s collapse of what happened and what could happen adopts a notion of time put forward by Michelle Serres and Bruno Latour: “...time does not flow according to a line...nor according to a plan but rather according to extensive complex mixture, as though it reflected stopping points, ruptures, deep wells, chimneys of thunderous acceleration...all sown at random, at best in a viable disorder.”\(^5\) My approach draws actor-network theory out of its mode as an analytical method serving the social sciences into an aesthetic creative practice context. While *BALE* and *utter matter* add to the large and burgeoning community gathering around ANT, they belong to a small group of artists, designers and architects probing the implications and affects of ANT in performative and material works.\(^6\) These works do not represent ANT, they practice it spatially, and more so, bear a vital connectivity between philosophy, politics and creative practice.

Folding reflective and the speculative modes of written expression together affords me the means to introduce a litany of human and non-human actors in this state of play: Luce Irigaray, Joseph Beuys, Bruno Latour, Francis Ponge and Jane Bennett have leading roles billeted alongside objects such as pink wool blanket and graphite pencil. All these things make
themselves present through their actions. Their voices are aired as forces to BALE’s conception and more importantly, to what BALE generates.

Inspiring me from the sidelines is Brazilian dramaturge Augusto Boal who developed The Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro in the 1970’s. Boal's method of performative theatre takes improvisation to its limits; often guided by an open-ended script or scenario, audiences are transformed into active participants in the theatrical experience to enable a socially liberating collaboration. While Boal’s performances challenged the passive state of spectators and increased the theatre as a site of political discourse, utter matters extends these liberating tactics to a conscious-raising state of performativity amongst things that are assumed to be even more passive than spectators, and I suggest, equally oppressed, as seemingly inert objects. Towards the same purpose, utter matter also employs the same experimental material principles to textual language as those used by Francis Ponge: “...letters and words are concentrations of energy: dynamic, material beings that have the power of speech, that dance across the page, that reveal different characters (depending on their typography), that can be seen as well as heard, that possess a history as well as a pre-history, and that disclose forceful, idiosyncratic personalities.” Written as a script for a play without dialogue, utter matter veers away from the role that speaking lines have to direct a specific narrative and ending to a performance. The absence of spoken voice leaves a space open for the audience (the reader) to interpolate and participate in the exchange – to invoke change. Structured as three scenes, one for each day of the performative installation, the text takes liberties with the conventions of punctuation, grammar, paragraph formation and possessive pronouns as a means to explore non-verbal communication between things.
SCENE ONE

enter snowhite

a gallery
da ground floor space consisting of two rooms connected by a doorway
one door welcomes
    and locks out the foyer
the other sneaks in through a back corridor

snowhite is hemmed in by a dull chalky white coat blistered by an overly absorbent brick structure

To an architect, snowhite looks like this:

isolated
bifurcated
misnamed
empty
emaciated

enter panasonic and sony

a button on panasonic
    a video camera perched
    on an internal ledge
    inside snowhite 1
confirms that transmission to sony
    the LCD screen mounted
    outside the gallery entrance
    is receiving a signal
green to red
going live to an audience
merely passing by
if there at all
watching from the outside
an indeterminate number of other yous
casual engagement
possible surveillance

of the vicissitudes of
a three day encounter

sony is confused by the stillness of the image on screen
pixels vibrating
expectant
anxious for action

49 meets snowhite
A wide girth stalls the ceremonial entry but the momentum of the
volume finds 49 in equilibrium with a luminous puddle conveniently
in full view of panasonic
watching persistently
voyeuristically

49 reeks of the shearing shed outside hamilton
grieves over being severed from the host
a ewe
bulges with pride
testing the woven sack
to hold it all in
waiting with baited breathe for the right moment to escape
to expand an interior volume exponentially

snowhite and 49 meet julieanna
sony grants julieanna a first glance of snowhite and 49 entwined
napping

she enters snowhite from the back door
shoes in the threshold
shades drawn

julieanna succumbs to horizontality
to the floor
to 49 and snowhite
on their own terms
grey hair and clothing fall into shadow
present in a pump profile
waiting for something to else to move
something like the eyes of the cat that stalked the
darkened studio in front of the camera
left running by Bruce
Naumann
a flash of retinal disturbance overtaking the interior
pregnant moment
insulated from the urgency of life
on the other side of the door

**enter luce**

luce slips julieanna a small thin book under the back door
gift to
of to

liberation from the shackles of
language that enslave one to
another
segregrating a sentence into active
and passive tense
symbolizing the ownership of one person to another
even in the throes of communicating the
ultimate profession
confession

“I love you”

luce renounces love as a possessive trap

julieanna finds several passage in the book underlined,

_i love to you_ says there are no strings
attached to my love, no contracts, no
promises, just a gift that acknowledges
us as equals; _i love to you_ means I
maintain a relation of indirection to
you. I do not subjugate you or consume
you. I respect you (as irreducible). I
hail to you: in you I hail. I praise you;
in you I praise. I give you thanks; to
you I give thanks for...I bless you.
for...I speak to you, not just about
something; rather I speak to you. I tell
you, not so much this or that, but rather
I tell to you."

...can we construct a temporality?

If I am attentive to your intentionality,
to your fidelity to yourself and to
its/your becoming, then it is permissible
for me to imagine whether there can be
anything long-lasting between us, whether
our intentionalities can come into
accordance.”
And so, you do not know me, but you know something of my appearance. You can also perceive the directions and dimensions of my intentionality. You can not know who I am but you can help me to be by perceiving that in me which escapes me, my fidelity or infidelity to myself. In this way you can help me get away from inertia, tautology, repetition, or even from errancy, from error. You can help me become while remaining myself.

julieanna touches 49 and snowhite with luce’s words

Thus: how am I to speak to you? And: How am I to listen to you? ¹⁴

enter joseph

joseph is hauled in by the sound of an ambulance siren carving a path through a new york city night a spectacle wrapped in wool felt on a gurney
to a gallery divided into two parts by a chain link fence

on one side
coyote paces
the other
an entourage
watches

joseph meets coyote
donning the signature hat and vest
actions oscillating between hieratic figure and ordinary man
wielding a shepherding staff
tap tap tap
laying down a stack of newspapers
smoking a cigarette
making a nest of the felted wool
chiming a triangle
chiming a
chiming

ting ting ting ting

in harmony with the animal
in the animal
rekindling a connection
to the animal
with the possibility of freedom¹⁶
sony sees none of this
blind to history
legend
posterity

joseph makes art happen
an art happening
actioning
art in action
actionism
the drama of material acting in and against itself
social sculpture includes the everyday man
mankind
maybe even
woman-kind
certainly animal
coyote-kind

reciprocity, fluid communication, never a one way flow

the stakes are high
a healing act uniting material
spiritual
human
animal
vegetal worlds
ensuring survival in its fullest most creative freedom
immaterial acts of shaping ideas
freeing creative energies
instating human universality rather than reifying capital
the affliction that is making our world
the ultimate rigor mortis...a fixation, an obsession, an addiction on the inorganic production of physical goods, a destructive misinterpretation of value.

the goal
freedom
the ideal
self-determination

julieanna meets joseph
joseph proclaims himself a shaman
a mystic figure
wages protest to the secular thrust of modernism
worldly all the same because of the currency that joseph
attributes to materials
wax
fat
lead
felt
soap
storehouses of energy
full of potential
batteries of warmth
more than physical warmth
spiritual warmth
evolutionary warmth

coyote
i like america and america likes me
a political campaign
a warning shot fired over the bow of western european
culture
a heed to listen
to act with empathy
to embrace human frailty

coyote
an environmental symbol
a powerful deity for the North American Indian
yet a wild animal plucked out of the desert
caged
taunted by domesticating techniques
clickety click clickety click clickety click

joseph demonstrating his cultish powers
a whisperer to animals
a preacher to students
an ability to reinstall an aura that walter
benjamin had declared lost
proposing nature as the organic alternative
infiltrating the animal kingdom in order
bringing its secrets to the surface of blackboards and
watercolour washes
bringing nature so close that humans fall
back into it
like Thales who fell into a well while watching the sky

a hire car drops julieanna off in front of snowhite
not long after a farm ute delivers 49
no fanfare
no fans
no media other than sony
a witness

49 has been rescued
temporarily
from the fate of a long
stormy
boat ride to China
to be graded
combed
bleached
spun
to journey back again
to New Zealand
to be felted
woven
wound
the animal in 49
extracted
dags of sheep
excrement
staining the fibres
pungent shades of
yellow ochre
mustard
green
ashen brown
industrial bleaching

julieanna touches the ewe
with gratitude
for sacrificing a coat
in circumstances less than
noble
more than humiliating
thrown down
held down
shorn down
stripped bare
bearing underbelly
private parts
to the camera
the audience

julieanna actions a redemptive
reconciliatory
agenda
healing a relationship between human and material
all matter
utter matter

a mutual expanded way of thinking
thinking that sets matter free
open ended making keeping it free
material actions that set thoughts free
binding creativity and life through action
self-affirmation
self-creation

49 is free to exit at any time as is snowhite

julieanna pondering

how is an interior an object or thing? that implies edges, definition, limits. does being a thing, having a name, thus being named by a noun, imply any kind of mastery? what is not owned, possessed or belong to something else? might luce join me in banishing apostrophes, am i part of snowhite, one of its kinetic accessories or an animated surface? where does 49 begin and snowhite end? why do they each have to end and begin?

enter jessica

visual interpreter
jessica circumnavigates snowhite

an awkward invasion
disrupting a trance
sets off an impulse to move to act

a prosthetic eye
nikon
roves about opportunistically
shutter snapping
consuming
gobbling up the view
trespasses and translates

interactions are minimal
no talking ensues
enter pink wool blanket, bees wax candle, matches, bottled water, cake of soap, ball of twine, a jar of honey, sewing shears, stainless steel bowl, cotton towel, electric kettle, gingernut biscuits, finely ground coffee beans, coffee plunger, ceramic cup, mandarin oranges and solid graphite pencil

an army of props and acting accessories
adopting a stoic stance
bundles of energy
assigned an empty geometric form and function by Plato
before they are filled with a material substance

long overdue for a coup
the revolution of things
the commodious revolt
consumptive gout

enter francis

francis shuffles in
unnoticed
taking in the scene
chewing on the details
sniffing matter
ears pulled close to the plethora of things
acting
up
mute
objects of
expression

a silent symphony to anyone seeking gratification
giving voice to ordinary objects
finding the profound in the secular
exalting the trivial
pulling the inalienable rights of things to the surface

soap
snail
door
wasp
meadow
glass of water
mud
orange crate

restoring the power and purity to language
avoiding the stereotype
steering clear of emotion and symbolism
francis writes essays that look like poems

poems behaving as essays
proems

exhausts the thing through intense
ferocious
observation

finds the visual equivalence between writing
matter

finds no privilege or status too high
or
too low
an existentialism of
things universally
equal
but
different

makes sense of the things through the senses
the object senses
real
concrete
visceral

a material constitution
and life
in the world
without the heavy overlay
of human imposition
the object direction
an independence

interfacing with human history
mythology
biology
geology
humour
puns
lots of french puns

performing
lively
showing little hesitation to play with words
thoughts as they
emerge²

with a prod from francis

the transparency of the glass door to snowhite 1 is obscured by soap
a “[m]agic stone! The more it forms, with air and water, clusters of scented grapes, explosive. Water, air and soap overlap, then, play leapfrog, form bombastic and slight combinations which a breath, a smile, the least interior
vanity, the slightest exaggeration cause
to explode..."  

francis makes notes about snowhite

the specifics of heat
air
art
light
water

scratches in a small notebook
turned away from panasonic

shy
introspective

a pinch of 49 wanders with francis
to the back room
in a pocket
a sanctuary
out of view

sighs
shuffling
scratches

a rhythm expelled by graphite consorting with coarse paper
giving its self up
as a soft cursive trail
to the subjects of blanket

candle
matches
bottle
 soap
 twine
 shears
 bowl
 towel
 kettle
 biscuits
 coffee beans
 plunger
 cup
 oranges
 of course
 pencil

sitting with things
noticing the life of things emerge in their stillness

julieanna opens the flaps of the sack that bind 49

reading
noticing
peeling back
stripping
unwrapping
undressing

finding more sacks
laying out
opening up
woven details
wearing details
repairing details
travelling data
puncture wounds
oily residue

thick
tacky
rank

**enter bruno**

the outside world whirls twirls swirls
breaks the soliloquy

bruno is out on the lawn
hands waving
eyebrows knitting	
twitching
orchestrating a storm that washes away
modernism as nothing more than a fanciful
misguided construct
a very persuasive marketing campaign by
those claiming to know
know what they don’t know
know that they have it
all under control
know that everything can
be known

rap rap rap window glass rants

bruno points to the ants ants ants
they are everywhere
those agents
those actants
those actors
those forces
go go go
go towards the richness
the realness
of the world
get moving
associate
assemble
migrate
circulate
connect
negotiate
be social
socialize as things

free things
  things that matter
  thing matter
  things with concerns not mere facts
be free as things to mingle
  collaborate
  join forces
  fuse
  incorporate
  multiply with other things
  things that might not have heartbeats or mammary glands
  but things fertile all the same

thinking
  reasoning brains aside
reconsider the networks between things that make other things happen
  the connective tissue
  the current
  the currency

francis peaks around the corner
  waving a text on electricity

bees wax candle ignites a wick
  a koha
  an offering

bottled water strikes a transparent pose
  waiting for thirst or smoke
  just in case
because 49 is frothing
  steaming
  spewing
  coming apart at the seams
  escaping the sack as anticipated
  things are heating up
julieanna runs from all corners of snowhite
flinging corporeal mass into fibre mass
again again again
once more with abandon
heaving flesh into the air
into fleece
trusting 49 to soften the fall
all colour drains from snowhite
except for two tiny dim red lights
panasonic transmitting
with the glowing ember of a torch
beuys warding off the prospect of becoming a victim of the wild in coyote

jessica retreats to consort with sony

luce exits
slight scowl
perfume linger

francis grins as frail wisps of 49 catch air currents
lofting eddies

julieanna dreams into the thick surface of pink wool blanket and 49
overcome by the pungence of sensing

SCENE TWO

enter jane

saunters in courageously
daring to play at the edges of animism
fetishism
anthropomorphism

brave enough to use plain english
to speak to
to speak of plain things
plain things that play havoc
have a life of their own
not gremlins
fairies
pixies
taniwa
borrowers
angels or
nymphs
but lively matter
deeply
entangled
in the matters of humans
so much so that the matter of humans
the body
might be just a transformative
host
a compost accelerator to
minerals
nutrients
fluids
challenging modernity’s
definition of nature as
mechanistic and lifeless which
acts to demystify the messy and
unruliness of bodies and world
as well as perpetuate a
seemingly insatiable state of
consumption

francis makes bubbles with soap in stainless steel bowl
having stood vigil throughout the night

jane hangs the wool sacks
to filter the exuberance of bruno
who is still outside making a racket
telling stories about how relations do
or do not assemble

ANT is better understood as a toolkit for
telling interesting stories about, and
interfering in, those relations. More
profoundly, it is a sensibility to the
messy practices of relationality and
materiality of the world. Along with this
sensibility comes a wariness of the
large-scale claims common in social
theory: these usually seem too simple.10

julieanna stirs
dances a jig
herds 49 towards the edges of snowhite

left stomp right swing swing swing
left stomp right kick kick swing
stomp kick swing swing
stompwingswingswingkick

49 accruing at the boundary
an island converted to a meadow
of floor

coffee
cup
gingernuts invited to a picnic in the meadow

francis applauds with pleasure

all pause
heavy breathing

joseph
bruno lecture to the public
outside
democracies are not all equal

julieanna 49 blanket agree to go horizontal
lounging in wool sown field
distributed evenly
basking freely
yielding
defiant to art history
the floor
as opposed to the
orthogonal verticality of
the canvas is debased and
uncultured

jane hovers overhead
in the heat
rising from the beach

snowhite quiet

SCENE THREE

unwrapping julieanna
migrating 49 to the passage
towards the door
snowhite stopping the draft
julieanna fitting soft mass

throw lob toss pitch hurl
squeeze clasp clutch

roll stuff compress pile push stack press tuck
presstuckpress
topple
once more pilepresstuck
shore
pilepressstuck
bolster

49 fills
sate
slake
insulate

hueeeemp

snowhite plugs
sucks
seals

swaaaaaaup

blanket props
leans
slumps

aaaghghghhhh

breath taking
holding

whooooooou

49 exhales
vacates
evacuates

heh heh heh hey hee

sacks cut free
falling flat
splat

smaacck flumppf

49 fills
stuffs
exhausts one sack
another sack
another sack

sweissssh shusush

three ripe bales ready
still
temporarily

not THE END


Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) was a German post-war sculptor, art theorist and performance artist active in the FLUXUS movement and developing the concept of social sculpture to effect change in society and politics at a metaphysical scale. The exhibition Coyote occurred at the René Block Gallery, New York, May 1974. Francis Ponge (1899-1989) was a prominent figure in French literature credited as being influenced by Surrealism and best known for his close and intimate examination of everyday objects in his work *Le parti pris des choses* (1942) and *Le Savon* (1967). Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010). Jane Bennett is Professor of Political Theory and Chair of the Department of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University. In addition to Vibrant Matter, she is the author of *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (2001) and *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (2002).

Luce Irigaray and Mary Green, ed., *Luce Irigaray: Teaching* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 231.


Irigaray, *i love to you*, 109.

Irigaray, *i love to you*, 110.

Irigaray, *i love to you*, 112.

Irigaray, *i love to you*, 112.

Irigaray, *i love to you*, 113.


Kuoni, *Joseph Beuys in America*, x.
All of these things are a part of my daily life: For example, an inheritance from my Croatian grandmother Rosalia Thelin, pink wool blanket usually serves as the first layer in my bed linens. Because my partner is a beekeeper, bees wax candles and jars of honey are staples in my household. My two Labradors Te Hine Poché and Raison d’Etre lent their stainless steel water bowl to this installation. There are few pleasures better than dipping a gingernut biscuit into a fresh cup of coffee.


