Conclusion

A brief reflection recalls the journey of the various parts of this written document: Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 exposed 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 introduced 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 pried open the power of oration and do-it-yourself renovation to expose the political bias of neutrality, including neutral colours. Chapter 3: IN wildness tampered 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 articulated ‘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, Chapter 5: utter matter tracked a significant shift in the intellectual and practical concerns of my project; I changed from a researcher who sought to liberate interior materials to one who now engages with materials (and objects) as like matter.

The spatial experience and encounter of BALE is the closest I have come to realizing an ethical engagement with matter inclusive of the matter of language and digital media, and yet I am sure that there is still more to be done on this front. The process of writing utter matter lends crucial evidence and wonderment to the final stage of my doctoral research project. First, it marks a growth in my spatial writing practice to mine and expand the concepts and actions driving a performative installation such as BALE; to use the writing process as a parallel state of play and experimentation, thus underscoring what I have professed all along, language is material and as susceptible and resistant to hard edged tools and metaphors as concrete, or wool. This has not always been the case; even when writing Chapters 1-4, I was bothered by a tinge of post-rationalization, backing the work up with theory or an over emphasis on narrating what had occurred. Though some of those habits may indeed be part and parcel to the role of the written portion of the doctoral thesis, I have not been completely satisfied. Together, BALE and utter matter clearly cross a threshold of achievement because the works took me out of my comfort zone, pressed me to own up to what I was ‘on’ about, helped me shed some of the detritus of other ways of thinking and practice, and most of all, they were cathartic; they left me standing in front of a (new) door (or better, lying on the floor) in a heap of questions, material, and zeal for where the practice can journey. I have not experienced this so profoundly before now. This makes the entire four years of study so much more worthy.

Not to diminish what I offer above in any way, utter matter also made clear to me that material is matter is material, to borrow a ploy from Gertrude Stein. In an immersive experience that trialled the animate constitutions and capacities of things human and non-human, standard modes of communication such as speech, writing and gesture were quickly replaced with modes of exchange (acting upon and with each other) and then further, shifting to states of sensing and feeling. Words had no place in the end; language
was too mental, too systematic, too articulate. Even Ponge’s sense of speech as a faculty of elocution proved more intellectual than animal. I believe this becomes all too evident at the (not) end of utter matter as I struggle to write sounds as words, and not just as onamonapias, but sounds that rest in your gut or mouth. Language, even spoken, is/was getting in the way of making contact. Beuys’ work with the coyote highlights that primal and visceral sensibility. I had to learn this myself nearly forty years later but motivated by different causes and concerns. It is still too soon to say whether or not this revelation will curtail my spatial writing or performative installation practice or merely shift me into the realm of sound art, phonetics, visual poetry or even actual script writing. What is certain is that that the feminism I applied towards the emancipation of interior materials as vibrant, vital and forceful stuff has absorbed me into a liberating assemblage.

For this I am indebted to political theorist Jane Bennett’s scholarship on vibrant material, Thoreau and wildness and the enchantment of the modern world; each work introduced me to a philosophical view linking matter and ethics. In *Vibrant Matter* Bennett dwells on commonplace things and physical phenomena including electricity, rubbish, stem cells, landfills as stuff imbued with vital materiality running through and across bodies, human and not. Her political analysis of public events reveals the potential to develop an ethical and more ecologically responsible politics that acknowledges humans and non-human as matter embroiled in a web of force-affecting situations. Philosopher Bryan Bannon’s review of *Vibrant Matter* highlights its relevance to my project:

Building on her previous book, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton, 2001), where she argues for a renewed attention to the ethical value of affects in addressing human malfeasance toward the material world, *Vibrant Matter* turns its attention toward the “thing power” that produces these affects. In this sense, Bennett’s vital materialism is akin to theories such as Val Plumwood’s “weak panpsychism” from *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Routledge, 1993) and David Abram’s terrestrial animism from *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Vintage, 1997). What these three positions have in common is their sincere attempt to provide a materialist philosophy that does not rely upon traditional definitions of matter as passive, inactive, and unitary… Following Deleuze, Bennett defines life as “an interstitial field of non-personal, ahuman forces, flows, tendencies, and trajectories” (61). To establish matter as vital, Bennett creatively synthesizes Latour’s work with Deleuze and Guattari’s. Those familiar with these thinkers will find themselves on recognizable terrain: material bodies are taken to be “assemblages,” aggregates of interacting bodies and forces, which interact with other assemblages to form larger networks of agency. By revealing how human agency is only possible within larger assemblages of bodies, Bennett claims to be “raising the status of the materiality of which we are composed…”

The gentle but persuasive force that Bennet reasons matter’s agency and hence its liveness proved significant in framing BALE and utter matters. Though I am aware of the dangers
of translating philosophy into concrete material form and actions, I feel that her works welcomed bringing physicality to conceptual and abstract thoughts especially since her own examples demonstrated virtuosity through real world circumstances. And thus throughout this research project I have consistently asserted that my practice crossed out or crossed over artificial divides between theory and practice, and writing and making. I have engaged spatial writing practice to reflect, position and tease out the issues of concern in the sculptural, exhibition and performative work and vice versa. Preparing this ADR has not been a case of merely “writing up the research”; it is a re-working of the original creative projects carried out with a firm conviction that language is a pliable material as susceptible to shimming, prying and wearing processes as wood, or even — bless you Ponge — soap. Spatial writing is related to “art-writing” which was developed by cultural critic Mieke Bal to bring one closer to art by placing it at the centre of attention. Bal’s close reading of the visual work through a structured narrative reveals to me a relational intimacy between the matter of me as an art viewer, the matter of the space of encounter and the matter of the objects. “Site-writing” is a practice articulated by architectural theorist and art critic Jane Rendell to prioritise the sites of engagement with art. “These include the sites — material, emotional, political and conceptual — of the artwork’s construction, exhibition and documentation, as well as those remembered, dreamed and imagined by the artist, critic and other viewer.” For the time being, I hold on to calling my own practice spatial rather than site-writing simply because of the project’s focus on the spatiality of surface and the connotations “site” has to an architecturally-bound place. But for all intents and purposes my spatial writing practice follows Jane Rendell’s lead, without perhaps the same deep knowledge and command of art and architectural theory and psychoanalytic interpretation. Where Rendell has invested in site-writing to position the critic in relation to art objects, architectural spaces, theoretical ideas and the act of writing itself, I have devoted spatial writing to the artist, a special kind of art user, who is seeking to discover what materialises in the work before words.

As the chapters have already signalled, I am not bound by proper academic discourse; I am at ease using a full array of writing voices, tactics and alternative forms of communication etiquette including the use of the subjective pronoun “I” and sentences that are written with emphasis on aurality and, at times, laden with emotion. In addition, this project engages the autobiographical, a tactic employed frequently in feminist works to reinforce and acknowledge the specifics of the individual as much as to avoid generalisations that reify essences. “I” is never neutral or disinterested. The five chapters present a full spectrum of spatial writing experiments that parallel the project’s maturation and my own skill and understanding of what this practice can yield and how it can also behave as matter.

**Inertia: Of interior, surface, matter** is a gift to the discipline of interior design. It rethinks what an interior is, how it is practiced, how it is performed and how it is gendered. It exposes where the discipline is thought to be fragile, weak and seemingly superficial only to find an alternative mode of power, another kind of strength, within all those attributes which have for centuries placed interiors, women, material and surface on the back side of a slash: “/”- a sign use in mathematics for fractions, a violent cutting action, a line demarcating a boundary or a binary relationship, and as my colleagues at the
University of Brighton told me after a big laugh, to urinate - the backside of a slash is not a good place to be.

The research project set out on a voyage to explore what an interior surface could do. The creative projects and spatial writing practice make evident that interior surfaces can wage a protest, support a feminist agenda, deploy a campaign, deny entry, prompt boundary-crossing, facilitate sensibilities, and, perhaps most of all, act as agents against oppression as well as actants for positive change. In the midst of probing interior furnishings and finishes, the research revealed how industrial products and building processes partner with modernist paradigms to support smooth, white, uniform and homogenous surfaces. These interiors are now suspect for the way they hide behind shades of neutrality sustaining spatial (and racial) indifference. While offering a point of resistance to the forces of consumerism, convention and standardization brandish in many everyday interiors, 

**inertia: OF interior, surface, matter** bears evidence of an interior’s capacity to be vibrant and expressive in its own material muteness. As one interior conspired with its inhabitant to wage an amplified protest against inequity, another interior bestowed a polychromatic experience of wildness in the stillness and quietude of a non-verbal exchange. These exercises serve to pry the interior loose from assumptions about its domestic and domesticated state, its onus to provide comfort, its confinement to architectural structures and its role as a retreat from the realities of a supposed external world. Throughout the research project, interiors shun assumptions about their identity as the mere consequence of material objects arranged in a room and they withstand the temptation to be deferred to an insular state of interiority couched in subjectivity and stimulated by phenomenon. In the process, interiors link to an expanded notion of surface as spatial encounters between things i.e. human, organic, synthetic, vegetal, non-human matter. Such disruption of the normative Western social pecking order reconfigured the primary aim of the project from one that used an interior to champion a feminist cause to one that employed feminist values towards the development of a material ethics. An interior changed from being the centre of concern to the site where an issue was performed, and in doing so, an interior grappled with issues well beyond the physical borders of the room.

As such, the research project contributes to interior design’s emergence as a contemporary, speculative and experimental spatial enterprise and part of a growing international effort to expand the practice of interior design through new media, modes of inquiry and intellectual scholarship.³ Again, with an affirmative outlook, my project looks at what the practice of interior design could be given its history concerned with domesticity, consumer goods, social status and built enclosure yet with an urge to leap out of the margin and participate in the questions and challenges of the twenty-first century. It does so with confidence in an interior’s capacity to be political, to support difference, to be a mobile assemblage. My creative work and spatial writing practice launches a future for interior design that capitalises on its rich history, its existing links with many other disciplines, practices and industries as well its embrasure of many ways of thinking that integrate empirical processes with poetic conceptualisation.
Inertia: OF interior, surface, matter’s critical and experimental exploration of building construction, material details and methods and processes of making space bring interior design’s normative practices to decorate, assemble, apply and arrange into a broader field of discourse and engagement with contemporary issues that are both philosophical and political. Rather than abandon them – to take flight as Rosi Braidotti would say – the project invests in them intellectually and creatively; to mine what is OF the surface rather than look on it or below it, acts which reinforce subservience or superficiality. \(^8\) This aspect of the gift is by no means exclusive to interior design. As the projects and written work reveal, the divide between humans and things, live and dead matter, is the site of oppression. This project calls me to expand that ethical efficacy in future works; to guide my feminist values and female body to the ethics of matter, especially those of materials.

While Inertia: OF interior, surface, matter has successfully transformed my creative practice, it has also propelled me towards a far more proactive and transdisciplinary engagement that is pointed at the nexus of the practical and the conceptual. As I enter the final phase of this doctoral study, all I can see, think about and act upon are the multiple avenues that the project introduced me to. There is enough to sustain a lifetime of creative activity and research. I am prepared to embrace transdisciplinarity with greater vigour; to give up sovereignty to any one discipline, to form — out of difference and diversity — new insights from emergent properties; to be a “generic rebel”. \(^9\) And as such, I will proceed to be fluid, to assemble, associate and circulate as a live force amongst others.


An excerpt from Ponge’s proem Soap: “Saturated with soap, the water froths at the least movement. Wants to join the air, climbs in the assault of the sky. Grabs the air’s arm, climbs the sky’s knees ... throws itself into the sky’s arms ... throws itself onto the sky’s neck ... Displays even a sort of aerostatic pretention. Displays a sort of exaltation, and even an aerostatic pretension. Sometimes achieves, in this respect, miraculous, brilliant short-lived success.” Francis Ponge, Soap, trans. Lane Dunlop (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 75.


In the past five years this expanded field has been fuelled by an unprecedented collection of conferences, exhibitions, symposiums and book publications aimed at international audiences. The authors, designers, artists and writers featured in these venues represent concerted efforts to see the interior design practice, including its theoretical explorations, link to contemporary discourse, media and modes of engagement. The following is a short list; I am a leader in this field of concern.


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APPENDIX A: DVD of Quicktime videos