

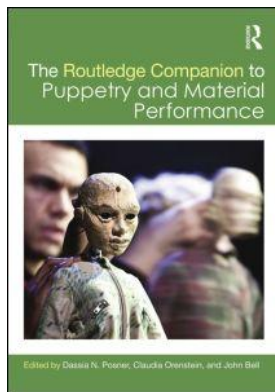
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Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## **The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance**

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### **Return to the Mound**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch28>

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**Published online on: 15 Jul 2014**

**How to cite :-** Eleanor Margolies. 15 Jul 2014, *Return to the Mound from: The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* Routledge

Accessed on: 02 Oct 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch28>

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# Return to the Mound

## Animating Infinite Potential in Clay, Food, and Compost

*Eleanor Margolies*

This chapter explores the live animation of food and clay in theatrical contexts, suggesting that “object animation” or “material animation” can help to dissolve the conceptual division between living and inert matter. Although this division appears to be one of the most fundamental concepts in everyday use, when we seek to understand processes such as the food cycle or the effect of radioactivity on genes, a more complex picture emerges. For example, a loaf of bread may appear to be an inert block of matter when sliding along a supermarket conveyor belt, but when it is eaten, its proteins, vitamins, and minerals interact with acids, enzymes, and bacteria in the body; the bread becomes integrated in the living body as well as fueling it. The science of the twentieth century opened up many new fields of study in which living and (apparently) inert matter interact. We are still digesting these concepts in the wider culture. Jane Bennett argues in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) that a rigid division between “matter” and “life” is partly to blame for our difficulties in conceiving of active interactions between substances, people, and animals. I will suggest that some contemporary puppetry succeeds in dramatizing the potential of matter to play an active part in life.

In a classical view of puppetry, the puppeteer creates the illusion of independent life in matter by manipulating it. “The term ‘puppetry’ denotes the act of bringing to imagined life inert figures and forms (representational or abstract) for a ritual or theatrical purpose” (Francis 2012: 5). The sense of “life in things” is thus no more than a pleasant illusion. However, some contemporary manipulation of objects, particularly the animation of formless materials in full view of the audience, evokes the unseen liveliness of matter by making visible material qualities such as weight, acoustic potential, and elasticity. Rather than attempting to create an illusion of life in the lifeless, such performances highlight the process of humans noticing and

responding to fundamental material properties, as well as the variety of possible interactions between humans and the material world.

This chapter focuses on three performances, each modeling a different kind of relationship to the material world. In their version of *Ubu Roi* (1990), Nada Théâtre remain within a traditional performance context: they present a puppet version of a classic play, with a clear distinction between audience and performers. Yet, by using vegetables as their puppets, they disturb the boundary between living and dead matter. The parallels they make between vegetable and human substance revive our sense of the fragility of human life, embodied as it is in organic matter.

In the second performance discussed, *Claytime* by Indefinite Articles (2006 to present), the puppeteers sculpt figures from clay, improvising in response to audience requests. The use of clay adds another level of meaning to the dramas, conveying a sense of the infinite potential of formless materials. With its improvised musical accompaniment and interplay with the audience, *Claytime* springs from a tradition of improvisation. It establishes a relationship between the different kinds of “listening” that the puppeteers employ: they listen not only to fellow performers and audience members but also to the raw materials of performance, attentive to all suggestions and implicit invitations.

The third performance, “Feast on the Bridge” (2007–2012), further dissolves the boundary between performer and audience. Artist-curator Clare Patey has created a day-long, agglutinative performance along the length of a city bridge; a series of everyday interactions with materials, such as kneading bread dough, are framed as heightened performances, drawing in hands-on participants from the public. As a series of linked yet independent performances, the form of Feast on the Bridge is analogous to the macroscopic structure of the British food chain or the microscopic activity within a lump of live bread dough – it is a complex structure of interactions between living and inert matter. In an important essay, Bruno Latour proposes that such complex structures encompassing both material facts and social beliefs might be described as “*matters of concern*, not *matters of fact*” (Latour 2004: 231). He mentions global warming, the hormonal treatment of menopause, and the Space Shuttle Columbia as further examples of “matters of concern.” I suggest that Patey’s Feast on the Bridge might usefully be considered as an attempt to dramatize an important matter of concern and that this performance (extended in time and space) falls within the remit of puppetry studies because it focuses audience attention on the diversity of possible interactions (both everyday and extraordinary) between human and nonhuman matter.

In the case of the performances discussed here, the notion of puppetry as a form of “mastery” of inanimate things must be set aside. Far from aiming to “master” the inanimate, these animators “listen” to their particular materials, sensing their physical properties and potential for movement or metaphorical deployment. This approach has wider ethical implications. Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch who, as Improbable Theatre, play extensively with puppetry and animation, often improvising with materials such as newspaper, sellotape, and foam, note that in “watching a puppeteer animating materials, we see her attitude to the world she inhabits” (Crouch and McDermott 2000: 13). Another example of this approach in actor training is given by director Enrique Pardo, who often asks actors to work with:

... a large and abstract object, too large to control cleverly, like a large piece of material, or cardboard, or a metal coil reel, or a set of bamboo sticks, etc. Respectful handling of such an object (and not “manipulating” it) will bring out its autonomous movements and sensual qualities, its “will” and caprice.  
(Pardo 1988: 170)

Pardo holds that respectful handling and receptivity help “to establish a dialogue with the object-world, beyond personal psychology and its expressivity” (Pardo 1988: 170). His approach to objects that are “too large to control cleverly” is particularly suggestive when considering human relations to substances, forces, and phenomena that seem beyond human control. Though a receptive, listening approach to matter does not constitute an ecological philosophy, it is perhaps a precondition for ecological thinking. Mark Down and Nick Barnes of the puppet company Blind Summit work mainly with table-top puppets operated in full view by three puppeteers each.<sup>1</sup> They make a suggestive analogy:

In Japanese Bunraku puppetry three puppeteers work closely together to make lifelike human movement. In order to master the art, puppeteers listen to the puppet and enable it to move the way it suggests. They allow it to live. By submitting to the puppet in this way the puppeteers fall naturally into collaboration. This reverses the way puppets are popularly thought of today. Maybe from this perspective the Earth should be thought of as humanity’s biggest puppet?

(Down and Barnes 2012: 146)

As Down and Barnes suggest, the metaphor of planet-as-puppet depends upon redefining the popular understanding of puppetry, removing the implied relation of dominance and the implication that the human “gives life” to the inanimate.

Though well-worn phrases such as “puppet master” and “puppet state” emphasize a relation of dominance and manipulation, the notion of puppeteers “listening” to the kinetic inclinations of their puppets also has a long history. Many teachers of puppetry describe the practice of animation as starting from “following” or “listening to” a puppet or object. For example, Henryk Jurkowski writes of puppet manipulation: “Tin, cloth, wood, plastic, willow-cane – every one of these materials has its own peculiarities, and that is why [Edward Gordon] Craig, in *Puppets and Poets*, has rightly remarked: ... ‘you don’t move it; you let it move itself; that’s the art’” (Jurkowski 1967: 26). Craig’s recommendation to puppeteers finds an echo in sculptor Stephen De Staebler’s approach to clay: “What I have tried to do for a long time is find out what the clay wants to do” (quoted in Adamson 2007: 50).

What might it mean to listen to the Earth, as Down and Barnes suggest? And why has it proved so challenging to do so? Any ecology is constituted by interactions on scales that escape direct human perception: transformations occurring in milliseconds or across millions of years, at the microscopic level or right across the globe. Climate change represents a particularly salient cluster of interactions that have proved hard to absorb intellectually or emotionally. It is difficult to grasp how burning fossil fuels in the nineteenth century could be implicated in alterations in

twenty-first-century weather patterns or how the gas that heats my London flat could have anything to do with the inundation of coastal Bangladesh or the melting of polar ice-caps.

Puppetry, celebrated for its capacity to play with scale, offers one way to help audiences visualize interactions at scales beyond ordinary human perception. The performances described below take their audiences imaginatively into the heart of events they could not otherwise perceive: death and destruction on a nineteenth-century battlefield in a nonexistent country, collisions between particles at the subatomic level, and the “gargantuan” activity involved in feeding a modern city. Further, the “hands on” work of object animation and improvisation with formless materials transmits to puppeteers and audiences alike a heightened awareness of material properties such as weight and texture, a sense of dialogue between the human and the material, and a vision of matter as having independent agency – insights which might help to alter patterns of overconsumption without denying the pleasures of consumption.<sup>2</sup> Giving a new name to people interested in the mutual interactions between human and nonhuman matter, Bennett suggests that “vital materialists” will “linger in those moments during which they find themselves fascinated by objects, taking them as clues to the material vitality they share with them” (Bennett 2010: 17). The following discussion lingers over moments that have been deliberately constructed to draw attention to the materials of performance.

### Playing with food

French puppet company Nada Théâtre adapted Alfred Jarry’s play *Ubu Roi* for “two actors, some fruit and a lot of vegetables” in 1990.<sup>3</sup> Two performers, Guilhem Pellegrin and Babette Masson, play the central characters, Père and Mère Ubu. They animate a barrowload of fruits and vegetables serving as puppets that represent the other characters, such as noblemen and soldiers. When the tall, skinny, pale noblemen played by leeks are hacked to death on a Polish battlefield, shreds fly across the performance space, a sharp, sulfurous smell fills the air, and fluids drip from the table. There is a visceral sense of the destruction of living substance that takes place in war. Nada’s decision to use food as characters reflects a trope that runs through Jarry’s play: in the original text, as translated by Barbara Wright, the king is said to have been “cut in two like a sausage” (“*en deux comme une saucisse*”) (Jarry 1966: 43; 1922: 60). In the vegetable version, the metaphor is made literal as the actors playing Père and Mère crush a bunch of grapes representing the king. The Ubus appear as amoral demigods who casually animate and destroy. In numerous speeches in the play, they blur the distinction between people and food: Mère Ubu dismisses the troops as “*une cinquantaine d’estafiers armés de coupe-choux*” (“fifty flunkeys armed with nothing but cabbage-cutters”) (Jarry 1966: 28; 1922: 10); while Père Ubu threatens her: “*Vous me faites injure et vous allez passer tout a l’heure par le casserole*” (“Insult me, and you’ll find yourself in the stewpan in a minute”) (Jarry 1966: 29; 1922: 11). Many of Ubu’s orders are carried out by puppet or robot-like subalterns known as *palotins*; for Ubu, other human beings are nothing more than cannon fodder. Food puppets thus become a metaphor for the instrumentalization of people.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 28.1 Leek nobleman from Nada Théâtre's *Ubu Roi* (1990; photo from 2013 remounting). Photo © Nada Théâtre

Nada Théâtre is working here in the tradition of object animation. A puppet is an object designed to move in particular ways, the distribution of weight and points of suspension facilitating particular kinds of characterful movement. Any “found” object – like the leek in *Ubu Roi* – can also be considered in terms of its center of gravity and potential for movement.<sup>5</sup> Object animation draws the spectator’s attention to the relationship between performer and everyday objects by overturning expectations: the performer picks up a teapot in an unexpected manner, gazes at it, turns it upside down, explores its potential for movement as a vehicle, a creature, a character. Through this process, object animation can reveal normally hidden

material properties, such as the sound potential of an eggbeater or the springiness of a hose.

The animation of food in this production draws our attention to all the resemblances between humans and fruit and vegetables: the bodies – bulbous or elongated, firm or tender – as well as skin, flesh, and pulpy interiors. The live animation is rather different from the use of fruits and vegetables to generate characters in cartoons aimed at children.<sup>6</sup> Food items in such cartoons are usually little more than logos: stylized shapes (an elongated orange triangle is a carrot; a red circle is a tomato), with no roots, shoots, or seeds; no specific properties of taste, texture, or nutrients; and no connection to the process of growing food. Those cartoon characters are never peeled, let alone sliced open. The anthropomorphism is cozy: with the addition of cute voices and googly eyes, anything can become a character. The aesthetic of Nada Théâtre is, however, closer to Rabelais than to Mr. Potato Head, exploring the unhappy resemblances between human and nonhuman matter – both subject to violence, death, and decay.

The puppeteers in *Ubu Roi* add voices and movement to their cast of vegetables, just as the food-based cartoons do, but a more complex sensory identification takes place in live performance: audience members not only recognize forms visually but also activate a corporeal memory of weight, smell, taste, and texture. The same process applies to watching other forms of object animation such as, for example, the family of teaspoons of different sizes in Peter Ketturkat's *Keine Angst vor großen Tieren* (*The Crazy Kitchen Crew*), touring since 2006.<sup>7</sup> As neurological research suggests, audience members bring their own bodily experience to performance; when I observe a performer peeling potatoes, it activates my own corporeal memory of performing the same action, a memory held in the muscles as well as the mind.<sup>8</sup>

Though the same principles of object animation apply, the impact upon an audience of using edible objects is different from work with objects such as cutlery. Food engages performers and audience in the sense of the provisional because it is so fragile, easily damaged, and quick to decay. By animating and then literally destroying food as the performance material, Nada Théâtre intensifies Jarry's themes of waste and wanton destruction. The familiarity of the vegetable and its closeness to the human body – peach skin to lip, potato peel to calloused thumb – can provoke a visceral reaction to the play's violence.

### The hands dream

When animating formless materials, such as clay or paper, a performer responds to material qualities such as weight, elasticity, and resonance without any recourse to the social meaning of pre-existing forms. The dialogue between the performer and the material therefore becomes central to the meaning of the performance.

An improvisatory response to matter might be characterized as an alternation between “listening” to assess material properties, such as weight, grain, and surface tension (as discussed above), and “responding” with empathy, breath, and intention, shaping and adding movement in the search for human meaning. Gaston Bachelard captures this duality when he writes, “Matter, to which one speaks according to the

rules when he is working it, swells under the hands of the workman. This *anima* accepts the flatteries of the *animus* which makes it emerge from its torpor. The hands dream” (Bachelard 1971: 72). Work with matter involves both a respectful address (“according to the rules”) and creative shaping (matter “swells” and “emerges”). His image of dreaming hands evokes the experience of improvisation with materials: the performer’s impulse is sculptural, but as it takes place before an audience that interprets and responds to the evolving forms, it is also aligned to storytelling. This delicate balance is exemplified in British theatre company Indefinite Articles, a collaboration between sculptor Sally Brown and actor Steve Tiplady.

Improvisation with formless materials has long played a significant role in the work of this company. Many of their performances have explored the expressive possibilities of a single material, most notably in *Dust* (2002), a retelling of Homer’s *Odyssey*. In it, the performers drew a series of rapid sketches in a layer of fine sand spread on the plates of overhead projectors, projecting the images produced onto sheets, the walls of the space, or even a stream of falling sand. The material evoked the ancient world and the impermanence of life, “dust to dust.”<sup>9</sup> The improvised performance *Claytime* (2006 to present) similarly brings characters to life for a brief moment of existence before they return to the earth.

*Claytime* grew out of storytelling and modeling workshops in a Cambridge nursery.<sup>10</sup> Originally developed for children from three to six years of age, it has also been performed for adults.<sup>11</sup> In both versions, the stage is set with a mound of soft terracotta clay. The performers initially work with the clay in a nonfigurative way, exploring its properties and establishing a relationship with each other and the audience, before inviting suggestions for an improvisation: “What would you like to see?” According to what is suggested, they sculpt landscapes, dinosaurs, dragons, or people, working the figures and themes into an improvised story that is accompanied by a musician. At the end of the performance, audience members are invited onto the stage to play for themselves. The resulting sculptures are photographed but not physically preserved – the clay is returned to the mound. This decision emphasizes the provisional nature of the performance: figures come into existence just for the time of storytelling and are preserved only in the memory. At the same time, it promises boundlessness: these marvelous creations of skill and imagination need not be saved since the clay contains infinite potential.

In a performance of *Claytime* that was part of the Suspense festival of puppetry for adults, an audience member requested a story about “the universe.” This was November 2009, the month in which the Large Hadron Collider, the high-energy particle accelerator, was due to start operating. The underlying scientific principles were widely discussed in the news media, accompanied by speculation about apocalyptic disasters (e.g., it was suggested that microscopic black holes might drill right through the Earth).<sup>12</sup> The *Claytime* improvisation at Suspense developed into a sci-fi adventure: a man walks into a pub at the moment when an accident at the Large Hadron Collider sends the universe racing backwards towards the Big Bang; he falls through a jukebox portal into a parallel universe and eventually manages to put the world back on the right course. Although the plot is conventional in outline, the performance provided room for a more spacious response to the materials of the story. The performers unhurriedly molded clay into planets and showed them





Figure 28.2 The Sugar-Eating Sea Monster. Photo © Sally Todd/Indefinite Articles

moving through empty air, morphing and transforming: we seemed to look at Earth from the perspective of deep time or to follow a high-energy particle in slow motion.

Here, the use of clay added an important metaphorical dimension to the performance. Its emotional effect depended upon the evocation of a web of associations – some conscious, some unconscious – that might be called the “poetics” of the material. Clay is familiar childhood play stuff, dug out of the earth, but here it represents the vast strangeness of planet Earth; it forms geological strata but is malleable by the smallest hands; it is inanimate but is also the *Ur*-material out of which humanity was formed in many creation myths. The combination of this generative material and the actors’ improvisation allowed the audience to daydream around big questions or the feelings provoked by them: the sense of wonder and of being small in the universe, the fear of being subject to processes that are out of our control.

The theme chosen for this performance of *Claytime* arose from the interests of a particular audience and the news stories of the day, but the cosmological scale is not unusual when working with formless materials, such as newspaper, cloth, or clay. Workshop improvisations with materials often take the shape of life cycles: bringing inanimate matter “to life” through the first touch of the puppeteer’s hands, proceeding through growth and transformation, then to death or decay, finally ending with a return to inanimate formlessness as performers lift their hands away.<sup>13</sup> Audiences looking at the improvised manipulation of formless masses often imagine them to represent processes geological (volcanoes, continental shifts, lava flows) or biological (cells dividing, animals migrating, evolving) that might in reality take place over thousands of years.

At the end of *Claytime*, audience members are given a small lump of clay and invited to model a person or object that figured in the story. This private absorption in a creative response seems to follow naturally from the improvisatory approach – in every sense, the performance needs to be completed by the audience.

### A giant playboard

As a substance, food acts on and alters the eater; it is the material most apt to call into question the fixed division between living and lifeless matter. Bennett describes the activity of eating as a series of “mutual transformations between human and nonhuman materials” (Bennett 2010: 40). In *Feast on the Bridge*, the materials of performance – in this case, foodstuffs – are not only animated by designated artists or performers, audience members also directly interact with the food. The performance is a structured assembly of everyday and fanciful interactions that cumulatively represent the life story of food:

Feeding cities takes a gargantuan effort; one that arguably has a greater social and physical impact on our lives and planet than anything else we do. Yet few of us in the West are conscious of the process. Food arrives on our plates as if by magic, and we rarely stop to wonder how it got there.

(Steel 2008: ix)

To understand the process by which food arrives on our plates, as Carolyn Steel invites us to do in her book *Hungry City* (2008), is very complex work, bringing together science, culture, agriculture, architecture, health, and economics, and ranging from the microscopic to the global. It requires a large canvas: if *Feast on the Bridge* can be interpreted as object animation on a giant scale, its playboard is a road bridge over the Thames, and the performance runs for ten hours, with a cast of thousands.

Over the last 20 years, artist Clare Patey has investigated food through a variety of means and with different constituencies.<sup>14</sup> In 2007, she created *Feast on the Bridge*, an annual festival that stages the whole life cycle of food, inviting “the participation of an urban public to explore the cyclical narrative of food production” (Patey 2012: 154). For one day a year, a bridge over the Thames in London is closed to road traffic. Trestle tables covered with hand-printed tablecloths run down the center of the bridge, forming two long banqueting tables. Around 40,000 strangers sit down and eat together over the course of the day, buying snacks from the stalls run by local producers or bringing food to share. But more than just a festival, with food as the means of encouraging sociability, *Feast on the Bridge* offers a coherent presentation of the story of food, focusing on a different staple produce each year.

Along the sides of the bridge there are dozens of stalls teaching specialist or forgotten food techniques, such as filleting fish, beekeeping, and bread-making. Participants grind wheat into flour, knead dough, bake bread, and eat it. They might also take part in playful activities that twist these artisanal interactions with food into art: they might decorate a hat with herbs, cut pumpkin lanterns, or toss a giant fruit salad in a tarpaulin held taut by dozens of people. Along the way, the story behind the raw materials is told conversationally by the artists and performers: the luscious peaches and berries in the giant fruit salad, for example, were destined for landfill because they did not meet the standards of uniformity, physical perfection, and longevity imposed by the supermarkets.

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The handling of food in playful ways that might be regarded as wasteful from a purely utilitarian standpoint is part of the artistic program, alongside the very visible collection and reuse of waste. There are terracotta flowerpots on every table for leftovers, emptied by volunteers garlanded with flowers who push wheelbarrows down the bridge to onsite compost heaps. Nothing disappears or arrives “as if by magic”: here are the cows that provide milk; there are the static bikes where cyclists generate power for a cinema. Feast on the Bridge is both a carnival, temporarily permitting new relationships and conversations to take place through the medium of food, and a participatory performance spread out along the bridge, describing the whole journey of food from growing, cooking and eating to decomposition.

If in *Ubu Roi*, the specific form, color, and texture of the leeks were intrinsic to their potential for animation as Polish noblemen (even if they had to be replaced for each performance), in Feast on the Bridge, the performance draws our attention both to the specific qualities of the material (i.e., there are particular fruits,

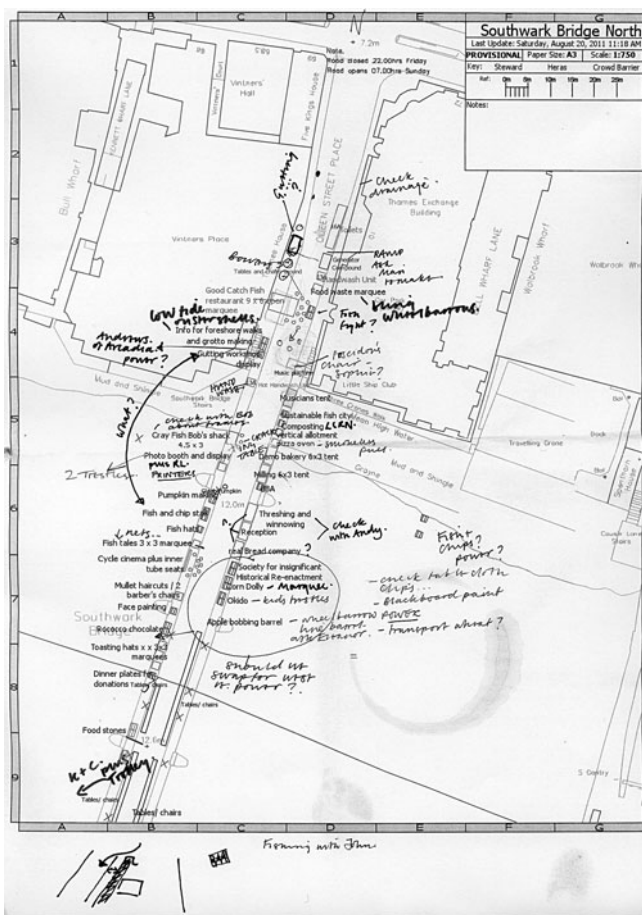


Figure 28.3 Map dated 20 August 2011 showing the location of individual stalls in that year’s Feast on the Bridge in London. Image courtesy of Clare Patey

vegetables, grains of wheat, and loaves of bread, each with their own properties and available for manipulation by individual members of the audience) and to the nature of food as a commodity, substance, and “matter of concern” (i.e., “food” as it is manipulated by the collective forces that constitute the food chain). In this second sense, the foodstuffs used in *Feast on the Bridge* are more like the clay in *Claytime* than the vegetables in *Ubu Roi* – together, they constitute a formless mass with infinite potential. Taking this viewpoint on the material requires us to consider *Feast on the Bridge* as a new kind of animation in which Patey curates hundreds of independent interactions between humans and nonhuman matter, unified by her larger theme. One might recall Edward Gordon Craig’s advice to the puppeteer, “You don’t move it; you let it move itself.”

Patey’s work as artist-curator of this event is perhaps best described through Nicolas Bourriaud’s notion of “relational aesthetics.” Bourriaud identifies relational works as “formations” rather than “forms,” providing opportunities for conviviality and ways of “learning to inhabit the world in a better way.” No longer is the role of artworks “to form imaginary and utopian realities”; relational works are instead “ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist” (Bourriaud 2002: 13). In terms of the manipulation of objects, *Feast on the Bridge* operates on a very large scale, but one that is not unknown to puppetry.<sup>15</sup>

Treated as a material, food is “too large to control cleverly” in Enrique Pardo’s resonant phrase (Pardo 1988: 170), both in terms of the geographically distributed physical space it occupies in production, distribution, and consumption, and in terms of the difficulties that we have in imagining the processes that lie behind its magical appearance on our plates. Food is one of many “matters of concern” (to use Latour’s term) that have proved too large to represent when handled in an everyday, naturalistic way by an actor. As a result, important matters of concern, such as climate change, the future of radioactive waste, or the scarcity of resources, have generally been left outside the naturalistic theatre.<sup>16</sup>

What makes it so difficult to dramatize subjects such as climate change? According to playwright Caryl Churchill, as paraphrased by critic Robert Butler, the essential problem is distance: “What happens in one place affects people in another place. What happens in one generation affects people in another. Plays tend to frame individuals within a world of cause and effect that is immediate and visible” (Butler 2009: 110).

At a dramaturgical level, working with formless materials such as food and clay opens up the possibility of telling stories that extend beyond the human in time and space, working on cosmological, geological, or evolutionary timescales. More importantly, performances that involve animating such materials offer implicit alternatives to two equally destructive ideologies: the ceaseless exploitation of resources and the indiscriminate restriction of all consumption. Instead, performances such as *Claytime* and *Feast on the Bridge* transmit a receptive attitude to matter that emphasizes its intrinsic value and a joyful sense of material abundance.

A sense of abundance in performance may appear an unlikely goal when looking for ways of understanding climate change. But as Simon Bayly points out in a recent article, a genealogy of performance that traces its origins back to ritual is inevitably invested in “energy, excess and expenditure” (Bayly 2012: 38). In contrast, the trend in environmental politics that takes its cue from the title of the 1972 report to the Club of Rome – *The Limits to Growth* – stresses the need for limitations and

constraints on consumption. But research has shown that well-intentioned exhortations encouraging sacrifice, restraint, and limitation for the sake of the planet not only fail to motivate change but can be counterproductive, arousing anxiety and suspicion or even a perverse determination to use resources right up to the permitted limit.<sup>17</sup> Thus, restrictions may prove ineffective from the environmental point of view, while destroying the efficacy of performance as ritual. Meanwhile, it could be argued that the creativity, playfulness, and invention embodied in performance are exactly what is needed in an ecological crisis – so long as the materials used are renewable.<sup>18</sup>

In festive mode, performers destroy barrowloads of vegetables and audiences make garlands that will quickly wilt and sculpt models that will be squashed back into a mound of soft clay. Performing with abundant, renewable materials spotlights interactions between human and nonhuman matter in the context of larger social and ecological formations. The barrowload of vegetables nightly destroyed in *Ubu Roi* could be made into soup or deposited on the compost heap. Either way, it constitutes a renewable resource for performance; the living matter so horrifyingly wasted in the performance need not be literally wasted in the real world, precisely because it is organic and biodegradable. This relationship with materials is made more explicit in *Claytime* and *Feast on the Bridge*: although apparently limitless quantities of clay and food are available for play and improvisation, the materials are not thrown away but are visibly “returned to the mound” or wheeled off to the compost heap. This action in itself generates a sense of renewal, potential, and abundance: children in the audience for *Claytime* refer to the “stories in the clay,” while the creation of a compost heap represents an investment in the soil and the promise of future years of food-growing.

## Notes

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- 1 See <<http://www.blindsummit.com>>.
- 2 See, for example, Simms and Potts (2012).
- 3 The full title of the piece was *Ubu, adaptation pour deux comédiens, quelques fruits et beaucoup de légumes*. Directed by Jean-Louis Heckel, the production was first presented at the Avignon Festival in 1990 and toured extensively in the following years.
- 4 There have been numerous versions of *Ubu* exploring tyranny through the use of puppetry, including *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Handspring Puppet Company, 1997; written by Jane Taylor) and *Mori el Merma* (1978, revived in 2006; a collaboration between Joan Miró and La Claca, directed by Joan Baixas). According to Jill Fell, *Ubu*’s earliest appearances were in plays put on by the schoolboy Jarry and his friend Morin, “first with live actors, then as a shadow play and finally with actual puppets”; a version for puppets was shown to the public at the Théâtre des Pantins in 1898 (Fell 2010: 23).
- 5 Henryk Jurkowski distinguishes actors from objects, props, and puppets as follows: “Actors are human beings fulfilling theatrical functions; objects are things made by human beings not for theatrical use; props are things made for theatrical use; puppets are objects made to be theatre characters” (Jurkowski 1988: 80). I use the term “object animation” here to refer to the live animation of objects not made for theatrical use.
- 6 See, for example, the BBC children’s series *Ooglies* <[www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/shows/ooglies](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/shows/ooglies)>. Cartoon characters based on vegetables are often used to promote a “healthy living” message, confident that viewers’ pleasure in the characters will extend to the unanimated vegetables on the plate.
- 7 See <<http://ketturkat.com/>>.

- 8 Research into mirror neurons has shown that the same areas of the brain engage when performing an action and when watching someone else perform the same action. This is particularly marked among spectators who have direct physical experience of the action. See Calvo-Merino et al. (2005) for an account of an experiment measuring the neurological responses of a capoeira dancer and a ballet dancer to video clips of ballet and capoeira sequences.
- 9 Reviewer Lyn Gardner wrote of *Dust*: “When Penelope’s suitors are dispatched by the returning hero, a constant stream of falling sand stands in for the screen itself: ghostly faces suddenly emerge from amid the falling grains and disappear. The sense of dust to dust, of walking in the footsteps of those who came before us, is palpable” (Gardner 2004: 1).
- 10 The resulting show that toured to theatrical venues in the UK (2006 to present) was co-devised and directed by Carey English of Quicksilver Theatre.
- 11 The workshops in the Cambridge nursery engaged with the investigative approach to art in education pioneered in the Reggio Emilia region of Italy. The Reggio schools employ artists in residence who reflect on the children’s activities and help to deepen the quality of their explorations, using an artistic process of purposeful investigation, building on children’s interest in natural phenomena such as shadows, the behavior of water, etc. As Sally Brown (Indefinite Articles 2006) puts it in the *Claytime* marketing materials, “When working with clay, children become scientists, alchemists, sculptors and architects in their investigations of what the material can do and what its properties are.” She reports that children involved in the workshops would re-enact stories weeks or months later, referring to the “story in the clay.”
- 12 See, for example, the detailed online rebuttal by CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research) of a number of such suggestions at <<http://press.web.cern.ch/backgrounders/safety-lhc>> (accessed 10 August 2013).
- 13 Observations of object-animation workshops run by Steve Tiplady and Rachel Riggs (1998) and Julian Crouch (1988) are documented in Margolies (1999, 2002).
- 14 *Feast on the Bridge* grew out of an earlier yearlong primary school project based on a local allotment, culminating in a meal for 400, cooked by the children using food they had grown.
- 15 For example, on Steve Kaplin’s “puppet tree” diagram (1999 [2001]), which distributes puppets on a grid with axes representing the distance between performer and object and the ratio of performer to object, *Feast on the Bridge* would fall into the same region as *Bread and Puppet’s Domestic Resurrection Circus* (1999 [2001]: 20–21). *Commute of the Species* operated on a comparable scale to *Feast on the Bridge* to dramatize a story that took place across hundreds of years: in the 2010 performance, animal puppets boarded a commuter train running up the Hudson Valley in New York State in order of their historical colonization of the area, creating “an allegory of migration, habitat expansion, and unforeseen consequences – in effect, condensing 400 years of eco-history into a single one-hour train ride” (Processional Arts Workshop 2010).
- 16 Though these themes are largely absent from naturalistic theatre, they have been explored in other forms of performance, such as street theatre and performance art. The timeline in *Culture and Climate Change: Recordings* (Butler et al. 2011) notes significant landmarks in drama, literature, and art addressing climate change.
- 17 For discussions of the psychology of climate change see Weintrobe (2012), Hulme (2009), and Butler et al. (2011).
- 18 See, for example, the essays edited by Goodbun et al. (2012) that form a special issue of *Architectural Design*.

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