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**Re-Membering the Colonial Present: Jimmie Durham's Serious Dance**

**Rhonda Meier**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Art History**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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### **Re-Membering the Colonial Present: Jimmie Durham's Serious Dance**

**Rhonda Meier**

**Jimmie Durham is a contemporary artist, performer, and poet who was born into a family of activists and carvers. A graduate of Geneva's Ecole des Beaux Arts (1972), he devoted nearly a decade to activist work for the American Indian Movement on both community and international levels, before returning to art practice in the 1980s. An articulate, astute writer, as well as cultural producer, Durham offers a nuanced theorization of present conundrums of multiculturalism and identity politics.**

**Underlying much of Durham's visual production of the 1980s and early 1990s is the conviction that what is at stake is a largely-repressed North American political situation in which colonization and racism continue to be perpetuated. His response is a multidisciplinary circulation between an evasion and invocation of clichés and stereotypes of Native Americans. As the plethora of competing voices, conflicting statements, and multiple histories inscribed across works such as the *Self-Portrait* (1987), and his series the *Caliban Codex* (1992) indicate, identity is constructed, fragmented, and in continual motion. Concomitant with this model of identity is movement as an actual condition in Durham's practice.**

**Hence, the final chapter of this thesis also examines theories of travel and displacement as modes to describe the movements his work enacts and the strategies it deploys. It necessarily navigates around exile as a solution to ill-conceived state legislation, as well as resistance to the "logics" of colonial imperialism, and fallible notions of "truth," "history," and "knowledge."**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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First, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Jimmie Durham, for the courage and perspicacity of his work, which has been a continuous inspiration for me to speak and more importantly, to listen well.

As all of her students know, Dr. Joan Acland is a professor who leads by exemplifying profoundly-committed ethics and humanity, in addition to intellect. I have benefited more times than I can remember, and in more ways than I can describe, from her insight, clarity, and consideration. I am also indebted to readers Brian Foss and Guy Sioui-Durand, who both responded to their obligation with alacrity and graciousness.

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Speaking of community, I wish to recognize my supervisor and the team of the Service des visites at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal for their fraternity, and the stimulation of their excellence.

Ruth Phaneuf of the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery went to especially great effort to aid my research and particularly to show me Durham's work in storage. Michelle Veitch kindly translated Durham's *Dokumenta* texts from German to English. Janelle Mellamphy encouragingly edited a draft of my first paper on Durham at a time when it was much needed, as did Ann Armstrong, generous as always, with the final version.

I must also thank artist Stéphane Gladyszewski. The shimmering light of his wings brightened a portion of this rather long, meandering path.

And finally, these two small—and uncharacteristically-succinct—words must be extended to Joseph Boucher, with the knowledge that they insufficiently convey the profundity of my debt and my gratitude.

**For Green Rock Woman, who spat in Columbus' face.**

**And my parents.**

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## **PREFACE**

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### **Cutting Off Their Feet at Acoma Pueblo**

We were standing in line to get a foot cut off. That was bad. Now, It's hard to say what was the hardest part, but that standing in line waiting your turn, listening to the whack! thunk! other guys screaming, that was hard.

I remember standing there remembering all the times when I was a boy running and running. But the guys who broke the line and ran, they really got hacked up.

You tried to feel it before your turn, so you'd be kinda prepared. You concentrated on the joint at your ankle, Imagining it separated from your foot. I thought, first this big tendon, then the smaller tendons, a little skin and muscle, all done.

But those Spaniards. The reason I cried was the first blow of the axe just got me in the lower leg, broke into the bone. I cried because it hurt really bad, but mostly I thought it would never stop, it hurt so bad, and my foot wasn't even chopped off yet.

It still hurts all the time. Slivers and chunks of bone still left in there, so if you accidentally lay the wrong way at night you get a really sharp pain, and then you wake up and think about your foot.

They have a festival of the Conquest now in Santa Fe, and they're always after me to come, but I never do.

Jimmie Durham  
c. 1983

extracted from his collected poems, *Columbus Day*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: West End Press, 1983.

**Introduction**  
**Listening, Turning**

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Remembering is never a quiet process of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.<sup>1</sup>

Homi K. Bhabha

The multidisciplinary work of contemporary artist Jimmie Durham implores its audiences both to remember, and re-member histories in order to make sense of the present, and move into a more humane future on this planet together. He writes:

We *are* from the past, but we echo and reverberate in the present. What a responsibility! . . . We, you and I, must remember everything. We must especially remember those things we never knew. Obviously, that process cannot begin with longer lists of facts. It needs newer, and much more complex, kinds of metaphors.<sup>2</sup>

As a writer, critic, curator, performer, poet, and activist, as well as a visual artist, Durham has striven to generate this complexity in debate, dialogue, and interpretation. In all of its forms, his practice is a multilayered, at times ambiguous investigation of new connections among histories, and new potentials for the meaning of knowledge, identity, and hegemony. As the poem which prefaces this introduction makes clear, in the artist's own words, "It would be impossible, and I think immoral to attempt to discuss American Indian art sensibly without making the political realities central. One of these realities is the racism manifested as romantic stereotypes by which North Americans may deny other political

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<sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: 'What Does the Black Man Want?'" *New Formations* 1 (1987): 123.

<sup>2</sup> "A Certain Lack of Coherence," republished in Durham's collected essays of the same name (London: Kala Press, 1993) 147.

realities such as enforced poverty and alienation, and constant land loss.”<sup>3</sup> These are not things to celebrate, and they are certainly not the subject of any white man’s festivals.

Far from celebratory, Durham’s artworks are multilevelled refutations of any kind of monolithic, essentialist, or totalizing meaning. Speaking in a polyphonic, hybrid voice characterized by ambiguity and paradox, he denies viewers the comfort and approbation of easy answers. In an interview he stated, “There’s a cultural arrogance that some of the artists are not aware of. There’s always the idea that they can solve some problem or that they can come up with some answers, and that’s just a different variation of the old missionary attitude.” Instead, his production consistently strives to challenge viewers with a multitude of questions. “Perhaps,” Durham writes at the conclusion of a catalogue essay in 1988, “we must trust confusion more, for a while, and be deeply suspicious of simple stories, simple acts.”<sup>4</sup>

A cursory, even random scan of a Durham bibliography quickly indicates the speculative breadth which marks his work. *On taking a normal situation and retranslating it into overlapping and multiple readings of conditions past and present*, was the title of a group exhibition from 1993; it also aptly describes Durham’s method of working in site-specific installation.<sup>5</sup> “On the Edge of Town” was an article written for a special issue of *Art Journal*; characteristic in structure of much of Durham’s writing, it is a weaving of eclectic narratives surrounding dumps and marginal spaces which segueways into a reconceptualization of identity.<sup>6</sup> “Savage Attacks on White Women, As Usual,” was

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<sup>3</sup> Jimmie Durham and Jean Fisher, *Ni Go Tlunh A Doh Ka (We are always turning around on purpose)*, exhibition catalogue (New York: New York State University, 1986) 1.

<sup>4</sup> The essay, “A Certain Lack of Coherence,” was written for the exhibition *Matoaka Ale Attakulakula Guledisgo Nhini (Pocahontas and the Little Carpenter in London)* held at Matt’s Gallery in 1988.

<sup>5</sup> This exhibition, held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (MUHKA), was organized by Antwerp, Cultural Capital of Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Jimmie Durham, “On the Edge of Town,” *Art Journal* 51.2 (1992): 14-16.

Durham's text for an exhibition he co-curated; it exemplifies a central operative of his strategy—the brashly sardonic deployment of prevalent stereotypes.<sup>7</sup> Complicating readings of his works further, as the title of another exhibition he curated implies, Durham is “always turning around on purpose.”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, these strategies correspond to the levels at which articulation works, as enunciated by communications theorist Jennifer Daryl Slack. As one, if not the most productive concept of cultural studies in her estimation, articulation describes a social formation at the levels of epistemology, politics, and strategies. She writes:

Epistemologically, articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities. Politically, articulation is a way of foregrounding the structure and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination. Strategically, articulation provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context.<sup>9</sup>

Increasingly, the context of Durham's “turning around” has been in international venues. New York's Alternative Museum held Durham's first solo exhibition in 1985. By 1992—the year of his inclusion in the prestigious *Dokumenta IX*—he had performed or exhibited extensively not only in the United States and across Europe, but in Mexico, Cuba, and Colombia. In Canada, Durham's germinal influence has been acknowledged through the inclusion of his work in four notable exhibitions: *Revisions* (1988), the Walter

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<sup>7</sup> Curated with critic Jean Fisher, *We the People* was held at New York's Artists Space in 1987. Also an artist, Fisher was also co-director of the master's program in visual arts at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She later continues to teach, write, and is editor of the journal *Third Text* as well as *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London, Kala Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> This was Durham's first collaboration with Fisher, then curator of the State University of New York in Old Westbury. The exhibition, *Ni Go Tlunh a Doh Ka (We are always turning around on purpose)* was held there in 1986, then toured to the North Hall Gallery of the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, and Central State University in Edmond.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies,” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996) 112.

Phillips Gallery's protest to *The Spirit Sings* exhibition held in conjunction with the Calgary Olympics; *The Bishop's Moose and the Pinkerton Men* (1989), a solo exhibition held contemporaneously with the work of Robert Houle at the Canadian Museum of Civilization; *Savoir-Vivre, Savoir-Faire, Savoir-Etre* (1990) at Montreal's Centre international d'art contemporain; and finally the milestone *Land, Spirit, Power* (1992) and *Crossings* (1998), both at the National Gallery of Canada.

This thesis focuses on Durham's production of the 1980s and early 1990s. This is because this earlier work more clearly and directly addressed racial politics and stereotyping, an avenue of action he does not see as productive at this time. More practically, since his move to Europe, the artist's recent production and its surrounding criticism and documentation is, for the time being, less available and accessible in North America. Chapter One revolves around Durham's *Self-Portrait* of 1987, a work I believe forms a kind of map of many of the discursive strategies of his art practice. At its root is also a highly effective elucidation of identity as bricolage. Chapter Two focuses on what I regard as another kind of portrait—Durham's impersonation of Caliban, a character from William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. (1611). It is salient for its critique of the role of language in colonial imperialism, and its exploration of identity, particularly colonial identity, as performance, or performative—one speaks, therefore one is. What I hope becomes evident from these circulations, is that identity is in motion. Hence, my third chapter is an exploration of motion and movement in various levels in Durham's life and work, and a search for a way to describe and think through this. The conclusion will discuss exile as a possible solution to the problematic of positional identity politics.

For my research on Durham, I consulted artists' files at the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal's Artex Information Centre, and the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery in New York City; this latter is a particularly rich source of visual documentation and more obscure

articles.<sup>10</sup> However, no written article could overshadow the irreplaceable experience of actually viewing some of Durham's work.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately I was hindered in my quest to see the *Self-Portrait*, located in the collection of New York's Whitney Museum, but travelling until the fall of 1999 with their *Art at the End of This Century* exhibition.

Durham himself has stated that to discuss Native American art without highlighting the political realities is not only negligent, it is obscene. Hence, I have tried as much as possible to draw out both historical and present actualities. The theoretical underpinnings for this thesis are strongly rooted in postcolonial theory, and cultural studies. I wish also to note my alignment and debt to the rich tradition of feminist theory, which has much to offer (and vice versa) cultural studies and postcolonialist discourses. A vivid example is Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" which exemplifies the work of many feminists (such as bell hooks, Rosi Braidotti, and Anne McClintock) which has interdisciplinary relevance and application.<sup>12</sup> These last three are quoted less or not at all in this volume; however their work runs deep in the veins of my own praxis.

In the course of my research I also examined studies on Cherokee history and more general sources of Native American philology, cosmology, and history, although I feel this subject area to be a minefield (particularly for non-native scholars who are not grounded in an aboriginal milieu) since there are no clear-cut signposts as to the providence or the accuracy of works exploring some facet of native "spirituality" or "ways" following on the

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<sup>10</sup> In their photocopying, these articles lost pagination; hence in my bibliography, I have appended a star to those where this was not possible to rectify through other research.

<sup>11</sup> I reiterate my thanks again to Ruth Phaneuf of the Gallery. Durham's work was more medium-sized—not in some cases as small or as large I had imagined—and seemingly more related to gestures coming from and speaking to the body.

<sup>12</sup> Martin, Biddy, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis, *Theories of Contemporary Culture* 8 (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1986) 191-212.



heels of Carlos Castaneda's success in the sixties. Hence, I tried to stick with "the classics," to pay attention to who would preface or introduce a volume, and also not to rely too strongly on any one source, except in cases, such as James Mooney's *Historical Sketch of the Cherokee*, where its authority appeared incontrovertible.<sup>13</sup>

Although art historical works or theory *per se* may appear neglected in my bibliography, I did employ more traditional, historical research in my investigation of portraiture. Further, I make no bones about my bias (if it may be called that) in privileging the art object, insofar as without it, my work as a visual commentator would not take place. As the regarded critic Roald Nasgaard remarks, "A work of art does not emerge from nowhere, it is based on the handling of material things in a certain manner in order to achieve a certain effect."<sup>14</sup> At risk of speaking for him, I venture that Durham himself would agree, having insisted on more than one occasion that works of art carry meanings which are crucial to the development of any society.<sup>15</sup> This is not to suggest that I am supporting or applying a formalist methodology. However, I believe that the strength of Durham's visual production, like any effective body of work, lies not only in its textual or discursive "meaning," but in the way its physical presence evokes that text.

Before I begin my brief delineation of Durham's background and early production, I believe it behooves this project to attempt to situate where I, as a viewer of Durham's work and writer of this text, am positioned. This is never an easy task as this thesis will affirm, any subject's identity is multiple, shifting, and continuously negotiated—a reality

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<sup>13</sup> James Mooney, *Historical Sketch of the Cherokee*, Smithsonian Institution Press (Chicago: Aldine, 1975). Likewise for the work of population historian Russell Thornton. Ronald Wright's *Stolen Continents*, was a readable, well-researched cross-reference. See *Stolen Continents: The Americas Through Indian Eyes Since 1492* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Roald Nasgaard, *Yves Gaucher: Paintings and Etchings*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Canadian Cultural Centre with Yves Gaucher, 1982) 17.

<sup>15</sup> See Durham, interview, by Ward Churchill, *What Follows*, prod. James Johnson, University of Colorado at Boulder, Academic Media Services, 1989, VHS, 45 minutes.

evident every time I return home to my roots in rural Saskatchewan. Not only am I saddened and frightened by the blatant and underlying racism I perceive there, but by the knowledge that inevitably I participate and partake in white hegemonic power.<sup>16</sup> However, as cultural theorists Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have written, “No one should be ashamed of belonging to the identity categories into which they happen to have been born, but one is also accountable for one’s active role or passive complicity in oppressive systems and discourses.”<sup>17</sup> As the famous 1960s slogan states more bluntly, “There is no negro problem in the United States, there is a white problem.”

Just how pervasive eurocentric attitudes can be was revealed again to me at a recent social gathering. From across the room, I glimpsed my friend Suzanne, originally from Edmonton, conversing with someone I had never seen before. Mentioning him later, I asked her if he was a relative. “No,” she replied with a small trace of amusement which may have belied irritation, “everyone asks me that.” Only at that instant did I realize that I had not really *looked* at them and perceived how completely different in appearance—in skin, hair colour, bone structure—they were from each other. Instead, in a moment of careless stereotyping, I had seen and assumed two people may have possibly been related because they both appeared to be of aboriginal descent—a miscalculation akin to relating an Italian and a Swede.<sup>18</sup>

Hence, even beyond the larger underlying economic and political interests which entrench and perpetuate discrimination against First Nations people in North America, it does not surprise me that the problem of a colonial present still remains, in the Americas,

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<sup>16</sup> An article to which I repeatedly return is Cornel West’s “Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism,” wherein he locates a starting point in the recognition of the interconnectedness of the political, economic, and cultural histories of humans on this planet. *Public* 10 (1994): 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Postmodern Age,” *Art and Design* 10.7/8 (1995): 11. On page 12 they continue, “we are less interested in identity as something one ‘has’, than in identification as something one ‘does.’”

<sup>18</sup> Marco, the person in question, it turns out, is from Central America. Suzanne is Alberta Métis.

and elsewhere. And like curator Abigail Solomon-Godeau, I do not perceive it as productive to view “one’s whiteness, or one’s privilege, as an excuse to occupy the sidelines in one of the most compelling issues we confront in the present.”<sup>19</sup> Hence it is my hope that my engagement with Durham’s work and writing is one, albeit modest, step away from the sidelines to ally myself as a participant in the struggle against racism. Because it is my problem. And because I can only learn alongside others, listening. In his statement for the catalogue of *Land, Spirit, Power*, Durham links a nuanced, inclusive, and evolving understanding of the past and the present with a conceptual frame for productive alliances:

The Cherokee concept of ‘Eloheh’ traditionally meant the land and the world but also history. Perhaps the best literal translation would be process. . . . Within the concept of Eloheh is the idea that existence, the universe, is like a big council meeting. It is obviously one’s duty to be a part of it, and that entails listening well and speaking well. One cannot do one well without having done the other well. Power for me then can only mean the goodness that integrity in that process can bring. That, again, cannot be either an individual project or a community project, it must always be both.<sup>20</sup>

Like Durham, who believes that European cultures have overwhelmingly accorded importance to text over art and other forms of meaning, I wish to deprivilege the authority of this text by locating it in the realm of listening.

Born into a family of Cherokee activists and carvers in Arkansas in 1940, Durham is an involuntary American, voluntarily-exiled, and since 1994, living and working in Europe. While not refusing his Cherokee heritage as a vital component of who he is and what he does, he insists on the universality of his work. His work is not in any way intended for Native people, whom he feels would have no use for it; as part of this society,

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<sup>19</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Mistaken Identities*, exhibition catalogue (Santa Barbara: University of California Art Museum, 1992) 14.

<sup>20</sup> In Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1992) 145.

Durham insists that his voice be given space in dialogues of the contemporary art world. In a statement for the Documenta IX exhibition, he wrote, "I generally think of myself as a very universal Cherokee artist in the same way that Marcel Duchamp was a universal French artist. He couldn't stop being French, even though he gave up his French citizenship and left France, he was always very French and always a very French artist. And very universal at the same time."<sup>21</sup> This also points to the double standard underlying the fact that few, if any texts exist discussing the "Spanishness" of Pablo Picasso, or the "Britishness" of Barbara Hepworth. Durham's production, then, mocks, satirizes, admonishes, challenges, critiques and enacts the processes by which it is not permitted the same reading by a predominantly white art establishment.

Durham remembers that even before he spoke, he made his own toys, creating and constructing a miniature world.<sup>22</sup> Since then he has carved, sculpted and fabricated objects for a variety of personal, ceremonial, and functional purposes. However in 1990, he told Susan Canning, "I don't do art so that I can screw the system. I do art because I do art. Because somewhere in your life, usually when you are little, you become an artist without knowing what that means. Then you have to figure out how to do it responsively."<sup>23</sup> This ethic of responsiveness was a familial legacy. In 1979, Ward Churchill asked Durham about the relation between political action and art-making, eliciting the following comment:

There is a way in which my life is beautifully frustrating, because I was raised as a political activist, and I was raised as a carver—I learned stone, bone and wood carving from my family—everybody does it to this very day. And I was also raised as a good fisherman, and I was also raised a

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<sup>21</sup> In Ilse Kuyken, "Documenta IX," artists' statements, *Kunst & Museumjournaal* 3.6 (1992): 5.

<sup>22</sup> Durham in Nemiroff et al. 145. In his 1983 essay "Creativity and the Social Process," he writes, "The toys involved a very complex fantasy life and any object I could handle was in danger of being transformed into playing a role in that private world. . . . I made my own society in which I had an important part. Something in my makeup caused me to build that society with material objects which I would change one way or another; I just had a 'bent' towards relating to objects and shapes." Reproduced in *A Certain Lack of Coherence* 72.

<sup>23</sup> Jimmie Durham, interview, by Susan Canning, *Art Papers* 14.4 (1990): 31.

squirrel hunter, and a lot of different things. I was taught blacksmithery by my Dad. And I was raised to be with the idea—let me say this differently, I was raised with the idea that I should be the best and most full of integrity human being that I could keep continuing to be, no matter anything I might be doing at any given time.<sup>24</sup>

This necessity for integrity fused with what Durham has termed his “first level of knowledge of the world,” another familial teaching—to take a militant stance against the United States.<sup>25</sup> Thus, he insists that the subversion his production effects, while not the sole impetus for making art works, is necessary at this particular juncture. As he explained to Susan Canning:

It’s subversion that I’m after, absolutely. But I don’t do art to be subversive. I would want to be the same subversive person no matter what I did. If I was a carpenter, I would want to be just as subversive. And it seems to me that’s a responsibility we all have because there is this big old thing that is oppressing us. Why would you not work against it?<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly then, as a teenager, Durham recalls he was “a Cherokee activist,” but “a naive resister,” not knowing how or what to resist. He left home at 16, becoming briefly involved with the Pan-Indian Native American Church, and worked as a cowboy at numerous ranches. In the early sixties, he joined the Navy. Durham was stationed in an Arizona unit constructing atomic bombs, when he requested a transfer on conscientious grounds. He was indeed transferred, to the South Pacific, and then on to North and South Vietnam.<sup>27</sup> Discharged in 1963, he worked as a furnace mechanic for the University of Houston, where he published some poems, and edited *Adept*, a poetry magazine.<sup>28</sup> Yet

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<sup>24</sup> Durham, interview by Churchill.

<sup>25</sup> Durham, interview by Canning 32.

<sup>26</sup> Durham, interview by Canning.

<sup>27</sup> “Our job,” he told Lucy Lippard, “was to start the war.” In “Jimmie Durham: Postmodernist ‘Savage,’” *Art in America* 81.2 (1993): 65.

<sup>28</sup> Durham’s curriculum vitae from the Nicole Klagsbrun gallery states that he founded both the Adept Art Center for minority artists, and *Adept Magazine*. New York: unpublished document, 1997.

another seed of possibility was planted when some small objects he made sold in a gallery in a local shopping mall:

I said yes, I'm an artist, I like this art business. I can make things and get money. . . . But at the same time I was trying to do something, I was trying to make sense of something, I was trying to see if I could investigate certain things with objects, with doing things with materials. And I didn't know that that was an art project, it was just my own personal project.<sup>29</sup>

At the urging of playwright Vivian Ayers Allen in 1964, Durham gave his first performance, "My Land." His reading of writings by Native American leaders shared the spotlight not only with Allen, but with a young poet named Muhammed Ali. Another seed took root: during periods of artistic activity, Durham would perform yearly.<sup>30</sup> Moving to Austin in 1965, he continued to publish both poems and articles, and began to exhibit his work more frequently. In an interview with Dirk Snauwert, Durham recalled an attempt to alter viewers' optical vision of his work by denying them specular experience of it. He blindfolded visitors and let them handle his objects, a project which was by his admission not clearly articulated, but nonetheless investigated how objects and materials can speak, and be read. It also displayed a desire to engage people with a new or unexpected kind of experience.

By 1968, Durham wanted to permanently leave the US, and so accepted the invitation of some foreign students to visit them in Geneva. In order to extend his visa, he enrolled at the Ecole des Beaux Arts . Durham stayed for four years, obtaining a degree in sculpture, performing in the streets, and writing a lengthy research paper entitled

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<sup>29</sup> In "Dirk Snauwert in Conversation with Jimmie Durham," Laura Mulvey, Dirk Snauwert, Mark Alice Grant, and Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995) 10.

<sup>30</sup> Following 1964, he performed in Geneva from 1969-72, and generally once annually beginning in 1982. Interestingly, in 1990, Durham gave five different performances *Crazy for Life* was performed at New York's Dance Theater Workshop [see appendix]; *The Self-Taught Artist* at Exit Art, New York; Catskills Give-away at Lexington, New York's Art Awareness; *Savagism and You* at New York's Whitney Museum Downtown; and for the second time in Derry, Northern Ireland, at the behest of the Orchard Gallery.

"American Indian Culture: Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle."<sup>31</sup> He returned to the United States in 1973 in order to participate in the confrontation of members of the Pine Ridge reservation and the American Indian movement with the FBI, at Wounded Knee in South Dakota.<sup>32</sup>

Following that event, Durham began eight years of intensive mobilizing, lobbying, and activist work, serving on the Central Council of the American Indian Movement. He was largely responsible for establishing, then serving as director for AIM's diplomatic arm, the International Indian Treaty Council, the first non-governmental consultative delegation accepted by the United Nations in New York and Geneva.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the frequent lobbying required of such an intensive, high-profile position, Durham was active on other intellectual fronts. From 1975-79, he co-edited and wrote essays for the council's monthly newspaper, *Treaty Council News*, he edited a children's book, and wrote essays which appeared in an exhibition catalogue, *Counterspy*, and *The Black Scholar*.<sup>34</sup>

Exhaustion and disillusionment with infighting led Durham to leave in 1980, although his work bore fruit in 1992 with the signing of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>35</sup> His initial idea was to write a book chronicling the

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<sup>31</sup> It would later serve as an Internal Study Paper for the Native American Support Committee (NASC), noted when republished in *A Certain Lack of Coherence* 253.

<sup>32</sup> See Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996) and *Voices from Wounded Knee: In the Words of the Participants* (Roosevelt, New York: Akwesasne Notes, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> With typical self-deprecation, Durham claimed this arrived "By default, I was the jetsetter." In Lippard, "Savage" 65.

<sup>34</sup> The second edition of *Chronicles of American Indian Protest* was published by New York's council on Inter-racial books for Children in 1976. The text, "Mr Catlin and Mr Rockefeller Tame the Wilderness" was included in *An Anti-Catalogue*, eds. Rudolf Baranik et al. (New York: Artists for Cultural Change, 1976). "Untitled Essay on Government Infiltration of the American Indian Movement" appeared in *Counterspy* 3.1 (1976). "The San Francisco *Black Scholar* published "American Indians and Carter's Human Rights Sermons," March/April 1979: 48-53.

<sup>35</sup> Noted in Ward Churchill, "Nobody's Pet Poodle: Jimmie Durham, An Artist for Native North America," *Indians are Us? Culture and Genocide in Native North America* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1994) 102.

history of AIM through the twentieth century. It was never written, but in 1983, a Federal Endowment for the Arts Grant enabled him to publish *Columbus Day*, a book of poems and drawings.<sup>36</sup> By progressive degrees, he began exhibiting and performing again in New York. From 1982 to 1985, Durham edited *Art and Artist Newspaper*, a publication of The Foundation for the Community of Artists, which he also directed. 1985, the year of his first solo exhibition, *A Matter of Life and Death, Singing*, held at New York's Alternative Museum, he returned full-time to his own work. True to his familial underpinnings, "his own work" implied writing statements and essays for others in addition to exhibitions of his own work and group shows he curated—*Ni Go Tlunh A Doh Ka (We are always turning around on purpose)* and *We the People*<sup>37</sup>—in addition to penning essays and criticism for *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *Third Text*. In the nineties, Durham would contribute writing to the catalogue of *The Decade Show, New Observations*, and two important compendia of essays, Susan Hiller's *The Myth of Primitivism*, and Lucy Lippard's *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans*.<sup>38</sup>

In an interview with Durham, Ward Churchill referred to the artist's earlier characterization of his artistic record in New York as one of failures.<sup>39</sup> While working for the American Indian Movement, Durham had been surreptitiously making objects in the evenings, "like I used to, just to pull my sanity together."<sup>40</sup> Following his departure from AIM, Durham decided to write a book chronicling its history, but he also made some collage/assemblage-type paintings. Stemming from knowledge gleaned over the previous

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<sup>36</sup> Jimmie Durham, *Columbus Day* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: West End Press, 1983).

<sup>37</sup> See notes 7 and 8.

<sup>38</sup> Many are published in *A Certain Lack of Coherence*.

<sup>39</sup> Jimmie Durham, interview, by Ward Churchill, *What Follows*, prod. James Johnson, University of Colorado at Boulder, Academic Media Services, 1989. VHS, 45 minutes.

<sup>40</sup> Sheila Farr, "Scavenger and Sculptor: Artists [sic] bends Cliches to Challenge Stereotypes," *The Bellingham Herald* 25 February 1990.



decade of his activist involvement, each painting contained text describing tragic, deplorable situations in native communities. Not intended in any way to be aesthetic objects, the paintings were first shown in *Beyond Aesthetics*, a group exhibition curated by Puerto Rican painter Juan Sanchez.<sup>41</sup> They were received enthusiastically. Yet surprisingly, Durham recounts that he didn't feel proud. As he explained to Dirk Snauwert, "It looked like the art crowd of New York was being entertained by the sorrows of my people and I was the agent who allowed them to be entertained. I felt that I had betrayed my own folks and betrayed my own struggle."<sup>42</sup>

While in Geneva, Durham had also been painting, embedding, and embellishing the skulls of various animals he had found, and for a subsequent exhibition at the Kenelkeba Gallery, he arranged them in a wooden simulacra of commercial trading post displays, entitled *The Manhattan Festival of the Dead (Store)*.<sup>43</sup> With "store" added almost as an afterthought, Durham indicated that both the commemorative function of the festival, the coming together, and the disorderly jostle of noisy crowds had more importance than commercial ends. Elaborately-patterned, and embedded with semi-precious stones such as agates, turquoise, and shells, the skulls of a deer, opossum, baby buffalo, armadillo, and a cat (among others) were satirically-priced at the sum of five dollars each, in reminiscence of the innumerable inbalanced transactions—of fur pelts for beads, land for alcohol—between Indigenous Americans and Europeans. Two texts accompanied the piece. Durham described them in an interview with Jean Fisher:

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<sup>41</sup> This group exhibition was held at New York's Henry Street Settlement in 1982.

<sup>42</sup> "Snauwert conversation," in Mulvey et al. 9.

<sup>43</sup> This exhibition was also curated by Sanchez. Lucy Lippard describes "an old-fashioned, glass-fronted cabinet." She also quotes Durham's recounting of his receiving the following name gift from Coyote at the age of 13: "that I would always see whatever was dead if it were within my field of vision. For more than thirty years I have seen every dead bird and animal every day wherever I am. So it became necessary to see if that was a usable gift or just a dirty trick that would drive me crazy." In Lippard, "Savage" 65-6. Not surprisingly then, Durham has worked with skulls and animal bones since his teenage years. See *Ni Go Tlunh A Doh Ka* 4.

One text read: 'Good news for art lovers. Indian artists may die'. I was about to turn 44, the average life span for an Indian male, I was pretty sick and my life had been threatened on several reservations. 'Therefore, statistically, your investment of \$5 could gain you more money later'. The other text was about giving things away, unlike the 'free lunch' of New York.<sup>44</sup>

I view this installation as the beginning of what Nikos Papastergiadis has identified as two consistent trajectories in Durham's work: "an attack of the exploitative thematic of non-reciprocity, and a mockery of the codes of misrecognition."<sup>45</sup> It is both curious and sadly ironic that both enunciations were played out literally in public reactions. In other words, Durham's joke was too subtle for some, and its backfiring was blatantly evident, as he recounted to Jean Fisher:

The response was horrible. Everybody wanted the pieces; and a couple of people came up—educated people, not people off the street—saying that they would buy several more pieces if I would make more on the quiet, all at the \$5 price. They could not see that this was not an Indian being naive and that this had nothing to do with whatever might be the price of a piece. What I was attempting to communicate was taken at face value, when I was trying to be ridiculous."<sup>46</sup>

Durham's consequent step was to address the New York art world more directly, becoming, as Jean Fisher maintains, "an archivist in the Foucauldian sense: . . . [concerned] not with a history of effects and causes but with the function of a statement—on racial difference—as it circulates through relations of power and the forms of exchange that inscribe the contact between disparate cultures."<sup>47</sup> *Bedia's First Basement*, held at 22

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<sup>44</sup> Durham, "Attending to Words and Bones, An Interview with Jean Fisher," *Art and Design* 10.7/8 (1995): 48.

<sup>45</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, "Metaphor: The Energy for Beginning," *Art & Design* 9.7-8 (1994): 24.

<sup>46</sup> Durham, "Attending" 48. This allusion was also lost perhaps on Lippard, who enthuses, "you could buy them for almost nothing if you got there first to sign up for your favorite on a sheet that was part of the exhibit." She acquired the armadillo skull. See Lippard, "Savage" 66.

<sup>47</sup> Jean Fisher, "Jimmie Durham," in Papo Colo et al., *Jimmie Durham. The Bishop's Moose and the Pinkerton Men*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Exit Art, 1989) 12.

Wooster Gallery in 1985, sought, as Calvin Reid described, “hermeneutical revenge on Western culture for its misinterpretation and mistranslation of Native American language, customs, and artifacts.”<sup>48</sup>

As an installation, it expanded physically into the space, and conceptually around an elaborately-constructed fiction narrated in a text entitled “The Mystery of the Two Islands: The True Story of How Cuban Communists Gained Control of Trump Tower in 1986.”<sup>49</sup> Therein, Durham appropriated the name of Cuban artist Jose Bedia, and recast him as a renowned explorer and archaeologist who in the third millennium discovers a “vast and complex civilization” on Manhattan Island, known then as the White Planes.<sup>50</sup> Parodying the manner in which historical “knowledge” is constructed, the text recounts Bedia’s unearthing of “an impressive array of artifacts from several cultures.” which he concludes, yet cannot prove, to be derived from the Great Plane White People. The text meanders and digresses in sections (such as “Certain Facts You Should Know,” and “Four-Part Chronicle Concerning Chickens, Cuba and Freedom,” and “Photography and Federal Reality”) before discussing the basement’s discovery, and the identity of its inhabitant. Chief Injun Joe, “The last Indian left on the Island,” was first imprisoned there, then later “released on parole,” in order to serve “as Manhattan’s Janitor, before rising to the prestigious position of the city’s “High Steel Walker.”<sup>51</sup>

A small drawing/text piece entitled *Of Special Interest* attributes the diminishing size of Joe’s drum to his wish to become civilized (Fig. 1) and the diminutive scale of his bed to his poverty: “Lo, the poor little indian was so poor he had to buy it at a 1/2 off sale.”

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<sup>48</sup> Calvin Reid, “Jimmie Durham at Exit Art,” *Art in America* 78.5 (1990): 238.

<sup>49</sup> Republished in Mulvey et al. 102-9.

<sup>50</sup> Jean Fisher, in her interview with Durham, mentions that Bedia stayed with him in New York while serving as artist in residence at New York State University. See Durham, “Attending” 47.

<sup>51</sup> Mulvey et al., 108.

Another of the *Basement's* elements was an altered advertisement for an aerospace company proclaiming, "The last thing he wants is a handout," and continuing with a romanticized description of the company's Navajo employees. Appended to it is a handmade sign in large block letters proclaiming "Donations Accepted," with a large caricature of a "native" arrow pointing to a barrel. Durham flagrantly contradicts its patronizing, liberal rhetoric with a degrading stereotype of aboriginal peoples looking for handouts.<sup>52</sup>

Other, more subtle plays with stereotypes may be found in the leather-wrapped, feathered, and beaded artifacts and their accompanying texts. *Bedia's Muffler* (Fig. 2) is reportedly "a musical instrument used by either the Comancheros or the Tainos . . . in the ritual Brake Dance." In describing the ethnographic gaze, Jean Fisher writes, "the object, displaced from the cultural knowledge that gave it meaning . . . becomes a pastiche of itself: the bearer . . . of misrecognized signifiers redirected toward meanings authorized by alien systems of signification, coming to rest finally in an affective liberal sentimentalism."<sup>53</sup> The label for *Bedia's Stirring Wheel* (Fig. 3) furnished the following "information":

From: Site B quadrant 71, White Planes, New York. Jose Bedia, the famous Cuban explorer/archaeologist, discovered this stirring wheel, sometimes referred to as the "Fifth" or "Big" wheel during the second excavation of the ruins at White Planes in 3290 AD. He believes that the stirring wheel was a symbol of office for the Great White Father, often called "The Man behind the Wheel." Bedia claims that the chief would stand behind the wheel to make pronouncements and stirring speeches.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Both works reproduced in Mulvey et al. 19.

<sup>53</sup> Jean Fisher, "In Search of the 'Inauthentic': Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art," *Art Journal* 51.3 (1992): 48. A current example is the mainstream vogue for Ojibwa dreamcatchers.

<sup>54</sup> Mulvey et al. 60.

Yet these objects not only parody the ludicrous deductive logic employed by some ethnographers. As Durham writes:

The series of sculptures using car parts as future Indian artifacts comes from the sense I got while growing up on the edges of small towns of the messages and voices contained in town dumps or old barns. Whatever people are trying to hide, discard, or ignore I want to reclaim. I feel a desperation about the dead animals but I know they can speak.<sup>55</sup>

What then, is the conversation of the skull and the other objects adorning the *Stirring Wheel*, or *Tlunh Datsi* (Fig. 4), made the same year? Initially, I believed that it was a problematic one insofar as it reinforced stereotypes of First Nations people. Skulls, bones, and materials such as feathers, fur, and leather continue to be associated with First Nations cultures through their pervasive ornamentation of objects from tourist doll figures to dreamcatchers (the base of the wheel is encircled with a beaded leather belt).<sup>56</sup> Yet it is important to recall, as Durham insists, that these are by no means materials used exclusively by First Nations people; nor in the case of beads or horsehair, do they possess a long temporal history within these cultures.<sup>57</sup> Rather, they are European imports with centuries-old histories of use in elegant formal dress. As writer Richard Shiff observes:

Euro-Americans attach a mythology to Indian crafts and other signs of 'Indianness,' so that the objects reflect an idealization of their makers' way of life—the Indian respect for processes of nature and natural materials, their environmentally sensitive economy, their refinement of handwork, which assembly-line labor fails to supply. . . . This is colonization by

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<sup>55</sup> Durham and Fisher, *Ni Go Tlunh* 4.

<sup>56</sup> A particular difficulty is their reinforcement of the putative image of aboriginal peoples' "innate" symbiotic relationship with their ecosystem—which often conflates them with nature. As George Lamming writes, "to be a child of Nature, in this sense, is to be situated in Nature, to be identified with Nature to be eternally without the seed of a dialectic which makes possible some *emergence* from Nature," in *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: M. Joseph, 1960) 110.

<sup>57</sup> Mentioned both in Durham's essay in *Ni Go Tlunh*, and his artist's statement in Nemiroff et al. 144-5. I will return to this issue in chapter 3.

metonymic exchange, the redemption of product (artwork) for process (conduct of life, system of values).<sup>58</sup>

Further, the problem lies not only in the reinforcing of a stereotype, but in the fact that stereotypes and notions of “authenticity” fix or arrest representations of people and their cultures, as if they are closed to the transformations of change, movement and time.<sup>59</sup>

The installation that followed, *On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian* (1985), took the investigation of the ethnographic gaze in *Bedia's Basement* one step further. A museological arrangement of “scientifacts,” “sociofacts,” and “artifacts,” *On Loan* offered, in the words of Jean Fisher, a “‘natural history’ of the Indian. . . . [while displaying] a portrait of a body dismembered and reassigned to the dead space of the museum.”<sup>60</sup> And that body, she contends, is that of an “unnamed generic Indian,” or in other words, “a non-self-portrait.”<sup>61</sup>

Enclosed in display cases and mounted on the walls were a variety of objects and images: a photo of “The Indian’s Parents (Frontal View),” “An Indian Leg Bone,” and “Real Indian Blood.” As if admitting to some inherent deficiency, hand-lettered script underneath this latter specimen declared: “(Color enhanced).” And in a moment of discursive slippage where the specimen briefly becomes a speaking subject, block letters on the side of the central handprint poignantly announced, “My Blood.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Shiff, “The Necessity of Jimmie Durham’s Jokes,” *Art Journal* 51.3 (1992): 74. Again, the quintessential exemplar is the dreamcatcher.

<sup>59</sup> Iain Chambers discusses this in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (New York: Routledge-Comedia, 1994) 82.

<sup>60</sup> Fisher, “Inauthentic” 47.

<sup>61</sup> Fisher in Colo et al., *The Bishop’s Moose* 12.

<sup>62</sup> A reproduction of this work in one of the early *On Loan* manifestations, dated 1985, shows merely the images/marks on a black ground with the label, “The Indian’s Blood” above. In Jimmie Durham, *A Certain Lack of Coherence* (London: Kala Press) 115.

As Judy Purdom noted, “A voyeuristic ethnographic frame emphasising a functional reading of culture with headings such as ‘home-life’, ‘travel’, ‘work’ and ‘mating’ is made to look absurd.”<sup>63</sup> A display of arrow types—“Tiny, Wavy, and Short and Fat”—lampooned ethnography’s obsession with taxonomy and classification. Further, the dry, dispassionate frigidity with which most information is relayed in museums “neutralizes,” as Richard Shiff observes, “the emotional impact of statistical data and other forms of evidence.”<sup>64</sup> Shiff refers to *On Loan*’s series of maps of the United States entitled “Current Trends in Indian Land Ownership,” which depicts a solid dark area (labeled 1492) being slowly transformed to a white mass with a few dark flecks. “The ultimate irony,” he writes, is that “a traditional Indian ethic cannot properly accommodate a concept of land ownership.”<sup>65</sup> Further, reduction of the outright seizure and theft of land to a trivialized, amorphous “trend,” sanitizes history for more comfortable consumption. Fisher acerbically comments:

The persistent institutional *reduction* of Native American arts to “ethnographic” spectacle has several implications. The widely-held view that aesthetics and scholarship are distinct categories with no responsibility to sociopolitical life means that institutions controlling such discourses are not obliged to interrogate the ideological assumptions of their own practices. This inevitable and conveniently excludes the voice of contemporary peoples for whom there may be no such category distinctions, and denies their status as *historical and political subjects*.<sup>66</sup>

In a similar mode of high irony, Durham took the opportunity to show the colonial “history” in the present. A small label proclaimed the exhibit to be sponsored, in an enactment of corporate duplicity (actually repeated soon after in the Shell Corporation’s sponsorship of *The Spirit Sings* exhibition in Alberta while remaining deaf to the Lubicon

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<sup>63</sup> Judy Purdom, “Who is Jimmie Durham?” *Third Text* 28/29 (1994): 175.

<sup>64</sup> Shiff 75.

<sup>65</sup> Shiff, “Necessity” 76.

<sup>66</sup> Fisher, “Inauthentic” 45.

nation's land claim) "in part" by colonial plunderers: "the Sir Walter Raleigh Tobacco & Firearms Corp. and the John Jacob Astor Animal Skinning Co."<sup>67</sup> Another case displayed a test tube of clear liquid accompanied by the following "Selected Scientificfacts":

American Indians have many uses for water. They drink it and also use it in many traditional dishes. In areas where they are allowed to grow crops they also use water for irrigation. When water was more plentiful on reservations it was traditionally used for many medicinal purposes, such as combatting impetigo, cholera, and lice. Because of the growing need for water in industries such as coal strip-mining, the government has had to set priorities for water usage. Studies are now underway to find acceptable substitutes among Indian communities with the cooperation of the Tribal Council and many scientific research organizations.<sup>68</sup>

At least one item migrated from *Bedia's Basement*: the beaded, flaming-red garment entitled *Pocahontas' Underwear* (1985).<sup>69</sup> With deft economy, Durham encapsulated the signs of "nativeness" and sexuality (heat, passion, the coursing of blood through veins in excitement, the running of blood in menstruation) which permeate both countless depictions of the legendary daughter of Chief Powhatan, and representations of First Nations women up until the present.<sup>70</sup> As communications theorist Gail Guthrie Valaskakis has documented, in the early part of this century, "the dominant representation of the Indian Princess was the 'red tunic lady,' a maiden draped in a red tunic, wearing the requisite headband and feather . . ." <sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> See Michael Ames and Bruce Trigger, "Share the Blame: 'The Spirit Sings,'" interview, by Peter Gzowski, *Vanguard* 17.2 (1998): 15-18.

<sup>68</sup> Illustrated in Shiff, "Necessity" 76.

<sup>69</sup> It is likely some of the skull-combine pieces, such as *Tlunh Datsi* did as well. The legendary princess's lingerie would also become a "souvenir" in a Canadian offshoot of the *On Loan . . .* installation, *Karl Marx and Alexander von Humboldt Tour the Americas*, held at Montreal's Centre international d'art contemporain in 1990. Also of interest is the fact of this migration itself, which I will discuss further in Chapter Three.

<sup>70</sup> See "Sacajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians," in Marilyn Burgess and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls, Stereotypes from the Frontier*, Bookwork, Rebecca Belmore (Montreal: Galerie Oboro, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> In Burgess and Valaskakis 27.



Both *Bedia's Basement* and *On Loan* . . . simulate, as Homi K. Bhabha observes, “the exertions of the ‘official knowledges’ of colonialism—pseudo-scientific, typological, legal-administrative, eugenicist . . . [which are] imbricated at the point of their production of meaning and power with the fantasy that dramatizes the impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin.”<sup>72</sup> Again, this is the realm of authenticity, which is all the more powerful because it is a crucial component of white fantasy. For a second time, the enormous, operative strength of that fantasy was confirmed by the misreadings of New Yorkers, who could not conceive that Durham was acting ironically. Comments informed Durham that aboriginal people did not and should not make that kind of work. Other viewers actually fell for the ruse, believing the exhibition actually came from the Museum of the American Indian. This was frightening, for as Durham told Susan Canning, “they were not dumb people.”<sup>73</sup> The reason, he explained, was that:

. . . parody takes a kind of subtle understanding. As well, people don't expect it from us, the Indians. People expect “the Noble Savage: in one way or another. They expect it and they want it. They don't want us to act bad. They want us to really reflect the stereotype. . . . in the sense that we are very straightforward, very stoic, that we love America, that we are simpleminded, and that we are very spiritual, which in real language, means that we are not sophisticated. We're kind of an animal that speaks only in a certain way that this kind of animal would speak.”<sup>74</sup>

From these early experiences Durham realized that if his attempt at conversation with New Yorkers was going to continue, the dialogue could only be opened up if he proceeded, turning, and polyphonically re-membering

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<sup>72</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 81.

<sup>73</sup> Durham, interview by Canning 33.

<sup>74</sup> Interview by Canning 34.

## **Chapter One**

### **Identification: Durham's Bricolaged Portrait**

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Who am I? In *Black Skin, White Masks* Frantz Fanon wrote that it is the responsibility of every human being “to pose that question and to refine it further by asking, Have I been all that I am capable of being? Am I who I am?”<sup>1</sup> Based on his study of Hegel’s “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage” in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Fanon believed there was an inevitable connection between personal identity and social recognition, dooming all individuals “to exist not as [they] were, but as [they] appeared in the eyes of others.”<sup>2</sup> On some level, almost all portrait representations of human beings evoke this subject/object duality and the disjunction which occurs as viewers oscillate between these two poles. Self-portraits, however, possess an added complexity, since the artist is simultaneously the acting subject and the represented object. Inescapably, the artist engaged in representing him or herself is trapped in a kind of dialectic flux between these two subject positions. Self-portraiture then, in the words of Marcia Pointon, “stands in a contradictory way to the mythic unified body which is rationalized and re-presented in portrait depictions.”<sup>3</sup> Further, as she writes:

Portraits engage a series of narratives. The portrait is the stage-set and the frame of reference, but the exchange that takes place exceeds the circumscribed bounds of the portrait as image. [Portraits] open onto a politics of representation in which the historical human subject is not a separate entity from the portrait depiction of him or her, but part of a

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<sup>1</sup> Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York: Pantheon, 1973) 3.

<sup>2</sup> Gendzier 23. I would also like to note that in all quotations of Fanon herein, I have modified his texts to read gender-neutrally, invoking as my rationale his own exemplary humanism and belief in the power of language to shape reality.

<sup>3</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head; Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 6.

process through which knowledge is claimed and the social and physical environment is shaped.<sup>4</sup>

It is for this reason that, in opening a dialogue on the work of Durham, I have chosen to focus this chapter on his *Self-Portrait* of 1987. For if Durham's work as a whole is based on an identity politics rooted in heterogeneity, multiplicity, and instability, then in many ways a self-portrait is, given the argument above, an especially appropriate forum in which to broach issues of identity. Moreover, I believe an in-depth examination of the *Self-Portrait* will be particularly fruitful insofar as it provides a mapping of many of the principle discursive elements of Durham's art practice. Therein it begins to posit answers to Fanon's other questions—is Durham who he is? Is he all that he is capable of being? From a perspective limited by my own subjective reading, my understanding of these answers and the larger colonial contexts to which they point are the crux of this chapter.

Still, the starting point is the body. It is important to note, as does Ralph Rugoff, that Durham is “less concerned with abstract principles of flux and multiplicity than with specific sites where cultural differences are demarcated and defined.”<sup>5</sup> The body is one such site. Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz summarizes Michel Foucault's poststructuralist delineation of the operation of power: “For Foucault, power deploys discourses, particularly knowledges, on and over bodies, establishing knowledges as the representatives of the truth of those bodies . . . Discourses, made possible and exploited by power, intermesh with bodies, with the lives and behavior of individuals, to constitute them as particular bodies.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pointon 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Rugoff, *Transformers*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Independent Curators Incorporated, 1994) 6. Rugoff's statement was generalized beyond Durham's work to include that of all of the artists in the exhibition.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, “The Body as Inscriptive Surface,” *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, *Theories of Representation and Difference*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 150. It should be noted that while Grosz endorses Nietzsche's reading of the body (as a site emanating

Hence, it is my thesis that Durham's *Self-Portrait* maps various discourses which constitute Durham's identity as a subject. Therein, it is an open-ended weaving of truths and fictions which portrays the myths and stereotypes of the Native body lurking in the white colonial imaginary rather than visually representing the artist himself.<sup>7</sup> Thus literally, the *Self-Portrait* becomes, in the words of Gayatri Spivak, "the place of knowledge, rather than the instrument of knowing."<sup>8</sup> However, this is not to say that the *Self-Portrait* contains texts or messages to be simply decoded and read.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it functions to map audiences into spaces where they are confronted with their own as well as his difference. As Jean Fisher remarks, "The effect of this non-logical process on the viewer is thus a fall into an unmappable space of difference, which exposes our own otherness or discontinuity within the discursive field presented. . . . In this way, the work *performs* the relation between self and other . . ." <sup>10</sup>

Like much of Durham's work, the *Self-Portrait* is an assemblage of various materials, but one hovering closer to painting than sculpture because of its relative flatness and parallel relation to the wall (Fig. 5). Essentially, it appears as if Durham laid down on

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the will to power, and resistance) over that of Foucault, she critiques the utility for feminism of the notion of the body as a blank, neutral page. See pages 146-47.

<sup>7</sup> Durham himself has stated, "I am Cherokee, but my work is simply contemporary art and not [Indian art] in any sense . . . although [my work] quite naturally reflects [my] background in some ways, it often deals with how whites identify themselves and the world," in Richard Shiff, "The Necessity of Jimmie Durham's Jokes," *Art Journal* 51.3 (1992): 75. In addition, Robert F. Berkhofer Jr.'s germinal book differentiates "Indian" as a White conception from the diverse nations inhabiting North America when European contact began. *The White Man's Indian; Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1979). As he states logically, "since the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere neither called themselves by a single term nor understood themselves as a collectivity, the idea and image of the Indian must be a White conception," 3.

<sup>8</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern,' *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987) 267.

<sup>9</sup> With some adamance in an interview with Ward Churchill, Durham expanded on his belief that art is tremendously ineffectual at conveying messages, although he was equally insistent that it does have functions. Durham, interview, by Ward Churchill, *What Follows*, prod. James Johnson, University of Colorado at Boulder, Academic Media Services, 1989, VHS, 45 minutes.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Fisher, "Hors d'oeuvre," *Cocida y Crudo*, ed. Dan Cameron, exhibition catalogue (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1994) 316.

a piece of canvas, cut out his traced outline, and tacked it to a wooden support. This is an act which performatively reduces his self-hood to a flattened surface resembling a flayed hide, a hunting trophy, or a skin pinned to its wooden support, and as some have said, crucified to the gallery wall. It is an action with multiple levels of significance. On the one hand, in an encapsulation of the earlier installations *Bedia's Basement* and *On Loan From the Museum of the American Indian*, it deconstructs and critiques Western desire to collect aboriginal art and culture. On the other, the simple event of Durham hanging his own body in such a space is also a strategic reappropriation of agency. And of tremendous resonance is this compression of his unclothed physical body to a thin epidermal layer. In a recent interview with writer Jean Fisher Durham reminisced, “in the 70s the Black Panthers were calling themselves ‘Bloods,’ and we were kind of jealous, so we started calling ourselves ‘Skins’ (short for Redskins) which was also a kind of funniness, because instead of blood we are skin.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet we are not just skin alone. Durham's comment alludes to the totality of cultural meanings and values with which skin's physical materiality is invested. As Elizabeth Grosz affirms, the body is discursively etched by its disciplinary history—actions, habits, commitments—which makes it “amenable to the prevailing exigencies of power.”<sup>12</sup> Hence it is no more a “natural” body, but is as distinctive in terms of class, nationality, sexual affiliation, and a host of other categories as if it were clothed. Among numerous other postcolonial theorists, Homi Bhabha has explored how the “scopic instantaneity” of skin is translated via presumptions of naturalness and “common knowledge” to become the principal indicator of racial difference.<sup>13</sup> At the heart of these inferences rests what Bhabha

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<sup>11</sup> Jimmie Durham, “Attending to Words and Bones: An Interview with Jean Fisher,” *Art and Design* 10.7/8 (1995): 53.

<sup>12</sup> Grosz 142.

<sup>13</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 80.

calls the “positivity” of whiteness as a trope, where in a peculiar classificatory elision, white skin comes to represent a racial ground zero: the purported absence of colour.<sup>14</sup> The common reference, until recent decades, to African Americans in the US as “colored” powerfully confirms this assertion. Once whiteness was positioned at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, as Kobena Mercer writes:

In discourses of ‘scientific racism’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which developed in Europe alongside the slave trade, variations in pigmentation, skull and bone formation and hair texture among the species of ‘man’ were seized upon as signs to be identified, named, classified and ordered into a hierarchy of human worth. The ordering of differences constructed a ‘regime of truth’ that could validate the Enlightenment assumption of European “superiority.”<sup>15</sup>

At first glance, Durham seems to contradict this regime of truth by speaking as an acting subject, for his canvas body serves as the foundation for a series of declarative phrases scrawled in hand-lettered, block script. Jean Fisher observes, “When the Native artist speaks as the author rather than the bearer of (an other’s) meaning, she or he precipitates an epistemological crisis, which exposes the fundamental instability of those knowledges that circumscribe the social and political place of colonized peoples.”<sup>16</sup> Further destabilization occurs through the fact of the markings on the skin. Probably more than the one viewer of whom I know has perceived Durham’s body as branded.<sup>17</sup> Indubitably, his skin is incised or inscribed. In her article, “The Body as Inscriptive

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<sup>14</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 76.

<sup>15</sup> Kobena Mercer, “Black Hair/Style Politics,” *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 249.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Fisher, “In Search of the ‘Inauthentic’: Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art,” *Art Journal* 51.3 (1992): 44. This is evidenced by the genre of Western cinema, which requires that native characters, the “Indians” must ultimately rest in the background, rather than in the centre of attention. To violate this norm would imply risking a questioning of foundational knowledges and values regarding the history of the Americas, and introduce complexity where simplicity is the formula for mass entertainment. As discussed by Berkhofer, 98.

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Nina Segalowitz for this observation.

Surface,” Elizabeth Grosz elaborates on Alphonso Lingis’ discussion of tattooing and scarification, remarking:

It offends Western sensibility (at least the white, and especially middle-class sensibility, although Lingis doesn’t specify this) that a subject would voluntarily undertake the permanent inscription of a verbal or visual message on its skin. Its superficiality offends us; its permanence alarms us. We are not so much surfaces as profound depths, subjects of a hidden interiority, and the exhibition of subjectivity on the body’s surface is, at least from a certain class and cultural perspective, ‘puerile’ (his word).<sup>18</sup>

That the surface/depth paradigm is an extremely critical one for Western cultures is indicated in Didier Anzieu’s psychophysiology of the skin, which describes the “epistemological conception, whereby the acquisition of knowledge is seen as a process of breaking through an outer shell to reach an inner core or nucleus.”<sup>19</sup> Anzieu mentions recent research in neurophysiology, which reveals that “the brain, the upper and frontal part of the encephalon, sits like a cap upon the white matter of the cortex.”<sup>20</sup> So literally the centre is situated at the periphery (and likewise for the skin, which is Anzieu’s interest). But the parallels between his next thought and Durham’s own epistemology are startling: “Thought then, following the model of organization of the nervous system, no longer appears to be a process of segregation, a juxtaposition and association of kernels, but a matter of relations between surfaces . . . ”<sup>21</sup>

However, from its beginning at the end of an arrow extending from his pursed lips, Durham’s jaunty introduction would appear to be earnest and straightforward:

Hello! My name is Jimmie Durham. I want to explain a few Basic Things About Myself: In 1986 I was 46 years old. As an artist I am confused

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<sup>18</sup> Grosz 138.

<sup>19</sup> Didier Anzieu. *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 9.

<sup>20</sup> Anzieu.

<sup>21</sup> Anzieu 10. This also aptly describes the function of the *Self-Portrait*. Additionally, it uncannily resembles the locution of Deleuze and Guattari, discussed in chapter 3. Perhaps it is not coincidental that Félix Guattari was a practicing (albeit iconoclastic) psychiatrist.

about many things, but basically my health is good and I am willing and able to do a wide variety of Jobs. I am Actively seeking Employment.<sup>22</sup>

In setting out to “explain a few Basic Things” about himself, Durham seems to imply that his selfhood is a unitary entity which can be described. But if the enunciations inscribed across Durham's body form a kind of “map of his identity,” they send viewers in several different directions simultaneously. Attempting to decode the *Portrait* then, is not a simple task, for the viewer is presented with criss-crossing tensions, inconsistencies, and instabilities of meaning or signification. Fraught with contradictions, these free-floating signifiers are not blowing around in a vacuum or void of context and reception; instead, much like the discursive operations of colonialism, they are reverberating and bouncing off each other. Homi Bhabha remarks:

A repertoire of conflictual positions constitutes the subject in colonial discourse. The taking up of any one position, within a specific discursive form, in a particular historical conjuncture, is thus always problematic—the site of fixity and fantasy. . . .in the face and space of the disruption and threat from the heterogeneity of other positions. As a form of splitting and multiple belief, the stereotype requires, for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes.<sup>23</sup>

Hence employing a similar strategy of “perverse alterity” as Canadian artist Edward Poitras, Durham reflects concepts of “Indians” back to his audience, eliciting in viewers’ own minds a confirmation of their stereotypical narratives, which he then destabilizes by inflecting the signs in ways which emphasize the fragmented, hybrid nature of identity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The capitalization of specific words follows the text as reproduced in the recent monograph by Mulvey et al., supervised by Durham. Obviously not random, I contend that it highlights words of particular tension, such as. “Scar,” “Jobs,” “Penises,” and “Alcohol, Nicotine, Caffeine.”

<sup>23</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 77.

<sup>24</sup> Gerald McMaster, “Desperately Seeking Identity in the Space of the Other,” *Edward Poitras: Canada XLVI Biennale di Venezia*. exhibition catalogue (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1995) 28. Logically, this varies according to each viewer's particular framework of stereotypes, myths, and fictions.



That this knowledge is not just Durham's own is indicated by the varieties of linguistic positions from which the phrases are inscribed. Of the eleven statements present at various points on his body (counting the series previously quoted as one) three different types of grammatical voice are present. Five are in a personal, subjective, or first voice: "I have 12 hobbies! 11 house plants! People like my poems." Two are in what I have christened the "official voice." One speaks of the object "Mr. Durham." The other satirizes the bureaucratic adulation of numerical data in ignorance of its actual utility or descriptiveness—it announces that "His Abdominal Muscle Protrudes Approx. 3-12 inches." The four remaining clauses, such as "Useless nipple," remain indeterminate. Further proof that this is more the white colonizer's portrait than Durham's own is offered by the fact that there are no words or phrases in the artist's maternal language. Durham still speaks and writes Cherokee; and he recurrently employs it in some works as an invocation of subjectivity and agency—but also as a means of frustrating viewers' attempts to gain complete mastery of the work.<sup>25</sup>

But this occurs anyhow. For even on the level of word play, Durham's body is mapped with inconsistencies such as "Useless," contrasting with his avowed willingness and ability "to do a wide variety of Jobs."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the interpretation of other statements reverberates, reinforces, and clashes with others as the viewer/reader circumambulates across Durham's body. One seemingly innocuous admission, "Hands are small, Sensitive," might initially combine with the knowledge that Durham is an artist, to

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that he has also used phrases in languages such as Portuguese, German, and French, often in accordance with the vernacular of the exhibition's hosts. So although W. Jackson Rushing states that the portrait was one of the few works in the *Bishop's Moose* exhibition not made for a New York audience, it could be concluded that it was made for Americans (in the larger sense, including Canadians). See Rushing's "Jimmie Durham. Trickster as Intervention," *Artspace* January-April 1992.

<sup>26</sup> To attempt to answer the question why Durham's nipple would be useless, it might be helpful to ask in what situations can a nipple be beneficial. Beyond any sexual function, it is most obviously implicated in breastfeeding; thus it is impossible for Durham to "nourish" in that maternal sense. Yet a colonial practice may also be invoked: at particular historic junctures upper-class European women employed lower-class nursemaids to feed their infants, a practice which was imposed on Southern American plantations upon lactating female slaves.

invoke a sense of him as gentle, intuitive, and cultivated, especially when merged with empathetic images of Durham as having (exactly) “12 hobbies!”, nurturing house plants, and writing poetry. For some viewers, this may also seem to contradict or reduce the “wide variety of Jobs” of which he is capable—few people think of plumbers or construction workers as delicate of hand. However, “sensitive,” also having echoes of “sensuality” resounds in a subtly different way off of the declaration, “Indian Penises are unusually large and colorful.”

That I have until now avoided mentioning this comment and its accompanying wooden penis is surprising, given its visual prominence. Punctuating the central part of his body, it is coloured red-hot at the base, gradually fading to pale yellow, and highlighted by a turquoise band<sup>27</sup> and the blue and violet testicles upon which it rests. Adding emphasis, flames or solar rays radiate from the base. The myth of the subaltern or “primitive other” as highly-sexual is imbricated with notions of carnality, animality, instinct, and the lack of social order (such as an incest taboo). In *The White Man's Indian*, Robert Berkhofer quotes one of the first widely-published accounts of the “New World” by Amerigo Vespucci:

. . . their women, being very lustful, cause the private part of their husbands to swell up to such a huge size that they appear deformed and disgusting; and this is accomplished by a certain device of theirs, the biting of certain poisonous animals . . . they marry as many wives as they please; and son cohabits with mother, brother with sister, male cousin with female, and any man with the first woman he meets.<sup>28</sup>

As Homi Bhabha has written, “Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie, which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Observer Nina Segalowitz, who is of Inuit ancestry, remarked that these were “Indian colours.”

<sup>28</sup> Berkhofer 8.

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 133.

In his lucid text, “‘Her Beautiful Savage.’ The Current Sexual Image of the Native American Male,” Peter van Lent notes that historical literary genres such as captivity narratives spawned early archetypes of bloodthirsty, barbarous sexuality. Therein, the inevitably-young, virile “warrior” was described as courageous, and scantily-clothed, with hardened muscles rippling, and long hair flowing.<sup>30</sup> Yet in proof of Homi Bhabha’s remark that “the chain of stereotypical signification is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse . . .” the contemporary image has been tempered with the romantic residue of the “noble savage.”<sup>31</sup> This stereotype has an equally long and complex history, stemming, as van Lent observes, from the perception that aboriginal people are uncorrupted by “civilization,” and somehow closer to the “primal forces” of life, meaning nature and a “natural” state of existence.<sup>32</sup> Predictably then, in the popular romance novels which are his focus, the sexualized Native American male is frequently located in a metaphoric past: a “traditional” lifestyle, and “close to the healthful, healing powers of nature.”<sup>33</sup> One of van Lent’s final propositions—that this genre of literature works to alleviate white guilt—bears remark. Here, the stereotype can be seen displaced onto its binary opposite: he also observed that the idealized Native male was often portrayed in contrast to slovenly, drunken white males.

That this image has persisted and remained in the popular imagination is evidence, as Joel Kovel affirms in *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, that “the basically sexualized

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<sup>30</sup> Peter van Lent, “‘Her Beautiful Savage.’ The Current Sexual Image of the Native American Male,” *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. Elizabeth S. Bird (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) 211.

<sup>31</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 82. He continues, “The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child.” This latter phrase brings to mind Durham’s “basically” light heart.

<sup>32</sup> See also Berkhofer.

<sup>33</sup> van Lent notes, “Narrative passages often frequently describe them bathing in a lake or river,” 219.

nature of racist psychology . . . is most intimately connected with issues of power and dominance.”<sup>34</sup> Jean Fisher has commented:

**Indigenous America has never been fully appropriated to the forces of labor, and as such it exists as an untenable excess in terms of capitalist production and reproduction. And so, at the same time that Durham's self-portrait mischievously claims he is 'willing and able to do a wide variety of Jobs' he provocatively displays a monstrous psychedellic dildo.<sup>35</sup>**

Perhaps another, more stereotypical “aptitude” may be triggered when considering the reverberation of “small, sensitive” with Durham’s “crooked back.” Of course the artist may truly have injured his spine. However, given the shared etymology of crooked and crook, amplified by Durham’s “small, Sensitive” hands, the idea of thievery as one of his “wide variety” of skills may surface. Similarly, “Appendix Scar” may seem to be another banal detail, or a ploy to invite empathy. And yet it too is reminiscent of criminal bulletins which list tattoos and scars as identifying features of criminal suspects, escaped slaves, and unidentified bodies. In 1967, Frantz Fanon’s experience caused him to remark that “face to face with the Negro, the contemporary white man feels the need to recall the times of cannibalism.”<sup>36</sup> What he means is that yet again, colonial discourse “‘construe[s] the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin in order to justify conquest and establish systems of administration and instruction.”<sup>37</sup> The evidence begins to accumulate: we are informed that “Mr. Durham has stated that he believes he has an addiction to Alcohol, Nicotine, Caffeine, and does not sleep well.”

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<sup>34</sup> As quoted in Gendzier 55.

<sup>35</sup> In Jimmie Durham and Jean Fisher, “the ground has been covered,” *Artforum* 26.10 (1988): 101. This article is comprised of alternating passages by each author.

<sup>36</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles L. Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 225.

<sup>37</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 70; quoted in McMaster, 25.

It is notable that these three aforementioned substances were propagated by European societies. That this is not coincidental may perhaps be indicated by Durham's reference to "nicotine," the addictive and toxic chemical added to cigarettes, and not tobacco, which has special significance and was traditionally cultivated in many indigenous societies. Coffee plantations were part of colonial economic expansion in the Caribbean; alcohol became a tool of trade. Public Health specialist Bonnie Duran writes that "Very few North American Native cultures had had experience with alcohol before the first wave of European colonization. The Papago and Zuni used alcohol sparingly for either informal secular gatherings or in religious ceremonies. . . . Intoxication by alcohol was subject to strict prescriptive cultural traditions and did not interfere with tribal life."<sup>38</sup> According to Duran, Jacques Cartier and Henry Hudson documented the first instances of alcohol being used as a trading commodity, and a means to lubricate interactions with traders in the late 1500s. They recorded an initial mistrust of alcohol among natives, who soon learned to enjoy its effects with no adverse results.

However she, as well as demographer Russell Thornton note that alcohol soon came to be regularly plied by European traders, since it facilitated transactions of the grossest inequity.<sup>39</sup> Thornton affirms that aboriginal leaders appealed to governments to stop the flow of liquor. Even so, legislative acts curtailing this exploitation were repeatedly altered according to the economic interests of the traders. Duran refers to a paper delivered by Dr. Benjamin Rush, Enlightenment philosopher, and member of Congress, to medical colleagues in Philadelphia two years before he would sign the Declaration of Independence.

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<sup>38</sup> Bonnie Duran, "Indigenous Versus Colonial Discourse: Alcohol and American Indian Identity," *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. Elizabeth S. Bird (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) 115. Of course Native Americans, like most other human beings, have always known and employed mind-altering substances. The question then, becomes, what was the imbalance that occurred to change patterns of use to abuse?

<sup>39</sup> Duran, 115-16. Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492*, The Civilization of the American Indian Series 186 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) 65-66.

Expounding on the vices he believed prevalent among Indigenous peoples, Rush cited uncleanness and idleness, followed thirdly by inebriation, telling his colleagues that “drunkenness was part of the Indian character, and that the savages glory in their fondness for strong liquor.”<sup>40</sup>

Returning to Durham’s alleged alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine addictions, also of note is how they contribute to an instability of signification which raises more questions. Is Durham too sensitive, or is he playing on what Berkhofer identifies as one of the “three major White images of the Indian . . . degraded, often drunken”?<sup>41</sup> And if “Mr. Durham” actually has stated this, how can he also be “basically light-hearted” and in “basically” good health? Answers are not forthcoming.

Thus the fragmented nature of Durham’s—and by extension our own—subjectivity begins to unfold. Rather than an atemporal essence that is expressed, the presence of these utterances suggests instead that identity is a construction that is narrated. And insofar as the statements comprising this narration come to reverberate and conflict with each other, it is apparent that it is also embedded in processes of negotiation. The Self-Portrait enacts Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s proposition in a special journal issue on hybridity: “Given the contradictory character of the socially situated psyche, individuals are traversed by dissonance and contradiction, existing within a constantly shifting cultural and psychic field in which the most varied discourses exist in evolving multivalenced relationships, constituting the subject as the site of competing discourses and voices.”<sup>42</sup>

Moving from analysis of the text to the assemblage elements of the portrait, it is interesting to note that whereas Durham’s socially-inscribed body is flattened, lacking

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<sup>40</sup> Duran 114.

<sup>41</sup> Berkhofer 30.

<sup>42</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Postmodern Age,” *Art and Design* 10.7/8 (1995): 10.

depth, substance, and volume, the three-dimensional collaged elements—namely his head, heart, and penis—could be considered the loci of his soul or agency as an acting subject. Thus Durham's selection and use of materials coincides with his notions of identity. As Abigail Solomon-Godeau remarks, "In much of Durham's art, the model of identity appears most closely to approximate Claude Levi-Strauss' concept of bricolage, whereby cultural identity, far from being a holistic, 'authentic,' and integral given, is rather a syncretic, piecemeal, and aggregate affair, cobbled together from disparate, random, even antithetical elements."<sup>43</sup> Durham himself reminisces:

when I was young towns still had edges, no-man's lands, that were not yet the surrounding farms. This was where the city's refuse was casually dumped, so that the edge of town was not a 'natural' place. There lived raccoons, opossums, rats, snakes, bob-cats, skunks ... Afro-Americans and displaced Indians . . . I so loved the dumps, where one could find the products of civilization so elegantly, surrealistically juxtaposed with pieces of wood, magic rocks, bones, and wild flowers, that they have remained the metaphor by which I define myself.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, a deceptively simple pun—the sea shell ear—refers on several levels to the "discursive refuse" which is equally the product of civilization. On one level, it is a substitution based on formal similarities (more than one romance novel has described the heroine's ears as "delicate and pink like seashells"). It also evokes the childhood rite of "listening" to the ocean by holding a shell to one's ear. Yet in combination with the grasses on his ankles, the fish imprints on his legs and across his chest, and the animal-hide hair, the shell may also reference the putative belief in aboriginal peoples' intimate connection and conflation with nature. This is manifested in stereotypes of First Nations people as necessarily or logically guardians of nature in the new environmental movement, and the slightly-older stereotype of their heightened sensorial acuity (purportedly making Native

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<sup>43</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Mistaken Identities*, exhibition catalogue (Santa Barbara: University of California Art Museum, 1992) 52.

<sup>44</sup> Durham, 'On the Edge of Town,' *Art Journal* 51.2 (1992): 14.

people superior hunters, trackers, or high-rise steelworkers). Rooted in rhetorical idealizations of the “Noble Savage,” this trope has a long and complex history—but one not separate from European exaltations of the joys of the Garden of Eden deployed for florid contrast to the degeneration of their industrialized societies.”<sup>45</sup> Ironically, as Jean Fisher notes, “European perceptions of America’s indigenous peoples and seeming unbounded ‘wilderness’ as a state of nature they felt themselves to have transcended clearly provoked a fear of loss of ego boundaries that had, somehow, to be brought under control.”<sup>46</sup>

Not surprisingly then, as curator Gerald McMaster dryly observes, “the Indian is alter to both European and aboriginal people alike.”<sup>47</sup> Rooted in stereotype, the Master narrative created an image of nonexistent “Indians.”<sup>48</sup> As Comanche writer Paul Chaat Smith has written about the rash of glossy coffee table books on First Nations subjects following the success of *Dances with Wolves*:

For me, too much Indian art remains within the predictable images of ecology, protest, anger and easy celebration. Rather than challenging or reshaping the prescribed myths and stereotypes it settles for comforting pastoral mythologies. The clear, unstated message is that the vast majority of Indians—there is no nice way to say it, disappoint. We have, apparently, lost our language, misplaced our culture. We rarely make rain anymore . . . and sometimes, when no one is looking, even throw trash out of our pickups.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Robert Berkhofer for a cogent and detailed elaboration.

<sup>46</sup> “Inauthentic” 46.

<sup>47</sup> McMaster 27.

<sup>48</sup> Of course, it bears repeating that even the term “Indian,” is a misnomer, resulting from Columbus’ navigational confusion, and subsequent denial of his geographic failings. Columbus could not even begin to conceive he was on a continent inhabited by several million people speaking over 250 different languages. Thornton’s critical analysis and synthesis of data ranging from Mooney’s low figure of 1 million to a higher figure of up to 18 million leads him to the conservative total of 7 million+, 32. Thornton also stresses that probably this was by no means the nadir of numbers on the continent. As Chaat Smith remarks, the same Indo-European root links languages as diverse as Greek, English, and Russian; the North America Columbus stumbled upon contained 140 different language roots. “Home of the Brave,” *C Magazine* 42 (1994): 38



While I cannot speak for Smith, I am not intending to deny that living in ecological harmony with the land was and remains a valid and valuable part of many First Nations cultures; nor to negate the imbrication of the “new environmentalism” with the self-empowerment and counter-hegemonic opposition it generates for *some* First Nations people.<sup>50</sup> But the problem for others, as Durham remarks, “is that none of us feel that we are authentic. We do not think that we are real Indians . . . For the most part we just feel guilty, and try to measure up to the whiteman's definition of ourselves.”<sup>51</sup> Guilt then, is another way the dominant regime of representation continues to act through the colonized subject. Moreover, this is, in the words of Stuart Hall, “the truly traumatic character of the colonial experience, the ways we have been positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization, precisely because they were not superficial. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as ‘Other.’”<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps this explains why the work continues to strike me with an overwhelming impression of pathos (Fig. 6). The curious, mask-like impression of Durham's face is abetted by his frozen expression and pursed, downturned lips. His brow is deeply furrowed, his cheeks sunken. Crowned with a motley composite of various kinds of fur, his hair is escaping out of its braid on one side. Again, I can only speculate on the rationale for its unkempt state. Sexual abandon? Sloth or disorderliness? Is it some kind of excess? Homi Bhabha has written extensively and cogently on the ambivalent power of colonial

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49 Paul Chaat Smith, “Ghost in the Machine,” *Aperture* 139 (1995): 7.

50 This is evident from one end of Canada to the other, from protests over logging in Clayquot Sound in British Columbia to the Old Man River Dam Project in Alberta, to low-altitude air force maneuvers across several provinces and the territories, to the infamous stand-off at Oka.

51 Jean Fisher, quoting Durham in ‘Jimmie Durham,’ in Papo Colo et al. *Jimmie Durham. The Bishop's Moose and the Pinkerton Men*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Exit Art, 1989) 12.

52 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation.” *Framework* 36 (1989): 71.

stereotypes which “must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.”<sup>53</sup>

From far away, it may appear as if there is a gunshot wound on Durham’s forehead. Up close it is evidently a red star—a bloodied star from the “spangled banner”? Lucy Lippard writes that Durham “has proudly called himself a ‘Double Red,’” in possible reference to the Cherokee affiliation of both his parents.<sup>54</sup> In a poem entitled “A Woman Gave Me a Red Star to Wear on my Headband,” Durham weaves a chronicle of stars with Cherokee history and resistance, writing:

A Comanche friend of mine  
Goes all over the hemisphere  
Collecting what he calls ‘indigenous red stars.’  
Woven into blankets, painted on leather, spoken of  
In stories, thought of—  
The people prepare for changes.<sup>55</sup>

The vermilion star is accentuated by the turquoise area on which it rests, which leads me to the most puzzling aspect of Durham’s face—it is vertically divided into two parts—one markedly lighter in colour than his canvas body, and the other vehemently striated with hues of blue, violet and fuschia. Yet it is also fitting, for as Bhabha writes, “the strategy of colonial desire is to stage the drama of identity at the point at which the black mask *slips* to reveal the white skin. At that edge, in between the black body and the white body, there is a tension of meaning and being, or some would say demand and desire . . . . It is from that tension—both psychic and political—that a strategy of subversion emerges.”<sup>56</sup> “My skin is not really this dark,” Durham writes on his leg, “but I am sure

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<sup>53</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 66.

<sup>54</sup> From Lucy Lippard, “Little Red Lies,” in Colo et al., *The Bishop's Moose* 24. As Lippard does not note the source of this quotation, I assume it stems from a personal conversation with Durham.

<sup>55</sup> Jimmie Durham, “A Woman Gave Me a Red Star to Wear on my Headband,” *Columbus Day* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: West End Press, 1983) 90.

<sup>56</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon: ‘What Does the Black Man Want?’” *New Formations* 1 (1987): 122.

that many Indians have coppery skin.” At the same time as he echoes the most prevalent of stereotypes, Durham also destabilizes it—not all “Indians” have russet skin tones.

Bhabha’s work interrogates the splitting and proliferation of belief which unravels “the bind of knowledge and fantasy, power and pleasure, that informs the particular regime of visibility deployed in colonial discourse.”<sup>57</sup> Herein lies the explanation to his observation that the colonial stereotype is invariably malleable and Janus-faced. This implies:

[that] it can be discursively rearticulated to construct new meanings, connect with different social practices, and position social subjects differently. . . . Its ‘unity’ is always in quotation marks and always complex, a suturing together of elements which have no necessary or eternal ‘belongingness’. It is always in that sense, organized around arbitrary and not natural closures.<sup>58</sup>

In proof of this is James Fenimore Cooper’s widely-successful *Last of the Mohicans*, published in 1850. Similar to his ten other novels—and those of almost every other writer of the genre at the time—it confuses nations, names, languages, and customs. Yet in an also-characteristic tone of unquestioned authority, Cooper maintains:

Few men exhibit greater diversity, or, if we may so express it, greater antithesis of character, than the native warrior of North America. In war, he is daring, boastful, cunning, ruthless, self-denying, and self-devoted; in peace, just, generous, hospitable, revengeful, superstitious, modest, and commonly chaste. These are qualities, it is true, which do not distinguish all alike; but they are so far the predominating traits of these remarkable people as to be characteristic.<sup>59</sup>

Resembling a kind of fetishistic mask, the initial impression of Durham’s lurid face is neither typical, nor characteristic. Rather, it is a disturbing, mortuary one—of frostbite,

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<sup>57</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 81.

<sup>58</sup> Bhabha, *Location* 76-77.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Berkhofer 93.

or of bruising caused by severe violence. However, that this is also the half with his red star and turquoise eye (“just to show a little Indianness”) lends credence to another explanation.<sup>60</sup> In his recent interview with Beverly Koski and Richard William Hill, Durham mentions a Cherokee conception of the colour blue: “. . . Cherokees invented the blues, our old spells are where it comes from and they are spells about turning people blue. Blue rocks are going to fall on you. All these blue things in these songs make people sick and they would get sick and they would get blue.”<sup>61</sup> Durham’s curse, like that of the inhabitants of both of the Americas, arose after 1492.

Emphasizing this woebegone state, Durham presents himself unclothed for all to peruse, revealing not just his body with its poignant scars, imperfections, and protrusions; his chest is peeled open above his heart for viewers to see the feathers of the lighthearted innocent within. The “simple savage,” ingenuous and uncomplicated of intellect, is another perversion of the colonial stereotype of the noble savage. Berkhofer outlines the nineteenth-century shift in the delineation of the noble savage as rational and enlightened, to the romantic savage as impulsive, passionate, and instinctual.<sup>62</sup> He cites Columbus’ widely-disseminated letter of 1493, describing the “marvelously [sic] timorous” Arawak people his party encountered, “content with whatever trifle of whatever kind that may be given to them, whether it be of value or valueless.”<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Berkhofer quotes Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas: “God created these simple people without evil and without guile. They are the most obedient and faithful to their natural lords and to the

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<sup>60</sup> Durham quoted by Lippard in Colo et al. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Jimmie Durham, “The Centre of the World is Several Places (Part II): Interview with Beverly Koski and Richard William Hill,” *Fuse* 21.3 (1998): 29.

<sup>62</sup> Berkhofer 79.

<sup>63</sup> Berkhofer 6.

Christians whom they serve. They are the most submissive, patient, peaceful, and virtuous. Nor are they quarrelsome, rancorous, querulous, or vengeful.”<sup>64</sup>

But vengeance has been wrought. The artist’s steam-rollered body has been punctured with silver tacks and crudely mounted on a wooden support (visible from the sides and over his left shoulder) suspended in mid-air out from the wall. Thus pinned like a helpless insect awaiting the entomologists gaze, it is altogether appropriate that his feet cannot touch the floor, for in 1984 he wrote, “I feel fairly sure that I could address the entire world if only I had a place to stand.”<sup>65</sup> The reason why is contained in Caribbean writer and poet George Lamming’s succinct remark, “colonisation has one certain psychological result. The colonised is slowly and ultimately separated from the original ground where the coloniser found him.”<sup>66</sup> Even now, as Jean Fisher astutely observes about the suppression of AIM and protesters at Oka, “the extent to which [First Nations people] exceed the demands of the situation and the unwillingness of authorities to negotiate, suggest that there is no legitimate ground or text from which the colonized person can speak back.”<sup>67</sup>

This “ungrounding” is rooted in the systemic and pathological denial on which the United States (and Canada) were built. Indeed, one of the manifold contradictions of colonial discourse is that while indigenous Americans were and continue to be depicted as closer to nature than Europeans, the latter displaced fact and reality to elide the aboriginal presence on the land. The Cherokee nation in particular subsisted by farming large tracts of land, and also managed the forest undergrowth through controlled burning in the spring.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Berkhofer 11.

<sup>65</sup> Durham and Fisher, “ground” 101.

<sup>66</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: M. Joseph, 1960) 157.

<sup>67</sup> Fisher, “Inauthentic” 46.

<sup>68</sup> Robin Wright notes that this practice “forestalled forest fires and kept the floor open between the well-spaced patriarchs (colossal oaks five to six feet in diameter). The young shoots that followed the burn fed

Yet just as Golda Meir claimed there were no Palestinians, and South Africa denied the existence of Africans in the area prior to Dutch arrival, Durham points out, North American pioneers traversed and subdued a “wilderness”:

**The Master Narrative of the United States proclaims that there were no Indians here, just wilderness. Then, that the Indians were savages in need of the United States. Then, that the Indians all died, unfortunately. Then, that the Indians still alive are (a) basically happy with the situation and (b) not the ‘real’ Indians. Then, most importantly, that this is the complete story.<sup>69</sup>**

Other omitted histories are similarly referenced by another pun—Durham's turquoise eye, which substitutes the azure gemstone for Durham's (actually blue) eyes. Derived from the sacred earth and recalling the variegated blues of the heavens and waters, the gem was accorded a key role in many creation and origin stories, and in the maintenance of harmonious relationships with nature and its other creatures.<sup>70</sup> Turquoise was offered to plants, trees, and the spirits of animals which were harvested, and was a component of amulets, medicine bundles, and healing remedies. Adorning cradles, it warded off evil; on planting sticks it brought abundant crops. It offered protection against lightning and rattlesnakes. Generally found in meager deposits in arid climates of high elevation, trade in turquoise (and obsidian) bound generations of peoples thousands of miles from Mesoamerica to the Southwest in dynamic networks of trade, and cultural exchange. Interestingly, the Western Blue Coyote, a Zuni fetish conferring longevity,

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deer and buffalo, and these in turn brought wolf and puma; bears searched for berries, roots, and the occasional feast of meat. All these animals provided . . . flesh, fat, and skin.” *Stolen Continents: The Americas Through Indian Eyes Since 1492*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992) 98. Earlier he remarks that most Native people towered over the ill-fed Europeans, 95.

<sup>69</sup> Jimmie Durham, “A Central Margin,” *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 80s*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990) 163, 166.

<sup>70</sup> Spencer Gill, *Turquoise Treasures: The Splendor of Southwest Indian Art* (Portland: Graphic Arts Center, 1975) 6.

and embodying the wily, shrewd, and scrappy character, possesses eyes of embedded turquoise.<sup>71</sup>

This semi-precious mineral was also one of the resources avariciously plundered by colonial invaders, and like gold and the land itself, one of the motivations behind the legislated relocation of many of these nations to further territories, and then later to reservations. The Cherokee Nation's enforced journey, which they christened *Nuna-da-ut-sun-y*, "The Trail Where They Cried" killed thousands.<sup>72</sup> In 1888, noted Cherokee historian James Mooney, recounted:

The history of this Cherokee removal of 1838, as gleaned by the author from the lips of actors in the tragedy, may well exceed in weight of grief and pathos any other passage in American history . . . troops were disposed at various points throughout the Cherokee country , where stockade forts were erected for gathering in and holding the Indians preparatory to removal. From these, squads of troops were sent to search out with rifle and bayonet . . . Families at dinner were startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets in the doorway and rose up to be driven with blows and oaths along the weary miles of trail that led to the stockade. . . . In many cases, on turning for one last look as they crossed the ridge, they saw their homes in flames, fired by the lawless rabble that followed on the heels of the soldiers to loot and pillage. So keen were these outlaws on the scent that in some instances they were driving off the cattle and other stock of the Indians almost before the soldiers had fairly started their owners in the other direction. Systematic hunts were made by the same men for Indian graves, to rob them of the silver pendants and other valuables deposited with the dead. A Georgia volunteer, afterward a colonel in the Confederate service, said: 'I fought through the civil war and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew.'<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Carol Karasik, *The Turquoise Trail: Native American Jewelry and Culture of the Southwest* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993) 115.

<sup>72</sup> The majority of estimates generally calculate mortality due to capture, imprisonment, and the trip itself to be 4000. Demographer Russell Thornton has taken a broader, five-year analytic perspective, concluding that "A total mortality figure of 8,000+. . . may not at all be unreasonable." "Demography of the Trail of Tears," in *Cherokee Removal: Before and After*, ed. William L. Anderson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991) 93. A little known fact is that at least 175 black Cherokee slaves also perished. See: R. Halliburton, Jr., *Red over Black; Black Slavery among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977) 61.

<sup>73</sup> James Mooney, *Historical Sketch of the Cherokee*, Smithsonian Institution Press (Chicago: Aldine, 1975) 124.

Peculiarly, Durham's own hands and feet are stained blood-red, possibly because his feet have been severed and reattached with stitching. As Frantz Fanon has reflected:

In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. . . I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects. . . I took myself far off from my own presence. . . . What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?<sup>74</sup>

A more literal association may be Durham's poem of 1983, "Cutting Off Their Feet at Acoma Pueblo."<sup>75</sup> Springing literally from this sanguine foundation are the grasses mentioned earlier in reference to "natural" stereotypes of natives. Closer examination suggests that they may not be grasses, nor ferns, as Lucy Lippard suggests.<sup>76</sup> To my mind, they more closely resemble a grain such as rye or wheat, the latter of which was a European import so unsuitable for the North American climate that it has been continually hybridized and engineered in ways far beyond its original biological structure.<sup>77</sup> The grasses are not however, the amber colour of waves of grain—there is something hopeful about these green shoots springing from such a malignant foundation. Durham has written, "there is the assumption that interpretation does not include conscience. As I have tried to show, in our aesthetic that is exactly what it must include, in a complex tapestry of metaphor and real prairie grass." Whatever the grass evoked in Durham's mind when he painted it, there is no doubt that the portrait is such a tapestry.

Weaving in and out of oral and written histories, myths, and fictions, re-mem-bering history and fantasy, the *Self-Portrait* abrogates clearly-defined categories, and the

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<sup>74</sup> Fanon 116.

<sup>75</sup> Refer to this volume's preface. Also republished in *A Certain Lack of Coherence* (London: Kala Press, 1995) 60.

<sup>76</sup> Lippard in Colo et al. 24.

<sup>77</sup> Durham makes this point in "On the Edge of Town" 16.



possibility of complacent mastery—visual, narrative, or otherwise—over itself and the discourses to which it points. Revealing that all identities occupy these positions of negotiation, it is counter-hegemonic insofar as it rejects totalizing discourses and master narratives. Therein, as Annie Coombes argues: “hybridity [is] an important cultural strategy for the political project of decolonization”<sup>78</sup>

Paul Chaat Smith has observed:

Even the most adventurous contemporary Indian artist faces the prospect of a lifetime of Indian-only shows. Even fiercely intelligent, complex Indian art—without a reassuring eagle or buffalo in sight—runs the risk of becoming another form of the exotic souvenir. Indian artists who choose to participate in the world of professional art . . . must face these contradictions head on if they expect to survive with a shred of integrity.<sup>79</sup>

Yet regarding integrity, Durham has stated, “Nothing is strong enough to withstand the constant pressure of our contemporary society. Integrity itself can’t withstand it and has to be continually rebuilt. It has to be evasive integrity most of the time.”<sup>80</sup> To this extent, his re-membered colonial portrait resounds with polyphonic, cacophonous clarity.

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<sup>78</sup> Annie E Coombes, “Inventing the ‘Postcolonial,’ Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating,” *New Formations* 18 (winter, 1992): 39.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, “Brave” 40.

<sup>80</sup> Ilse Kuyken, “Documenta IX,” artists’ statements, *Kunst & Museum journal* 3.6 (1992): 5.

## Chapter Two

### Translation: Cursing Prospero

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*You taught me language; and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse. (I.ii. 365-6)*

1992 marked the quincentenary of the arrival of three Spanish ships on a Caribbean island inhabited by the Arawak people, and the beginning of centuries of ruin, misery, and disease, as the dispossession of land, culture and even genocide were enacted across the Americas. Yet framed initially on both sides of the Atlantic in terms of “celebration,” and “commemoration” and “achievement,” the most odious of the festivities was perhaps the re-enactment,—complete with historically-accurate replicas of the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria—of what was an immense nautical error born of ignorance. Nevertheless this almost mythological event became further reified through a deluge of books, films, and “docudramas.” But thankfully, counterdiscourses also developed as a chorus of voices echoed Georges Erasmus, National Chief of the Canadian Assembly of First Nations, when he indignantly and eloquently demanded, ““What are we going to celebrate?””<sup>1</sup>

1992 was a busy year for Durham who, in addition to contributing to the prestigious *Documenta IX*, participated in a number of exhibitions presenting alternative voices to the Eurocentric version of the Quincentenary: *America Bride of the Sun, 500 years Latin America and the Low Countries; Dissent, Difference and the Body Politic; Will/Power; Regarding America (Ante America);* and *For the Seventh Generation: Native American Artists Counter the Quincentenary*. Durham also attempted once again to engage

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<sup>1</sup> An extract from that speech is reproduced in Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, eds., *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives*, exhibition catalogue (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992) 8-9.

the New York art world in his first solo show at the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, entitled *Janus and His Double*. He related its impetus to Mark Gisbourne:

I was trying to figure out how I might address a certain situation with what are called minority artists in New York, without anyone knowing that I was doing it unless they wanted to know. As 'minority artists' we feel a need to use art to search for our identity which is a strange mind set to me. It seems self-indulgent and goes nowhere . . . And, it worked so well in the beginning—in the late 70s and early 80s, I don't remember—that it became the law whereby all minority artists had to do work that is primarily about our identity . . . . Afterwards we get kind of instructional, kind of confrontational: 'this is to be my identity and it's not yours ha! ha!'<sup>2</sup>

Durham did construct a sculpture representing Janus (which I will discuss later), but the majority of the show was comprised of the *Caliban Codex*, a series of works wherein he adopted the guise of Caliban from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter is a circulation around the *Caliban Codex*, weaving between the social formation surrounding *The Tempest*, including cultural readings or understandings of the play—particularly the character Caliban—and Durham's impersonation of him for purposes of articulation in the Gramscian sense referred to earlier as enunciated by Jennifer Daryl Slack.<sup>4</sup> It begins with a brief introduction to the plot and its readings for possible sources, concentrating on the reception and interpretation of Caliban. This is integral for what remains the greater part of this chapter: an analysis of the drawings and sculptures made by Durham as Caliban. Once again, Durham's "articulation" works epistemologically to highlight the schisms and fractures in the narrative and interpretation of the play itself; and it works politically to highlight the operation of power through language in colonial

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<sup>2</sup> Jimmie Durham, interview, by Mark Gisbourne, *Art Monthly* 173 (1994): 7.

<sup>3</sup> The works are reproduced in full in the Phaidon monograph by Laura Mulvey, Dirk Snauwert, Mark Alice Grant, and Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995) 76-89. A codex is defined as a manuscript book, such as Scripture or the classics.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Daryl Slack, "The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies," *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996) 112-127.

relationships. Strategically, I would assert that the *Caliban Codex* typifies almost all of Durham's works, insofar as they are always made for particular sites, situations, and audiences.

In a rare article examining *The Tempest* from a politicized perspective, Francis Barker and Peter Hulme remark that "No one who has witnessed the phenomenon of midsummer tourism at Stratford-upon-Avon can fail to be aware of the way in which 'Shakespeare' functions today in the construction of an English past."<sup>5</sup> To what extent the "great bard" has permeated North American consciousness as synonymous with "Literature," "cultural achievement," and "civilization" was illustrated when Durham spoke to a group of college students in Ohio. Afterwards an audience member implored, "But don't you think we contributed *anything*—what about Shakespeare?" Durham's reply was that "I could easily have gone to England and discovered Shakespeare on my own without having my family murdered and my farm stolen as the price for the privilege of reading *The Tempest*."<sup>6</sup>

Written in 1611, *The Tempest* was the aging playwright's final, independently-authored work before his retirement four years later. It was performed for King James and his court at the Banqueting House of Whitehall, to mark Hallowmas—the seasonal festivities marking the arrival of winter and its associations with endings and death—although it was repeated shortly thereafter on the occasion of the engagement of Princess Elizabeth.<sup>7</sup> A romantic comedy possibly tailored to those audiences and events, its action begins twelve years after the learned Italian Duke Prospero has been ousted by his brother and banished to the sea with only his books and his young daughter, Miranda. Fortune

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, "Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Con-texts of The Tempest," *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985) 191.

<sup>6</sup> Jimmie Durham, "Here at the Centre of the World," *Third Text* 5 (1988-89): 23.

<sup>7</sup> Meredith Anne Skura, "The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*," *Caliban*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1992) 240.

washes their craft upon the shore of an island between Tunis and Naples, where Prospero perfects the magic arts and “prosper” by exploiting the services of two of the isle’s inhabitants: the spirit Ariel, and Caliban, described in the list of actors as “a sa(l)vage and deformed slave.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite the expressly Mediterranean location of the action, commentators have analyzed and debated the extent to which the Americas served as the playwright’s inspiration. That a New World scenario of rightful title and domination is transposed and reenacted on this fictitious isle is undeniable. Shakespeare himself elides the presence of Ariel and Caliban, characters from his own pen, by describing the scene of the play as “an uninhabited Island.”<sup>9</sup> His usurped Duke frees Ariel from imprisonment in a pine tree in exchange for Ariel’s services for one year—which turns into twelve. In no uncertain terms, Caliban’s first speech defines the disservice Prospero has rendered him:

This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother  
Which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st first,  
Thou strok’st me and made much of me, would give me  
Water with berries in’t, and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,  
And showed thee all the qualities o’th’isle,  
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.  
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms  
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!  
For I am all the subjects that you have,  
Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me  
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me  
The rest o’ th’ island. (I.ii.321–44)

In fact, despite the depth of Prospero’s erudition or the marvels of his magical powers, like the New World colonists, he has barely succeeded in establishing a hunting and gathering economy—and that only by conscripting the knowledge and services of Caliban. Indeed

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<sup>8</sup> Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 7.

<sup>9</sup> H.C. Porter, *The Inconstant Savage: England and the North American Indian, 1500-1660* (London: Duckworth, 1979) xiii.

the “freckled whelp, hag-born,” is so indispensable, that even after his attempted rape of Miranda, his sole punishment is to be “Deservedly confin’d into this Rock, who hadst / Deserv’d more than a prison” (I.ii.351-52).<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, much scholarship has been devoted, as is frequent in Shakespearean criticism, to pinpointing precise New World (and other) sources for names, details, and passages. References to “Indian” savages occur rarely in the Shakespearean canon, although the New World inhabitants were a source of popular fascination for Elizabethans of the era.<sup>11</sup> As the character Trinculo comments regarding Caliban, “A strange / fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and / had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver . . . when they will not give a doit / to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a / dead Indian” (II.ii. 27-34). Indeed, Londoners crowded the streets to catch a glimpse of living, kidnapped indigenous people.<sup>12</sup> An “apparently avid reader” of New World travel accounts with connections in the Virginia Company of London, it is plausible that Shakespeare was among them.

Although Caliban is never referred to as “Indian,” there is broad critical consensus that his name is an anagram of “Canibal.”<sup>13</sup> This word stems from “Carib” or “Canib,”

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<sup>10</sup> At one point Prospero chides a complaining Miranda, “We cannot miss him; he does makes our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us” (I.ii.312-14). Peter Hulme remarks that this was a topos replayed frequently throughout the Americas—Europeans arrived with “miraculous” technology, but were incapable of feeding themselves. See Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986) 128.

<sup>11</sup> Vaughan and Mason Vaughan note a total of six appearances—all inconsequential—throughout the corpus of Shakespeare’s works, 45. They provide an excellent summary of most of the sources.

<sup>12</sup> Vaughan and Mason Vaughan 44. Sydney Lee notes that Shakespeare’s patron, Lord Southampton partook of this fervent interest, in an extract of his article “Caliban’s Visits to England,” in Bloom 20.

<sup>13</sup> This origin is by no means definitive—numerous other sources have been posited, from the Romany (Gypsy) word “cauliban” (meaning black, or things related to blackness) to the Arabic word “Kalebon” (meaning vile dog), to the African coastal town Calibia, as discussed by Vaughan and Mason Vaughan, 26-36. Most plausible is that both Caliban and his island are composite portraits of romantic and orientalist accounts permeating the history of occidental literature—from Homer, to Virgil, to Ovid, to early Celtic lore, to figures in commedia dell’arte to, of course, the Medieval wild man.

the European name for Caribbeans, who were putatively believed to eat human flesh. But in point of fact, Caliban is not even a cannibal, preferring to dine on roots, berries, fish, and other bounty of the isle. As Meredith Anne Skura observes in "The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*," their haste to prove that Caliban is a New World native leads critics to overlook ways in which he transgresses dominant colonial discourses.<sup>14</sup>

Hence distinguished critic Sir Sidney Lee's contention that Caliban encapsulates "the essential significance of the native personality."<sup>15</sup> Lee proves his case with comments altogether typical of most scholarship, replicating the determinist racism of colonial discourses. He writes: "Caliban's menial services of cutting and stacking firewood, or scraping trenchers and washing dishes, were those of all natives in the early American settlements. The Indians were the hewers of wood and drawers of water wherever Europeans set foot in America."<sup>16</sup> Worse is John Draper's comment that Caliban's "mental and moral shortcomings . . . are mere matters of stupidity and vice attributable to many primitives and so of little help in determining whence Shakespeare took him."<sup>17</sup> And still more problematic is G. Wilson Knight's insistence on proving Caliban is a "Red Man," through comparisons with "Red Indian material" of specious validity (such as Carlos Castenada's *The Teachings of Don Juan*).<sup>18</sup> Thus Durham's observation:

I love Caliban because he is written by Shakespeare, by an Englishman, and he still convinces the world. This is partly because Shakespeare was a good writer, but being a good writer does not mean that he could write Caliban well; it means something else about the language of describing the savage. He made a savage that really at the time was too absurd. I think he exaggerated even at the time. And therefore he made a believable savage, in

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<sup>14</sup> Skura 228.

<sup>15</sup> Lee 20.

<sup>16</sup> Lee 22.

<sup>17</sup> John W. Draper, "Monster Caliban," in Bloom 91.

<sup>18</sup> G. Wilson Knight, "Caliban as a Red Man," Bloom 190-91. Knight notes that he has ended his own performances with "a short delineation of Caliban in Red Indian guise."

some strange way. . . . So to have a believable fictional character, that then became a model for other fictional savages in the history of literature (and not only in English) is too good to pass up. I have to be his brother.<sup>19</sup>

But why was Shakespeare's Caliban believable? How can such an extravagant caricature have such a ring of truth? I would contend that it is due to its continuity with the grain of unspoken colonial assumptions, as revealed in the myopically racist and Eurocentric readings above. Subsequently, the attribution of Caliban's origins, as Vaughan and Mason Vaughan have demonstrated through the course of their book, is often "a barometer" of the social, intellectual, and historical position of the interpreter:

The late seventeenth century—to summarize broadly—deemed Caliban a pure monster, with emphasis on his vices, deformities, crudities, and bestial qualities, in keeping with the era's concern with basic distinctions between savagery and civility. The eighteenth century continued to view him as the personification of various vices, but here and there a hint of potential virtue crept in. With the romantic movement of the early nineteenth century, Caliban became more docile, and his 'natural' qualities were newly appreciated; later in the nineteenth century he was often portrayed as the missing link—part beast, part human, and wholly Darwinian.<sup>20</sup>

Another more general problem with source theorization has been raised by structuralist and poststructuralists, who maintain that the enumeration of sources tends to serve only as historical backdrop, and fails to challenge the isolated authority of the singular text. *The Tempest*, for instance, was one of many texts which participated in the justification of New World colonial policy. Hence, the New World was not merely material for an exotic locale, but was at the center of the play itself, embedded in power relations, and enacting discursive strategies shared with colonial discourse in the world beyond the stage.<sup>21</sup> Skura contends that "*The Tempest* itself not only displays prejudice

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<sup>19</sup> Jimmie Durham, "Attending to Words and Bones: An Interview with Jean Fisher," *Art and Design* 10.7/8 (1995): 51.

<sup>20</sup> Vaughan and Mason Vaughan xxii.

<sup>21</sup> Skura 222.



but fosters and even ‘enacts’ colonialism by mystifying or justifying Prospero’s power over Caliban.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Barker and Hulme perceive the play as “quelling a fundamental disquiet concerning its own functions within the projects of colonialist discourse.”<sup>23</sup> They continue:

No adequate reading of the play could afford not to comprehend both the anxiety and the drive to closure it necessitates. Yet these aspects of the plays ‘rich complexity’ have been signally ignored by European and North American critics, who have tended to listen exclusively to Prospero’s voice . . . It has been left to those who have suffered colonial usurpation to discover and map the traces of that complexity by reading in full measure Caliban’s refractory place in both Prospero’s play and *The Tempest*.<sup>24</sup>

In order to de-stress the significance of the author and the moment of production, poststructuralists such as Tony Bennett have suggested that one political strategy, would be for texts to be ‘articulated with new texts, socially and politically mobilized in different ways within different class practices.’”<sup>25</sup> This is exactly what Durham does with the *Caliban Codex*.

Caliban is undoubtedly central to the course of *The Tempest*, speaking—aside from Prospero—the greatest number of lines.<sup>26</sup> He is also the character most often described by others—indeed he is labelled “monster” 40 times alone.<sup>27</sup> Yet paradoxically, long and furious scholarly debate has been unable to conclusively establish Caliban’s true

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<sup>22</sup> Skura 223.

<sup>23</sup> Barker and Hulme 204.

<sup>24</sup> Barker and Hulme.

<sup>25</sup> As quoted in Barker and Hulme 193.

<sup>26</sup> Vaughan and Mason Vaughan 7. At 177, it is however, only slightly greater than the number accorded Stephano and Ariel.

<sup>27</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, “Caliban’s Theatrical Metamorphoses,” Bloom 192. She adds that it is usually accompanied “with a pejorative adjective: ‘shallow,’ ‘weak,’ ‘credulous,’ ‘most perfidious and drunken,’ ‘puppyheaded,’ ‘scurvy,’ ‘abominable,’ ‘ridiculous,’ ‘howling’ . . . ‘ignorant,’ and ‘lost.’”

appearance. Equally paradoxical is that this conundrum is produced in the face of a wealth, rather than a dearth of details.<sup>28</sup> The progeny of a devil and a witch, Caliban is called everything from a “tortoise” (by Prospero), to a “cat” (Stephano), to “puppy-headed,” to a “fish” (both Trinculo), and several times a “moon-calf,” implying an offspring prematurely born, and hence unformed. Meaning is further complexified by the impossibility of determining whether these adjectives were intended literally or metaphorically, and impelled equally fractious discussion as to whether Caliban was human at all. As Peter Hulme comments:

In a way Caliban, like Frankenstein’s monster carries the secret of his own guilty genesis; not however, like a bourgeois monster, in the pocket of his coat, but rather, like a savage, inscribed upon his body as his physical shape, whose overdetermination baffles the other characters as much as the play’s directors. The difficulty in visualizing Caliban cannot be put down to a failure of clarity in the text. Caliban, as a compromise formation, can exist only within discourse; he is fundamentally and essentially beyond the bounds of representation.<sup>29</sup>

Appropriately then, Durham’s *Caliban Codex* is comprised of a series of drawings and sculptural works wherein Durham affects the persona of Caliban, who documents his quest to draw his own nose (Figs. 7 and 8). Taking the form of Diary (or as Caliban christens it, “Dairy”) entries labeled in corresponding logic from Chapter I through to IIIIIII, Durham as Caliban vows to relate “what really happened here since Dr. Prospero came.” Caliban’s version not only introduces schisms or disruptions to the untroubled flow of *The Tempest’s* colonial narrative, it presents a complex weaving of operations, patterns, and conceptions within colonial discourse.

In the drawing labelled Chapter I, Caliban asserts his subjectivity by challenging the untroubled flow of Prospero’s narrative: “Dr. Prospero says he killed my mother because

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<sup>28</sup> James Smith, “Caliban,” in Bloom 125.

<sup>29</sup> Hulme 108.

she tried to kill him. I was very young then but I know its not true. Or at least maybe she had a good reason.”<sup>30</sup> The page titled “Chapter II” elicits our sympathy: an apologetic Caliban explains his literary tardiness by claiming understatedly that he, “went through a kind of depression.” Continuing on to confess his dislike for Ariel, Caliban recounts, “He’s not from here, but Dr. Prospero says all these islands are the same.” This evinces the homogenizing tendencies, the conflation of various people into one category of otherness, by refusing to acknowledge the distinct and subtle differences among them, expressed in that old stereotype, “They all look/think/act alike.” Caliban ends his entry with the admission, “maybe I shouldn’t say this, but I think Dr. Prospero really likes me. or at least admires me.” His signature at the bottom plays with the letters of his name through a series of inversions—“Balican, bacilan, liban ca, canilab,” and finally crossed out, censored, implying it is a label so condemnatory, even he cannot bring himself to say it—“canib”[al].<sup>31</sup>

Recurring in other entries, this liberty with his given name exemplifies what Houston A. Baker calls “Caliban’s Triple Play,” a “*supraliterate*” play with language which explodes the dualistic conception of “the West and the Rest of Us.” By opening a space for the liberating sound of vernacular speech, Baker asserts that these “morphophonemics” “invade the linguistic territories of traditional academic disciplines and ‘masters’ with sounds of the vale.”<sup>32</sup> This assertion of Caliban’s own subjectivity and perspective in *The Codex* functions to compel viewers, (like readers of *The Tempest*) “to acknowledge the independence and integrity of Caliban’s construction of reality,” writes critic Stephen

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<sup>30</sup> Grammatical errors, it will be demonstrated, are intrinsic parts of the text itself.

<sup>31</sup> I would argue this is a suggestion that Caliban is no cannibal. For he has no shame in admitting his lecherous intent when responding to Prospero’s charge of rape—“Oho, Oho! would’t had been done! / Thou didst prevent me: I had peopl’d else / This isle with Calibans” (I.ii.351-53).

<sup>32</sup> Houston A. Baker, Jr., “Caliban’s Triple Play.” *Critical Inquiry* 13.1 (1986): 190,195. The italicization of “supraliterate” is his.

Greenblatt: "Caliban's world has what we may call opacity, and the perfect emblem of that opacity is the fact that we do not to this day know the meaning of the word 'scamel.'"<sup>33</sup>

Durham then skips over Chapter III. Perhaps this is in repudiation of rationalism's linearity; perhaps it is a gap that allows Caliban to remain unknowable, beyond the totalizing grasp for mastery of western viewers. Chapter III addresses a key element of the dramatic plot: Caliban's purported rape of Miranda, revealed in Prospero's bitter charge, "thou didst seek to violate the honour of my child" (I.ii.349-50).<sup>34</sup> Again Durham's Caliban destabilizes the primacy of straightforward readings of Shakespeare's text by the insertion of an entirely different version of events, implying Miranda's complicity in their coupling. Moreover, it is a perspective which calls into question the scatological conception of the over-sexed other's threatening desire: "Miranda says we can't do that anymore, what we used to do. I think she must've said something to Dr. Prospero. Because she always used to say oh what if daddy saw me." Alluding perhaps to the delights of developing sentiment and passion, Caliban's signature floats above a fancifully intricate, decorative line drawing; sexual intertwining is also suggested in the fusion of their names in another playful signature: "Calibanda, Calimir."

Still another jump occurs to Chapter IIIIII [VII], which sets in motion the plot for the rest of the series: Caliban has decided to become an artist, and excitedly resolves to "make a complete portrayl" [sic] of himself. The counterplot is that Caliban cannot visualize his appearance: "Since Dr. Prospero came there's nothing here that reflects me." Moreover, he has no knowledge of what his nose looks like, and "can't touch it because

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen J. Greenblatt, extract from "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century," in Bloom 75. The word stems from the plea of Caliban for aid in his usurpation of Prospero: "I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow; / And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts; / Show thee a jays nest, and instruct thee how / To snare the nimble marmoset; I'll bring thee / To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee / Young scamels from the rock" (II.ii.167-72).

<sup>34</sup> Peter Hulme notes the critical speculation that Caliban's intentions were within the norms of courtship, but interpreted as "violation" by an over-reactive Prospero, 126.

Dr. Prospero says its not nice to touch yourself.” Again the entry is signed whimsically, C.A. (a pun for “see a?”) Li Ban. As distinguished Caribbean poet George Lamming wrote in his germinal essay, “A Monster, A Child, A Slave,” “Caliban is never accorded the power *to see*. He is always the measure of the condition which his physical appearance has already defined”—hence, what others have presumed to see.<sup>35</sup>

That condition, one of “savageness” in desperate need of the “benefits” of a colonial regime, is defined not just through appearance, but through language. This is a theme present in the text of the play itself, stemming particularly from a speech (attributed varyingly to Prospero or Miranda) admonishing Caliban: “I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour / One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known” (I.ii.353-58). Most critical readings eurocentrically negate the oral expressivity of Caliban’s “gabbling,” by asserting that Caliban did not formerly possess language. They also fail to come to terms with the paradox that much of the play’s most melodic verse is spoken by Caliban, despite his purported linguistic ignorance. I am reminded of Peter Hulme’s observation that “Civility—European civility—can only guarantee the stability of its own foundations by denying the substantiality of other worlds, other words, other narratives.”<sup>36</sup> As Jean Fisher writes:

According to white rhetoric, the land’s people were savage because they were without ‘Scripture,’—they were excluded from the family of man in biblical text—the written contract with God. They also lacked scripture in the sense of European writing, and they had made no inscription on the land in the form of property boundaries . . . Without written title to its history, territory, and name, the Native American body and its extension, the land—

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<sup>35</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: M. Joseph, 1960) 107. This premise recalls Frantz Fanon’s critical essay in *Black Skin, White Masks*, which begins with the story of a white child who once saw him and cried out in alarm, “Look, a Negro!”

<sup>36</sup> Hulme 156.

was to be the blank page upon which the colonizers would forcibly trace their own master narrative.<sup>37</sup>

George Lamming explains it thus: "Without the light which is the very origin of Language, the light which guides Prospero," Caliban's very personhood is abnegated. "With the negation of his own tongue," Mark Alice Durant observes, Caliban's subjectivity is also destroyed, he is unable to represent himself. He is compelled to learn Prospero's linguistic structure to make himself understood, but by using the colonial language of the master he inevitably negates his own identity and is forced to assume the identity of Caliban."<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless Harold Bloom insists that Caliban is not a victim, but rather places him "in the tradition of Shakespeare's displaced spirits . . . Yet to associate Caliban with displacement is a peculiar irony; only he, in the play, is where he belongs. A Hermetic sage is an absurd educator for Caliban; it is the education that constitutes his displacement."<sup>39</sup> Elizabethans and Jacobean, according to Terrence Hawkes, unequivocally viewed language as critical to the projects of unification and civilization.<sup>40</sup> "Language," writes an author of an early treatise on grammar, is the perfect instrument of empire."<sup>41</sup> As Durham told Mark Gisbourne ". . . white English works against us. Because English is not just a language, it is a politics and a form of colonization . . ."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In Jimmie Durham and Jean Fisher, "the ground has been covered," *Artforum* 26.10 (1988): 103. See also Paul Chaat Smith, "Home of the Brave," *C Magazine* 42 (1994): 33-42.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Alice Durant, "The Caliban Codex or A Thing Most Brutish," in Mulvey et al. 79.

<sup>39</sup> Harold Bloom, ed., "The Analysis of Character" 2.

<sup>40</sup> Terrence Hawkes, extract from "The Tempest: Speaking Your Language," in Bloom 73-74.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Barker and Hulme 197.

<sup>42</sup> Durham, interview by Gisbourne 8. For instance, he often points out how discourses of multiculturalism, framed in terms of "celebration," and "openness," ensure that other cultures are consumed more thoroughly than before, leaving the dominant system and its master narratives (such as the beneficent, civilized West) intact.

Durham's earliest published essay, "American Indian Culture: Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle," details how terms such as "band," "tribe," "medicine man," "warrior," and "chief," not to mention "squaw," are derogatory, employed to inferiorize and trivialize the things which they describe—nations, states, doctors, soldiers, presidents, and women.<sup>43</sup> In his interview with Jean Fisher he has also described how at the time of their defeat, Plains Indians were given last names by the American army, which used the first names of those defeated.<sup>44</sup> But perhaps the European mania for naming is best exemplified by Durham's own experience, recounted to Susan Canning:

People, white folks used to come and ask us about our place, because we lived in the woods. We knew the woods because we were from the woods. And they wanted to know the names of things. A lot of times we didn't really know the names of things, but no matter what, all you could tell them about a particular tree or flower, its species, its habits, everything, couldn't satisfy them. They wanted the name of it and if you could tell them any name, they were satisfied.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, a subsequent entry in the *Caliban Codex* mentions that it is "Dr. Prospero who taught me to speak right and to write, as he says his language is marvelously subtle and complex." Then below, in ironic repudiation of this, Caliban creates a list of opposites under the headings, "Heavy, or Dark" and "Light."<sup>46</sup> This underlines how Prospero's language creates the discursive structures underlying his hegemonic power. The framing of the world in terms of oppositional binaries stems from an Enlightenment epistemology which is not only overly simplistic—it is underwoven with a notion of opposition that

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<sup>43</sup> Jimmie Durham, "American Indian Culture: Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle," in his compendium of essays, *A Certain Lack of Coherence: Writings on Art and Cultural Politics*, ed. and pref. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press, 1995) 4-6.

<sup>44</sup> Durham, "Attending" 54.

<sup>45</sup> Jimmie Durham, interview by Susan Canning, *Art Papers* 14.4 (1990): 32.

<sup>46</sup> René Girard writes, "Caliban is an authentic poet; the critics never fail to observe that some of the most beautiful lines in the play belong to him." Extract from "They'll Take Suggestion as a Cat Laps Milk: Self-Satire in *The Tempest*," Bloom 87. For an example, see footnote 33.

legitimizes a violent, irrational fear of one side of the dichotomy, revealed in Caliban's *Small Action Painting* (Fig. 9).

Furthermore, to be categorized within a dialectic is to be imprisoned within its structure, which is often naturalized. Yet Homi Bhabha asserts:

[T]he ideological sign is always multi-accentual and Janus-faced—that is, it can be discursively rearticulated to construct new meanings, connect with different social practices, and position social subjects differently. . . . Its 'unity' is always in quotation marks and always complex, a suturing together of elements which have no necessary or eternal 'belongingness'. It is always in that sense, organized around arbitrary and not natural closures.<sup>47</sup>

That Durham shares Bhabha's outlook was indicated by the mixed media sculpture at the entrance to the 1992 Klagsbrun exhibition where the *Codex* was first shown (Fig. 10). Affixed to *Janus* was a note asking viewers to "please pretend it is actually me, the piece of art, talking to you." Janus introduces himself as the two faced god, requesting that his "double-ness not be confused with duplicity, however, or with 'pail-faces [sic] who speak with forked tongues.' Janus goes on to describe himself as a guardian, the god of passages, a unifier of opposites. With a jovial "sorry folks!" Durham interrupts:

. . . as soon as Janus mentioned opposites I could see he was going in the wrong direction. Humans and their gods seem to naturally create, opposites-as-a-system. When one thinks 'white' one's next thought is usually 'black', for example; and then one declares a polarity that may not necessarily reflect a natural truth. "Do you think the North Pole is really 'up' in the universe? - that the earth is bobbing along in space happily right-side-up?)

May I suggest that we imagine systems in opposition to any concept of opposites?

Durham recalls that he "was actually taught opposites in school":

The teacher said that black was the opposite of white, sweet was the opposite of sour and that up was the opposite of down. I began to make my

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<sup>47</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 176-77.



own list of opposites: the number one must be the opposite of the number ten, ice was the opposite of water and birds were the opposite of snakes.

But I soon had real problems, because if snakes and birds were opposites, where could I put the flying rattlesnake that we saw every night in the sky as the rattlesnake star? I theorized that in special circumstances things could act like their opposites. If grey is the blending of the opposites black and white then the flying rattlesnake could be seen as a grey bird.<sup>48</sup>

Hence by pushing binary structures to their illogical ends, Durham effects another triple play, which asserts an identity beyond categories of otherness, “us” and “them.”

Most appropriately then, Caliban the budding artist does not limit his explorations to two dimensions. A group of mixed media three-dimensional works are mounted on wood panels and suspended from heavy metal hooks: no fine art framing for this “savage” (Fig. 11).<sup>49</sup> Like much of Durham’s work, there is a deployment of natural materials—from a raccoon skin, to coconuts, to a root, to pig skin leather—evoking the earth, and its metonymic parallel with First Nations people. These are melded with high art sculptural materials, such as plaster, marble, and brass. Mark Alice Durant contends that this references “how the West has always measured cultural sophistication in terms of the tools and metals utilized (stone age, bronze age, etc.)”<sup>50</sup> In “The Search for Virginitly,” Durham calls these “the technologies of poking and hitting”:

It is as though we took the worse part of ourselves to be the best. What made the Iron Age the Iron Age? What if there were some much more important developments at the same time which we overlooked because the age has been assigned to Iron? My folks, then, were in the Stone Age when you guys showed up. But if groceries were the standard, we were in the Maize, Tomatoes, and Beans Age and you were in the Turnips Age. For you, today is the White Bread Age.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Durham, “The Search for Virginitly,” in *Coherence* 154.

<sup>49</sup> This is another example of Durham’s pervasive blurring of categories—three-dimensional works which are not sculptures, but are hung on the wall like paintings, a material hybridity found in the *Self-Portrait* discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>50</sup> Durant 86-87.

<sup>51</sup> Jimmie Durham, “Search for Virginitly” 157.

Three works present pairs of images, two of which evoke a nature/culture dichotomy: a bronze nose, with a mud one seemingly dribbling from the nostril above, and a raccoon skin paired with an unidentifiable metal piece (also nose-shaped). Caliban's third version is a pig skin leather piece glued diagonally to a long, slightly triangulated piece of wood. Another work is a vertically arrangement of a row of brass noses of varying shapes, scales, and proportions. Yet another presents an anthropomorphic effigy of a scarlet animal-like creature (really a root), above the words, "Sometimes I make myself look worse than I think I am to see if Dr. Prospero will coll [~~crossed out~~, but invoking the word "collect" in my mind] correct me." Little errors like this abound, and are not inconsequential; according to Homi Bhabha, Caribbean writer C.L.R. James recalled of the Haitian Black Jacobins, that "Sometimes the slaves entered the role of Camouflage; but it was not a camouflage of imposing their personality. It was the camouflage of self-negation. They would affect to be the perfect embodiment of stupidity."<sup>52</sup> Bhabha has written persuasively on the process of colonial mimicry and analyzed its roots:

... colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the colonized mimic can only be a partial presence—hence Caliban's difficulty in visualising his own nose.<sup>54</sup> But what interests me is Bhabha's contention that this mimetic presence does not hide an essence, but rather rearticulates and disrupts the notion of any and all identities as fixed and stable. This is a threat of terrifying proportions, not

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<sup>52</sup> Bhabha *Location* 122.

<sup>53</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 126.

<sup>54</sup> Bhabha, "Mimicry" 127.

only because it alludes to something which escapes the totalization of colonial authority, but because it equally implies that the colonizer's own identity is a masquerade. Jean Fisher writes:

Caliban, the 'noble savage' invented by the European as a redemption from what he perceived as his own lost innocence, knows the language of the coloniser better than he does himself. And so it is the very distance between the real and its symbolisation that Durham recognises and exploits. Through his metaphoric torsions and sardonic wit, what is momentarily opened up is the space of the unaccountable remainder which always escapes the determining frames—or nominalisation—of language, and which signals our essential lack of continuity with the world. At the same time, however, it is precisely this space which opens the possibility of new intuitions of reality and renewed dialogue.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, the *Codex*' pièce de résistance presents the realization of Caliban's earnest labours, characterized in the accompanying ingratiating, self-deprecating letter as "an embarasingly [sic] inadequate small token of my extreme gratitude for the constant encouragement, extreme patience and inspired friendship (I hope!) which you have so generously employed to show me a Better Way . . ." *Untitled (Caliban's Mask)* is comprised of two mismatched glass eyes, (one possibly, but not definitively human) on a ground of crackled, dark mud (Fig. 12). Lamming writes, Caliban's "assets—such as they are—are dangerous, since they are encrusted, buried deep in the dark. It is not by accident that his skin is black; for black, too, is the colour of his loss; the absence of any soul."<sup>56</sup> But the crowning, and ironic achievement is another pun, Caliban's button nose. As Durant comments, "Caliban's success becomes a travesty of representation, an absurd demonstration of language internalized; he is mud, he is animal, he is dark and ugly, yet he does have that cute button nose."<sup>57</sup> Hence, what George Lamming calls "the first

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<sup>55</sup> Jean Fisher, ed., "Preface," *Coherence* xii.

<sup>56</sup> Lamming 107-8.

<sup>57</sup> Durant 87.

important achievement of the colonising process,” “the application of the Word to the darkness of Caliban’s world,” could not change the colour of his skin.<sup>58</sup>

Nor did the Cherokee’s brilliant assimilation of the principle of their invader’s written language (one year after Sequoyah invented the Cherokee syllabary in 1825 the entire nation was literate) and subsequent institutions (as universities, newspapers, and a constitution) change the path of Colonialist imperialism.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, I would probably not be the first to argue that this transgression of the bounds of the colonialist vision of “the savages” accounted for the virulent attempt at suppression of all things Cherokee. In 1828, the year following the founding of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, and the adoption of the sovereign Cherokee constitution, Andrew Jackson took power in the White House, emboldening the state of Georgia to declare the existence of the Cherokee nation null and void.<sup>60</sup> 1835 saw the Phoenix’ offices seized and its production suppressed.

Not surprisingly then, Durham’s work questions the efficacy, and the occidental privileging of language. In 1995, he stated, “. . .when we do communicate, we communicate through the complicity of love, more than through actual words . . . . and some communication happens in spite of the communication.”<sup>61</sup> Significantly, 1992 is

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<sup>58</sup> Lamming 109.

<sup>59</sup> The Cherokee census of 1824 noted an increase in gristmills, sawmills, spinning wheels, stores, domesticated livestock. Doulgas C. Wilms, “Cherokee Land Use in Georgia,” in *Cherokee Removal: Before and After*, ed. William L. Anderson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991) 6.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The Americas Through Indian Eyes Since 1492* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992) 218. Later, he writes, “it is one of history’s darkest ironies” that Junaluska, an eminent Cherokee soldier, had saved Jackson’s life in a battle against the Creeks in 1814, 211. Noted Cherokee historiographer James Mooney also notes this event, in his *Historical Sketch of the Cherokee*, Smithsonian Institution Press (Chicago: Aldine, 1975) 168.

<sup>61</sup> Jimmie Durham, “Attending” 54-55.

also the year that he performed twice wearing a head apparatus he constructed and named the speech deprivation mask (Figs. 13 and 14).<sup>62</sup>

I would like to return briefly to one drawing where Caliban has tenuously traced some vertical marks above two lines of text; one reads “left nostril right nostril,” and the other below, “I breathe out, I breathe in” (Fig. 8). Durant interprets this as Caliban’s moment of rest from his representational travails: “He breathes, he makes marks, he observes himself. He is human.” But what is intriguing as well is that the left nostril corresponds not to the representation of Caliban, but to the nostril of Caliban—or, I would contend, of viewers—gazing at his representation. I am reminded of a culminating moment near the conclusion of *The Tempest*, when Prospero, gazing at the “poor monster,” admits, “this thing of darkness, I / acknowledge mine” (V.i.275-76). Thus to a great extent Caliban’s dilemma is equally that of colonizing subjects, who do not really see the colonized, but rather use them to reflect themselves. Hence, Caliban’s, and his brother Durham’s dilemma is also our own. As Mark Alice Durant remarks:

Caliban is lost, so is Prospero, though for him to admit it would mean to overturn the civilized/savage binary that gives him power. It is Caliban’s task, then, to teach Prospero about his own inauthenticity, and the paradoxical naturalness of this artifice. By drawing and redrawing versions of himself, Caliban draws a roadmap through the wilderness of representation, and it is a road that continually interrupts the belief in the stability of history and identity.<sup>63</sup>

The most recent work by Durham that I have seen, part of the group exhibition *Crossings*, organized by Diana Nemiroff at the National Gallery of Canada, continues to address the duplicitous nature of language (Fig. 15). Although most of the eminent international artists presented installation work on a scale ranging from the large-yet-

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<sup>62</sup> The first, titled “Veracruz/Virginia,” was a collaboration with Maria Thereza Alves and Alan Michelson at the Edge 92 Festival in Madrid and London. The second paired Durham and Alves at the Museo de Monterrey in Mexico. Both were accompanied by installations.

<sup>63</sup> Durant 87.

intimate (María Magdalena Campos-Pons) to the grandiose (Xu Bing, and Cai Guo-Qiang), Durham's singular, unimposing mixed-media piece hung alone on one partition with the label and translation of its Portuguese passage by novelist José Saramago on the wall perpendicular to it.<sup>64</sup> It read: "Do you say that I am lying? Certainly not, we have never lied to each other; when precision limits us, we use words to lie for us."

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<sup>64</sup> *Crossings* was held in 1998; the untitled work was originally made for a 1995 solo exhibition at the Modulo Centró Difusor de Arte, in Lisbon. Indeed, the smallest piece in the exhibition (which took migration, exile, and diaspora as its themes) seemed to be in exile from the exhibition—or the institution itself.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Multiplication: The Mobile Heart(h), or I hate America

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A range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality—as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms—transforms our critical strategies. It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside *objets d'art* or beyond the canonization of the 'idea' of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value . . . produced in the act of social survival.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned in the Introduction, Durham's life has been marked by spatial mobility; he is a habitué of living on the road. Hence, I will begin this chapter with a quick sketch of some of the geographies he has traversed, before continuing on to explore other manifestations of movement in his life and practice. Following his birth in Washington, Arkansas, the young Durham moved with his family across that state, and also to Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma as his father sought employment.<sup>2</sup> As an adolescent, he worked on several ranches, later joining the Navy, which took him to Arizona, the Pacific, and North and South Vietnam. Upon his discharge, Durham lived in Houston, and Austin, Texas, then Geneva, Switzerland (where he studied), and then North Dakota. During his diplomatic work for AIM, Durham was based in New York, yet shuttled frequently back and forth to Geneva. The beginnings of his "second conversation with the art world" took place in New York, but Durham and his partner, Maria-Thereza Alves left in 1986 to live in Cuernavaca, Mexico. In 1992, his work took him increasingly to Europe—he and Alves eventually resided first outside of Brussels, and following exhibitions in Vienna, Calais,

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<sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 172.

<sup>2</sup> The information in this section is culled mostly from Lucy Lippard, "Jimmie Durham: Postmodernist 'Savage,'" *Art in America* February 1993: 62-9. See also Laura Mulvey, Dirk Snauwert, Mark Alice Grant, and Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995).

Reims, Antwerp, Sweden, Finland and Rome, Durham accepted the German government's offer of a one-year residency in Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

Coextensive with this perpetual motion is a similar ideological movement which underlies much of his work. Drawing upon his identification and experience as someone of Cherokee ancestry, Durham strives to challenge and contradict stifling notions of identity, history, and truth as singular, fixed, and stable. Correspondingly, this discursive motion is reenacted physically in the art works. Thus, the following chapter begins with a more detailed elucidation of these movements before exploring ways to discuss and describe them theoretically.

One of the most significant features distinguishing Durham's practice is that he does not have a studio; instead, he creates work with materials gathered mostly from the location where an exhibition is to be held. "Frankly," he remarked in conversation recently, "I don't have any reason to sit in my studio and make an object just because I like to play with physical stuff."<sup>4</sup> As he told Susan Canning, "We still think of ourselves [as artists] as the creative people. We make our things and then we force them on the world and if they are great things the world will then appreciate them. That's an infantile idea that we've been given as the role that the artist plays."<sup>5</sup> In his words, the "poisonous myth" perpetuated by the relatively recent museologically-based art system, nullifies the true power and import of art by placing it on "a silly pedestal."<sup>6</sup> He wrote:

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<sup>3</sup> This is by no means a complete list.

<sup>4</sup> From "Covert Operations: Excerpts from a Discussion between Jimmie Durham and Michael Taussig with Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth," in Mulvey et al, *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995) 121.

<sup>5</sup> See Durham, interview by Canning, *Art Papers* 14.4 (1990): 35. As he explained to Ward Churchill, "The only reward for an artist that makes sense is to be a productive member of society as an artist, and that must be the same for a physicist or doctor or a carpenter or any other profession." See Durham, interview, by Ward Churchill, *What Follows*, prod. James Johnson, University of Colorado at Boulder, Academic Media Services, 1989, VHS, 45 minutes.

<sup>6</sup> Durham, "Creativity and the Social Process," reproduced in *A Certain Lack of Coherence: Writings on Art and Cultural Politics*, ed. and pref. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press, 1995) 72.



To live in luxury on an island off Florida and have your work caged in 'major' museums is not satisfying. To have one's work accepted and used by a free society and to participate in that society *as an artist*, to have society interact in the *process* of one's work must be satisfying. I will add that to accept passively or cynically that a given society is not changeable, or to use talents and art as an escape is not only ultimately unsatisfying, it is a sign of inhumanity.<sup>7</sup>

In his interview with Susan Canning, Durham alluded to his background as influential; he clarified this further in conversation with Ward Churchill:

. . . anytime I go to a reservation and spend even just a few days, you start being with the people out on the rez, and you start being an artist in *our* sense, without ever thinking about it, you start falling into suddenly you as an artist are a useful member of society—and nobody has any money to buy your paintings, if you tried to put up a show they wouldn't know what to do with it. You might go to any reservation, and put up a show out on the grass or out in someone's barn or something, and say this is an art show, nobody would come—they aren't going to traipse by and look at your stuff, but they have a use for you, and they have a use for your work.<sup>8</sup>

Durham's ideas on the role of the artist took further shape when he was invited to Derry, Northern Ireland, in 1988. It was there that he realized the absurdity of acting as "the lone artist, riding into town to make some object or processional construct for the locals, and then to ride out."<sup>9</sup> With typical humbleness, Durham credits the revelation which arose and the consequent success of his project in Derry to the sophistication of the citizens, and the vision of the Orchard Gallery's director.<sup>10</sup> What occurred, as he explained to Ward Churchill, was the following:

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<sup>7</sup> Durham, "Creativity," 73.

<sup>8</sup> Durham, interview by Churchill.

<sup>9</sup> From Durham's "'... very much like the Wild Irish' Notes on a Process which has no end in Sight," originally an exhibition broadsheet, reproduced in *Coherence* 151.

<sup>10</sup> In his interview with Churchill, he claims, "It had nothing to do with me. It wasn't because I became less stupid or naive, it had to do with the gallery and the vision of the director of that gallery and the people of the city of Derry . . . The gallery has an international reputation and it's a very sophisticated place, so I was working within the art system, I wasn't outside of it, because of the vision of this amazing director."

. . . the people of Derry forced themselves upon me—I came in at the invitation of the gallery and I had my little bag of sculpting tools—“Okay, where do you want that sculpture?” and someone took me to one bar and sang some Irish songs, and someone gave me a beer and told me to sing a Cherokee song, and a process started of talking to people about what they thought of the British occupation of Derry and what they thought of themselves as Irish. . . . so they told me what sort of things I could do and how to do them, not in the sense of ordering me, but by listening to who I was and what I was up to, and in real solidarity telling me who they were and what they were up to, so in a real sense the entire city became my teachers and collaborators—not once did they imagine that I wouldn’t do my own thing, they demanded I do my own thing, but they demanded that I do it with them, and that’s why it was a success.<sup>11</sup>

Another factor contributing to Durham’s rejection of the studio as a site of production is procedural: having to do with what he calls the “theatre”—the separation or isolation of objects away from the outside world and spectators—of the studio itself, and the kinds of activities it encourages. As Durham told curator Pascale Cassagnau, “Working in your own studio leads to experimenting with the same processes, repeating the same ways to conceive things that one already knows. . . . I don’t have a studio in the traditional sense of the term, nor a home in the permanent sense of the term and I prefer to feel like a stranger where I live rather than become sentimental.”<sup>12</sup> He adds, “If one looks at the position of art since the last five centuries, one notices a certain cosmopolitanism.”<sup>13</sup>

This “cosmopolitanism” to which Durham refers stems from a long history of travel and exile associated with practitioners of the arts. Heads of the royal courts of Europe (and other realms) invited, enticed, and commanded musicians, composers, storytellers, bards, and theatre troupes, (as well as artists) for the pleasure and edification of those present, as well as the status of having such wonders at close hand. Considering the implications of

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<sup>11</sup> Durham, interview by Churchill.

<sup>12</sup> My translation. Durham, interview, by Pascale Cassagnau, *Maisons-cerveaux*, exhibition catalogue (Reims: Le Collège, Frac Champagne-Ardenne; Noisiel: La Ferme du Buisson, Centre d’art contemporain, 1995) 97.

<sup>13</sup> Durham, interview by Cassagnau.

such travel, art historian Linda Nochlin argues that accepting such invitations was a more tenable—and bearable—option for artists and musicians than writers because less was lost in translation. She writes:

. . . artists traditionally have been obliged to travel, to leave their native land, in order to learn their trade. At one time, the trip to Rome was required, or a study-voyage in Italy; at other times and under special circumstances it might be Munich or Spain or Holland or even North Africa; . . . For every Constable enamored of the very slime on the logs of his native landscape . . . we can point to a Sargent triumphantly catering to an international clientele; a Picasso finding himself and his modernism in Paris rather than in Barcelona; a displaced Mondrian inventing *Broadway Boogie Woogie* in New York rather than in his native Holland.<sup>14</sup>

Durham's contemporary transcription of this practice of travel is still one motivated by learning, but not about "tricks of the trade" (as he pointed out to Dirk Snauwert, "I can paint, . . . I can sculpt, I can do all the arty things"); his interest is in producing work engaged in a social process of dialogue with its audiences.<sup>15</sup> Hence, he cannot envision any justification to make something in isolation in the studio, and then present it to viewers.

His reward, as is anyone's, he claims—whether they are a doctor, a baker, or a blacksmith—is to be a productive, contributing member of society. Durham's interview with Ward Churchill is particularly informative regarding his vision of the artist's role; in fact he asserts that he doesn't think of himself in terms of the label "artist." These ideas, as his aforementioned comment about being an artist "on the rez" indicates, stem from traditional Cherokee philosophical tenets. Discussing tradition with Churchill, Durham refers to patterns of outlook, behaviour, or states of mind. One of the most salient of these is what he calls "dynamicism." It is not based on a view of cultures as static, frozen, and

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation," *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances* ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 37. It should be noted that the history Wolff delineates here is overwhelmingly an Occidental one.

<sup>15</sup> In "Dirk Snauwert in conversation with Jimmie Durham," Mulvey et al. 13.

comprised of particular essences; instead it regards cultures as entities in constant motion—shifting, responding, adapting, integrating, appropriating. Durham explains:

. . . I respect our traditions, and I think they are very dynamic and useful for us, and kind of necessary for me; but they are not a static “how to do things” but much more of a vision: “we are human beings in the entire world and we have a responsibility and a privilege in the entire world,” that is a main tradition with Indian societies.<sup>16</sup>

This is, it should be noted, a dynamism which engendered the appropriation of beads, metal, horses, rifles, and flour for fry bread, not to mention the remarkable adaptation and survival of native people through centuries of dislocation, disease, and attempted genocide.

Motion is also manifested through Durham’s interest in what I call figures of transmutation—people who have led “hybrid” lives marked in various ways by the collisions, transfusions, and interrelations of varying cultures, but who later became iconic figures whose very identities are subject to variations in interpretation. One such figure is La Malinche, the principal figure of Durham’s installation *Ama*. (Fig. 16).<sup>17</sup> Called both mother and whore by Octavio Paz, she was sold by her people, the Aztecs, to the *cacique* of the Mayans, and went on to bequeath racial and cultural hybridity to Mexico.<sup>18</sup> As conquistador Hernán Cortés’ interpreter and mistress, Malinche smoothed his passage into Mexico and collaborated with the conquest and plunder of the land and people for their gold. As Jean Fisher writes, “[Q]uick to learn the language and customs of the strangers from the sea,” La Malinche was “so adept . . . at spanning the borders of . . . Aztec and Spanish, that she becomes a key figure in the unfolding drama of conquest. It was said that Cortés ““could not understand the Indians without her.””<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Durham, interview by Churchill.

<sup>17</sup> Held at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp as part of the 1992 travelling group exhibition, *America, Bride of the Sun, 500 Years Latin America and the Low Countries*.

<sup>18</sup> As noted by Mulvey in her essay, “Changing Objects, Preserving Time,” Mulvey et al. 69.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Fisher, “The Savage Gift: Jimmie Durham’s *Ama*,” *Third Text* 21 (1992-93): 25.

The United States had its own figure of transmutation in Pocahontas. Durham explored the conflicting histories and fantasies surrounding this woman in the installation *Matoaka Ale Attakulakula Guledisgo Nhini*, (meaning Pocahontas and the Little Carpenter in London) held at London's Matt's Gallery in 1988 (Fig. 17).<sup>20</sup> Now canonized (and sanitized) by Walt Disney, "the paragon Indian princess of North American popular culture" first rose to fame in 1624, when John Smith published the tale of his rescue from imminent execution due to her appeal to her father, Chief Powhatan.<sup>21</sup> Following Smith's 1624 best-seller, numerous poets, playwrights, caricaturists, novelists (even musical writers) would write their own versions, or "adaptations"<sup>22</sup> of Smith's original, undoubtedly embellished mythic tale, in ignorance of the forlorn truth: the young princess would instead marry John Rolfe, who would uproot her to England, where she would adopt an English name (Rebecca), bear his child, and die tragically of smallpox on her journey home.

Another figure of transmutation, referred to obliquely by the snakeskin pattern on one side of Malinche/Pocahontas' face, is the serpent, which appears in other works including "The Banks of the Ohio" (1992), for the Wexner Centre in Columbus, Ohio. There, Durham's choice was this form was appropriate given the proximity of monumental serpentine burial mounds of the Adena culture (c. 1000 BC to 0 AD) as well as the significance of the serpent in Cherokee culture. Curator Sarah Rogers writes, "The horned

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<sup>20</sup> Attakullakulla, "the Little Carpenter" began his distinguished diplomatic career by being the first Cherokee to bravely volunteer to board the strange and putrid vessel of Sir Alexander to visit King George in England. The year was 1730, and the slight, wiry youth, accompanied by five compatriots, reluctantly stayed longer than promised—one full year—but returned with a mutual pledge of friendship and alliance, which would secure peace for the Cherokee for seven years, until they were dragged into England's conflict with France. Recounted by Ronald Wright in *Stolen Continents: The Americas Through Indian Eyes Since 1492* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> As characterized by Gail Valaskakis in "Sacajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians," in Marilyn Burgess and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls, Stereotypes from the Frontier*, bookwork by Rebecca Belmore (Montreal: Galerie Oboro, 1995) 23.

<sup>22</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler's *The Return of the Vanishing American* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968) provides a good critical discussion of these permutations.

serpent . . . [symbolizes] the evening star: an embodiment of the passage from day to night, a condition of transition . . . an apt metaphor for . . . history, which [Durham] sees as a succession of transitions and contradictions—rather than as the isolated ‘great events’ and ‘discoveries’ written about in history books.”<sup>23</sup>

As is evident in comparing figures 16 and 17, another movement is also present—Durham’s physical transformation of the figure of Pocahontas into Malinche.<sup>24</sup> This “migration” is interesting in itself, for it is an element which recurs throughout Durham’s body of work, and challenges the modernist, museological conception of artworks as unique bearers of singular meaning.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, I read such movement in Durham’s oeuvre as communicating that his works have no essential meaning, but may, like semiotics’ signifier, break away from the signified and take their place in a variety of other situations. This demonstrates a “certain lack of coherence,” which Durham asserts is critical for revising paradigms of truth, knowledge, and identity. As Sarah J. Rogers writes in her introduction to the catalogue for the group exhibition *Will/Power*, Durham views history as processual, “a succession of transitions and contradictions—rather than as the isolated ‘great events’ and ‘discoveries’ written about in history books.”<sup>26</sup> It is a vision which is skeptical of the possibility of obtaining truth or knowledge. “It’s the time to be confused,” he stressed to Susan Canning, “but not in an inactive way; to see there are great complexities and to investigate more, to investigate more constantly, to not be satisfied with

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<sup>23</sup> Sarah J. Rogers et al., *Will/Power*, exhibition catalogue (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1993) 11-12.

<sup>24</sup> It could also be argued that this reflects a semiotic conflation of both figures into the more generic “Indian princess” icon. Again, see Valaskakis.

<sup>25</sup> This work would also become a “souvenir” in a Canadian offshoot of the *On Loan* . . . installation, *Karl Marx and Alexander van Humboldt Tour the Americas*, held at Montreal’s Centre international d’art contemporain in 1990.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah J. Rogers, *Will/Power*, Exhibition Catalogue (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1993) 12.

some little piece of something that makes you feel like you are powerful, that you've got the answer so you can move ahead. That's very dangerous."<sup>27</sup>

Not surprising then, is Durham's claim to never choose his materials. "Objects present themselves," he writes, "and I therefore have a responsibility (in part) to present myself in return."<sup>28</sup> As Mulvey notes, "His materials preserve their own presence as objects, so that the original shapes and textures enter into new configurations in his sculptures. A completed Jimmie Durham sculpture remains 'unfinished.'"<sup>29</sup> Therein lies part of the influence—to which Durham often refers—of French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968).<sup>30</sup> While his "found objects" or materials are often transformed more than famed Duchampian works such as the *Fountain* (1917), or the *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), they nonetheless retain their identities, evidence of their former lives as objects. Nonetheless, an earlier influence is also active—the integrity of a Cherokee way of being/cosmography. Durham explains:

When we do works on paper we cannot forget the paper-making process, the fact of the trees on our land. . . . A whiskey bottle has as valid an artistic use as any other object. Of course, one listens to the conversations of the bottle when considering aesthetic purposes. It would be something like a sin to trick the bottle into lying . . . One can use the bottle to play tricks, or to tell jokes, or to make any unexpected combinations, but we would not force it into false positions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jimmie Durham, interview with Canning 33.

<sup>28</sup> In Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1992) 146.

<sup>29</sup> Mulvey 48.

<sup>30</sup> This is discussed in the Snauwert interview. Although pages could be written on this subject alone, I would assert that Durham shares Duchamp's sense of the artist as instigator, provocateur, and the revelation that art is as equally an ideological proposition as it is a particular object.

<sup>31</sup> Durham with Jean Fisher, *Ni Go Tlunh A Doh Ka (We are always turning around on purpose)*, exhibition catalogue (Old Westbury: State University of New York, 1986) 2.

Mulvey astutely observes that Durham's "refusal of the moment of artistic creation as a zero point at which a new object comes into being from nowhere, condenses with a rejection of the moment when America was created, as a zero date in the history of the continent."<sup>32</sup>

Quite appropriately then, as curator Ralph Rugoff observes, Durham's artworks are "self-consciously awkward, unheroic, and slapdash" as if in confirmation of the occidental fantasy of the pure and uncorrupted natural Indian incredibly untouched by civilization.<sup>33</sup> This is the element of "neoprimitivism" which Durham slyly used to identify his work in the mid-eighties. Yet there is also another, less conspicuous signification to the material presence of his practice. Again, as Rugoff remarks:

The improvised appearance of Durham's art echoes that idea of perpetual flux. Its rawness hints at something terminally unfinished and open-ended, impossible to pin down. The over-sized blots, nails and gobs of glue with which he fastens everything are a kind of repeated joke: they mock our desire—and the artist's—for something permanently secure.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, Durham's earnest attempt to "fix," and securely attach elements of his assemblages together has another signification—it mocks both aesthetic and categorical conventions of the Western art historical canon. Herein is another instance of the close parallel between Durham's formal means and the underlying discourse of his work—what the artist calls his "neo-conceptualism." As Laura Mulvey has written:

It is easiest to describe him as a sculptor, but only because so many of his objects are constructions that stand free in space and can be approached from every angle. Even the sculptural constructions break out of formal unity. They are often decorated with a heterogeneous collection of

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<sup>32</sup> Mulvey et al., 52. This is an instance, although she does not specify it as such, proving her assertion, that "these sculptures might often seem to be the product of 'bricolage,' but in fact they are works of 'montage,' in that the idea behind them is an essential part of their function," <sup>39</sup>. Yet in an artist's project for *Blocnotes*, Durham's list of things he packed for his Eurasia project ends with "Le Dictionnaire Marabout du Bricolage." See *Blocnotes* 8 (1995): 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ralph Rugoff, "Laminated Warrior: Jimmie Durham Dances with PVC," *L.A. Weekly* 10-16 September 1993: 41.

<sup>34</sup> Rugoff "Laminated."



extraneous things, such as written messages, a photograph, words, drawings, and particularly found objects of various kinds. Titles are often an intrinsic element . . .<sup>35</sup>

Mulvey's latter observation about titles applies to text in general, which Durham employs often in works, partially-joking that the 1980s "was a time when art had to have text"<sup>36</sup> Chapter two discussed an instance of this in the sculpture *Janus*; a divergent example where the text appears "readymade," is *Tlunh Datsi*, of 1985 (Fig. 4). While pieces such as this one have been often misread as fetishistic or shamanic, *Tlunh Datsi's* content is political: the barricade is used to delineate property, and both block and direct the movement of persons around it. Its identifying label—"Police Dept."—as W. Jackson Rushing notes, "announces the secularity and impurity of the object, as well as a form of violence associated, not with nature, but with institutional power."<sup>37</sup> In this way, Durham's titles and texts also refute the idea of "art" as solely an object.<sup>38</sup> As he told Pascale Cassagnau, "In my work, I am not looking to unite the linguistic and physical dimensions of things, but more to draw out again the attention to the close relationships in a paradoxical manner, to make them play together, to loosen them, to reactivate them."<sup>39</sup>

One material prevalent in Durham's work of the early nineties is PVC pipe, fortuitously marketed and imprinted on occasion with the brand name, "Apache." As he explained to writer Hope Urban:

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<sup>35</sup> Mulvey 37.

<sup>36</sup> In "Snauwert conversation," Mulvey et al. 17

<sup>37</sup> W. Jackson Rushing, "Jimmie Durham. Trickster as Intervention," *Artspace* January-April 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, hybrid works such as the *Self Portrait* (1986) also challenge the traditional categories of painting, and sculpture, much as does work in installation and performance.

<sup>39</sup> Interview by Cassagnau 92. As he wrote in 1986, "I believe that the acts and perceptions of combining, of making constant connections on many levels, are the driving motivation of our aesthetic." See Durham and Fisher, *Ni Go Tlunh A Doh Ka (We are always turning around on purpose)* exhibition catalogue (Old Westbury: State University of New York, 1986) 2.

. . . because it's made of salt and petroleum cooked up; that's kind of silly already. And, it lasts forever. If I cut a section of PVC and signed my name to it, when Michelangelo's *David* has gone away, my PVC pipe will still be there. But metaphorically, sewer pipe is what shit goes through, a vehicle in passage that doesn't hold things, a passive conduit that is not heroic or unheroic.<sup>40</sup>

Further, two other qualities spring to my mind: one is the fact that this kind of piping is underground—not intended to be seen by the average citizen, but running like a silent labyrinth across and among cities and counties, linking homes, workplaces, and institutions of the most divergent character. The other is its quality of industrial refuse, contrasting with more “natural” materials often stereotyped in their association with native people. Durham has come out very strongly on the issue of the “native” appearance of some of his works, writing in *Land, Spirit, Power*:

My work has been described as using traditional Indian materials such as feathers bone and leather, but those are certainly not ‘traditional Indian material’ in any art sense, except for very recent times. They certainly are not exclusively ours. That line of discussion more demonstrates the trick bag that the world has devised for us, and keeps discussion of our work very shallow. Yet my love of material and of connections and echoes does seem to me to come from a Cherokee base which I think is both valid and valuable.<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, while refuting this linkage as both fallacious, and racist, Durham has increasingly shied away from the assemblaged “neo-primitivism” which characterized his work through the eighties in favour of a more visually spare and somber presentation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hope Urban, “The Road to Nowhere,” *Los Angeles Reader* 15.46 (1993). Interestingly, in an article entitled “What Artists Dream,” Durham recounts “In a typical dream I find myself in some trashy polluted place and [my father] says, “Come through this drainpipe, I’ll show you another place,” and we go through the drainpipe and there’s some nice pretty place over there,” Margot Mifflin, *Art News* 92.8 (1993): 148.

<sup>41</sup> Durham in Nemiroff et al. 145.

<sup>42</sup> It could be argued that this is a result of the materials derived from the locations of his exhibitions. Nevertheless, Durham has complained about the stereotyping of his work as always concerning his Cherokee identity, decrying (as one example) a review of his exhibition entitled, “Un Indien à Calais.” See Durham, “The Centre of the World is Several Places (Part I): Interview with Beverly Koski and Richard William Hill,” *Fuse* 21.3 (1998): 29. I suspect the article in question is by Thierry Davila, *Beaux Arts Magazine* 144 (1996): 40.

Responding to a comment Dirk Snauwert made about “the bricolage side” of his work, Durham maintained that he believed it necessary to eliminate it: “If I can stick things together that are physical histories and they didn’t want to go together but then something intellectual happens when they are together, I’m just very pleased, I’m very charmed by it. And of course I don’t trust it and I see now I’m going to have to find a way out of that.”<sup>43</sup>

It should also be mentioned that in addition to the works themselves, Durham’s exhibition installations encourage and evince motion. The 1993 exhibition, *Original Re-Runs*, is illustrative.<sup>44</sup> As is evident from Figure 18, not only was the gallery space filled with a cacophonous multitude of work, the space surrounding the objects was activated by a series of cords diagonally splicing from floor to ceiling.<sup>45</sup> Recalling her experience of the exhibition, Laura Mulvey observed that the ordinary presence of the spectator in front of the object was altered in two principal ways. First, the all-encompassing omniscient gaze, and its specular consumption of the exhibition was impeded by its visual clamor and eclecticism. Second, a physical, corporeal dimension was invoked, as viewers necessarily circulated with care around the aforementioned ropes, and the usually “dead,” or empty gallery space around the works was activated. As she concludes, “In a sense, he addresses his materials and materializes his audience.”<sup>46</sup> However, this materialization of the audience is one which forces that same audience to call into question basic tenets of their own positions, ways of “knowing,” and histories, the very notions on which identities are

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in “Snauwert conversation,” Mulvey et al. 25.

<sup>44</sup> A kind of mid-career “retrospective,” (although Durham might chafe at such a label) grouping works from the preceding decade, the exhibition was held in at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. Durham’s bookwork *The East London Coelacanth*, with an essay by Dan Cameron, was published by the ICA in conjunction with the exhibition. Additionally, in lieu of the Institute’s usual videotaped artist’s interview, Durham produced a fictional video where he interviews himself about his search for the purportedly-legendary coelacanth.

<sup>45</sup> Again, a reference to Duchamp is present, namely, his famous installation of the Surrealist exhibition in New York in 1942.

<sup>46</sup> Mulvey et al. 48.

founded. Helen Molesworth commented in conversation with the artist in 1993, “[Your work] turns the gaze around while at the same time undercutting any sort of validity to either of the gazes. Your work laughs at the turning even.”<sup>47</sup>

At this point I would like to turn (pun intended) to a more theoretical exploration of ways to describe these variant motions. It is interesting to note the congruence between Durham’s second period of artistic activity in the 1980s, and the increasing search by academics in various disciplines for new paradigms for identity. As Michael Keith and Steve Pile noted in the introduction to their 1993 compilation of essays, *Place and the Politics of Identity* :

In order to articulate an understanding of the multiplicity and flexibility of relations of domination, a whole range of spatial metaphors are commonly being used: position, location, situation, mapping, geometrics of domination, centre-margin, open-closed, inside-outside, global-local; liminal space, third space, not-space, impossible space; the city.<sup>48</sup>

Yet other theorists identified these theorizations as problematic, for as Madan Sarup suggests, “places are socially constructed, and . . . this construction is about power.”<sup>49</sup>

Since the consensus seemed to be that identity was in some kind of motion—and that cultural theory must strive to eliminate ethnic essentialism—a logical response to this problem appeared to be the deployment of metaphors of travel and displacement.<sup>50</sup> In her

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<sup>47</sup> “Covert Operations,” Mulvey et al. 118.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds., “Introduction: The Politics of Place; The Place of Politics,” *Place and the Politics of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 1.

<sup>49</sup> She continues, “Capital moves about the globe and creates a *hierarchy* of places.” “Home and Identity,” *Traveller’s Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, eds. George Robertson et al. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 96. This will be discussed in greater detail later on.

<sup>50</sup> A good overview is provided by Neil Smith and Cindi Katz in “Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialized Politics,” *Place and the Politics of Identity*, eds. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (New York: Routledge, 1993) 67-83. As Keith and Pile write in their introduction, “We want to move away from a position on privileging positionality and towards one of acknowledging spatiality. Such a move takes us towards an understanding of identities as always contingent and incomplete processes rather than determined outcomes, and of epistemologies as situated and ambivalent rather than abstract and universal,” 34.

essay "On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism," Janet Wolff located this emergence in the triad of poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism, all of which highlighted notions of mobility, fluidity, and provisionality as alternatives to static, foundational rhetorics and ideologies. Wolff remarked that "vocabularies of travel seem to have been proliferating in cultural criticism recently: nomadic criticism, traveling theory, critic-as-tourist (and vice versa), maps, billboards, hotels and motels."<sup>51</sup> Migrancy and border-crossings may be added to Wolff's list.<sup>52</sup>

One of the first volumes to introduce this germinal confluence between travel and identity was Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in a chapter entitled "1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine."<sup>53</sup> It is important to clarify that the war machine does not necessarily refer to actual battle. Although it is a politics in opposition to the state, the war machine is rather, a strategy of spatial and temporal discontinuity which does not seek to reify transcendent, singular formations.<sup>54</sup> It is of course also a "counter-ideology in pre-capitalist use of the

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<sup>51</sup> Janet Wolff, "On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism," *Cultural Studies* 7.2 (1993): 224.

<sup>52</sup> See Mike Featherstone, "Travel, Migration and Images of Social Life," *Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995). He also situates Deleuze and Guattari in a larger historical context of European intellectual and bohemian valuation of travel as experience (linked integrally with modernity) noting work by theorists such as Iain Chambers "refers to the nomadic experience of language which ceases to be an instrument of precision and clarity. Rather thought wanders and migrates: instead of having a fixed base or home, it dwells in a mobile habitat which produces discontinuities and fragmented experiences," 126-7. See also Caren Kaplan's excellent *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and fwd. Brian Massumi (1980; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 351-483. Reference to the nomad first surfaced in critical theory in a 1978 article for the journal *Semiotext(e)*, by Deleuze, "Nomad Thought," reprinted in *The New Nietzsche* ed. and trans., David B. Allison (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985) 142-9. It should be noted that nomad thought, however, is not confined to philosophy. "Nomadic thought" is used interchangeably with "pragmatics" and "schizoanalysis," all three of which are elucidated throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*. 1227 refers to the year when the war machine was hypothetically found in its "purest" incarnation.

<sup>54</sup> See Stephen Muecke's analysis, "The Discourse of Nomadology: Phylums in Flux," *Art & Text* 14 (1984): 24-40.

land.”<sup>55</sup> Essentially, the term nomad encompasses a vast diversity of societies who employ spatial mobility as a strategy of adaptation and survival in a particular ecosystem.<sup>56</sup> Still, their emphasis on strategy may explain why Deleuze and Guattari stress the marauding, renegade movements of nomads at the expense of qualities of seasonal or cyclical adaptation. Even given James Clifford’s caution that “there are no neutral or uncontaminated terms,” the employment of the war machine in this context enforces a problematic stereotype of “Other” people as dangerous.<sup>57</sup>

While movement in a dynamic sense characterizes a Cherokee way of being, it is extremely important to stress that literal movement, or nomadism per se, which is an ecological adaptation to specific environments, was not practiced by the Cherokee nation. In fact, few First Nations societies were nomadic—the Great Plains inhabitants were not the rule but the exception. This is a point that I do not hesitate to belabour, given that it was precisely this elision which conveniently justified white occupation of First Peoples territories. Typical were Heylyn’s observations in his global geographical survey *Microcosmus*:

The lands lie in common to all Natives and all Comers . . . the country is vastly bigger than the Inhabitants, who are very few in proportion to its greatness and fertility. . . . This will show that we have done them no Injury by settling amongst them; we rather than they being the prime occupants, and they only Sojourners in the land: we have bought however of them the most part of the lands we have, and have purchased little with out Swords, but when they have made war upon us.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Krim Benterak, Stephen Muecke, with Paddy Roe, *Reading the Country; Introduction to Nomadology* (Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre, 1984) 15.

<sup>56</sup> See Rada Dyson-Hudson and Neville Dyson-Hudson, “Nomadic Pastoralism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9 (1980): 15-61; Amos Rapoport, “Nomadism as a Man-Environment System,” *Environment and Behavior* 10.2 (1978): 215-47; Brian Spooner, “The Status of Nomadism as a Cultural Phenomenon in the Middle East,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 7 (1972): 122-31.

<sup>57</sup> Clifford 110. In fact, it is precisely because of their taintedness that Clifford believes it is useful to work with travel terminologies.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted by Robert F. Berkhofer in *The White Man’s Indian; Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1979) 131. Berkhofer also demonstrates how settlement was framed as a moral imperative by citing John Quincy Adams: “What is the right of a huntsman to the

This depiction of aimless, purposeless wandering also melded with the popular conception of First Nations people as wild, and beast-like. For as Peter Hulme maintains, “English colonists could . . . see seeds planted and food grown on a regular basis. They visited villages, described them in their texts and drew them in their pictures. Yet this settled pattern of living became, in the discourse of colonialism an aimless, nomadic wandering that, by extension, left the land empty and virgin.”<sup>59</sup> The irony, which has been pointed out by more than one writer, is that a class of European migrants unsettled themselves and traversed an immense distance to arrive in a foreign land and label its inhabitants “nomads.”<sup>60</sup>

Hence, by the beginning of the 1990s, critics such as Stuart Hall spoke of nomadology as untenable. Responding to James Clifford’s paper at a cultural studies conference, Hall referred in passing to “the fashionable postmodern notion of nomadology—the breakdown of everything into everything.”<sup>61</sup> In his presentation, Clifford himself had expressed reservations that nomadism was both generalized and primitivized. Of course the problem is that nomadism—which is a highly-sophisticated strategic response to austere or rigorous environments—is seen as equivalent to

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forest of a thousand miles over which he has accidentally ranged in quest of prey? . . . Shall the fields and valleys, which a beneficent God has formed to teem with the life of innumerable multitudes, be condemned to ever-lasting barrenness?” 138.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986) 157.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, anthropologists are now largely in agreement with Muecke that the label “nomad” constitutes “the inappropriate application of any *singular* word to the lifestyle of a whole people. It is only within relations of power difference (colonialism) or knowledge difference (the social sciences) that a discourse can be mobilized as the *summary* account of a culture,” in Benterrak Muecke, and Roe 217.

<sup>61</sup> Transcript of discussion following Clifford 115. See also Andrew Lattas’ critical article, “Primitivism in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*,” *Social Analysis* 30 (1991): 98-115. Ethnocentric, binary, and homogenizing, according to Lattas, *A Thousand Plateaus* ultimately recolonizes nomadic societies, silencing their discourses “in order to read its own discourse ontop of them,” 111.

“primitivism,” in Western discourse. Later, Hall commented at more length to Kuan-Hsing Chen:

[diaspora] never loses its specificities. That is the reason why the way in which I'm trying to think questions of identity is slightly different from a postmodernist 'nomadic.' I think cultural identity is not fixed, it's always hybrid. But this is precisely because it comes out of very specific historical formations, out of very specific histories and cultural repertoires . . . [that] we have to live this ensemble of identity-positions in all its specificities.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, this untenability applied to almost all metaphors of travel, which are in the words of ethnographer James Clifford, unquestionably tainted in their “associations with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like.”<sup>63</sup> I am strongly compelled to maintain a certain rigor rooted in the precision of definitions: a motel is not a hotel, a migrant is not a tourist, and a nomad is none of these. Further, as Clifford maintains, a multitude of porters, drivers, trackers, servants, attendants, escorts, and chaperones “have been discursively excluded from the role of proper travelers because of their race and class” and relegated as adjuncts to the real “travellers,” who I might add, were often as dependent as children on the above for their much-vaunted peregrinations.<sup>64</sup>

This does not even touch upon the horrific travel which fueled expansion across the North American continent—the transatlantic voyages endured by countless slaves.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, it is necessary to bear in mind Janet Wolff's warning that current travel terminologies are problematic. Inherently gendered insofar as they deny the existence of a

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<sup>62</sup> “The formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An Interview with Kuan-Hsing Chen,” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996) 502.

<sup>63</sup> Clifford, “Traveling Cultures,” *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) 110. See also See Grossberg's “Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics,” *Cultural Studies* 2.3 (1988): 377-91.

<sup>64</sup> Clifford 106.

<sup>65</sup> For this reminder, I must acknowledge Featherstone, who draws upon the work of Paul Gilroy. Of course human history is rife with examples of enforced transportation of this kind.



patriarchal center, their promise of liberation suggests a conception of common, categorical mobility. “[W]e are not,” as she remonstrates, “‘on the road’ together.”<sup>66</sup>

To begin to conclude this chapter is to admit that I have not arrived at my envisioned destination. Although movement is a theme which resonates on multiple levels throughout Durham’s practice, the deployment of travel terminologies, particularly the nomad, is a treacherous endeavour. Nonetheless, it could be useful to conceive of the nomadic in terms of strategy. Feminist scholars have overwhelmingly stressed that a nomadic conceptualization of identity is valuable both within feminism and in terms of larger struggles against fixity and domination. As Stephen Muecke remarks about the work of Deleuze and Guattari: “the opposition between the State and the war machine . . . is introduced . . . hopefully to direct analysis towards an examination of limited, local, and multiple strategies.”<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, many anthropological researchers concur this should be the course charted to understand nomadic societies. However, they also stress the imperative of examining nomads as parts of larger, even global systems—a refrain for context. Finally and most importantly, is their uncovering of nomadic spatial mobility as a survival strategy, for in effect this is what Durham has adopted. In an essay on the situation of contemporary art in Central America, Durham maintains that cultural producers “must ultimately walk away” from the colonial “power structure” which continues to determine limits of their practices.<sup>68</sup> “A Friend of Mine Said That Art is a European Invention,” written by the artist in 1994, declares the following:

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<sup>66</sup> Wolff 235. This may perhaps account for why feminist writers seem to have been most successful in using the nomad as a metaphor of decentred, fluctuating subjecthood. Examples include Rosi Braidotti’s *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Chantal Mouffe’s less-explicitly feminist ‘For a Politics of Nomadic Identity,’ originally a text for the 1993 Venice Biennale, reproduced in *Traveller’s Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, eds. George Robertson et al. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 105-113; and Caren Kaplan’s “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse,” *Cultural Critique* 6 (1987): 187-98.

<sup>67</sup> Muecke 38.

<sup>68</sup> Jimmie Durham, “Here at the Centre of the World,” *Third Text* 5 (1988-89): 23.

**Like the scientific theories about the first three minutes after the 'Big Bang' that began our universe, our theory must be that both terrorism and censorship, orthodoxy and 'nationality' itself, begin at the moment, at the next moment the thoughtful member must escape, if not physically then at least intellectually, to hold on to the little nation's original idea.**

**This exile then, is the only 'true patriot.'**<sup>69</sup>

In accordance, the concluding chapter of this thesis will discuss Durham's voluntary, thoughtful exile. It is one which avoids ideology, and patriotism in its more literal conception. As he admitted in one of his more angry published pieces, he "absolutely hate[s] this country. Not just the government, but the culture, the group of people called Americans. The country. I hate the country. I HATE AMERICA." Still, Durham's exile is no less an affair of the heart. <sup>70</sup> It is an exile, "of the brain, so that [his] heart can the more be home," and one of perpetual search for "a broader homeland," an Eloheh where things are a little bit better on the other side.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Jimmie Durham, "A Friend of Mine Said That Art is a European Invention," in Mulvey et al. 143.

<sup>70</sup> Durham, "Those Dead Guys" 132. He continues, Don't ask a white man to walk a mile in your moccasins because he'll steal them, and the mile, too. . . . The *fact* of the US is destructive to Indian country. Every piece of progress, social or material, is more destruction to Indian country."

<sup>71</sup> Durham in Nemiroff et al. 145.

## *Conclusion*

### **Location: Durham's Eurasian Exile**

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There is a story that many years ago, Mohandas Gandhi was asked what he thought about Western Civilization. "It would," he replied, "be a good idea."<sup>1</sup>

Durham and his partner, Maria Thereza Alves, first *chose* (my emphasis) to live in exile in 1986, in order to escape both the exorbitant cost of living in New York and its hectic pace—which imposed an overwhelming schedule, and non-contemplative rhythm of life.<sup>2</sup> Cuernavaca, Mexico became their chosen base, for as Durham told Mark Gisbourne, "I was not willing to live anywhere else in the US, except New York. What I like about New York is that it hates the US, and the US hates New York, it's like an immigrant ship that pulled in; Manhattan is like a ship that it does not want to come into port."<sup>3</sup>

However, as he wrote for the catalogue to the Canadian exhibition *Land, Spirit, Power*, "I've lived all of my life in voluntary exile from my own people, yet that can also be considered a Cherokee tradition. It is not a refusal of us, but a refusal of a situation and of imposed-from-without limits."<sup>4</sup> The reason why I emphasized his and Alves' choice above is, as should now be evident from the first two chapters of this thesis, related to these limits: the irrevocable damage of British, Spanish, and French imperialism upon the

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Charlie McKenzie, "On the edge of civilization," *Hour* 22-28 April 1999: 6.

<sup>2</sup> In an interview with Mark Gisbourne in 1994, he stated, "I had no place to work and I was getting stupider in the New York sense of always being busy—you think that begin busy amounts to smartness, to a sense of sophistication—and it wasn't. But really I had no more money to live there . . ." Durham, interview, by Mark Gisbourne, *Art Monthly* 173 (1994): 9.

<sup>3</sup> Durham, interview by Gisbourne.

<sup>4</sup> Artist's statement in Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, exhibition catalogue (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1992) 143.

continent now known as North America. This reference to the history of colonial territorial expansion (one only has to recall the Trail of Tears), explains the artist's affirmative response to Richard W. Hill's query as to whether he considered himself to be living in exile. He replied to Hill, who is also of First Nations descent, ". . . I was born in exile. So were you."<sup>5</sup>

Durham's rationale for this response can be explained in an autobiographical essay entitled "Those Dead Guys for a Hundred Years." Therein an exasperated Durham demands "Where am I supposed to go and what am I supposed to do? Some folks say, 'Why don't you go back home and live with your own people and those woods you claim to love so much?' In the first place, those woods are destroyed. In the second place, I am a human in the world in this century, just like you."<sup>6</sup> This latter point relates to Durham's sense of political exigency. In his important 1983 essay, "Creativity and the Social Process," Durham advanced the Cherokee tenet that "the social dialogue is what makes us human," thus compelling him to make his art "out in the world," and not, as previously discussed, in isolation in a studio.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally another, legislative factor ensured Durham's exile into perpetuity. In November of 1990, President George Bush ratified Public Law 101-644 (104 Stat. 4662), "An Act to Promote the Development of Indian Arts and Crafts," which had been introduced by Hawai'i Senator Daniel Inouye (head of a committee on Indian Affairs) and representative Ben Nighthorse Campbell.<sup>8</sup> Supported vigorously by the Native American

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<sup>5</sup> Richard William Hill, "Born in Exile," *Aboriginal Voices* April 1997: 33.

<sup>6</sup> Durham, "Those Dead Guys for a Hundred Years," reproduced in *A Certain Lack of Coherence: Writings on Art and Cultural Politics*, ed. and pref. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press, 1995) 132.

<sup>7</sup> Durham, "Creativity," reproduced in *Coherence* 71. Not surprisingly, pre-colonial Cherokee politics and policy, like many Native societies, operated according to an enviable standard of democracy: no decisions were taken until complete consensus among every tribal member was achieved.

<sup>8</sup> Ward Churchill, *Indians are Us? Culture and Genocide in Native North America* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1994). In an ironic footnote, Churchill notes that Congressman Campbell cannot provide proof of

Art Alliance, a political lobbying organization operating out of Santa Fe, the act aimed to prevent the infringement and appropriation of Native American artistic representations (from carpets, to dolls, jewelry, dreamcatchers and the like) by those who are not certified tribal members. Ostensibly aimed at stopping the flow of products from overseas, which have garnered approximately twenty per cent of the eight hundred million dollar market annually, the aim of the bill was almost universally applauded, but contention arose over its means.<sup>9</sup> PL 101-644 required that individuals claiming to make "United States Indian products" prove their descent through tribal certification.<sup>10</sup> In the bill's favour, Dennis Fox argues:

. . . artists who happen to be American Indian, but who are not recognized by the Act for whatever reason, will not be hindered. They can identify as artists involved with an artistic movement or an aesthetic community, or in some other way describe their accomplishments. The intent of the Act is simply that those who have identified as American Indian for years must now prove that they are American Indian or relinquish that claim.<sup>11</sup>

However, as contemporary painter Kay Walkingstick observes, "The members of no other racial group in the United States have ever had to prove their ethnic heritage in order to sell their art."<sup>12</sup> Further, one year following ratification of the act, details of its implementation and regulation were undefined, and would remain so for another year.<sup>13</sup> Amidst this

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his own purported three-eighths Northern Cheyenne lineage, a stipulation which was to grant his distinction as "the only certified Indian in the US Congress." See page 108.

<sup>9</sup> This figure from Brian Wallis, "Indian Arts Law Penalizes Native Artists," *Art in America* 81.2 (1993): 29, is similar to that given by Dennis Fox in "Indian Arts and Crafts Act: Point," *Akwe:kon Journal* 11.3-4 (1994): 114-15. Churchill's article offers an intriguing view of some of the political imbroglios, such as infighting between lucrative Santa Fe commercial interests, and Randy Lee White, a talented young artist exhibiting in certain Santa Fe galleries at the time.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Shiff, "The Necessity of Jimmie Durham's Jokes," *Art Journal* 51.3 (1992): 74. Shiff provides an extensive discussion of the bill.

<sup>11</sup> Fox 115.

<sup>12</sup> Kay Walkingstick, "Indian Arts and Crafts Act: Counterpoint," *Akwe:kon Journal* 11.3-4 (1994): 116.

<sup>13</sup> Walkingstick 115.

climate of uncertainty hung the spectre of fines of up to \$250 000, and/or a maximum of five years imprisonment for individuals, and \$1 million dollars for galleries who violated the law.<sup>14</sup>

One result occurred immediately upon the bill's approval, when the Five Civilized Tribes Museum in Muskogee, Oklahoma—which realized almost one-third of their exhibiting artists were not certified—closed its doors. Apprehension focused in particular on the museum's massive centerpiece display, *Uprooted by The Trail of Tears*, by deceased master carver Willard Stone. Although Stone, as Ward Churchill remarks, was “long-considered the pre-eminent wood-carver in modern Cherokee history [and] probably a full-blood or close to it,” he was never registered as such.<sup>15</sup> Durham's situation is similar. He has stated that he is not registered “because he doesn't want to be.”<sup>16</sup>

As a result, two of Durham's upcoming exhibitions were canceled, one in Santa Fe, and another to be held at San Francisco's non-profit centre, American Indian Contemporary Arts. Its trustees issued a press release affirming their mission “to exhibit works by Native American artists and comply with Public Law 101-644.”<sup>17</sup> However, accompanying this statement was a letter expressing their concern for the impact of the law's implementation on artists such as Durham.<sup>18</sup> Two alternate exhibition venues were found—*John Rollin*

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<sup>14</sup> These figures from Robin Cembalest's article, “What's in a Name?” *Art News*. 90.6 (1991): 36; and Wallis 29. Although Walkingstick notes that the law allowed galleries to print a disclaimer, clearly—and particularly for non-profit institutions—the stakes were too high to gamble.

<sup>15</sup> Churchill 93. The museum resolved the problem by erecting a sign affirming that unless expressly-stated, the work on display is by artists not officially-certified; it also eliminated the unsubstantiated affiliations from the identifying labels. Following a telephone conversation with the author, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Cembalest 36.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Jacqueline M. Pontello, “A Call to Harms,” *Southwest Art* October 1991: 34.

<sup>18</sup> It did not however, mention that the law may offer interest groups ground on which to silence the production of artists they oppose, which is the case here. Kay Walkingstick, corroborating Churchill's thesis, noted that Santa Fe's Native American Art Alliance, which had accused “many prominent artists,” lobbied vigorously to impede Durham's exhibition at the Center, 117.

*Ridge, Zorro and the Joad Family Players* was hosted in a San Francisco gallery called The Luggage Store, and the University of California at Davis' C.N. Gorman Museum showed *Jimmie Durham and Brian Tripp* (both in 1991). At this time, Durham composed the following artist's statement, which he also circulated in an open letter:

Personally, I do not much like Congress . . . I hereby swear to the following statements: I am a full-blood contemporary artist, of the sub-group or clan called sculptors. I am not an American Indian, nor have I ever seen or sworn loyalty to India. I am not a Native 'American' nor do I feel that 'America' has any right to either name me or to unname me. I have previously stated that I should be considered a mixed-blood; that is, I claim to be a male, but in fact only one of my parents was male.<sup>19</sup>

Durham's deployment of humour is not merely a strategy intended to reduce the concept of blood quantum to ridiculous proportions, it alludes to an essential reality of biogenetics: from Asia's silk road, to the Americas' "turquoise trail," from the crossings of oceans by Vikings and Melanesians, people have fled, moved, migrated, and traveled across the globe since time immemorial. The result is that genetically speaking, almost all human beings have "mixed" blood.

Nonetheless, despite Durham's insertion of this *reductio ad absurdum* in the debate, the bureaucrats remained unmoved. In a strangely ironic conjunction, in February 1993 *Art in America* published both Lucy Lippard's laudatory article, "Jimmie Durham: Postmodernist 'Savage,'" and Brian Wallis' report on PL 101-644.<sup>20</sup> Although now over the two-year deadline for the Act's implementation, Assistant Director of the Arts and Crafts Board Geoffrey Stamm issued a statement which continued to strike more a tone of impending threat than actual execution of the Act. According to Wallis, he "insists that there will be strict enforcement of the law by the FBI and the attorney general."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Marilyn Moyle, "Turbulence at Home and Abroad Marks Shows," *Enterprise* 7 November 1991. Richard Shiff refers to a public open letter, distributed and copyrighted by Durham, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Art in America* 81.2 (1993): 62-9, 55.

<sup>21</sup> Wallis 29.

However, Stamm continues with the more ominous statement, “So, if Jimmie Durham is selling art work as a Cherokee and he does not have certification from the tribe, he will be arrested.” Not surprisingly then, Durham was compelled to address a letter to the editors in a subsequent issue stating, “I am not Cherokee. I am not an American Indian. This is in concurrence with recent U.S. legislation, because I am not enrolled on any reservation or in any American Indian community.”<sup>22</sup>

In fact Durham’s situation illustrates one aspect of the bill—the determination of tribal membership by individual tribes—which appears reasonable, even laudable initially, but proves problematic in reality. The Act allows “artisans” to apply for membership, but as a Department of the Interior document notes, “just as in membership criteria, the criteria for certification . . . are entirely at the discretion of the tribe, and it is possible that some tribes will choose not to certify anyone or even adopt a certification process.”<sup>23</sup> Kay Walkingstick has proffered the example of an urban resident whose father is Hopi (who determine membership matrilineally), and whose mother is Salish (who require members to live on Salish land). Although one hundred per cent Native American, this individual would be denied official membership, and hence the “right” to declare him or herself an aboriginal artist. Moreover, as imprisoned AIM activist Leonard Peltier told Paulette D’Auteuil Robideau in 1991, “This is not our way. We never determined who our people were through numbers and lists. These are the rules of our colonizers, imposed for the benefit of our colonizers at our expense. They are meant to divide and weaken us.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Identities Clarified?” Letter, *Art in America* 81.7 (1993): 23. Durham’s letter is followed by a searing critique of Lippard’s article by Nancy Marie Mitchell (possibly not-coincidentally of Santa Fe), in which she accuses Lippard of offering the “mandatory” boxes to check (i.e. “artist born into a clan”) and for the non-Indian viewer to consume his work. She also implies that Durham is knowingly “mask[ing] his performance” before an ignorant audience. Mitchell’s letter bears remark, not only because it exemplifies the diversity of viewpoints which exist among Native artists, but also because it may indicate an attitude towards Durham’s work which further strengthens Churchill’s case.

<sup>23</sup> Shiff 74-75.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Churchill 106.



Peltier's statement is correct. The idea of determining tribal membership through blood quantum—the percentage of native ancestors in one's familial background—originated to serve colonizing ends. As Pauline Turner Strong and Barrik Van Winkle have noted, "in the flip side" of the naturalization and legitimation of white occupation of North America, "the vanquished are required to naturalize and legitimize themselves in terms of 'blood quantum'—an imposition of the victor's essentialized reckoning of identity."<sup>25</sup> Strong and Van Winkle note the particular enlightenment logic which deduces that because blood is a thing which can be quantified and measured in precise reproductive steps between given ancestors, identity could be accurately determined by individual possession of the proper/official amount.

Thus, with the signing of the Dawes Act in 1887, the federal government declared that all (and only) aboriginal people registered with government census-takers were entitled to 150 acres of land. Not only did this introduce a concept of individual ownership which was blasphemous to peoples such as the Cherokee, it effectively reduced the amount of land held in aboriginal title, conveniently freeing up land for white settlement.<sup>26</sup> Ward Churchill has observed that government rolls "have been maintained in this reductionist fashion ever since, a matter which has served to keep federal expenditures in meeting the government's obligations . . . at a very low level."<sup>27</sup> This may perhaps illuminate the underlying rationale for the unilateral declaration of the "extinction" of the Abenaki nation of Vermont, the Lumbees, and Coatan of North Carolina, and Juafieno (near San Diego) by

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<sup>25</sup> "Indian Blood': Reflections on the Reckoning and Refiguring of Native North American Identity," *Cultural Anthropology* 11.4 (1996): 552.

<sup>26</sup> Churchill 92. Durham writes that to own land privately instead of communally, meant "that we, in other words, had to begin being someone other than ourselves. The mere concept of parcels of owned land is an insult to Cherokees," "Those Dead Guys," *Coherence* 130

<sup>27</sup> Churchill 92. Strong and Van Winkle's incisive article cites Gerald Vizenor in a 1981 novel, "Geometric blood volume was introduced by colonial racists, and from time to time . . . depending upon the demands of federal programs and subsidies, tribal blood volume increases or decreases. You could say that tribal blood volume follows the economic principles of supply and demand," 563.

government officials.<sup>28</sup> As a result, it is highly probable that presently more native people are unenrolled than enrolled on reservations. According to Churchill, of the “probably upwards of seven million persons in the United States today with a legitimate claim” to American Indian descent, only 1.6 million were admitted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.<sup>29</sup>

Cherokee membership exemplifies the complexity and paradoxes inherent in determining tribal descent. Currently, descent is still determined by tribal rolls compiled in the first government census of the Cherokee nation in 1927. At that time, Kay Walkingstick’s grandfather, a lawyer in Tahlequah, served as an interpreter. She recounts:

Many Cherokees, however didn’t sign. Some lived outside Indian Territory and felt they had nothing to gain by making the trip to Tahlequah. Others mistrusted white people—the Trail of Tears was only sixty years in the past. These people were often traditionalists who wanted to retain the old ways. Their land and their way of life was being taken from them. Furthermore, numbering and registering them was a humiliating process, and its purpose was to control people.”<sup>30</sup>

Durham’s response to PL 144, then can be seen as a similar refusal. An open letter he published and circulated at the time of his exhibition closings stated, “I do not want a Cherokee license to make money selling ‘Indian’ art or any other art.”<sup>31</sup> Here he is alluding to a conception of identity as something acquired through conduct, not “owned” through certification, or any other form of bureaucratic dogma. It is also a conception which echoes the clarion call of eminent cultural theorist Cornel West, when he asks the “fundamental question . . . What is the moral content of your identity?”<sup>32</sup> At least in

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<sup>28</sup> Churchill 94.

<sup>29</sup> Churchill.

<sup>30</sup> Walkingstick 115-16.

<sup>31</sup> Shiff 75.

<sup>32</sup> West, “Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism,” *Public* 10 (1994): 12.

“fundamental question . . . What is the moral content of your identity?”<sup>32</sup> Although I could never presume to speak for Durham, in 1989 he stated to Ward Churchill:

I decided on a certain road because I couldn't see another road I could take and stay sane . . . but I do feel like I am on a successful processional path because it is the only path that makes sense to me, and I feel like I am doing it in some way that I can see the next step, I can see where to go because I have done this practice and I've looked at it and I see the next step I can take, I can see society's responses, and my response to society's responses.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, Durham's path is one of irreconciliation, expressed by choosing exile in “Eurasia.”<sup>34</sup> But it is also one on which he is carrying out what Gayatri Spivak calls “the two-step”—the dance between the ‘short-haul solution’ of placing your body in to be counted in true democratic fashion, and the ‘long-haul solution’ of showing “through displacement and deconstruction,” hegemonic complicities.<sup>35</sup> As he maintains:

We need to be in conversation with everything, to dance serious dances with everything. so it is a religious system that attempts to break down separations, and therefore is an integral part of all other systems and activities. . . . That directly involves artistic work with political work: two necessities that are inextricably bound to each other.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> West, “Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism,” *Public* 10 (1994): 12.

<sup>33</sup> Durham, interview by Churchill.

<sup>34</sup> Beginning in 1996, Durham articulated his presence on the continent he calls “Eurasia,” as a project of “discovery.” See Durham, Jean-Pierre Rehm, and Denys Zachropoulos, *Eurasian Project, Stage One: La Porte de l'Europe (Les Bourgeois de Calais, La Leçon d'Anatomie. (A Progress Report)*, exhibition catalogue (Champagne-Ardenne: Le Collège Éditions; Calais: Galerie de l'Ancienne Poste; Antwerp: Galerie Micheline Szwajcer; 1996). While I respect and acknowledge Durham's decision, one reservation I do have surrounds the productivity of his removing himself from the US debate—how then, will it change? As George Lamming wrote in *The Pleasures of Exile*, it is only in working together that the legacy of the original contact between colonized peoples and colonizers will be nullified (London: M. Joseph, 1960) 159.

<sup>35</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, lecture on cassette, The Power Plant International Lecture Series, Toronto, February 24, 1991, 60 mins. I am using hegemony in the Gramscian sense, as Jennifer Daryl Slack explains, as a process where through ideological notions such as “common sense” a “class articulates (or coordinates) the interests of social groups such that those groups actively consent to their . . . status.” In “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies,” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996) 117.

<sup>36</sup> Jimmie Durham and Jean Fisher, *Ni Go Tlunh A Doh Ka*, exhibition catalogue (New York: New York State University, 1986) 6.

**It is a dance of strategies of resistance to the logics of colonial hegemony, and one which compels participation.**

**Thus for the same reason that I initially took pen in hand—in exploration of Durham’s praxis and discourse as a way to think through my own attempt at exile from hegemonic complicity—I am now compelled to set it down to engage in concrete action, and community activism.<sup>37</sup> And although I have necessarily arrived at the end of this road, following (albeit only briefly in the span across time) the route outlined by Durham’s path has taught me that re-membering is a journey which never ends.**

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<sup>37</sup> I must also mention some of the paths I have not taken—a discussion of Durham’s ambivalent relation to the work of Joseph Beuys; the influence of Bertolt Brecht; the difference between Durham’s strategies and that of other, particularly Canadian First Nations artists; a more articulated discussion of the significance of exile in terms of Durham’s identity as both Cherokee, and an artist; to the performance aspect of his practice. For instance, I would be interested in knowing, why, or what circumstances led him to give five different performances in 1990?

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*Crazy for Life*  
Performance for *The Decade Show: Frameworks for Identity in the 80s*  
The Dance Theatre Workshop, Bessie Schoneberg Theater, New York, June 10, 1990  
camera Mark Robison

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Durham enters slowly, wrapped in a brightly-striped blanket, wearing moccasins, a red headband, and clutching a book. He surveys the audience, opens and removes the blanket to reveal a "suit" cut off above the knees, and sits at one end of a wooden black table. Affixed to a chair at the other end is the portrait of George Washington known from American currency.

He reads a passage in Cherokee from the open book on his lap, breaks into song, and then just as abruptly ends. He turns the page, and begins to read in German, and sings a lullaby, which seems to break off in mid-phrase. He again turns the page and continues in Spanish . . . "Buenos noces senors et senioritas . . ." The audience laughs. Again, he sings and seems to end in mid-phrase. The page is turned and Durham recommences in French: "Good evening Ladies and gentlemen, with great pleasure this evening we would like to present to you a real savage, a figure derived from the new world, and his biographic portrait."

He then addresses the audience in English: "Oh yes, that was hardly fair, was it? I speak several languages simply because the university from which I matriculated required knowledge in at least two American Indian languages."

"I feel that I should warn you at this point that during the course of the following performance I will take off my clothes, perform several gratuitously vulgar acts, slightly mutilate myself and splash the blood on the portrait of George Washington." At this point he looks at the portrait of Washington and turns the page.

"Oh, Oh dad. It means a lot to me that you are always here for me. Will someone bring my bow and arrow?" A woman of Asian descent (possibly video artist and filmmaker Shu Lea Chang) wearing a chignon and a cocktail dress brings a long arrow, lays it across the table, bows to the audience, and leaves. Durham regards the laughing audience and turns the page.

He sings, "There once was an Indian maid, who said she couldn't be laid, she laid on her back in a one room shack and let a cowboy stick it in her crack," and then states, "Perhaps that was inappropriate."

He then begins singing "Onward Christian Soldier," and then comments: "Another cheap shot. Certainly, not all killers of American Indians were Christians."

"Here is a real English song: 'I saw her as she came and went . . . among her flowers content . . . no more shall I see her face. There was a word I might have said, but what it was I hardly know . . . now I must say it through, must say it through the day.'" He turns the page.

"I'm sorry Dad. That other stuff was just show business. Will you tell Jesse and the gang that I meant no harm?"

"Those that cannot repeat history are condemned to remember it."

He gestures towards the Washington image, "The leaders of revolutions do not really die, they live on in the arts of people."

"American Indians are known as great orators. But few people realize that great writers have also had an influence among the settlers. I would like now to read to you a brief excerpt from the autobiography of Crazyhorse, the famous leader of the Sioux Indians. From chapter 39 of the autobiography of Crazyhorse, called simply, 'Crazy for Life':

When I was growing up my father worked quite hard and was good at what he did. Nevertheless we were very poor, and the family was large. We did not feel poor because my parents stressed always the importance of gratitude to the Good Lord for everything. I cannot say when I began working, for all of us children had our chores from an early age according to our abilities. Discipline was strict and swiftly administered. Woe betide the child who shirked his duties. But I remember my first job from which I made real money to contribute to the family coffers.

It was of course, only an after school job, yet every day at 3 o'clock I would race to the shop. The boss was a stern but kindly man, from whom I learned a lot, including how to endure the teasing I often got from the experienced workers. In those crucial formative years, I learned from my parents and from our community certain values which have served me well over the years. These values are seldom seen today, and yet would we not all be better off if we held to them, promoted them to the young who today seem so restless and lost.

Among those values, surely the most important is faith and trust in the Good Lord and his plan for each and every of us. Often, when times seem difficult beyond our endurance, we are tempted to imagine that God cares not, it is specifically at those times when it is most important to learn to accept those things that we cannot change. Second, the concept of hard work and individual responsibility. When I was growing up, none of us would have dreamed of relying on government handouts. Success comes only from hard work, and as my father often said, 'God helps those who help themselves.' My father also said, 'Never judge a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins.' Is that not an ingredient of true patriotism? It is so easy to complain about what our elected leaders are doing. What would each of us do in their place, with their responsibilities? What is it that has made this country great, and the envy and hope of peoples the world over? It is that freedom which allows every man, no matter how humble his origins, to achieve what he will, and what he is willing to work for.

My father started with nothing. As a young man he brought his new bride over from Siberia. In those days there was a toll-free bridge across the Bering Strait. Still the going was often rough, and his stories of those times are full of humour and pain. It is because of that that the misunderstanding between my father and I is still so grievous to me. It occurred when I announced my intention to take up a life in the arts. Dad wanted me to go into real estate because there was such a great and open challenge about the country in those days. But also, he had no real grasp of what art was. He would say, 'We have no art; we do all things well.' He particularly detested those artists whom I as an inexperienced young man most admired: Catlin, Rousseau, and especially Gauguin. Naturally, his main concern was whether or not I would be able to properly sustain myself as an artist. For that I had no reply. Sadly, he passed away before I had attained any real accomplishments in my chosen field."

There is a long pause, and the light dims.

## OF SPECIAL INTEREST

### HIS DRUM

WHY IS HIS DRUM SO SMALL? THE LAST INDIAN IN MANHATTAN WANTED TO BE CIVILIZED, AND TAKE HIS PLACE IN SOCIETY, BUT HE DID NOT WANT TO GO "COLD TURKEY", SO EVERY FEW MONTHS HE WOULD GET A SMALLER DRUM, AND WOULD SING SHORTER SONGS.



← HIS DRUM  
(SEE DISPLAY)

### HIS BED

WHY IS HIS BED SO SMALL? LO, THE POOR LITTLE INDIAN WAS SO POOR HE HAD TO BUY IT AT A ½ OFF SALE.

Figure 1. *Of Special Interest* (detail, *Bedia's First Basement*), 1985. Installation, 22 Wooster Gallery, New York.

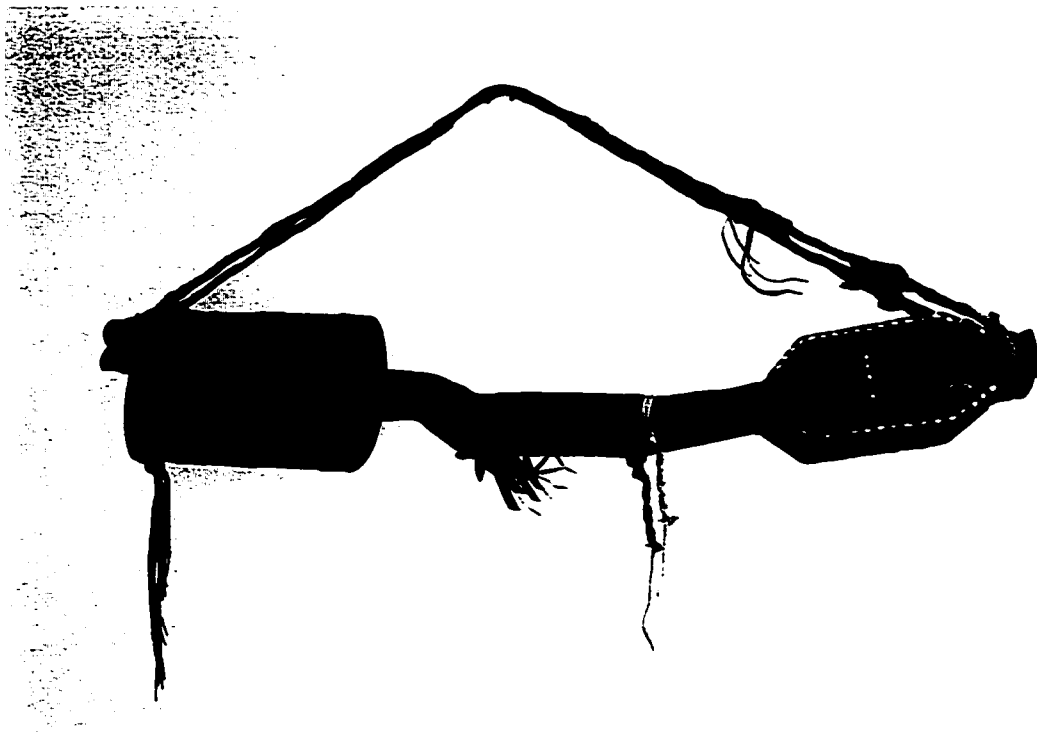


Figure 2. *Bedia's Muffler*, 1985. Metal, leather, beads, shells, acrylic paint. 86 x 115.

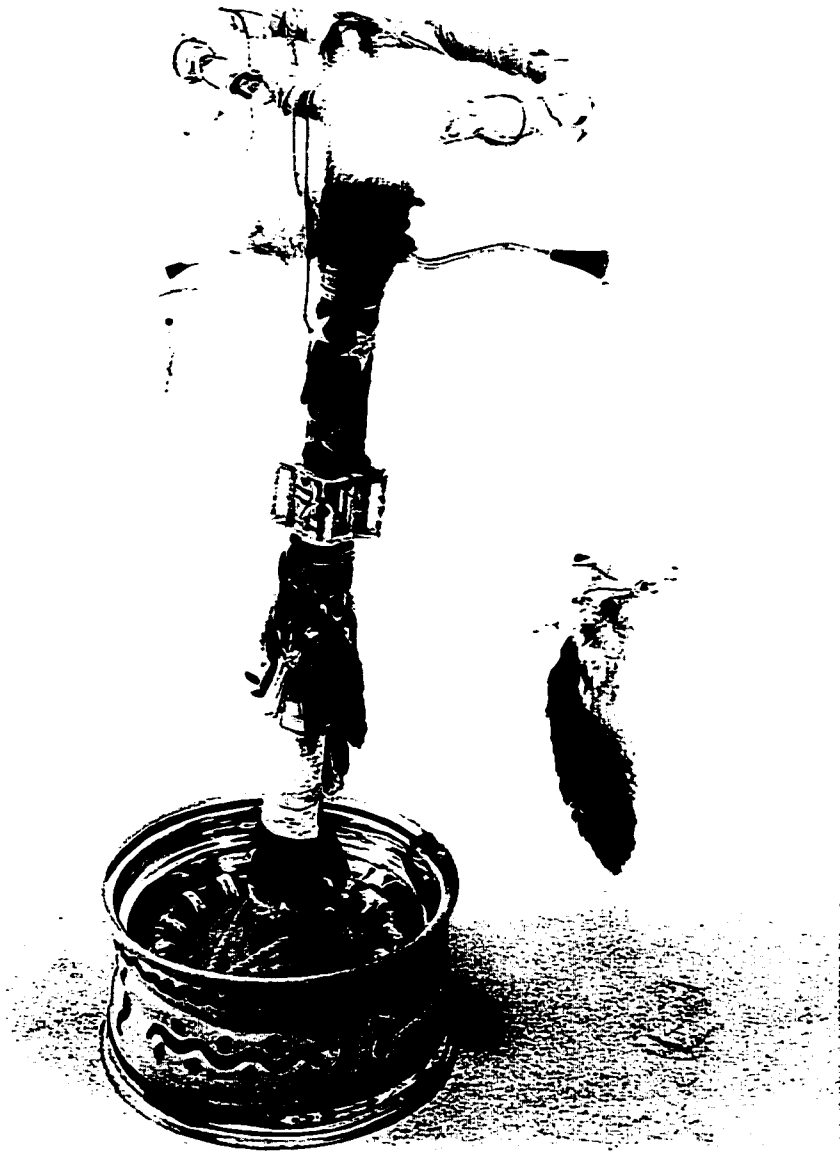


Figure 3. *Bedia's Stirring Wheel*, 1985. Aluminum, leather, fur, paint, feathers, skull, string, cloth, stirring wheel. 115 x 46.



Figure 4. *Tlunh Datsi*, 1985. Skull, feathers, fur, turquoise, acrylic paint, shells, wood. 103 x 91 x 86.



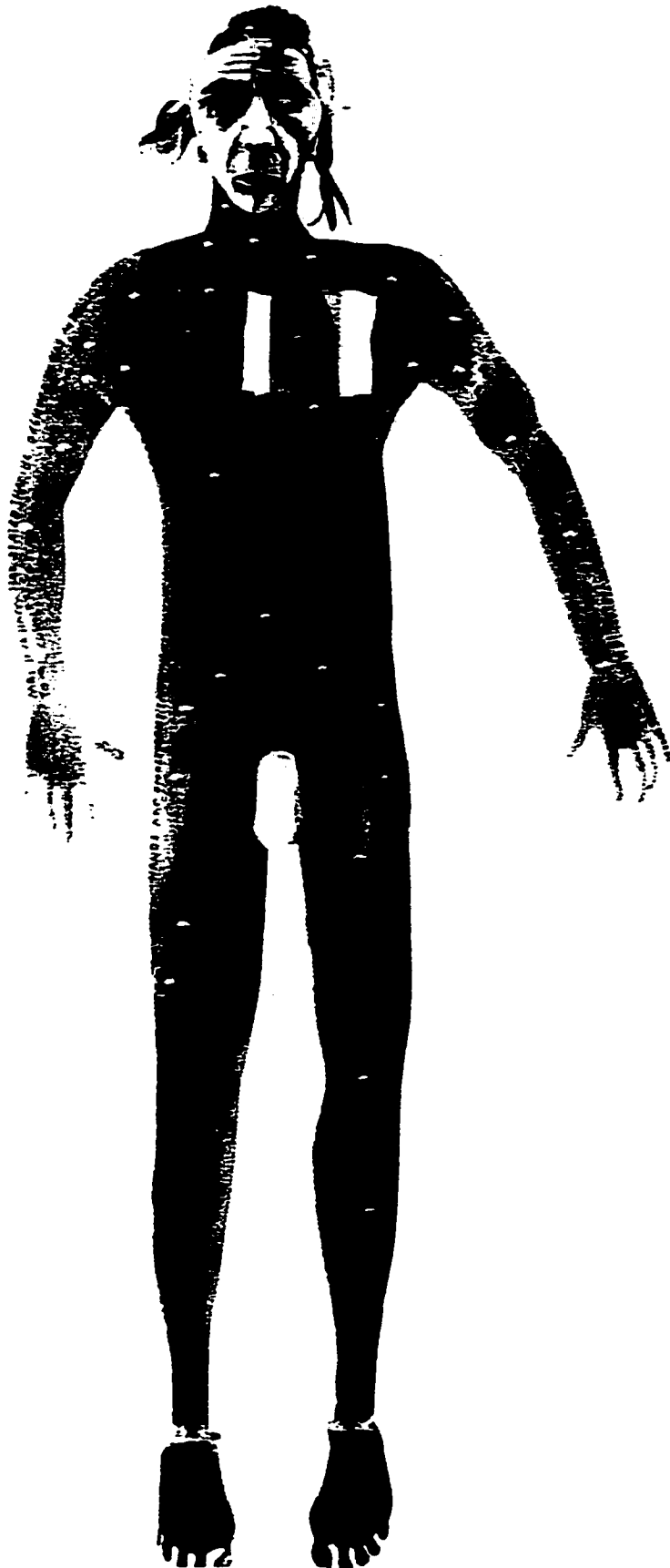


Figure 5. *Self-Portrait*, 1987. Canvas, wood, paint, feather, shell, turquoise, metal. 173 x 86 x 29. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

'Hello! I'm Jimmie Durham! I want to explain a few Basic Things About Myself. In 1986 I was 46 years old. As an artist I am confused about many things but basically my health is good and I am willing and able to do a wide variety of Jobs. I am Actively Seeking Employment'.

'Mr. Durham has stated that he believes he has an addiction to Alcohol, Nicotine, Caffeine, and does not sleep well'.

'Useless nipple'.

'I am basically light-hearted'

'I have 12 hobbies!'

'11 house plants!'

'People like my Poems'.

'His Abdominal Muscle Protrudes Approx. 3-12 inches'.

'Hands are small, Sensitive'.

'I have a crooked back'.

'Indian Penises are unusually large and colorful'.

'Appendix Scar'.

'My skin is not really this dark but I am sure that many Indians have coppery skin'.

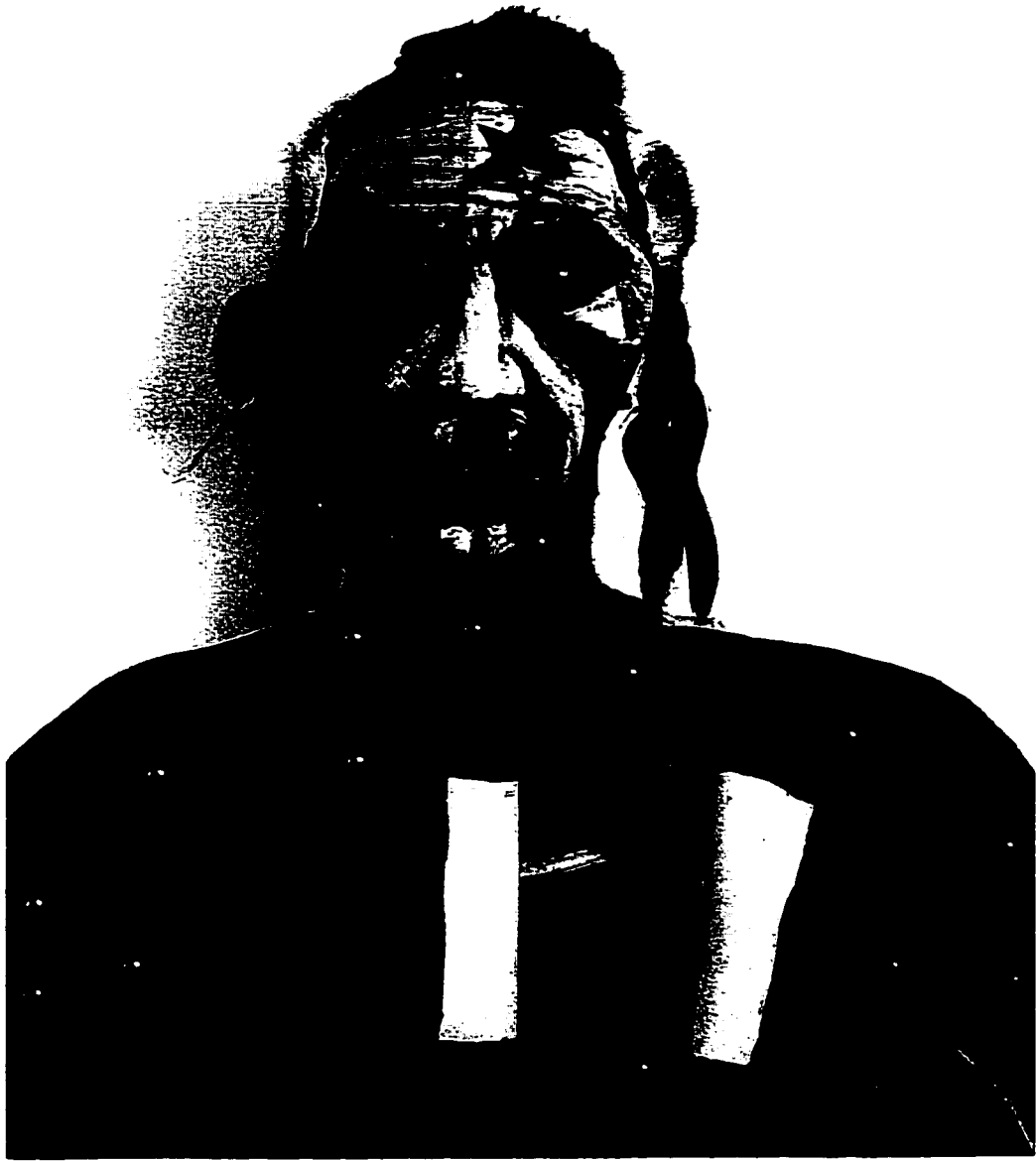
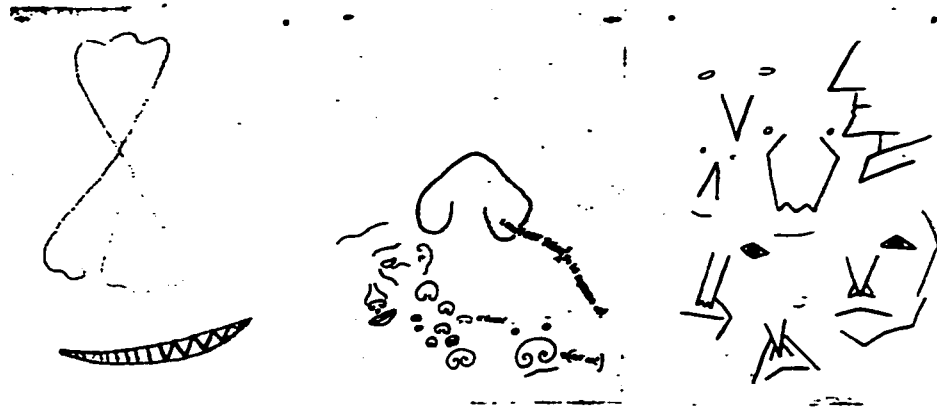


Figure 6. *Self-Portrait (detail).*





IF I CROSS MY EYES AND CLOSE MY  
LEFT EYE AT THE SAME TIME THIS IS  
THE POINT OF MY HEAD THAT I CAN SEE.  
(EXCEPT I DON'T KNOW IF VERY WELL.)

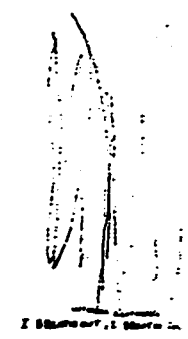


Figure 8 *Caliban Codex*, 1992. Pencil on paper. 53 x 36.



Figure 9. *Small Action Painting*, 1992. Paint and dirt on paper. 50 x 48.

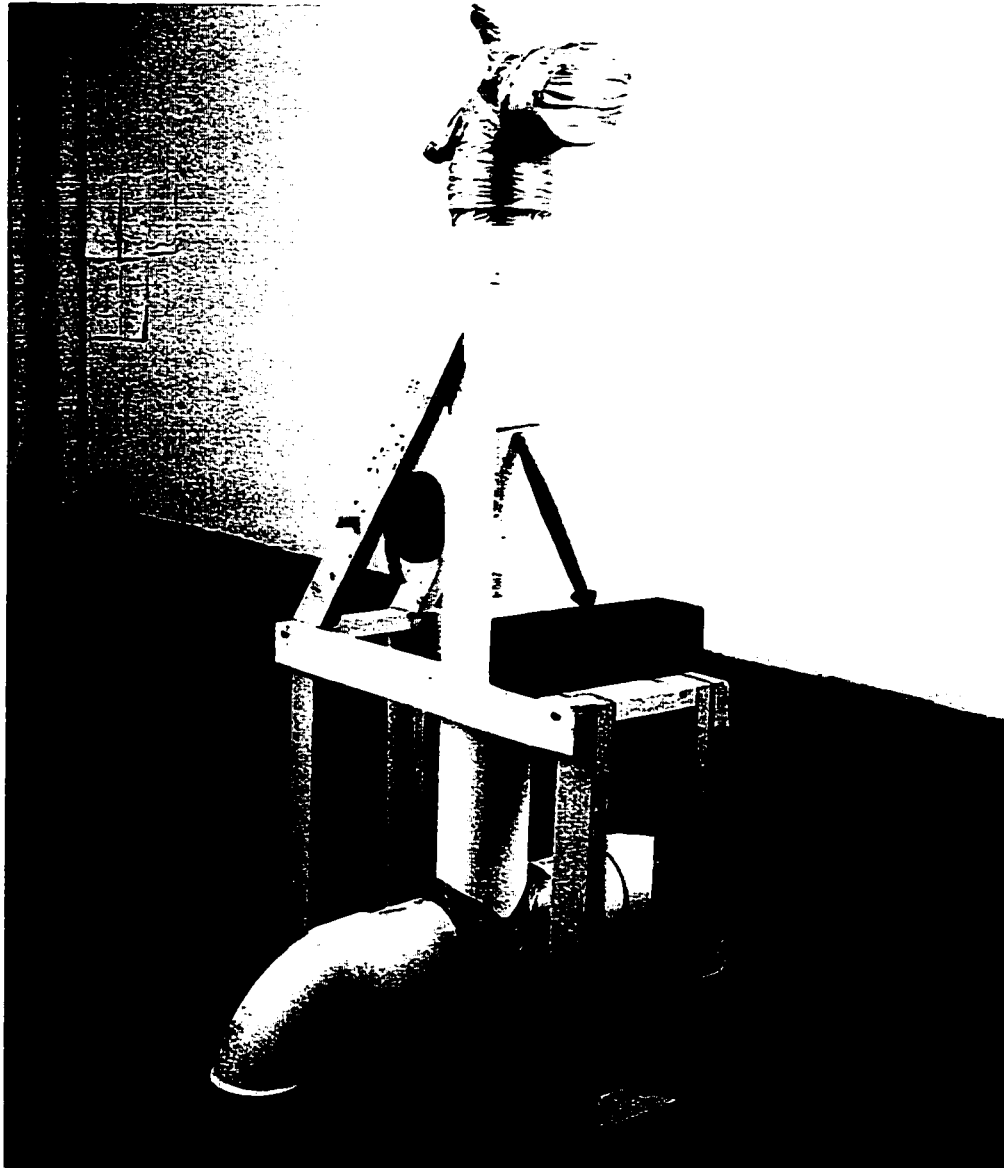


Figure 10. *Untitled (Janus)*, 1992. Wood, plastic, PVC pipe, paper, paint, insulating tape, text. 195 x 102 x 86.

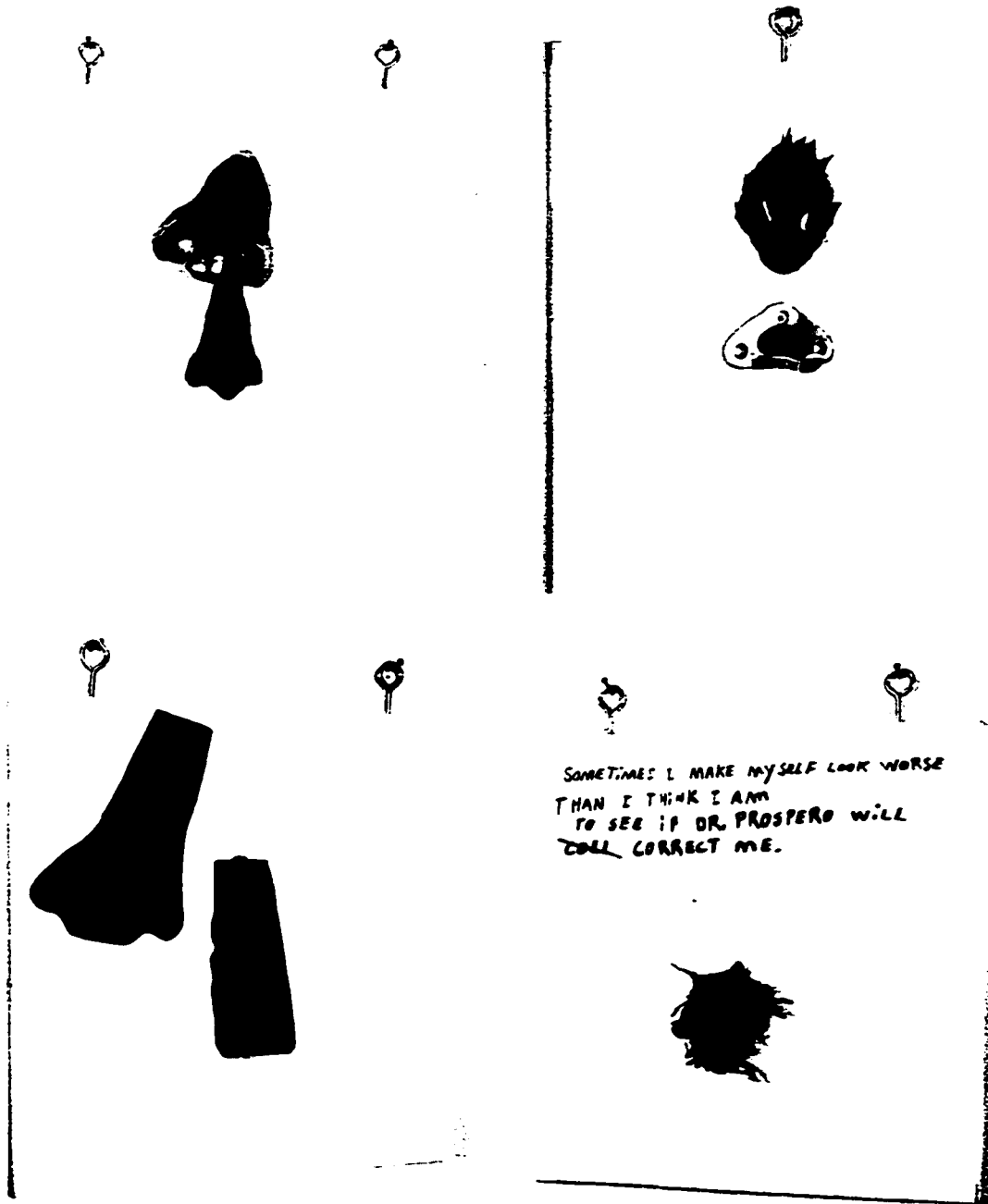
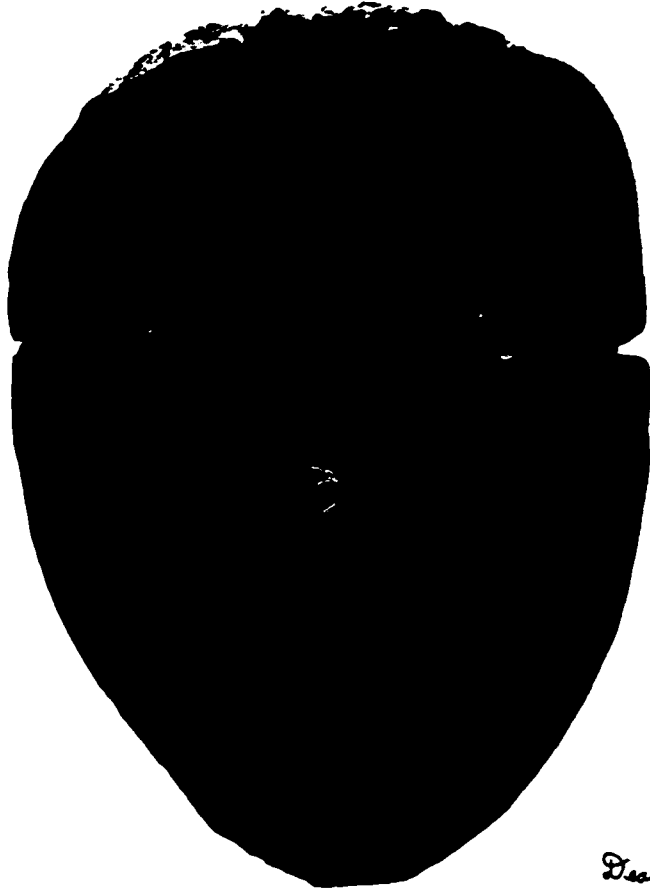


Figure 11. All: *Untitled*, 1992. mixed media. 49 x 36-38 x 6-9.



Dear Dr. Prospero,

May I, with great humility, please  
present to you, as an embarrassingly  
inadequate small token of my extreme  
gratitude for the constant encouragement,  
extreme patience and inspired friendship  
(I hope!) which you have so generously  
employed to show me a Better Way,  
this self-portrait? I hope you will  
always remember me. (But I still wish  
I knew what my nose looks like! ha, ha!)

Your grateful student,  
Caliban

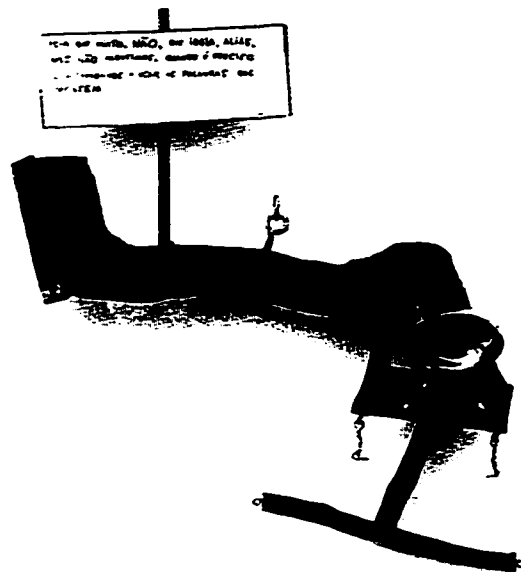
Figure 12 *Untitled (Caliban's mask)*, 1992. Glass eyes, button, mud, PVC pipe, glue. 24 x 16 x 5.





**Figure 13** Speech deprivation mask, Installation and performance, with Maria Thereza Alves. 1992. Museo de Monterry, Monterry, Mexico.

**Figure 14** Speech deprivation mask, Installation and performance, 1992. Museo de Monterry, Monterry, Mexico.



*Acha que minto, Não, que ideia, alias, nós não mentimos,  
quando é preciso limitamo-nos a usar as palavras que mentem* 1995  
("Do you say I am lying? Certainly not, we have never lied to each other;  
when precision limits us, we use words to lie for us")  
Wood, canvas, paint, steel, sea shell, metal coin  
62 x 66 x 17 cm  
Courtesy of Módulo – Centro Difusor de Arte, Lisbon

Figure 15. *Acha que minto . . .*, 1996. Wood, canvas, paint, steel, sea shell, metal coin. Módulo—Centro difusor de Arte, Lisbon, Portugal. 62 x 66 x 16.

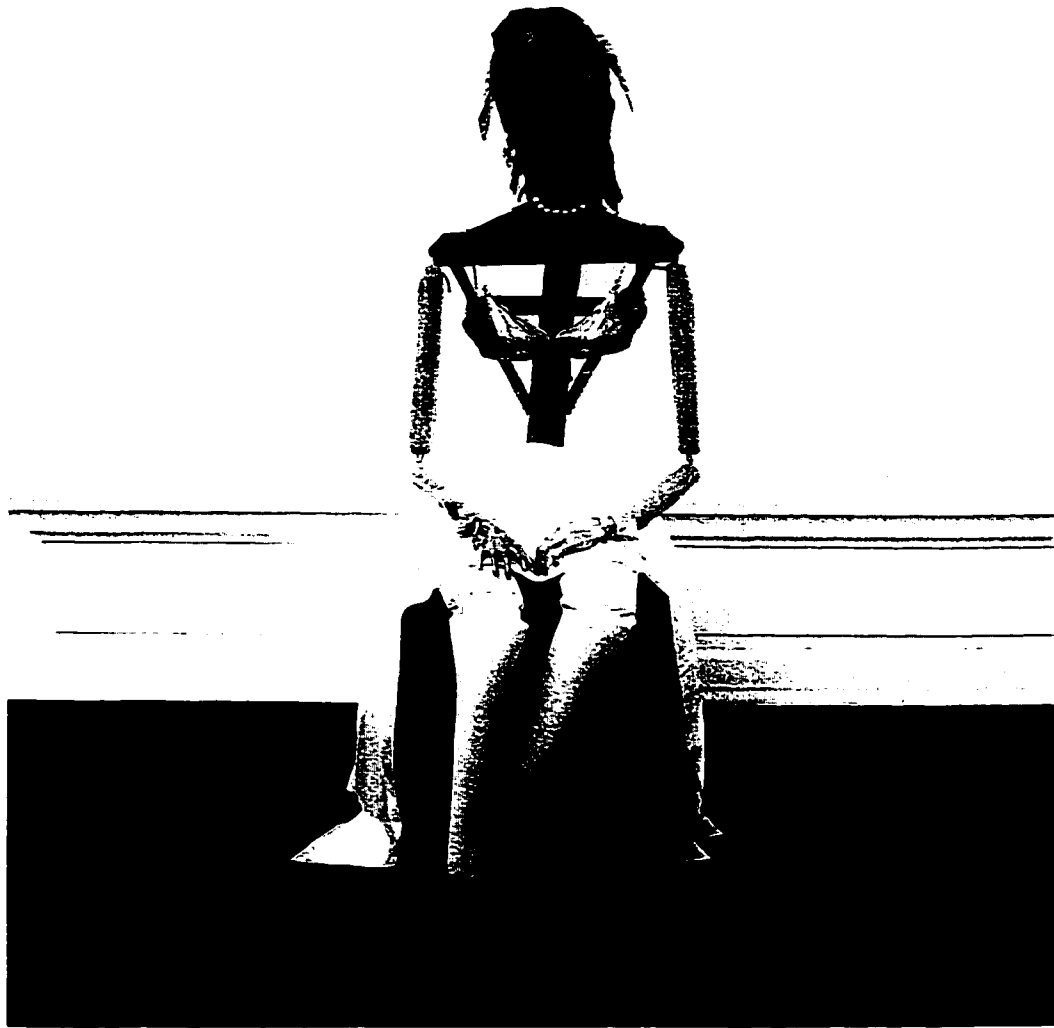


Figure 16. *La Malinche*, 1988-91. Wood, cotton, snakeskin, watercolour, polyester, metal. 168 x 56 x 84.

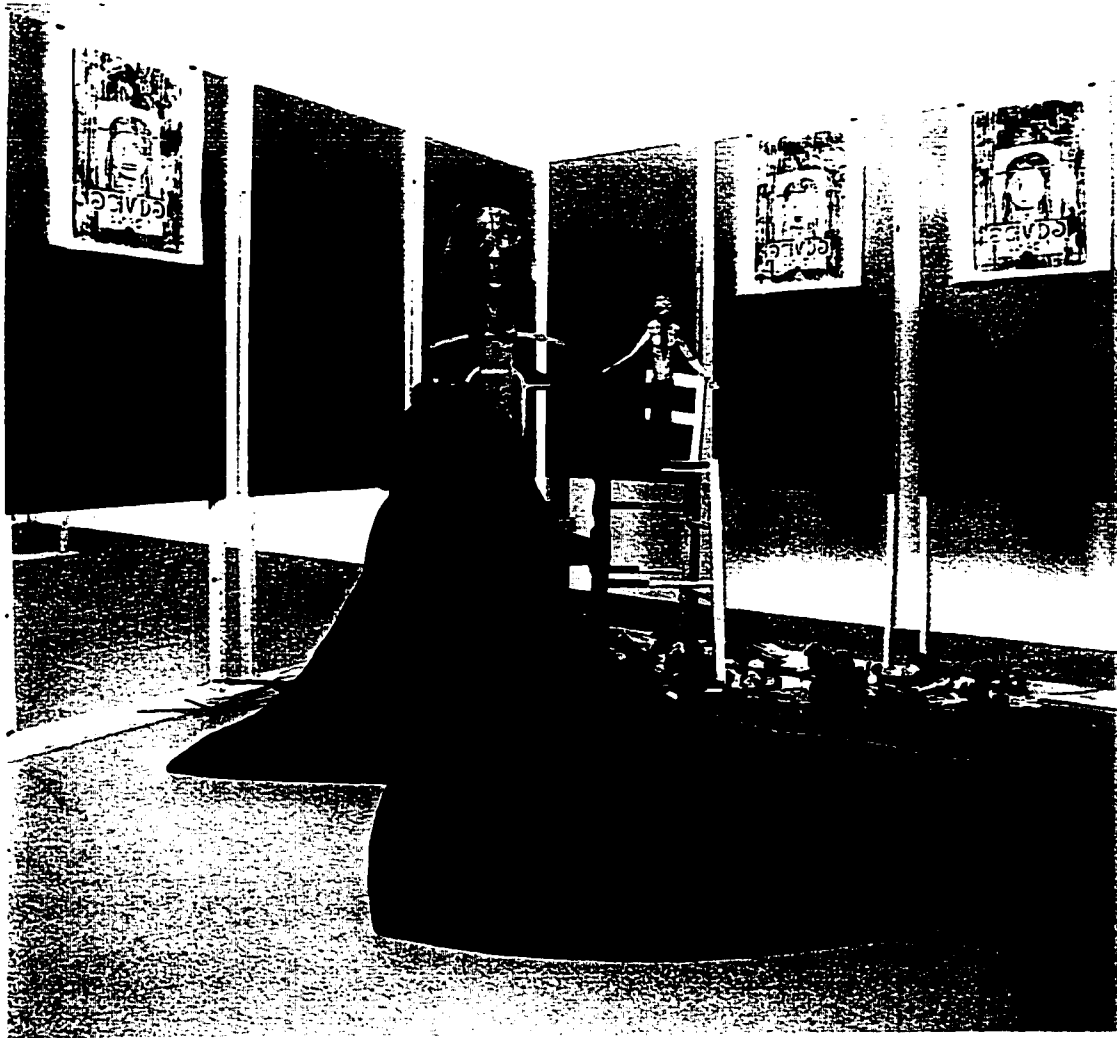


Figure 17. Installation, *Pocahontas and the Little Carpenter in London*, 1988. Matt's Gallery, London.



Figure 18. Installation, *Original Re-Runs*, 1993. ICA, London.