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The “Disappointing Object:” A Challenge to Dominant Epistemologies Through the Art
of Jimmie Durham

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

Catherine Czacki

Committee in charge:

Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair
Professor Grant Kester, Co-Chair
Professor Elizabeth Newsome
Professor William Arctander O’Brien
Professor Mariana Wardwell

2016

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Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The “Disappointing Object:” A Challenge to Dominant Epistemologies Through the Art
of Jimmie Durham

by

Catherine Czacki

Master of Arts in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair
Professor Grant Kester, Co-Chair

In the writing that follows, I argue that the artistic oeuvre of Jimmie Durham constitutes a critique of dominant epistemological worldviews. This project approaches Durham’s writing and artwork using dedicated sections as lenses through which to analyze and interpret his visual and linguistic output. The individual sections cite

sociological and historical sources such as Michel Foucault, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer; anthropological sources that address materials such as stone, dirt and debris, including Mary Douglas, Tim Ingold, Leslie Marmon Silko and Nurit-Bird David; art historical sources such as Laura Mulvey and Rosalind Krauss; literary/philosophical sources that discuss intimacy with objects and materials of interest to Durham, namely the writing of Roger Caillois and Francis Ponge on stones; as well as sources discussing colonial encounters with differing cosmological ordering systems and methods of engaging with materials—namely those material operations categorized as “fetishes”—supported by the scholarship of Peter Pels and William Pietz. Though the sources are mainly used to address Durham’s work through sections, the sources themselves cross over categories or disciplines, and are therefore deployed throughout. This weaving together of scholarship aims at addressing Durham as a complex artistic producer who functions within the elite establishment of the art world while simultaneously critiquing dominant modes of structuring knowledge and aesthetic production. Durham’s sculptures and writing foreground the human manipulation of language and material as a central stage for negotiation with what is deemed correct, developed, or logical material use—further investigating the human tendency to place nature and culture in dichotomous positions. *The stone, as an object, is thus launched as an agent of critique.*

Section 1: The “Disappointing Object”

Objects are the immediate future, in the sense of reaching out for something (or trying to avoid it) — of desire.

But let’s face it, objects are treasure. There is that truly strange phenomenon of fetishism and its relative, money. That is not, however, what I want to consider...

It is extremely difficult for an object to lie. Often someone makes an object dishonestly, and presents it as something that it is not. People are deceived for a while, then upon discovery of the deception discard the object. At that moment grace descends, (or perhaps ‘ascends’ is more appropriate). The object itself never lied. As we now see it in the vacant lot or garbage dump, its brave, confessional honesty shines. ‘Yes, I am plastic and glue and impermanent paint’, it proclaims with humble courage. As an act of saintly generosity it further explains, ‘Don’t worry, I’m completely useless.’¹

The “disappointing object”²

The above Jimmie Durham quotation accentuates the expectations humans have of objects and the material world, generally seen as open to our desired outcomes. Our disappointment in the object is eloquently addressed by Durham when he announces its reply to us, “Don’t worry, I’m completely useless.”³ The “vacant lot” or “garbage dump” are the spaces where we are most disappointed in our material friends, friends that do not

¹ Jimmie Durham, "The Wonder of Humanity in No Particular Order," Things That Fall, accessed September 01, 2013, <http://www.thingsthatfall.com/jimmie-durham.php>.

² The “disappointing object” is a term borrowed from psychoanalytic theory. Though this is not the lens through which I will evaluate Durham’s work, the phrase is appropriate to how he writes about our human subjective desire towards objects *performing*. See Melanie Klein and Robert Waska’s scholarship for a further discussion on this term.

³ Olu Oguibe, e-mail message to author, March 24, 2014. ‘All material have intrinsic value, and that value may change or appreciate, decline or escape recognition or acknowledgement, depending on location, context, time or circumstance. The driftwood or bone in Jimmie’s work is not inherently useless out on the beach or the burial mound, neither is the plastic can in Hazoum’s work or the rusted shovel in Beuys’s, or the discarded bottle top in David Hammons’s work or El Anatsui’s, no matter the state of it. The only reason they can be used in or translated into art is because, on the contrary, each has inalienable value. They have utility and that utility is multivalent. They are usable in so many different ways, so, they can’t be both usable and inherently useless all in one.’ In the above email conversation with historian and artist Olu Oguibe, it was pointed out to me all materials potentially have ‘intrinsic’ or ‘inalienable’ value; anything can be used to make artwork. This idea of objects or things being ‘useless’ is then contestable. They may appear ‘useless’ to some members of society, based on subjective feelings about the material world, but they are seldom completely useless.

ascend in a transcendental form of grace, but rather point firmly to their *descent* into material states of being.⁴ When an object is seen as “dishonest,” Durham says this is when we need to think about what the object is, as it is not the object that has “lied,” rather the way in which it has been arranged by human hands that creates the misconception. There is a perceived hierarchy to matter, particularly in Western thought, that can be linked to the soul/body split popularized by Cartesian philosophy, though it can also be earlier traced to *The Great Chain of Being* (Figure 1), here illustrated in a 1579 drawing from Didacus Valades, *Rhetorica Christiana*. The concept for *The Great Chain of Being* stems from the Aristotelian philosophical tradition that proposes a rational ordering system and taxonomy for the things of the world, *man being* distinct from the experiential/sensual world, ultimately positioned with the power of concept closer to the apex (God), via the wielding of language and knowledge. The recognition of “being human” was made possible by taxonomy, by the separation of *subjects and objects*, additionally relegating some humans to lower positions on the chain, *closer to animal/mineral/vegetable forms*. Humans have used this power of language, of abstraction away from material, to warrant their position *above* other creatures and things

⁴ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 73-74. Rosalind Krauss has written extensively about George Bataille’s notion of the ‘base’ as the term relates to art objects. Most notably in *No More Play*, Krauss discusses the shift from vertical to horizontal in the work of Alberto Giacometti, his desire to have sculptures be ‘horizontal’ instead of ‘vertical’ and their placement on the ground, closer to the ‘base’. ‘For the rotation of the axis onto the horizontal plane was either specified by the contents of the work as the “lowering” of the object, thereby joining it simultaneously to the ground and to the real – to the actuality of space and the literalness of motion in realtime.’ This same notion is also elaborated upon in her book, *Bachelors*, on page 8 where she states: ‘That the word *alteration* could thus, like the Latin *altus*, have the internally contradictory double meaning of both “high” or sacred and “low” or rotten is evidence once more of formlessness doing its job. And the alteration Bataille saw at work in the caves, even while the painters promoted the detailed description of animal life, was a lowering or debasing of the specifically *human* form.’



Figure 1:
1579 drawing of *The Great Chain of Being* from Didacus Valades, *Rhetorica Christiana*. Public domain.

of the world. Giorgio Agamben, in a section of his book *The Open: Man and Animal*, titled “Taxonomies” states: “*Homo Sapiens*, then is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human,”⁶ *The Great Chain of Being* (Figure 1) is then the visual/illustrative map for this “machine,” attempting to give order to *the world of things*, placing human subjectivity (particularly white/male) closest to the absolute. At the base of our current version of the chain is no longer the category of plants and minerals, but instead, arguably, that of dust and debris. *Progress relegates large portions of the material world to the bottom tier of debris*. What was plant and mineral now consists of industrial waste—the outcome of progress and productivity. Durham’s work addresses the material past and present of *human cultures* and challenges the dominant order of things that constitutes the system of progress.

For Michel Foucault, the scientific tradition of empiricism, and accordingly Western human knowledge, are based on the elaboration of a system of taxonomy and thought that can be traced back to the 16th century. This system relies on principles of “resemblance” to order and classify the things of the world, via empirical study and the matching of “like to like.”⁷ How particular systems of taxonomy and material categorization that constitute current scientific and technological systems became

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 26.

Later on page 27: ‘Linnaeus, who defined *Homo* as the animal that *is* only if it recognizes that it *is not*...’

⁷ In Michel Foucault’s book, *The Order of Things*, he discusses the systems by which human beings name and organize the world into categories. His book deals with traditions that are termed as Western, and provides a historical narrative around taxonomy that takes resemblance as the basic principle for naming things in the world. *The Order of Things*, through its narration of the historical use of resemblance, reveals the arbitrariness of how this particular ordering system, among many in the human domain, became the ‘dominant’ one.

dominant—relates to notions of progress, based on enlightenment thinking, and closes out possible alternatives such as *myths or storytelling*. This has ramifications in the treatment of the material world, as in the model that we currently tend to hold, many elements of material life are considered dirty or waste objects and are then relegated to *base positions, things which we wish to hide and not see*. Additionally, if we regard humans as *outside of and above nature*, there is little reason to be considerate of how the material world is manipulated. For one system to emerge as the authoritative system by which all logical conclusions can be drawn, also necessitates *proving wrong* other human systems of negotiation (such as *myth or storytelling*). What emerges in Durham's work, is a considered critique of this dominance of taxonomy, scientific progress, and the human construction of *time and culture*. Through his work, we are challenged to rethink categorizations, such as *the fetish*, and consider how human manipulation of the material world is reflected in our dichotomizing of *nature versus culture*.

Section 2: Dust/Debris

Dust/Debris

To begin with dust is to begin with one of the lower perceived elements in the ontology of being. Dust is dirty, invisible until it accumulates into a larger mass, moving and persisting through our human constructed spaces and activities. In Leslie Marmon Silko's article about the material practices of Pueblo Indians, there is a description of dust as elemental instead of incidental:

You see that after a thing is dead, it dries up. It might take weeks or years, but eventually if you touch the thing, it crumbles under your fingers. It goes back to dust. The soul of the thing has long since departed. With the plants and wild game the soul may have already been borne back into bones and blood or thick green stalk and leaves. Nothing is wasted. What cannot be eaten by people or in some way used must then be left where other living creatures may benefit. What domestic animals or wild scavengers can't eat will be fed to the plants. The plants feed on the dust of these few remains.⁸

Silko's discussion of dust reveals that it is constituent of various materials: shed human skin, the animal or plant matter around in the air, all things that leave a small trace of material behind. Dust, like debris, is seen as material unworthy of the higher states, yet it is at the base of *all material existence*. Dust continues to cycle through states of being, those considered living and non-living. Dust is a challenge to systems of ordering, as it is a composite material that defies one category and like debris is perceived as impure, or counter to cleanliness. As Mary Douglas points out in her book, *Purity and Danger*, cultures set up ordering systems to establish which things are pure or impure and who can

⁸ Leslie Marmon Silko, "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 264.

or can't touch the things in said categories. Douglas specifically states, "there is no such thing as dirt," that it is rather the thing which defies classification or does not fit into classification in terms of purity that is categorized as dirt.⁹ These notions of purity underlie the systems by which a culture organizes itself, how it negotiates intruding elements (internally or externally), and how this negotiation keeps the chaos of the natural world in check. Dirt is an "offense against order," the keeping of order that is based upon some material allowances, while other materials are relegated to a low, dangerous, chaotic or other state.¹⁰ Douglas identifies this not as a negative act—the offence of dirt and the implementation of order to combat it—but instead as a commonly shared means by which human cultures order the world. In the case of Durham's visual work and his writing, he stands in favor of some objects that do not fit within the traditional Western systems of value, but which in the art market can be seen as valuable if they become sufficiently attached to the mythology of an artist. Though George Bataille argues that we "no longer have a relationship to myth," or at least we no longer *believe in it*,¹¹ artists engage in *myth and storytelling* as strategies to frame their

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), xvii. 'They (Durkheim and Mauss) demonstrated explicitly that classification is inherent in organization; it is not a cognitive exercise that exists for its own sake. I thought I had made the same assumption explicit: organizing requires classifying, and that classification is the basis of human coordination.' 'They should remember that there is no such thing as dirt; no single item is dirty apart from a particular system of classification in which it does not fit.'

¹⁰ Ibid., 2. 'Hygiene, by contrast, turns out to be an excellent route (to understanding religions), so long as we can follow it with some self-knowledge. As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behavior in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment.'

¹¹ Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, trans. Michael Richardson, comp. Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994)

visual/subjective output—and it is artistic mythology, the story told by the artist (or subsequent art historians) that warrants a prolonged interest in an art object, and constitutes part of its cultural *value*.

Durham's method of assembling objects reveals an *intuitive* reaction to materials. Rather than illustrating a particular skill or dexterity with materials (which there is ample evidence of in his earlier works as he is a master wood worker), his object choices reflect a position that prioritizes thinking about what the material *is*, instead of every material simply being a thing to be manipulated by human hands. His objects are also categorized as referencing “non-Western” identities, an interesting categorization that will be later discussed in relation to the term *fetish*. Durham's investment in material, as *what it is*, is also illustrated by his choice to use his own handwriting in his art texts, forgoing typewritten or computer printed options that are seen as cleaner and more authoritative in their ability to convey an ordered, so-called *logical*, message. He performs an act of “correspondence” between his writing and objects, which according to Tim Ingold, is a type of relationship between living agents and things. Ingold uses “letter writing” as a concrete example to illustrate “correspondence,” and describes the writing of a letter as an act of correspondence between the mind of the letter writer, their material hand, the pen, the paper—and further the hands and minds of the recipient of the message. For Ingold, this act of “correspondence” is also that which constitutes the dance of life, *life intertwined*—coextensive.¹² Dust, is then an appropriate metaphorical and literal material,

¹² Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 105.

as it is always coextensive, *always there* in the dance of life, both as a base layer and as a material record of all that transpires. Though Durham does not use dust specifically, his interest in deep materiality, *inherent properties*, is evidenced in how he addresses the nature/culture dichotomy with his material use. His arranging and activating objects from these categories in relation to each other, exemplified by his pairing of so-called *natural* objects, with so-called *cultural* objects—such as stones and cars—additionally engages this idea of debris. The materials in Durham’s “garbage dump” initially descend, but ascend *from their status as trash* as art objects, while still being “completely useless.” Debris is, put most simply, *unwanted material*. It can be either excess or waste product, though it is essentially what we wish we didn’t see, the stuff that humans compulsively try to hide, which in some cases (As Durham addresses in his Diary, *Nature in the City*)¹³, *can be nature itself*—but debris is also the remnants of capitalist production that has found their way to Durham’s “garbage dump,” or the things that break and can no longer be reconciled in terms of use-value. The possibility of *ascendance* here, comes as the object of art made from debris can become a *fetish* in the contemporary art market,¹⁴ holding a precarious position as both a remnant of the waste of production and high cultural object. Once it is removed from its status as trash, taken out of its contextual heap of mass consumer culture, *the object has the potential to become elevated*. This

¹³ Jimmie Durham, *Nature in the City* (Berlin: Büro Friedrich, 2000).

¹⁴ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986). I refer again here to Krauss’s discussion of Giacometti from *No More Play*, as she posits that Giacometti desired to ‘de-hierarchicalize’ sculpture by placing it on the ground. This gesture seems in retrospect futile as a critique, since all objects are capable of being reified in the art market regardless of how close to the ground they are. This is an interesting notion in regards to Durham’s work, which questions our human notions of *hierarchy* and human exemptionalism in the world of things.

issue of material worth is further complicated by the history of what constitutes a fetish, an object that expresses “uneasy materiality” in terms of so-called *logical* material use, both in terms of the *material as what it is*, and how the object was or is used in daily practices. How particular cultures decided to activate particular materials, is rendered strange when revealed in a new cultural context, creating a cultural rupture. It is *culture*, or more accurately, *the authority of a dominant culture*, that dictates value—and sometimes that value comes from the perceived strangeness of the everyday activities of another culture.¹⁵ *As the old adage goes “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure”—the categories of trash and treasure are malleable, hard to solidify.*

¹⁵ Examples of this abound: in *attempting to trace* the origin of colonially acquired objects, cases where the provenance can be found, there is frequently a ritual/social function to the object that was embedded in the everyday practices of a particular culture. See William Pietz *The Problem of the Fetish I, II, and III* and Kwame Anthony Appiah’s “Why Africa, Why Art?”

Section 3: Nature Crushing Culture

Nature Crushing Culture

Durham makes and arranges objects and writes poetry and essays around the themes of material and/or human subjectivity. Both his writing and his art contain as a central theme the acknowledgement of human negotiations between *nature and culture*, and address the subjectivity of Durham as the *maker and arranger of things*, a human among *the things of the world*. His culture-crushing rock, titled *A Meteoric Fall to Heaven* (Figure 2), shows an assertive material that literally and symbolically destroys the culturally constructed chair. He launches an inquiry into culturally defined objects, such as chairs, in his writing and his sculptures. The chair is an instance of “affordance,”¹⁶ as the chair is known to be for sitting if one is in a culture that uses and embraces chairs. If, however, one comes from a culture that sits on the floor or crouches, not elevating the human above the material world, the chair might not present itself as a *natural* or obvious object. Durham’s chair is an “affordance”—as per the term coined by James Gibson, defined as an object that insinuates its purpose for use through its suggestive shape in relation to human bodies. Durham approaches the chair as an “affordance”, a *human cultural construction*, in his book *Between the Furniture and the Building (Between a Rock and a Hard Place)* where he says:

Everyone knows that paintings of Biblical scenes are not historically accurate about what sorts of clothes were fashionable in those days; why don’t we think about the inaccuracy of the furniture at The Last Supper? Jesus didn’t have a chair that evening. There were no chairs in Israel then,

¹⁶ James J. Gibson coined the term ‘affordances’ in his 1977 article “The Theory of Affordances”

except perhaps some thrones for Herod and Pontius Pilate. Folks went to their favorite restaurants and were given cushions if they were lucky. We can see in some way chairs are thrones – seats of power. It is not for nothing that the chairman chairs the meeting. (In German the chairman is the “Vorsitzender”; because German doesn’t call its stools cathedrals. It doesn’t want to say “Stoolman” so it calls our attention only to the fact that the chairman sits before us, and leaves to our imagination what sort of object he might be fore sitting on.) They’re always crouching, aren’t they? And when they are empty they always look empty.¹⁷

Durham’s observations identify holes in perceived historical truths, while also addressing the ease at which we now accept the chair as a normal part of our perceptual world, our *everyday experience and use*. In the same book, Durham also gives notice to pop-cultural uses of the chair and its power dynamics when he discusses Sharon Stone’s alteration of the power symbol of the chair in the film *Basic Instinct*.¹⁸ The actress’s last name becomes entangled within what initially seemed like a simplistic joke about a chair being crushed by a stone. In *A Meteoric Fall to Heaven* (Figure 2), a fall ‘to’ Heaven suggests that “Heaven” is the seat of the chair; the place where the human end sits is then “Heaven,” suggestive that material instead of ascending descends.¹⁹ The word *to*, is directional, Heaven is indicated as a place of *future travel*. As will be discussed later, Durham in multiple areas of his writing and artwork criticizes this idea of linear futurity, in other words, *progress*. The scene he addresses from the film with Stone, centers around her crossing and uncrossing her legs, something that Durham states is facilitated by the chair, and in fact would be impossible without it. This leg crossing also reveals

¹⁷ Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham: Between the Furniture and the Building (between a Rock and a Hard Place)* (München: Kunstverein München Berliner Künstlerprogramm DAAD, 1998), 27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27. Durham points out that it is the chair that gives the human body a ‘rear end’, and that without chairs our bottom would be our feet.



Figure 2:
Jimmie Durham, *A Meteoric Fall to Heaven*, 2000. Image courtesy of Christine Koenig Gallery, Vienna, Austria.

genitalia not covered by underwear. This seems a pertinent reference for Durham, not only in terms of the chair as a seat of *power* being usurped by Stone's overt (and female) sexual act, but additionally because that space of human shame and very material *origin*, the female womb, *the active space that generates human life*—is frequently placed in opposition of the pure as a carnal and impure space (as opposed to Heaven as a pure and abstract space, away from the carnal/material).²⁰ Durham's complex system of references refutes the notion that there is one right answer, while also indicating that other cosmological ordering systems might treat the chair and the stone (or Stone) differently. As was the case in colonial encounters, not everything can be gleaned at face value—complexities are revealed through addressing various elements of an object and that object's relationship to human counterparts. Durham's critique is not just of objects and systems, but of architecture as well—"an invention of the State" which ultimately creates conformity and submission. Featured in tandem with the writing in the book, are photographs and images of interventions staged with chairs, stones and architecture. One such drawing in Durham's book, depicts an exaggerated chair protruding out of a piece of architecture, like an extremely large, unruly appendage (Figure 3).²¹ The building in this drawing has spider-like legs, four of them extending out from the base of the building, rendered in a simple, iconic and immediately legible drawing style.

²⁰ It is interesting to note a relationship between this sequence of revelation in *Basic Instinct*, and Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* from 1866. Upon a recent visit to the Louvre, I had the pleasure of observing audience participation around this work, participation oscillating between one viewer who in *shocked aversion promptly exited the room* versus two other viewers who proceeded to *take multiple photographic self portraits of themselves with the artwork while kissing, smiling, or laughing*.

²¹ Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham: Between the Furniture and the Building (between a Rock and a Hard Place)* (München: Kunstverein München Berliner Künstlerprogramm DAAD, 1998), 37.

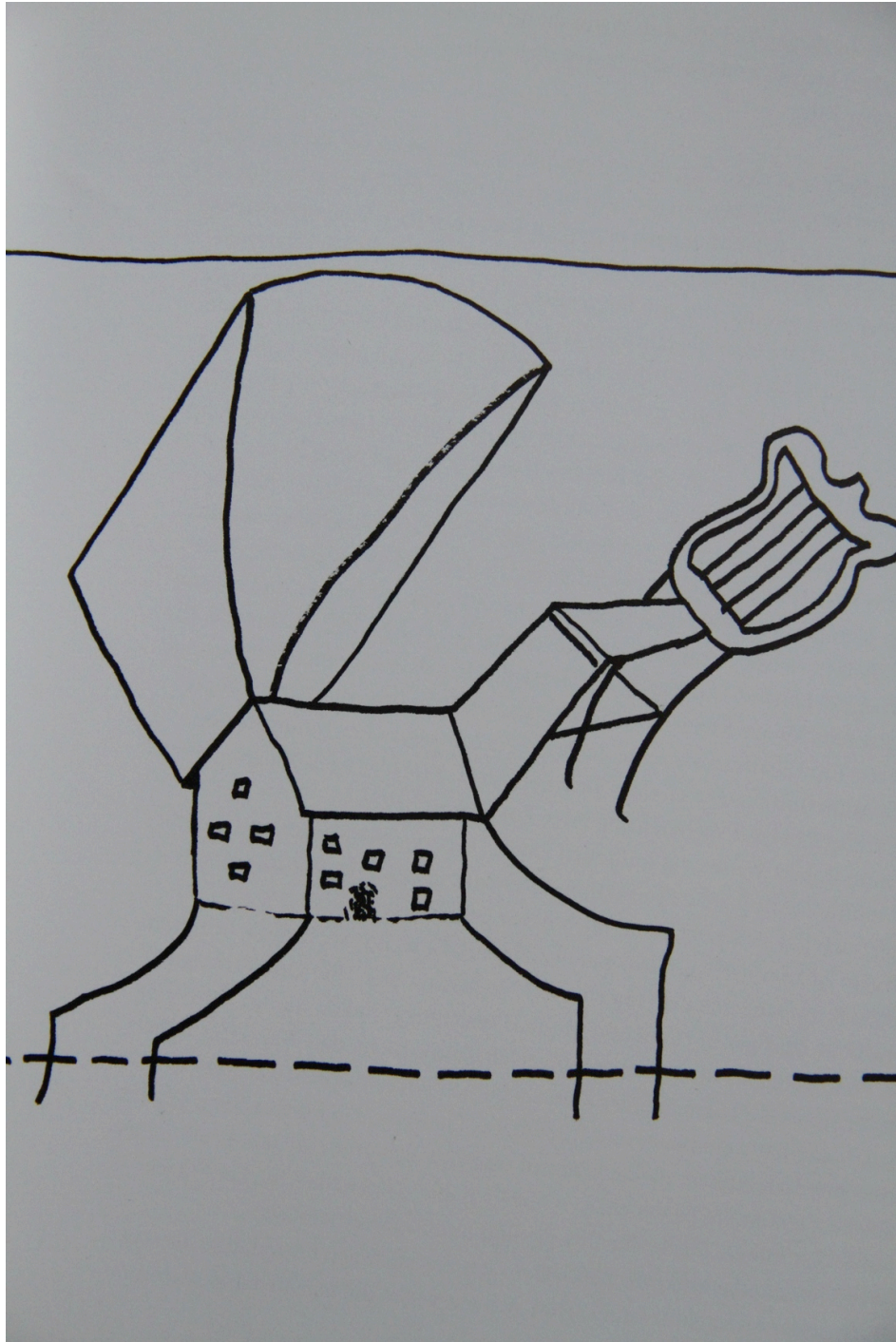


Figure 3:

Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham: Between the Furniture and the Building (between a Rock and a Hard Place)* (München: Kunstverein München Berliner Künstlerprogramm DAAD, 1998), 37.

Architecture is not organic, not part of evolution; it is an invention of the State and a program of the State. I propose there the thesis that architecture, as the holy ghost of this slippery and ghostly entity of the State, invented chairs. Chairs are spies.²²

Durham suggests another side to the problem of the chair and its modification of the human body toward domination when he cleverly points to the etymology of the word “chair” as related to the cathedral and its place in religious culture:

The word “chair” is even more deathly: this word is just a mispronunciation – an elision, we lexicographers like to say – of the word “cathedral.” A chair is a cathedral. But do not imagine that a cathedral is just a big old church. A cathedral is the “Seat,” the site or place, of a Bishop. When we say “chair” or “chaise,” then, we are not only mispronouncing a cathedral, we are subliminally speaking of and re-enforcing a political concept that is not on the side of our liberation.²³

The human manipulation of the materials *stone* and *wood* are what allow the construction of these sites of power (the cathedral and the chair). The stone and the seat are *cultural forms* made of *natural materials*, the same materials that Durham is interested in for their inherent properties and additional symbolic properties—with an invested interest in how the material reacts (or doesn’t) to being manipulated for human use. The stones that constitute the cathedral, the wood that constitutes the chairs—come from *vibrant living natural* circumstances—the living tree, or the stone that is possibly *compressed* ancient dead material. Durham’s use of stones addresses the potential attribution of animacy to perceived *dead* material; since in his work *the stone acts*, possibly with the aid of a human, though also with the force of its own materiality that is

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ Ibid., 31.

capable of crushing. The stones are launched against the culturally constructed objects, un-manipulated/or strategically and minimally manipulated. In his work titled *A Piece of Granite Shaped like a Camel's Head* (figure 4), he simply adds an animal eye, likely one used in taxidermy, to a rock, which, by the indexical nature of the title, he asks us to read as a camel's head. The indexical nature of Durham's title in relation to the object he presents relates to Foucault's historical analysis regarding the human impulse to find in everything in the world a mirror of other things, sometimes anthropomorphically—an endless act of matching performed by our cognitive recognition of objects in the visual field as like concepts relatable to other things we know of and claim to understand.²⁴ This giving of eye to the rock also indicates the uneasy “animate” properties of the rock, an idea seen as impossible by Western standards for what is living and what is non-living. In Nurit Bird-David's article, “Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology,” the cultural understanding/comprehension/interpretation of stones in terms of animacy is discussed in relation to a specific epistemological worldview. For the South-Asian Nayaka culture, stones are capable of possessing *Devaru*, a force which can come and go potentially within all materials at various times. The stones with *Devaru* are capable of acting; *animism is uneasiness in the realm of*

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1994), 31. Foucault is discussing the tradition of the ‘microcosm’ as a system of ordering, though this act of ‘mirroring’ that infinitely happens on the small scale relates to our ordering of things based on likenesses, such as that everything has its ‘mirror’. ‘As a *category of thought* (the microcosm), it applies the interplay of duplicated resemblances to all the realms of nature; it provides all investigations with an assurance that everything will find its mirror, and macrocosmic justification on another and larger scale; it affirms, inversely, that the visible order of the highest spheres will be found reflected in the darkest depths of the earth.’



Figure 4:

Jimmie Durham, *A Piece of Granite Shaped like a Camel's Head*, 2006. Collection Prof. Egbert J. Dommering, The Netherlands. <http://miekewillems.blogspot.com/2012/07/jimmie-durham.html>

being, many things can be active agents.²⁵ Bird-David suggests that we inherit the negative relationship originally given to animism by E.B. Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture*. She proposes “a plurality of epistemologies by refiguring so-called primitive animism as a relational epistemology.”²⁶ As mentioned earlier, Foucault’s book *The Order of Things*, explains scientific taxonomy coming from resemblance, also then a “relational epistemology.” Devaru is another system, just as *The Great Chain of Being*, and modern scientific taxonomy are systems. Giving life to what is regularly considered inanimate—such as Durham’s rock that kills the chair—suggests that an unruly material thing can lend unease to the long reaching history of humans attempting to negotiate the chaos of nature, to seek order in instances which are fundamentally disordered and maintain a system for the process of “life.”²⁷

Other works of Durham’s feature stones—*many*, in fact. In some of his works, he throws stones at other *objects*, mostly those objects Western human societies see as technological necessities. The stone’s assault is launched on chairs, refrigerators, and, in one bold case, a car. All three objects are relatively new in human history; all three are seen as indispensable to the workings of contemporary culture, yet humans lived without

²⁵ Nurit Bird-David, "Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology* 40, no. S1 (February 1999): 74, accessed October 30, 2013, doi:10.1086/200061. Bird-David also brings up Gibson’s idea of ‘affordances’ in this article, and cites Gibson’s definition that an affordance ‘cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective’. In the case of the rocks, Bird-David argues through Gibson that meaning is not given but ‘educated’ or created, one learns to see the Devaru in the material world through attunement of attention.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 5. ‘For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.’

them for centuries. Just as chairs raise human bodies above the ground and separate the human form from other material, refrigerators enable a distancing from things killed for consumption/nourishment. When Durham launches stones at an object, he is also launching stones at its privileged status, both as a commodity available to some humans and not others, as a supposed necessity, and as a Western object of scientific and social progress resulting from Enlightenment ideologies.²⁸ In Durham's journal titled *Nature in the City*, he states:

Maybe it was Gertrude Stein who said that keeping a journal is a way of living in the present. But trying to look at nature, as a witness, is more a way of seeing that one lives in a continuity; and even, that the continuity is made of life and of lives; made of seasons but not made of this human (in) convenience called 'Time'.²⁹

This duality of *time*, a convenience and “(in) convenience” in Durham's words, is that thing which supposes progress as a linear construction, versus the continuity that is life. Time, like the chair, is a *cultural construction*, invented to order the chaotic forces of nature, of *life*, to help humans to produce and progress. This invented structure of time is then counter to some aspects of the natural rhythms of nature, but also stems from our desire to contain and control nature for human productive use, and likely the invention of time is what leads us to try and produce not for necessity or pleasure, but for productivity.

²⁸ Durham has made several works in which he destroys a culturally produced object with stones, some in which the art work consists of video documentation of an event—as is the case with his video work, *Stoning the Refrigerator* from 1996. In other cases, the achieved result is a destroyed object paired with a crushing stone, framed as a sculpture works.

²⁹ Jimmie Durham, *Nature in the City* (Berlin: Büro Friedrich, 2000), 1.

However, when nature “intervenes”, it surprises us in its disruption of the discipline of the city, a *rupture* to the human constructions of cities and time.³⁰

Durham’s launching of the primordial, basic material of stone against the progress/privilege machine of the car, lightly approaches the topic of social inequity around technological objects seen as necessities, while also initiating a dialogue of chaos—at any time, the primordial/natural rock form might destroy the cultural/functional machines of human use. Durham’s public sculpture *Still Life with Stone and Car* (Figure 5) engages this idea of the destroyed functional cultural object, whereby a red car is crushed under the weight of a large boulder, installed at a public automobile turn-style in Sydney, Australia. His choice to begin the title of the piece, *Still Life*, speaks to the tragedy of the genre, as for the *still life* to exist, something must be rendered non-living, *life must become still* (be it animal or vegetable). In this instance, the car, the *human time* condenser, is rendered still, *function-less*, by the stone. One wonders if Durham picked the style and color of car for these interventions as well, or if it’s simply a matter of what car can be procured to perform such an intervention. In the style of *A Piece of Granite Shaped Like a Camel’s Head* (Figure 4) Durham has added a face to the boulder that sits upon the car, though in this case not animal, but *human*, or more accurately *human-esque*. Two cartoonish eyes are painted on the indent on the top of the boulder, with a small, pursed-lip pink mouth towards the base. We register this as a human face, not because of completely accurate representational qualities, but because

³⁰ Ibid., 1. ‘When un-disciplined life happens, or chance, or a rabbit in the park, don’t we feel liberated? I mean when ‘nature’ happens in the city; the prison built to keep nature out.’



Figure 5:
Durham, Jimmie. *Still Life with Stone and Car*. 2004. On Hickson Road at The Rocks, Sydney, Australia.
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Still_Life_with_Stone_and_Car_by_Jimmie_Durham_on_Hicks
on_Road_at_The_Rocks.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Still_Life_with_Stone_and_Car_by_Jimmie_Durham_on_Hicks_on_Road_at_The_Rocks.jpg).

we are habituated to see the loosely rendered shapes in the spaces where two eyes and a pair of lips should go, as distinctly human.³¹ The painted forms nestle in nooks that predict an anthropomorphic likening to a countenance emerging from within the boulder (as will be later discussed, an ongoing human tendency according to Roger Caillois and Michel Foucault). The car is an object that alters temporality—changing the human conception of distance and time by placing the human at a remove from direct bodily contact with the surface of the earth while traveling. It is also a marker of privilege and progress, as to be able to escape the regimes of time and space requires the money to invest in the car and its upkeep. Public transport is only an escape in countries that are deemed *developed*; all those relegated to so-called *underdeveloped* countries still have feet that must touch the ground, *must walk or run at the pace their bodies allow*—they cannot cheat time or space. Feet do not allow one to travel fast enough, to produce enough, to be in as many places at once as is mandated by capitalist work schedules. Nature is that very *catastrophic uncertainty*, that no human cultural framing or system of organization can ever completely control—tidal waves, earthquakes, meteors, and death, will come regardless. Because the catastrophic comes to rupture the rhythm of the banal, the quotidian, the daily—it is seen as counter to *the everyday*, but in fact, it always *returns*, only at a different temporal rhythm. Like all aspects of nature—*it acts in cycles*.³² Durham’s conflation of the culture-machine and the nature-object, placed into

³¹ Though other mammals have lips, humans bear the most distinctive set. Camels, for example, *appear to have lips* – while dogs on the other hand, do not.

³² Special thanks to Andrew Witt, for his assertions about the everyday nature of catastrophe or ‘the catastrophic as routine’, a component of *life itself*—instead of posited as counter to it (from his presentation

an aggressive/catastrophic relational act of crushing speaks to this very deep cycle—that the quotidian, that “low plane” area of life that still life painting frequently honors, such as in the works of Jean Siméon Chardin,³³ is always subject to interruption by the larger continuity of the *cosmic/catastrophic* event.

Perceptual Glitch, Prefiguring Disaster presented at the Terra Foundation for American Art in Giverny, France on July 30th, 2015)—as well as for his sharing Durham’s journal *Nature in the City*.

³³ Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 14. ‘...still life exists as a coherent category through being inextricably caught up in the process of evaluating, in visual representations – and through the most complex symbolism – the place of what might be called low plane reality, as this appears within the ‘higher’ discourses of culture.’ Bryson’s formulation of the ‘low plane’ possibly relates to Virginia Woolf – whose diaries (Volume I: page 53) feature a reference to what she calls ‘low life’.

Section 4: Stones

Stones

The stone, materially, is seen as an object of stalwart and steady properties, mute and unable to speak—yet durable, almost insistent in its longevity. That stone can be disintegrated gives its appearance of ever-permanence an Achilles heel—strong but with the weakness of being subject to disintegration by a seemingly impermanent fluid material that lacks solidity: *water*. In the Surrealist imagination and ordering system, stone sometimes becomes “anthropomorphic”—existing as a stand in and correspondent to the body, while also being symbolic of the primordial and of the material world that is unreachable yet persistent. Roger Caillois describes stones as a thing with “intrinsic” value that can be seen for what they are via their properties, and though he is speaking of stones that appeal to collectors in his book *The Writing of Stones*, he still approaches this realm of the base material and the primordial associations attribute to some kinds of material.³⁴

Stones possess a kind of *gravitas*, something ultimate and unchanging, something that will never perish or has already done so. They attract through an intrinsic, infallible, immediate beauty, answerable to no one, necessarily perfect yet excluding the idea of perfection in order to exclude approximation, error, and excess.³⁵

Caillois negotiates the slippery boundaries and multiple categorizations of stone, stones sometimes contain dead material, various metal deposits, and other things—many materials that allow for a variation in shape and color, changing their properties. Like the aforementioned dust, stone is a material that we categorize as a singular form even

³⁴ Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

though it is a complex amalgamation of material, material that over long expanses of time has *come together* into something that we register as *bounded and delimited*—in a word, *solid*.

The stones of Durham are not the stones of appeal in the realm of connoisseurship but are instead average or standard stones. They are stones that you can imagine passing over every day and never noticing, the kinds of stones that populate landscaping and mountains. Returning to Durham's *Nature in the City* journal—we see his consideration of *stone* as it is, versus how human agents use it: 'Cities are stony, for example, as are hills and plateaux, but the stones are usually ordered into buildings, streets, curbs, monuments. They, like us, must work'.³⁶ The stones that Durham uses are however, *stones that act like stones*, stones that suggest a state prior to manipulation by human hands to create cities and buildings. Even these stones, though *average* looking, are likely as complex in structure as those that Caillois speaks of, striated material accumulated *over long periods of time*, stones that we then 'put to work' for architecture. Caillois speaks of stones as holding human fascination because they herald a "doomed nature (that) has won to the gratitude of its latest, grudging heir."³⁷ The stone, as a doomed

³⁶ Jimmie Durham, *Nature in the City* (Berlin: Büro Friedrich, 2000), 1.

³⁷ Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 82. Later on page 82 Caillois speaks of a 'secret affinity' of materials, which will be discussed later via Foucault, who also speaks of this 'secret affinity'. 'Man has unknowingly inherited a capital made up of immemorial audacities, unsuccessful risks, and ruinous wagers, an endeavor which through for long persisted in vain was one day to foster in him a new, rebellious grace, combining hesitation, calculation, choice, patience, tenacity, and challenge. I can conceive of some divinity, some total intelligence that is panoramic in the widest sense of the word, capable of contemplating in one purview this infinity of vicissitudes and their inextricably complex interactions. Such hypothetical cosmic consciousness would not be surprised at the existence of a lasting and inalienable collusion between this series of fertile abortions and their ultimate beneficiary. It would seem to it inevitable that a secret affinity should allow their heir to recognize, among

component of *man*'s conquest of nature is a fitting object to destroy the temporal/spatial melting machine that is the car, as stone is that material which holds *old geological knowledge*.³⁸ Caillois additionally addresses Foucault's shared notion of the human seeking of affinity, of mirroring in the world through their love of collecting stones that appear to contain images or representations. The human desire to match like to like is illustrated by the registration of likeness in the patterns seen on the surface of stones (as discussed at length in Caillois book), a desire to connect to *deep time*. A "universal syntax"—again matching Foucault's assertions—regarding the foundation of taxonomy being a system rooted in the human desire to find resemblance.

I see the origin of the irresistible attraction of metaphor and analogy, the explanation of our strange and permanent need to find similarities in things. I can scarcely refrain from suspecting some ancient, diffused magnetism; a call from the center of things; a dim, almost lost memory, or perhaps a pre-sentiment, pointless in so puny a being, of a universal syntax.³⁹

Francis Ponge deals with the stone as a subject in *The Voice of Things*, specifically addressing the alteration of stone by water in his entry "The Pebble." For Ponge, the pebble signifies less the accumulative aspect that Caillois is interested in, instead focusing on its unchanging form as it is reduced from a larger to smaller form, from a jagged unwieldy form to a smooth and even form. Ponge describes the melting and breaking away of stone, countering the human tendency to ascribe longevity or

the daunting mass of nature's ventures, those which, though they did not succeed, opened up for him, through their very failure, a glorious way ahead.'

³⁸ Ibid., 12. 'In some Eastern traditions insight may be obtained from the strange shape or pattern in a gnarled root, a rock, a veined or perforated stone. Such objects may resemble a mountain, a chasm, a cave. They reduce space, they condense time. They are the object of prolonged reverie, meditation, and self-hypnosis, a path to ecstasy and a means of communication with the Real World.'

³⁹ Ibid., 104.

permanence to stone. As he sees it, stone is the thing which is “constantly dying”⁴⁰—it is this breaking and shattering that terrifies “life” the most, as it means the foundations, which we make out of stone, might be subject to falling to dust beneath our feet.

And so when life, through the mouths of beings who successively and briefly get a taste of it, pretends to envy the indestructible solidity of its setting, the truth is it contributes to the continual disintegration of that setting. It is this unity of action that life finds so dramatic: it mistakenly believes that its foundation may one day fail it, while believing itself to be eternally renewable. Placed in a setting that has given up being moved, and dreams only of falling into ruin, life becomes nervous and agitated about knowing only how to renew.⁴¹

Like Durham’s critiques of architecture and of progress, we see in Ponge an awareness of the impermanence of everything, even that which we attribute with symbolic solidity.⁴² Two opposing directions for speaking about stones reveal their complexity: with Ponge, his initial dealings (as in the quote above) are with the large aspects of the material, while Caillois, begins with the small aspects—both authors reverse their discussion as they unfold narratives about stone, alternating their discussions to elaborate upon *small and large scales* of the material. Stones are simultaneously simplistic forms that are unchanging when reduced and complex systems of materials capable of monumental shifts over time. There is also, in the human imagination, a propensity for equating the grand scale of the mountain with awe, while disregarding or seeing as insignificant the same material as it is collected in palms and pockets or turned

⁴⁰ Francis Ponge, *The Voice of Things*, trans. Beth Archer Brombert (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1972). 73 ‘So contrary to popular opinion, which makes stone in man’s eyes a symbol of durability and impassiveness, one might say that stone, which does not regenerate, is in fact the only thing in nature that constantly dies’.

⁴¹ Ibid., 73.

⁴² Ibid., 73.

to powder beneath the feet. Durham's work is an investigation into the perceived primordial, solid, deeply natural old stone object as capable of destroying the culturally produced object, specifically those cultural objects that aim to control the human body, place it in a position above other materials in the world and keep chaotic forces at bay. Stone has dual material significance—oscillating between a sublime, awe inspiring, metaphysical, primordial deep time thing with a grandness of scale—versus a material configuration of small parts that *could have been* a large mountain, pulverized by time into insignificant, lowly, everyday dirt. Stone questions our very notions of solidity, as we see it capable of traversing expanses of time and lasting in ways that the human body does not—yet it can be cut by water, and disintegrate into pebbles on impact.⁴³ Ponge brings up this issue of “scant value” and the considered low items of existence, objects that we disregard yet that constitute the most insistent aspects of everyday experience:

But these objects of scant value, lost without order in a solitude broken by dune grass, seaweed, old corks, and other debris of human provisions – imperturbable amid the greatest upheavals of atmosphere – are mute spectators of these forces that run blindly after anything and for no reason until exhausted.⁴⁴

⁴³ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 30. Tim Ingold discusses the elusive nature of stone, suggesting both that its hardness is ‘alleged’, and that we might be making an assumption to think that cultures of the past desired to use stone for its permanence, since they might just as well have seen this material as fragile – or selected because of its ‘fluidity and mutability’. He writes: ‘Indeed, any attempt to produce a classification of materials, in terms of their properties or attributes, is bound to fail for the simple reason that these properties are not fixed but continually emergent along with the materials themselves. ‘The properties of materials’, as I have argued elsewhere with specific reference to the stoniness of stone, ‘are not attributes but histories’ (Ingold 2011a: 32).’ He additionally references Chantal Conneller’s suggestion that materials ‘properties have been so often highlighted as to make them seem all but universal (Conneller 2011:82)’, and as she says ‘it is clear that there is no such thing as “stone”; there are many different types of stones with different properties and these stones become different through particular modes of engagement (Conneller (2011: 82).’

⁴⁴ Francis Ponge, *The Voice of Things*, trans. Beth Archer Brombert (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1972), 75.

This problem of running blindly in the name of progress, are those problems of progress within capitalism. Capitalism is the thing that can't take it slow, the thing that goes until it exhausts itself. Stones, *and other materials categorized as objects*, act as the "mute spectators" to this blinding, *unidirectional* rush.

Section 5: Chairs

Chairs

If we are to give so much notice to stones, we must also think about the *chairs*. Durham, as mentioned earlier, has a particular distaste for chairs as “spies for the state”—objects which force us into a position unnatural to our anatomical structural desire, and potentially part and parcel with the control of our bodies by forces, such as capitalism, at the hands of others higher on the chain. For Durham, chairs insinuate, first of all, *power*—power of the human over the material world, elevation of the human above the base/material world. Chairs also pre-suppose use, they tell us *how to sit in them*, rather than react to what our bodies are like: *chairs trap us*.⁴⁵

A specific analysis of surfaces used in Durham’s work might be useful here. The image featured on page 19 of Durham’s aforementioned book consists of a stone resting on what appears to be a stool (Figure 6),⁴⁶ except that it is *not a stool*. It exists somewhere between a stool and a table, a surface too tall for a human end to sit on as a chair, and too small to use as an object for function as a table—appropriate instead to a display *other things*. This arrangement anthropomorphizes the rock; it appears to be sitting, because what it sits on *looks like a stool*. With Victorian flourishes, not quite

⁴⁵ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 62. ‘Every object of design sets a trap by presenting a problem in the form of what appears to be its solution. Thus we are deceived into thinking of the spoon as a solution to the problem of how to transport food from bowl to mouth, when in fact it is the spoon that determines what we should do rather than, say, holding the bowl directly to our lips. We are fooled into supposing that chairs afford the possibility to sit down, when it is the chair that dictates that we should sit rather than, say, squat. And we imagine that the table is the solution to providing support for box, jug, bowl and spoon, when it is only because of the table that we are expected to place things at such a height, rather than at ground level.’

⁴⁶ Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham: Between the Furniture and the Building (between a Rock and a Hard Place)* (München: Kunstverein München Berliner Künstlerprogramm DAAD, 1998), 19.



Figure 6:
Jimmie Durham, *Jimmie Durham: Between the Furniture and the Building (between a Rock and a Hard Place)* (München: Kunstverein München Berliner Künstlerprogramm DAAD, 1998), 19.

modern and not quite antique, the chair resembles an end table that you might find in any corner of any room, the kind of furniture one might find at a thrift store, or in a grandmother's home. The chair from *A Meteoric Fall to Heaven* (Figure 2) is similarly formed. It has a hint of Art Nouveau details, *aesthetic nature-reminiscent forms*, in the arms, though not overtly ornate. *Not quite modern and not explicitly archaic*, another chair we might find in ubiquity, possibly in America or some European countries. It is not a "primitivist" construction, but it is also not an incredibly "crafted" piece, translated into labored ornateness.⁴⁷ This is a chair that is a true spy that has made its way into countless homes, an object now just as unassuming as a plate or glass from which we consume. Chairs, populate everyday life, but didn't always do so—as Durham points out in his story about *The Last Supper*. Durham *privileges the stone*, through raising its form above the world of other things, classifying it closer to the apex. It appears comical, *uneasy*, because it is incongruous, because we do not expect such an object to be put in a privileged position. Humans often privilege valued objects, like expensive porcelain vases, gold gilded artworks, or myriad other *valued things*—however, this object is a solid, basic, rock. *It is neither a person, nor an expensive thing.*

⁴⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 1996), 14. See Jean Baudrillard's book for additional scholarship regarding different orders of furniture – their contribution to desired "atmospheres" that are nostalgic and belie the human world of possession/separation of high/low commodities as the central means by which to order objects contemporarily. "Human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain destiny, an emotional value – what might be called a 'presence'." Later on the same page Baudrillard states: 'In their anthropomorphism the objects that furnish it become household gods, spatial incarnations of the emotional bonds and the permanence of the family group. These gods enjoyed a gentle immortality until the advent of a modern generation which has cast them aside, dispersed them – even, on occasion, reinstated them in an up-to-date nostalgia for whatever is old. As often with gods, furniture too thus gets a second chance to exist, and passes from a naïve utility into a cultural baroque.'

Section 6: Index, Taxonomy and Hierarchy

Index, Taxonomy and Hierarchy

The greater metaphor of the book that one opens, that one pores over and reads in order to know nature, is merely the reverse and visible side of another transference, and a much deeper one, which forces language to reside in the world, among the plants, the herbs, the stones, and the animals.⁴⁸

The address of *materiality versus language* in Durham's work, launches an inquiry into the separations that humans stage between "nature/culture, high/low, human/nonhuman."⁴⁹ Though the terms *subject and object* have been the source of hotly contested historical/philosophical debates, much of our way of framing knowledge still depends on these dichotomies, our categorizations of *life versus non-life* depend on such divisions.⁵⁰ As a user of language, Durham reveals the tricky relationship between words and the world. Instead of a separation between them, his works and writing act among the "plants, the herbs, the stones, and the animals" as Foucault describes. This endless intertwining underscores the complexity of language as hierarchical in the world of things that, as Foucault suggests, helps us to obtain and possess "knowledge" in order to classify

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1994), 35.

⁴⁹ Laura Mulvey, "Changing Objects, Preserving Time," in *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 44. Mulvey describes an exhibition of Durham's works that featured mostly his signs, she writes: "...the exhibitions actual layout rendered visible the binary oppositions nature/culture, industrial/organic, word/object, above/beneath, modern/archaic, civilized/primitive, city/country, and so on." Though she is talking specifically about his exhibition *Original Re-runs*, which took place at the ICA in London in 1994 – this assertion of the dichotomies he reveals applies to his larger body of work as well.

⁵⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 13. 'For anyone undertaking a genealogical study of the concept of "life" in our culture, one of the first and most instructive observations to be made is that the concept never gets defined as such. And yet, this thing that remains indeterminate gets articulated and divided time and again through a series of caesurae and oppositions that invest it with a decisive strategic function in domains as apparently distant as philosophy, theology, politics, and—only later—medicine and biology.'

the world authoritatively with words.⁵¹ As Laura Mulvey points out in her essay “Changing Objects, Preserving Time,” Durham retains an “indexical” relationship to the things of the world he manipulates to frame as art, The original thing and its history seeps through, haunts, reminds of what it was prior.⁵² This is counter to what are sometimes called *finish-fetish* objects that also proliferate the world, objects that wish to remove the trace of original material, to become something other, higher, elevated away from the original material that composes its form. This transformation is a means by which to stage a true divide between the things of the world and the culture that humans produce, a separation that Durham finds dubious, and to be one of the backbones of progress—the complete removal of things from origins. This is how resemblance figures in as the continual desire to order the things of the world, to provide a taxonomy that can keep everything neat and ordered.⁵³ Foucault’s study of resemblance is incredibly dense, as he

⁵¹ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013). Tim Ingold describes a similar act of intertwining as “correspondence” between humans and the things of the world and sees this as one of the fundamental factors of the life—as a web of being rather than a simple description of animacy. In *Making*, he elaborates this idea on pages 21 and 31 in order to begin describing how humans engage with material, further discussing this act of intertwining/correspondence as “becoming”, an idea originally elaborated by Henri Bergson in *Creative Evolution*.

⁵² Laura Mulvey et al., *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 37.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1994), 29. ‘To search for the law governing signs is to discover the things that are alike. The grammar of beings is an exegesis of these things. And what the language they speak has to tell us is quite simply what the syntax is that binds them together. The nature of things, their coexistence, the way in which they communicate is nothing other than their resemblance. And that resemblance is visible only in the network of signs that crosses the world from one end to the other. ‘Nature’ is trapped in the thin layer that holds semiology and hermeneutics one above the other; it is neither mysterious nor veiled, it offers itself to our cognition, which it sometimes leads astray, only in so far as this superimposition necessarily includes a slight degree of non-coincidence between the resemblances. As a result, the grid is less easy to see through; its transparency is clouded over from the very first. A dark space appears which must be made progressively clearer. That space is where ‘nature’ resides; at it is what one must attempt to know. Everything would be manifest and immediately knowable if the hermeneutics of resemblance and the semiology of signatures coincided without the slightest parallax. But because the similitudes that form the

traces all possible relationships of “resemblance” established during the Renaissance regarding similitudes.⁵⁴ Though the complexity of his study would require more time than is warranted here, his thoughts on the trading off between “signs and their likeness”⁵⁵ is a good lens through which to address the oeuvre of Durham’s work, where language is not used as a means to dominate the material of the world or serve as explanation, but instead is a tool for additionally describing the world, an intimate relationship between word and thing.⁵⁶ Foucault is also relevant to Durham as he outlines the development of Western scientific taxonomy, ordering the things of the world by matching like with like, an ordering that sometimes claims authority over the world itself

graphics of the world are one ‘cog’ out of alignment with those that form its discourse, knowledge and the infinite labor it involves find here the space that is proper to them: it is their task to weave their way across this distance, pursuing an endless zigzag course from resemblance to what resembles it.’

⁵⁴ Ibid., 18. Foucault’s discussion of 16th century thought, which leads to taxonomic ordering as we know it, can be reduced to the four similitudes: 1. *convenientia* ‘so that in this hinge between two things a resemblance appears’ ‘the plant communicates with the animal, the earth with the sea, man with everything around him. Resemblance imposes adjacencies that in their turn guarantee further resemblances.’ p. 18. ‘holding extremes apart, God and matter’ p.19. 2. *aemulatio* ‘free from space...things imitate each other across the universe’ p. 19. ‘Similitude becomes the combat of one form against another – or rather of one and the same form separated from itself by the weight of matter or distance in space.’ p. 20. 3. *analogy* ‘*convenientia* and *aemulatio* are superimposed...it makes possible the marvelous confrontation of resemblances across space (like *aemulatio*), but also speaks of bonds and joints (*convenientia*)’ p. 21. ‘the space occupied by analogy is really a space of radiation’ p. 23. 4. *sympathies* ‘no path has been determined in advance, no distance laid down, no links prescribed’ and ‘It is a principle of mobility: it attracts what is heavy to the heaviness of the earth, what is light up towards the weightless ether; it drives the root towards the water, and it makes the great yellow disk of the sunflower turn to follow the curving path of the sun.’

⁵⁵ Ibid., 34. ‘There is no difference between marks and words in the sense that there is between observation and accepted authority, or between verifiable fact and tradition. The process is everywhere the same: that of the sign and its likeness, and this is why nature and the word can intertwine with one another to infinity, forming, for those who can read it, one vast single text.’

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36. ‘In its original form, when it was given to men by God himself, language was an absolute and transparent sign for things, because it resembled them’. Here again there is the reference to the apex ordering system, because ‘God’ himself gave language to humans, they are then placed higher on *The Great Chain of Being* for having this godly language—and therefore are in a position to order the things and beings of the world according to their desires. On page 129-130 Foucault says this about the relationship of things to language: ‘Natural History finds its locus in the gap that is now opened up between things and words—a silent gap, pure of all verbal sedimentation, and yet articulated according to the elements of representation, those same elements that can now without let or hindrance be named. Things touch against the banks of discourse because they appear in the hollow space of representation.’

and sets up distance between things of the world and the language that describes them. As Mulvey points out, Durham's play with language and signage questions our reliance on the "sign" as a physical means to orient ourselves in the sensual world, both conceptually and physically. This is illustrated in his work *Choose Any Three* (Figure 7), an object consisting of assembled wood with hand-painted names of famous figures. The object is assembled like a road marker with a birdlike figure at its apex, possibly a tongue-in-cheek reference to the *totem pole* that has been *fetishized* in its original form as an object of Native American "primitivism".⁵⁷ As the title suggests, we can select "any three" of the names on the pole, and possibly end up with an outcome. This is then, Durham's *game of intellectual chance*, how one is to be influenced mentally might depend on the chance encounter with any number of *sets of ideas* elaborated by particular thinkers. While revealing the relegation the messy, disordered, and non-resembling materials to a lower plane on the hierarchical scale, Durham's work additionally questions why we seek high levels of resemblance, why we think of the perfected surface removing traces of the origin material as better, higher, or more well conceived than the momentary, fragmentary or material/referential arrangement of things that does not attempt for a logical, dominant or explanatory outcome. What is sometimes called skill is also a means to separate and order some artistic production to the moniker of *underdeveloped* or lesser if it does not provide this complete separation from material to concept. This also has to do with awe and virtuosity, how far can an artist take a material

⁵⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Changing Objects, Preserving Time," in *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 43-44. Some of the names included on the sculpture are: Gunther Grass, Ho Chi Minh, Crazy Horse, and Rosario Castellanos.



Figure 7:
 Jimmie Durham, *Choose Any Three*, 1989, in *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 43

into the conceptual realm and remove it from the order that it comes from. Durham writes about the dominance and hierarchy of classification in his text/poem “Ni’ Go Tlunh A Do Ka”:

I believe that the acts and perceptions of combining, of making constant connections on many levels are the driving motivation of our aesthetic...So it is a system that attempts to break down separations, and its therefore an integral part of all other systems and activities. European culture has evolved into one of separations, of classifications and of hierarchies. I do not mean to imply that one culture is totally positive and the other negative, just that they are truly different. With that remarkable difference we find our selves invaded by European culture.⁵⁸

This act of “making connections” described by Durham is at the crux of the historical colonial problem. When a culture deviates from the colonizer’s defined systems of logic, ordering, systematic approaches that were developed just at the time of colonization in the 16th century as described by Foucault, their cultural products, ways of thinking and means of relating to the world are relegated as inferior. Durham is careful to say that he does not think one culture is “negative” and the other “positive,” but he is making a distinction that one seeks constant order, while the other might let the world of material things in its chaotic-ness dictate some of the possible outcomes instead of always being fit into categories—to seek connections and interrelations rather than hierarchies and bases.

⁵⁸ Laura Mulvey, "Changing Objects, Preserving Time," in *Jimmie Durham* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 34.

Section 7: Trifle/Fetish

Trifle/Fetish

William Pietz in his three-part suite of essays titled *The Problem of the Fetish*, points out that the worshipping of “trifles,” or objects perceived to be valueless, was one of the main issues of colonial encounter.⁵⁹ This confusion of value, seen on the part of the Europeans, authorized the export of resources, provided—in part—the *reasoning* for the exploitation of humans maintaining a different relationship with the material world, and allowed the relegation of humans from particular cultures to the category of *primitive*. At issue with *the fetish*, was its ability as an object to be activated and act as a transmitter for the absolute. That *fetishes* (as categorized by European colonizers) were made of materials like bone, dirt, or other so-called lowly materials, added to the difficulty in reconciling such objects in the European system of ordering things. As Pietz points out, *one cannot see value in what one sees as trash*. However, this *very same confusion*, later initiates the collection and exotification of these objects—objects that, as mentioned earlier, likely came from very practical, daily ritual practices that partook in a negotiation with cosmic/natural forces.

The Cartesian view, in which the soul is not supposed to live in any material but that of the body until it transcends, including the absolute or “God” as it is not supposed

⁵⁹ William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish III," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 16 (Autumn 1988): 110, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20166805>. ‘...from religious confusion to a contemptuous clarity regarding the primitives’ aesthetic taste for mere ornamentation empty of any real value (an interpretive movement) – is one of the characteristic rhetorical slides within the discursive nexus of the “Fetisso.” Also characteristic is the interpretation of fetish offerings of food and drink as performed in the deluded belief that the (personified) fetishes literally “eat”. Indeed, Europeans became convinced that the African mind failed to distinguish between personal religious objects and aesthetic ornaments. By the eighteenth century this perception had reached the level of theoretical statement...’

to live in arbitrary material, as that is considered idolatry. Significantly, Durham negotiates an in-between space in the troubled history of exotification and colonial control, as formerly *excluded* and now *included*.⁶⁰ The objects Durham makes, in different eras of this past century, might have been seen as *trash and trifle*, with complicated associations for the differing value systems of European and Native American subjects around material. Like Marcel Duchamp, Durham negotiates with the knowledge that any object can be a commodity in the art market, regardless of its seemingly “base” position in the past. The *value* of the object might depend more on the subjectivities of the institutions showing it, and the collectors who buy it than on a past notion of what material is valuable.⁶¹

We return here to the first quotation of Durham on page 1, regarding the uneasy nature of the “fetish,” be it object or its relative: money, and how valuation becomes determined for material objects in terms of material “value” as well as cultural constructs

⁶⁰ This specifically relates to the ‘value’ confusion between Europeans and Native Americans and West Africans during first contact, discussed in relation to West Africa by William Pietz in his trilogy—*The Problem of the Fetish*. Relevant to Durham’s work are instances giving of beads or so-called ‘trifles’ to Native Americans as a bartering practice staged by the Europeans, both a means by which to get what the Europeans deemed as more ‘valuable’ from the Native Americans, namely property in the form of land, while simultaneously convincing themselves that the Native American population had a skewed and less reason based value system if they could value the beads so highly—the fact that the Native American population did not believe in ‘property’ per se, making for a fundamental misunderstanding around what was happening with the bead exchange, is an issue worth further address.

⁶¹ Amelia Jones, “Women” in Dada: Elsa, Rose, and Charlie,” comp. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998), 5-6. ‘Perhaps the best lesson, taught by the *maitre* Duchamp, is that in fact there is no way out of the circuits of desire that commodity culture puts into play. The modernist subject is irrevocably destabilized by the very mechanics of capitalism that were engineered precisely to support and sustain its Cartesian dream of centered intentionality.’

around what materials are valuable.⁶² Pietz brings forth the historical issues of value around colonial encounter and the religious and social practices around material through his study of the fetish. The word fetish comes from the root word “feitiço,” a word that reveals the uneasiness Europeans had with the material practices they encountered on other continents, practices they most likened to paganism and “witchcraft” in their own recent past.⁶³ Durham deals with the problematic history of the fetish within his work by dually thwarting the desires of the Western art audience while also *pandering* to the desires of art collectors to own objects that will be seen as “valuable” in the liquidity of the art market, sometimes exotified as *primitive-like objects*—as in works like *A Piece of Granite Shaped Like a Camel’s Head* (figure 4). The simple gesture of adding an eye to a piece of stone subverts the notion that art is a virtuosic dealing with materials. Instead of a chaste arranging of materials suggestive of things having the potential for a higher level

⁶² George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 112. See further George Baker’s book for a discussion of the ‘general equivalent’ as related to Dada and avant-garde practices, supported by Jean-Joseph Goux’s book *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*. This idea of the ‘general equivalent’ relates to the discussion here, as the basis of value is established, as mentioned above, through an act of ‘mirroring’, or comparing objects based on a standard measure. What the standard measure is, depends on the classification system that underlies the measure. ‘Marx posits four developmental stages. The first phase, the “elementary” or “accidental” form of value, entails the placement of two isolated commodities in a relationship of equivalence with one another—but with no other commodities. This relationship of equivalence Goux describes as primarily *visual*. It is also based on the recognition of a likeness, a quest for *similarity*. It is a “specular relation, a mirroring,” Goux asserts (N, p. 13); one commodity finding its value in the body, in the image of the other. “The commodity becomes a “citizen of the world” (Marx).”’ Both Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan speak of this ‘mirroring’ with different aims—though both in regards to subjectivity in relation to the material world. Later on the page, Baker discusses the malleability of value because of the perpetual newness of the commodity.

⁶³ William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish I," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 9 (Spring 1985): 5, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20166719>. ‘Fetisso derives from the Portuguese word feitiço, which in the late Middle Ages meant ‘magical practice’ or ‘witchcraft’ performed, often innocently, by the simple ignorant classes. Feitiço in turn derives from the Latin adjective factitious, which originally meant ‘manufactured.’ The historical study of the fetish must begin by considering these words in some detail, only then going on to examine the initial application of feitiço on the African coast, its subsequent development into fetisso, and finally that word's textual dissemination into the languages of northern Europe, where national versions of the word developed during the seventeenth century.’

of activity within the realm of being, it *reacts* to the historical concept of the fetish. Visually, we can see his choice to particularize this rock is based on its shape, since the curve of the rock is suggestive of a camel-head shape. The left side of the rock is the area where Durham has decided to place the eye. This area has a subtle indent, which can read, as an eye cavity, sloping downward towards a slightly pointed area of the rock reminiscent of a mammalian/camel nose. The opposite end of the rock is squared off, giving, especially with the addition of the eye, a skull-like appearance. His eye choice is important as well, as it mimics the color of the granite (a deep red/orange variety of ochre with brown shadows) as sometimes is the case with the eye of a mammal that matches their body coloration. This eye has the attributes of species indicated as well; this is not the ape or human eye with a circular retina, but a slanted slash retina shape particular to mammals such as goats or camels, though in this case Durham has placed the eye sideways—a camel eye would generally have a horizontal not a vertical slash.

In the title of one of his artworks, *We Have Made Progress (and will continue to progress)* (Figure 8), Durham continues his critique of the idea of progress and its linear tendencies, through his arrangement of an object possessing *fetishistic qualities*.⁶⁴ The work consists of a stick attached to a clip like object with string, a sign bearing handwriting attached directly below the stick. Though simple in gesture and subtle in material means, the impact of this dichotomous pairing of language and objects provides a powerful statement that incites viewers to think deeply about *what progress is*.

⁶⁴ Jimmie Durham, *We Have Made Progress*, 1991, in *Jimmie Durham*, by Laura Mulvey, Mark A. Durant, and Dirk Snauwaert (London: Phaidon, 1995), 48.

Progress is a temporal configuration that moves not cyclically, but linearly, where each move along the line is supposed to indicate an advance forward, presumably to a better place. Durham demonstrates in this work, that a contradiction is embedded in the word. The goal of the Enlightenment was to improve the humanitarian/ethical and scientific realms, a move towards a reliance on empirical sources for knowledge, relieving humans of their relationships to magical or mythical modes of constructing knowledge.⁶⁵ As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer point out, the very idea of progressive thought was to “liberate man from fear and establish(ing) their sovereignty.” Knowledge was intended to organize the things of the world, yet the very search for knowledge (or ideas) “have been the very things which have forbidden the happy match between the mind of man and the nature of things”, the distance between consciousness and materiality. These assertions address

⁶⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 3. Horkheimer and Adorno’s book stages an analysis of the Enlightenment, and all of reason based thought. Through dialectical thinking, they outline the nature of progress and how it both constitutes and destroys human subjectivity. Their project additionally addresses the changing relationship to *myth* and how a different status has developed around the relationship of the object and human subject. The object away from myth becomes a commodity that serves the human who serves the apparatus. ‘In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment with the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy.’ ‘But indeed facility to believe, impatience to doubt, temerity to answer, glory to know, doubt to contradict, end to gain, sloth to search, seeking things in words, resting in part of nature; these and the like have been the things which have forbidden the happy match between the mind of man and the nature of things; and in place thereof have married it to vain notions and blind experiments; and what the posterity and issue of so honorable a match may be, it is not hard to consider.’



Figure 8:

Jimmie Durham, *We Have Made Progress*, 1991, in *Jimmie Durham*, by Laura Mulvey, Mark A. Durant, and Dirk Snauwaert (London: Phaidon, 1995), 48.

progress, that it is not a continuing dialectic of the idea and the thing, but rather is a set of assumptions whereby progress is the resulting action of posing a question, then through empirical study and the accumulation of knowledge, finding a solution to that question. The ironic aspect of the title *We Have Made Progress* (Figure 8), is the invocation of the notion of *progress* in such a simple material construction. This is not an object that registers as a scientific instrument, or other contemporary technological tool, it is instead multiple *natural* objects that could be fashioned into tool-forms and technologies—*bones, sticks, string, and language*. *We Have Made Progress* (Figure 8), in its fetishistic form and material, titled in such a manner—is a *slap-on-the-hand* to enlightened ideologies. The relegation of objects to *fetish* status, is part of the attempted escape from *magical thinking*, as to see things having properties outside of what they are belies an uneasy relationship to the cosmic. Durham walks the line, as he both deals with material for *what it is*, and references non-Western object-arrangements in his constructions, objects that have a sensitivity for what the object was before becoming *dead* material (a living form prior). His loosely twined string that attaches the semi-arc of copper/metal rod to the metal clip that attaches to the wall, appears deliberate in its looseness. This was a practical decision, made to *attach one thing to another, binding*, but Durham does not waste his time with attempting a virtuosic feat with string, *it is good enough as it is* as a simple, in-the-moment, solution. Despite this simplicity, it also engages another realization, that of the *manual dexterity* necessary to tie string, or even make it in the first place, *something human-animals can do well*. String is potentially one of the oldest

technologies, a human-animal feat of manual manipulation.⁶⁶ The elements are legible as found objects, possibly two kinds of sticks attached together—though the one on the left appears to be an antler, reminiscent of the kind that are given to dogs to chew. At the break in the sticks appear to be two small blue pearlescent bead forms. His attaching these items, is possibly another meta-joke on the idea of progress, the ability to combine and fix one thing to another as if the solution is *always an outcome of improvement*.

Durham is asking us to value this object as his framed artistic production, even though it appears haphazardly put together of materials that would have been, at some point, regarded as *fetishes*. Two of the objects have a direct/correlative relation to nature, to *the cosmic*, as they are the very materials shed by *life* (cosmic effulgences). The bone-protrusion shed by the animal as it molts, the branch shed by the tree as it grows or dies.

We Have Made Progress (Figure 8), *Still Life with Stone and Car* (Figure 5), and *A Piece of Granite Shaped like a Camel's Head* (Figure 4) relate back to the earlier discussion around “classification,” how humans attribute “likeness” in the world to things that we wish to classify in the categories of sameness. Durham’s move of giving *life* to the rock plays on our living/non-living categorizations, reminiscent of the childhood pet rock that some humans activate as children. *A wish for animacy within the things that do not move*, that is, the wish to have a pet/possession. This also speaks of the bind that *possession* and ownership entail in terms of other humans, animals and the material world, which are relegated to various states of *possession* underneath the God/man apex

⁶⁶ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 117-118. ‘No one knows when our ancestors began making it, since the organic fibers from which it is made do not lend themselves to preservation.’

configuration. Durham plays with the conceptions and expectations the art market and gallery or museum systems have of him in a *high-art* discourse as an accepted member of an art world elite class.⁶⁷ He illustrates this double bind through his works, offering residuals of a *foreclosed* past now elevated, yet firmly critical of the future of the dominant order of capitalist consumption and its negotiations with the world of things. This confusion of the object within the discourse of capitalist commodity culture leads us in a circular path back to the original problem illuminated by Durham's work, that the object which seems to be "an uncontrollable object that burst the bounds of capitalist calculation."⁶⁸ The contemporary art market functions in this same speculative way, with many uncontrollable objects that belie the system of valuation we generally attribute to a scientific, reason-based calculation of quantitative versus qualitative factors—objects instead become valued based on the *mythical* status of the artist, or at least some form of *cultural capital* gained that provides the object of art a sales value in the market. Mercantile ideas are attached to rational value do not always play nicely with objects produced by differing cultures, though ironically it is in the art market that almost any object of *poor* means can be elevated, as long as the participant or artist is part of one of the accepted art worlds or markets. Peter Pels supports Pietz's argument that the "un-

⁶⁷ Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). See Oguibe's book for a discussion of the double bind of 'exoticism' and 'inclusion' that artists marked as 'other' are subjected to as part of the elite art market.

⁶⁸ Peter Pels, "The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy," in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. Patricia Spyer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 93. 'Merchant ethnographers like William Bosman transformed the *fetisso*—an object functioning within African trading relationships, into the fetish—the central figure of "African" religion (1). This essentialization of the fetish tends to obscure that it was, in a sense, and uncontrollable object that burst the bounds of capitalist calculation.' (1) In his notes, Pels elaborates on this paragraph 'Such essentializing movements, in which a practical relationship between unequal (groups of people is translated into an "essential" difference between subject and object, are constitutive of ethnography'.

transcended materiality” of the object is the main issue around the fetish.⁶⁹ As Pels posits, “The fetish is not singularized by being absorbed into the person or history of the consumer: although it is often close to the body, it maintains an aesthetic value that radically distinguishes it as a material object from the subject it confronts.”⁷⁰ This discussion is complicated by the idea of the fetish as “a form of misrecognition as well as recognition of reality; that it implies a ‘double attitude’ or ‘double consciousness’”⁷¹ The stone (and the stick) perform this “double consciousness;” seen as simplistic or complex depending on who is addressing the materiality of the objects, on how long it lasts or what it “does.” Furthermore, the stone for example, can operate as an object of worship or reverie, containing an energy that we cannot see or access, having “animic” properties for some cosmological ordering systems, as in the *Devaru*.⁷² The fetish in its radical materiality defies the categorical imperative set up by colonizers when confronted with other forms of dealing with and in material, but after enough *time*, it can be valued as an art object. As Pels states “The fetish erases the distinction between signifier and signified on which the present-day discourse is based.” The fetish *subverts* categories such as *use*

⁶⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁷¹ Ibid., 102. Pels attributes “double attitude” to Sigmund Freud, and “double consciousness” to William Pietz.

⁷² Tim Ingold, "Group Seminar" (Material Culture Working Group: Tim Ingold, Structural and Materials Engineering Building, Room # 206, University of California San Diego, October 3, 2014). Tim Ingold uses ‘animic’ in favor of ‘animacy’—in part because of the negative associations granted in the past by people such as E.B. Tylor, but also because animic is ‘circulation, cycle importance not life in objects but objects inside of life, field of relationships—a reversal of agency and animacy puts the motor in other things’, for Ingold it’s more of a ‘web of relations’. He also finds the term ‘agency’ troubling as ‘we know ourselves as agents, and this has a historical association problem of not only human exemptionalism, but human relegation other humans to a lower place on *The Great Chain of Being*.

and *everyday-ness*, it is an object that does not behave according to the logic of *objecthood*.⁷³

⁷³ Peter Pels, "The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy," in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. Patricia Spyer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 113. 'Even more: Whereas in everyday life, we can usually supply the meaning of things, by giving either their use, or a descriptions of their place in life, such a distinction between the thing and its meaning, a symbol and referent, or representation and represented is subverted by fetishistic relationships: The fetish erases the distinction between signifier and signified on which the present-day discourse is based'. Pels cites Roy Ellen's "Fetishism" at the end of this paragraph.

Section 8: Cyclical Endings

Cyclical Endings

Durham continues the dialectical exchange around subjects and objects, selves and others. What he brings to the discussion of the *fetish*, and material issues in general, is the acknowledgment that humans develop many systems of negotiating the natural world—negotiations that are continually questioned and re-assessed in relation to the human subjective interaction with *the world of things*. Returning to Ingold’s notion of “correspondence” is an appropriate *cyclical end* for a discussion of Durham’s work, as his oeuvre performs *correspondence*, as an example of the “intertwining” of cosmic agents—a *dance of life that is coextensive*, with acute sensitivity to the inherent material properties of the things that are arranged and manipulated *with his hands*. As Ingold defines “correspondence” it is not only about an “intertwining”, but it is also a particular temporal configuration, one that requires distance and “relay” between messages sent and received, an act that does not have an end, but *continues in a cycle*.⁷⁴ Durham uses art as an avenue to discuss how human agents *act among things* and see themselves in relation to the temporal configuration of nature, which humans are both a part of (always), and try to separate themselves from (continually). Humans fear this return to *natural states*, the possible dissolution of their exceptional nature, *back into animal form*. Giorgio Agamben illustrates this through the figure of the “wise man” who sees “the end of history” and

⁷⁴ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 105.

then “fades...into an animal snout”. *Man*, returned to a purely natural state, would then no longer be *man*.⁷⁵

The “animic dance of life” is both *cosmic and quotidian*, the things which appear to *move* and those which appear to *stand still*—engaging grand and small temporal scales. The stone (or rock), launched by Durham as an *agent of critique*, incites a dialogue with our human consciousness as a signal,⁷⁶ a message from the primordial past surrounding us, beneath our feet, constituting our very material forms. Serving as a reminder that despite our incredibly human *cultures*, we exist within a “web of relations”,⁷⁷ in which humans (and *man*), are coextensive with multitudinous *other* material and subjective entities.

⁷⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 7. ‘If history is nothing but the patient dialectical work of negation, and man both the subject and the stakes in this negating action, then the completion of history necessarily entails the end of man, and the face of the wise man who, on the threshold of time, contemplates this end with satisfaction necessarily fades, as in the miniature in the Ambrosian, into an animal snout.’

⁷⁶ Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962. I use signals here in reference to George Kubler, who discusses artworks as ‘signals’ from the past that convey weak messages to the viewer of now. See page 15.

⁷⁷ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

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Certainly the redemption of things (in the spirit of man) will be fully possibly only when the redemption of man is a *fait accompli*. And now it is understandable why I work at preparing each of them at the same time. ... The birth in the human world of the simplest things, their accession by the spirit of man, the acquisition of corresponding qualities – a new world in which men and things together will enjoy harmonious relations: that is my poetic and political goal. This might strike you as somewhat hazy... (I'll have to get back to it.)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Francis Ponge, *Mute Objects of Expression*, trans. Lee Fahnestock (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2008), 122.

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