

Introduction

Stephen Muecke

I wrote to Jimmie Durham last year with a view to putting together this special issue of *Performance Paradigm*, and this letter is reproduced below. The idea came not only from meeting Jimmie and Maria Thereza Alves in Sydney at the time of the 2004 Sydney Biennale (as discussed in Darren Jorgensen's contribution to this volume), but also reading his writing, which arrives in surprising ways, in emails where he tells stories you are not sure are 'true', to essays, to narratives and poems. Noel King has attempted to collect as many references to these writings as he could, and this bibliography follows this introduction.

When writing performs, something it can't help doing if it is to be the least bit interesting, it necessarily aims to transform the norms of the communicative scene. We find, for example, Jimmie Durham, the writer, being interested in *words*, not in language as such, and tells fascinating etymological stories in *Between the Furniture and the Building* (1998), and then in Chapter Seven suddenly takes a bath:

(...) I hope you don't think I want to abolish anything! I am against architecture like I am against language.

Hello I'm back! I had lost my train of thought so I went and had a nice long bath. It always seems to induce good thoughts. (131)

I believe he took a bath, and allowed that event, that interaction with a bit of furniture, to interrupt, and record the interruption, of his writing on such things. And in the same book he elaborates a bit on his idea of interruption:

One reason I always interrupt is that this is a book against architecture. Against the narrative line. Against linearity to a point. Against the State and its structures, (Belief and Truth) just as we might be against the wall (of a train station, waiting for the 3:10 to Yuma). An interruption can sometimes bring a more interesting direction.¹

So that is now the theme of the interruption came about for this volume.

And there is also the question of address, the precision and particularity of the addressee that is engaged directly with epistolary modes of writing. This particularity, this location of the letter, is a marvelous antidote to the universal and transcendental pretensions often found in creative or academic writings. The postcard, the letter, the signature, are ways that artists have often engaged with the question of the precision of location, and the passage of words through time and space.

The contributors to this volume have engaged with Jimmie's writing or other art-work in various ways, and not always in an epistolary mode. Valerie Tring, herself an artist who enjoys using local materials (just as Jimmie will source a particular kind of stone for an installation in Glasgow, Sydney or Bologna) has created our first contribution, which addresses Jimmie Durham's 'Self-Portrait Pretending to Be a Stone Statue of Myself,' 2006. Tring traveled to Aotearoa, where she was born, to collect a stone for insertion in a local material, Kangaroo skin, from the country she now lives in.

Anthropologist Michael Taussig is an old friend of Jimmie's, and in their conversation, which took place in Berlin at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in May 2010, he engages him on the question of rage, as elaborated in Peter Sloterdijk's new book, *Rage and Time*.² 'On Rage' was the theme for the

exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt of which Jimmie Durham's 'Building a Nation' formed a part. The conversation has been transcribed in a 'performative/ethnographic' mode, which means the language remains in its spoken form, and includes indications of mood that are part of speaking as performance. The transcription as writing thus reproduces this event to some extent, as the text takes on a new 'poetic' character, with its hesitations, interruptions, laughter and pauses.

Darren Jorgensen directly addresses Jimmie's work, in a genuinely interrogative mode. He asks questions to which he, or his students would like to know the answers, and we hope that in a later issue of *Performance Paradigm* we will see responses, perhaps from the artists themselves, to these thoughtful ideas. The other artist aligned in the discussion is John Citizen, an artistic avatar of Australian artist Gordon Bennett. Nikos Papastergiadis is a key figure in critical work associated with Jimmie Durham (see bibliography), and it is a wonderful piece of writerly reflection that he offers us here. Hamish Morgan, an anthropologist of the 'new ethnography' school, takes Jimmie Durham on a journey in the Western Australian desert which once more engages with a method of making storytelling and the local-particular resonate with aspects of Durham's work. It is highly pertinent that Misha Myers is then able to engage yet another aspect of Jimmie's work, the mythology of the Wild West; the tropes of 'nation building' dispossession and violence that was America's (and so many other new worlds') colonial magic, mirrored and framed in a play of mimicry that has not yet ended with Hollywood. Strange, then, that Kim Satchell plunges Jimmie Durham into the Pacific Ocean via the contingency of objects and messages. It is a prose poetics that links with Durham's ecopolitical mode, as in his 2001 *Nature in the City* diary. In Berlin this May, then back in High Falls, upstate NY, Mick Taussig penned a poem in homage to his old friend, a reflection on fieldwork, drawing and note-taking that will be the subject of a new book.

Finally, my own piece tries for a little metaphysics in the field, as it articulates the multirealism of Bruno Latour with a little bit of ethnography of tourism at the start of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.

Dear Jimmie

I thought you might like to see a few friends and acquaintances gather under the rubric of a performance journal. We all know that you tell stories and write as a kind of performance, in conjunction with your other art work, which is sometimes also a kind of performance: these are all events, they keep things alive in their places, they take time, and give a lot back too.

Would it be alright if we asked a few people to contribute to this journal? Friends like Mick Taussig and Nikos Papastergiadis, myself. Others who maybe you don't know so well, but wouldn't mind seeing there. In any case, they will all write in a performative manner, sometimes what we call fictocritical writing. 'Fictocriticism,' says Mick Taussig, 'is humorous and playful and suspicious of authority and therefore in its own way political, nowhere more so than in its cockeyed wink at the necessary fiction of the fiction/nonfiction divide.'

I will ask a friend, Noel King, with whom you had roast lamb at my place (I noticed that you gave tidbits to our dog, Jackie) to do a bibliography of your writings, since you told me you don't always know where they all are.

This journal issue will be about writing *with* Jimmie Durham, certainly not *about* you. So it will have your writing in mind rather than your other art-work, I guess. There are a lot of interesting things happening in writing which is not governed by that familiar fiction/nonfiction divide, a writing that is about making and making things up, not to transcend this world and find some more imaginative one, but to plug into its power sockets and make words and ideas crackle with energy.

This special issue will be devoted to that kind of thing, and when we say *devoted*, we mean it. We mean writing with an attitude of care and astonishment that respects all kinds of things: human, animal, objects, wisps of smoke...

Stephen Muecke

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Endnotes

¹Jimmie Durham, *Between the Furniture and the Building (Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (Köln: Walther König, 1998), p. 39.

² Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. Mario Wenning (Irrington, NY: Columbia UP, 2010)