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*The Usual Song & Dance Routine with a Few Minor Interruptions* is the complete transcription of the Friday Event Lecture (Glasgow School of Art, January 29, 2010). The lecture was presented in collaboration with Glasgow Sculpture Studios and the Goethe Institute, Glasgow. This transcription was published as part of the series *how to write*, Wiens Verlag, Berlin 2013

Jimmie Durham

The Usual Song & Dance Routine with a Few Minor Interruptions

Wiens Verlag

(The audience is applauding.)

Thank you. Good morning.

I am first going to show some short videos that Maria Thereza and I did over the years that we have lived in Europe since '94.

I started my adult life more or less as a performer and poet. But it's easier to sell objects than it is to sell poems, so I started making sculptures to sell. We started recording on video, performances that I was doing in New York, and noticed that it doesn't work. If you are not speaking to the machine, the machine doesn't record what you're doing. So you can't make a document of a performance unless you are talking to the machine. So then we started doing this. Maria Thereza is a good photographer and video person, so we started doing these videos. They are all about using stone as a tool instead of a monument.

I take a science magazine called Nature, and I read two things yesterday in my new Nature magazine. The first is about memory and how we select what we will remember. If someone, according to this article, tells you a long story and adds things in the story that are not part of the story, you won't remember those things later, because you want the narrative of the story. So everything that doesn't seem to relate, you throw it out of your memory. That meant to me that no one will remember my talk today (audience laughs), because I like to interrupt myself.

The second thing I learned... the most common mineral on earth: I suppose I would have thought it was iron. You don't know what it is, do you? You probably can't guess. Well it's, remember this now, magnesium silicate perovskite. Magnesium silicate perovskite. I guess a guy named Perovski discovered it. But where was it before Perovski, if it's the most common element on earth, the most common mineral? It was there, but we didn't notice it, or we called it stuff or we said it's rocks. I haven't yet looked at google to see what else the scientist named Perovski did, but this afternoon I hope to do that.

I first came to Glasgow in 1969. And I first came to Scotland in 1969. I want to try a little bit of a dangerous thing. Dangerous for me. I met a woman named Margaret Frazer in 1969, and she knitted a pair of socks for me. (He holds his pair of socks up to show it to the audience – the audience laughs.)

And I've worn them every winter since 1969. And what I would like to do is just pass them around, so you can appreciate them. But I don't want you to steal my socks, okay? (The audience is giggling.)

I also have trouble remembering things, so I took some notes. I took the notes on the back of a poem and I was going to read a poem this morning. But this is not the poem I was going to read. So I am not going to read a poem. Well I might look at this and see if it's readable. It is not very readable here. (The audience laughs.)

There is another stone. Its name has changed several times. But its real name is the most beautiful name: Combaline Tantalón. Combaline Tantalón. Isn't that like a poem in itself? It only comes from the Congo, no other place. By now you might know what it is already. It goes in your mobile phone. And we don't have mobile phones without this stone. So when I talk to this little machine, I am talking through a stone from the Congo. I only know about this stone because, in Sweden a few years ago, I met a government official from the Congo, and his job was to try to convince farmers in the Congo to keep farming, because that way they could eat, and they didn't want to farm because they wanted to dig for Combaline Tantalón. And they got something like five US dollars for a huge amount of Combaline Tantalón, which was a lot of money because they've never had five dollars before. And then they sell it to a middle man and the telephone company buys it for something like three or five hundred dollars for the same amount that the digger gets five dollars for. But he didn't convince them and as time went on, very quickly after that, everyone in the Congo started digging for this stone and now there are every kind of atrocious situations, with people stealing each others' digs, and murdering each other, and every kind of crazy thing for this little piece of money.

We live in a quite strange world with material, and we think that... I don't know what we think. We think we live in a conceptual world. We don't think we live in a material world. We don't think that material is very important to us. As a sculptor, it's very important to me, to think about material, to think about the politics of material as much as I can.

I know by now that the most sophisticated art is not handmade. When you handmade art, it's a little bit kind of folksy, isn't it? It's a little bit sentimental, it's a little bit crude. Lawrence Wiener, Joseph Kosuth, all these

very sophisticated artists who are a little bit younger than me know that you don't make anything. So I'm learning that. And I can be a conceptual artist. I can make art anywhere, any time. And I have.

As I was speaking this morning, I made a sculpture that's actually quite good. It is a wrapped object with a big black cloth over it. So it is a mysterious shape. It is a little bit like Christo, but I didn't make it, that makes it more sophisticated. I only signed it, and now it is my work and cannot be moved. It is over here, in the corner here. (All are laughing.) I think the price is 200,000 pounds, if anyone, any collector is in the audience.

Everyone knows about material when we need to know about it. If I have trouble with British Airways, for example, I could write them a letter. Write, write, write, that's the way I write. I write with my fingers. And if I write a letter to British Airways, a handwritten letter, as soon as someone sees it, they will know it is from a crank. A handwritten letter... they will know, it's not even to be taken seriously at all. They will think it is from some little old man in the countryside who is just a crank. If I have a typewriter – maybe I am a little old man who is a crank and I still have a typewriter – I put a piece of paper in the typewriter and I type out this letter. Soon as British Airways gets it, they will know it's from a crank. "Argh, a typewritten letter!" they will say. "It's from a crank." They will know not to take it seriously. So I... what do I do with my... I just learned how to type two years ago, a story I'll tell in a minute. But suppose I write it on my computer and print it out. It's then a letter, but it's not a very serious letter, because I'm sure a lot of people complain to British Air – they should. But if I write it with some stationary of some of my companies, and the letter head is at the top, and you see that I am CEO of some company, then someone at British Airways will say: "Oh yes, it's an important letter, it is worth reading." This is just the politics of material. How do you present material, what is the medium of your message, in other words.

I was once in – I've told this story many times, you may have heard it – I was once in a group show... many, many people... Maria Thereza and I both were in the show in New York City, artists in solidarity with the people of El Salvador. And we had a big show, and the show then went to Havana or some place. I think it went to Havana, didn't it? So, all the top galleries in New York agreed to be part of this show and I made a new piece, out of wood, leather and bone, and stuff like that. And I was assigned to John Weber Gallery.

I've never met John Weber, I don't know who he is. I didn't meet him at that time either. I'm sure he is a nice guy. But his gallery was one of the bigshot postmodernist galleries at the moment in New York. So I took my work by subway, a big thing like this, and I brought it into the gallery and the manager said: "Don't bring that thing in here!" And I said: "Oh, I'm supposed to bring it in here, it is for the El Salvador show." – "Here?" he said. "Yeah, I am sorry. They said to bring it here." I didn't see what else was there, because I didn't go back to look at the opening. Maybe I was away, I don't know why I didn't. This was at a time when postmodernism was kind of brand new in New York. And the idea was "anything goes." And what they meant by "anything goes" is: stainless steel and glass. (Audience is laughing.) Sophisticated stuff and a lot of text. I use a lot of text also, but I like a marking pen, and marking pen text is not good enough. You can't imagine a Lawrence Weiner work that's in marking pen, can you? People would say it's graffiti. They wouldn't know it was Lawrence Weiner, would they? He is a good friend, I am not knocking on Lawrence.

I used to give a lecture about how the world was changing. This was when I first moved to Europe in '94. In '94 we had just gotten new things in the world. Before that, there were three categories of matter. There were solids, gases and liquids. And just about that time, they added a fourth. You may not remember what this fourth is, because now we have five. But the fourth is glass. There is solids, gases, liquids and glass. And the reason for that is: glass is like a liquid, but it's flowing slower than the universe is. So it never actually flows. But it's otherwise like a liquid. Then, soon after that, a fifth kind of matter came along. And it turns out that most stuff is this fifth kind of matter. At first they, the scientists – scientists are a little goofy, aren't they? – at first they called it "brown matter." And then they say: "Naa, better not call it that." (Laughter.) So then they called it "dark matter." Now they are calling it dark matter. And its most of the universe that is made of dark matter. Similar thing happened to life. There used to be two categories of life: the animal kingdom and the plant kingdom. Is there a Duke of Glasgow, by the way? (Someone in the audience: "Yes.") There is a Duke of Glasgow? Is he married to anybody important? (Someone: "He lives there in Kelburn Castle.") Aha! Because I was just thinking about the Kingdom and the Duke of Edinburgh... word associations.

Well the scientists in the old days had these two kingdoms, plants and animals. And then just about at the same time in the nineties, they said, it doesn't really work that way. Because bacteria are not really so much like plants and animals. They were really trying to figure out what bacteria was. And then in the nineties they did. And they said, mushrooms are also another kingdom. So then they had, very quickly animals, plants, mushrooms and bacteria. And then, then they discovered archaea. Archaea mostly lives in the oceans, but some of it lives in your mouth sometimes.

It's the stuff that makes plaque. It doesn't like oxygen, loves cyanite, loves sulfuric acid, invites itself to tea on all sorts of crazy things, not tea. Lives in every place where there is not much oxygen, or the stuff that we like, whether we are bacteria, or plants or animals. It doesn't like our kind of thing.

But archaea is most of life on earth. Just like dark matter is most of the universe, archaea is most things, because there is so much of it. It used to be the only thing. I think there is even another category that they don't want to admit yet and that is viruses. Viruses are like archaea, but they don't want to admit yet, is that viruses are living organisms. Because they can kill viruses, powder them up, and then stir them up and bring them back to life. And they say: "If we can do that, it is not alive in the first place. It is just as though it were alive." Well it makes it very interesting times, doesn't it. When everything changes with such complexity. It makes for a time that would be really exciting to live in, if only it didn't look like it's all about to be over. If only we didn't have to be so anxious about everything. In the US they sell fear and anxiety and they always have, and it has always worked for them. They sold fear of my family, for example to the newcomers, as a way to control them. And in the fifties they sold fear of communism to everybody.

Oh, I read a funny story in this Nature magazine, an obituary of a chinese scientist, nuclear physicist, I don't remember his name, because this was all in the airplane today... yesterday. But he worked at Los Alamos, he worked at Sandia Base in New Mexico? - Yeah!, helping make the atomic bomb and later he was a part of the team, that I guess it was Oppenheimer's team.

And then, when McCarthyism came along they said: "No, since you are chinese, most likely you are a communist spy." So they kicked him out of the US. He had no place to go except China and he just died, and he was the top scientist in China who developed the atomic bomb for China. Could have stayed in the US and cause less worry to the US if they had been a little nicer.

But there really are now very good reasons to be fearful, aren't there? Besides the fact that governments are fear mongers, and governments want us to be always afraid, we have good reason to be afraid now. But then how do we try to live our lives where we might encourage each other, where we might make things with meaning and make meaning for ourselves.

I was going to bring a stone tool with me today. And I didn't do it, because I wasn't sure it would work to... are my socks still going around somewhere? I am not sure it would work to put this little stone tool around such a big audience. But it's a stone knife that's about 50,000 years old, and I found it in the Parc des Tuileries in Paris. And I have several of these stone tools that I've found in different places of Europe. You can tell their age because you can tell how they're made. The technology of stonework is pretty clear as it goes along. And it's still a good working tool, I can still open a box with it or these kinds of things. But I like it because it shows how ingenious humans are and how marvelous our technological brains are. How marvelous our ability to make all of this stuff is.

I am completely on the side of technology, because that's what humans do. We are technology. It's not a new thing. When we first started being humans, we were technological. That's what we do. Working with material is what we do. Working with it stupidly is what we have always done. But we could get smarter. We easily could get smarter. I often say to groups of people that I make my artwork for the smartest people. And everyone usually thinks that, therefore, I include myself in these smartest people, but I don't. And I don't know who these smart people are, and I don't know where they are. I know they're not necessarily art students or academic people or graduates from university. Anyone on the street, I don't know who they are. I only know I want to make my work for the smartest people, because if I don't, I only have two ways of making work which I've seen other artists do. And that is making work for people just like yourself. In which case you are making art in the same way that you go to a pub with your mates and you are talking and laughing with each other. You're just being friendly, stay in the same place, stay in the same stuff – mates. Or, you can make work, assuming that you are one of the smartest people. In that case, you're instructing humanity and you think that you're showing them something. Telling them something that they need to know. Showing them things that they need to see. You're being paternalistic, which is pretty stupid, isn't it?

So it doesn't put you onto the smart people, does it? There is a clear example of that, in... people, I want to be a little mean here, 'cause it drives me crazy. The people who... artists who take photos of things that they think you couldn't on your own have possibly noticed, 'cause you're just too stupid, and they, the sensitive artist, could see these things and take this photo, and it impresses a lot of people. People agree to be stupid.

A friend of mine, Sarat Maharaj, says that the making of art, the production of art is the making of meaning. I like that very much. I like that idea of what art practice is. But it is the same thing for anything else, isn't it? One of our troubles with visual art, especially in Europe, maybe it's a European idea, is that art has to be a metaphor for some concept in language. That art can and should be translatable into language. That the meaning of art has to be in language. We don't think that with music usually. Nowadays we don't hear much music. We put words to the music, so then we know what the music means. It means: "I love you and I miss you." We put these words to it. But if we listen to a smart musician like Beethoven, we know that there is intellectual meaning to his pieces of music. And we know that this intellectual meaning is not translatable into language. We wouldn't think of translating it into language, would we? We might talk about it in language, but we wouldn't try to translate it into language or say that it's meaning. That it means this and that or the other in language. We do that with visual art, because we think of visual art as a tool for the project that I call "the Cathedral." This project is the European project. The cathedral is a, for me, a metonym for – I just noticed something: before I get up, Maria Thereza told me "Move that water bottle," but it's not there, so I didn't have to – a metonym for belief in the state, and belief in Christianity, belief in the monument, is what I mean by cathedral building.

The city started its life as an architectural monumental project. That's what the city is. And at the same time, the city started writing as the system started. Architecture and writing, in other words, started at the same time. I am a kind of a writer. I like writing. I don't like the physical part of writing. But what I don't like about writing is the same thing I don't like about architecture. It replaces metaphor with truth. It says there is such a thing as truth and that it has this truth. Before that, we had metaphor, we had poetry, we had memory. Now we have an archive of truth, and this is part of the monument that is the city. It has to do completely with belief. And belief itself



becomes a holy concept. So everyone says "Well, what do your people believe? Is there a belief for a holy thing, an important thing?" It's just a piece of European craziness, isn't it? There is no reason to believe anything. There is a good reason to recognize lies. And we can all do that, can't we? We know a lie when we hear it. When we see it. Most of the time. We know most of the time when a piece of artwork is lying to us, don't we? The two things don't go together. There might not be any truth, but we know a lie. Well, we ought to know it about belief, and we ought to know it about the city. We ought to know it about the monument that is architecture. I don't mean I am against the city. I wouldn't live anywhere except a big city, because I like the anonymity of the city. I like for my neighbors not to gossip so much about me. Not to know so much about me that they can gossip very much. And, well, I think that's how we got where we are. I think there is something instinctual about architecture for humans, just like there is something kind of instinctual that gives us the ability to speak, that gives us this very complicated syntactical ability, that kind of speech.

We have an idea that human life is sacred and cannot be messed with. And we have this from our family, because we know these children, these brothers, these parents cannot be killed. At the very same time, these are the first groups of people who kill each other. I tried to kill my brother when I was thirteen. He tried to kill me several times. So we have populated the earth by trying to escape from each other and bringing our little family... and you suddenly have a fight with your cousin and that becomes another tribe. And then those cousins have a fight and then you make more and more... . We only learned 150 years ago that we had populated the entire earth. We didn't even know ourselves at all. We didn't realize that we had populated the entire earth, because we had populated it, because we murdered ourselves. And because we hate that, we'd like to love each other instead. So we've spread out everywhere, trying to escape ourselves and protect our other selves at the same time. The best way to do that, it turns out, is in a big city. In a village, you know it, if you are from a village, it can get much more murderers. Your chances in a big city are better just by statistics. Did I start out saying something and forget what I was saying? (Audience laughs.)

Yeah, I started out a long, long time ago, about the different categories of the world. As artists are as people who work intellectually, and for me this means

a carpenter, or a plumber or anyone else, who is it that doesn't work intellectually? Those of us who work intellectually have a responsibility to our practically hopeless humanity to try to help us get smarter. I take it very personally. I want to get smarter. I want to be smarter. I heard a long time ago an Irish saying a text, ten smart guys to make a smart guy. I am sure it is true. I was going to say early on – I'm just reading my notes here – something that I didn't say or I interrupted myself and say it now. I was going to talk about it when I passed the socks around and I forgot. There is a big trouble about American Indians. And this trouble is Hollywood. Hollywood started celebrating the genocide of American Indians. That's the start of Hollywood, it started with cowboy movies. That's the beginning of Hollywood. It wasn't Hollywood that invented the system, Hollywood used it. The US and Europe were celebrating the genocide of American Indians culturally long before Hollywood. The cowboy books, the cowboy dime novels. There were, in Oklahoma, show ranches where people went to see cowboys act like cowboys and Indians act like Indians. That's what Buffalo Bill did with his tour, his touring group of cowboys and Indians. And we somehow think that this is not only okay, but we think it's reality. We think the American West is reality. The American West starts in Manhattan and it's genocide. But it does not only start in Manhattan. There is a problem with it, because of the strength of Hollywood. There is a problem in most Latin American countries that I have seen first hand, Indians will come to see a real Indian. Indians in Mexico, Indians in Colombia, Indians in Peru will come to see me or Paul Smith, a Comanche friend of mine, to see what a real Indian looks like. Because we are from the US, we are from Hollywoodland, especially a Cherokee or a Comanche, because these Indians in Latin America know these names and they want to meet a real Indian. I am a great disappointment in that case. Especially when you look at Hollywood, and this is the part that I forgot, which I now read in my notes, which I am now getting round to. A strange fact about Cherokees, Choctaws and Creeks is our Scottish ancestry. Our Scottish, you might say, internal colonizers. This guy named Durham, who is in my family, I suppose he was actually Scottish, or in those days the borderlands were... nobody knew if they were English or Scottish or cared very much, because they were mostly bandits, servants, guys who were not given much in life. And he was, as far as we can figure out, kind of an indigent servant who was sent to South Carolina as part of the Durham estate. His last name wasn't Durham, he didn't have a last name probably.

There was a famous chief of the Choctaws, named McIntosh, Chief McIntosh, and he wore a Tam O'Shanter and he dressed as Scottish as he could imagine in those Pre-Hollywood days. This is about two hundred years ago, a hundred and fifty years ago. Our most famous chief, Cherokee chief, was named John Ross. And he looked a little like me. His eyebrows were bushier and as he got older they were whiter. But some of the famous Cherokee names, for the past more than two hundred years, the Ross family, the Van family, the Rich family, the Star family... these people came over mostly as traders. People who did trade, I don't mean conspirators. And settled in with us, married Cherokee or Creek or Choctaw women, their children very often didn't speak much English. But they brought with them a European craziness. So that by the time, after many, many years of war, all of us were moved west to Oklahoma, by something called "the Trail of Tears," force marched to Oklahoma. Many of these Cherokees and Choctaws and Creeks had African slaves, not only the Scottish Cherokees, but anyone who was opportunistic enough or could have enough land and enough whatever it takes to work with people as slaves, I don't know what that takes. So that we, during the US Civil War, we had our own civil war. Cherokees against Cherokees, and there were slave owners on both sides. In my own family there are African American people and people who look like me and Hollywood-Indian-looking Indians. Michelangelo Pistoletto said: "Why do you have blue eyes?" And I said: "Because history happened to us! – What colour eyes do Italians have?" He said: "Brown!"

I was just going to throw that in, as a Scottish interesting thing. But now that I have thrown that in, it has taken me away from whatever I was trying to talk about about art. I want to close with a different subject, that's the real subject of my talk. Do I have time to tell a little bit more? (Somebody in the audience: "You do!")

I gave the wrong title for this talk. This talk is titled "How to Kiss." And it starts with... my family are knife makers and Cherokees used to be famous knife makers. I'm pretty sure we learned that from the Spanish, because we met the Spanish before we met the English or the Scots.

When you have a sword, you want the blade to be very sharp. So you make a scabbard, a sheath for the sword, a knife is the same – sheath, knife and sword, it's the same principle – usually out of two pieces of wood, or it can be two pieces of thick leather, and you put them together like this (demonstrates

it), the blade fits in tight, and the sharp edge of the blade is down here where they meet. And then, if it is a sword, you can wrap leather around this wood, or this harder leather, and then you can wrap steel around that to make it strong. That way the sharp edge of the blade never touches anything. Because you wouldn't want it to touch something until you are ready to cut off somebody's head, would you? You want it to be sharp until you use it. So you would never put a knife blade or a sword blade touching metal, would you? Never, never, never. 'Cause as soon as you draw it out or put it in, you would be making it dull. That's clear, isn't it?

So everytime we watch a movie, the guy draws his sword, it makes this noise of the sword going through metal. Why does it do that? Because the movie wants us to believe it. And adds everything false, to make us believe the movie. Sound is one of those things. You have to have this sound, this false sound, so that people will believe it. I always tell people, if you are in a forest, especially in the evening, and you hear some strange music: "Run away! Don't stay there! This means something bad. Run away!" (Audience laughs.) Everytime you see an animal in a movie, the animal has to make the noise of the animal. But they don't usually do that, hah? They're usually pretty silent. Even dogs don't bark all the time. It's even worse than that, because you can usually tell this is some stupid man making this noise, pretending to be the animal and very self-satisfied, you can hear it in the, in his animal voice. Everytime you see, for example, a bird in a movie, if the bird flies, you have to hear the flap flap flap of the wings. If you've ever seen an owl fly, they're so beautiful because they are so silent. They have feathers here and here that keep them silent when they fly, so the lunch won't hear them. In the movies they have to go flap flap flap flap flap. It's some guy making a flapping noise as the owl is flying along.

We are taught how to be by movies. They are so strong, they are the biggest monument now. They are the biggest part of this monument called a city, or the cathedral, our lives these days. We are taught how to talk, what to say, how to react by movies. And by now you can see what I mean about kissing, I hope. The whole idea of kissing is that your lips are very sensitive and sensual. If you do this to your own hand (kisses his own hand) – there is nothing sensual there, there's nothing sensitive. You're taking all of the sensitiveness away from it. This sound of kissing – I don't see any young people now who kiss silently. They all smack each other. (Laughter.)

This is from the movies, it's not the way to kiss. Well that's all. (Laughter.)  
We can now just talk as I have nothing more special to say.  
(Audience applauds.)

Thank you.

Amy Sales: Jimmie, are you willing to take a few questions?

Jimmie Durham: I am, yes.

Question 1: What is your relationship to thrown stones as you get older? Are you still doing it? Is it more difficult?

Jimmie Durham: My bones have gotten rather delicate lately, and I am trying to figure out a way to throw smaller stones more effectively. Or no, what really works is what I have been doing with great success: hiring other guys, with trucks, to throw bigger stones onto bigger things. (Laughter.)

Someone: Technology.

Jimmie Durham: Yah. I did a piece in Paris that I actually made in Berlin. I bought an old airplane and rented a stone in Berlin, from the stone store, a great big eight-ton boulder. And put the stone on the airplane, then took the stone back off. Just paid for it for one day and I had some guys make a fake stone out of polyester resin to put in Paris in the show, 'cause the real stone was too heavy for the museum.

Question 2: Jimmie, you once said that you thought it was more difficult for Western people to imagine art. Can you explain more about that?

Jimmie Durham: I think it is the strength of the idea that art is a metaphor for language. So we think we have to get it. We go to a gallery, we look at the work and we say: "Oh yes, now I get it!" And this affects the artist too. The artist wants to make something that people can get. And what we mean is something very strange and exotic. We mean that we understand it linguistically, in language. And I just had a funny conversation with Cuauhtémoc Medina from Mexico – we were in Spain together. And my show is in a place called Sala Verónicas and these are nuns. It was a nunnery at one time. There were saint orders that were named after Verónica. And I didn't know who Verónica was and Cuauhtémoc explained to me that she is the lady

who gave Jesus her hanky. And he put it over his face or she put it over his face and it made a perfect image of his face. And what I really didn't know is that's why she is named Verónica. It means the true image, Verónica means the true icon – vera icon. So it means her mother named her that, in anticipation that Jesus will need her hanky. (All are laughing loudly.)

But there are two things wrong with this hanky. I did a self-portrait course in Malmo Art Academy and I painted my face and I put a handkerchief over it and I took it away – and as you know, your face is tridimensional – and the print of a tridimensional thing doesn't come out like this. It comes out much bigger and unrecognizable. But what is really wrong with this story: if we had the "true" image of what Jesus really looked like – so what? So what if we had the true image? What would that mean? How would that, how would that mean? How would it mean to have this true image? Would we say: "Oh, now I get it!" (Laughter.) Would we say: "Ah, that proves...?" What, what would it prove? One thing, we would still lie. We would still say, he had blue eyes, wouldn't we? We would still imagine him as a non-Jewish guy.

We think visual art is illustration. That's the evil. We think it's illustration. That it illustrates stories, that it's supposed to be representational. Probably in Glasgow it's the same as in London. Most people still say, when they go to an art museum, that they are going to see pictures. They are going to look at pictures. They still think that art is painting and painting is pictures. And people still say: "Do you like pictures?" – meaning, do you like art? It doesn't mean, therefore, that there is a something that art is, just because we say, it's not about illustration. We don't therefore get to say what it is is xxx. What we ought to say is: what next can I do with art? That's the real challenge. What more can I do with art?

I say to art students the story about me and Kendell Geers. Before I met him – he is a South African artist – before I met him I saw, in the early nineties, a catalog of a group show of South African artists, and he was one of the artists. I don't remember his work in the catalog, but his bio in the back, his curriculum vitae, was a long creative thing. It wasn't a lie but it was added onto it. It starts with the Boers coming to South Africa as his curriculum vitae. It talks about the three times he tried to commit suicide, and many, many other things. And it was so energizing to me, because it was art. He had turned his curriculum vitae into art. And it made me think: if you are good enough, anything is art. If you are a good enough artist, you can make art out

of anything. Even a list of things. And this gave me a great energy to think that way.

That's why I was thinking... that's why I was talking about the different categories of things. We used to think art was representational sculpture and painting. And we used to think that it served architecture. Doesn't mean that we have to redefine, we have to stop defining instead! And we can say: whatever some serious person does, that gives us encouragement and energy – excellent!

Question 3: What has motivated you to come to Scotland now and what are your plans?

Jimmie Durham: I only came now because I was invited. (Laughter.) I might have thought about it a year before, because a friend of mine, Abraham Cruzvillegas, had been here a year, two years ago, and he said such good things and tried to talk to us in a Scottish accent. He did not a bad job. Spanish in a Scottish accent is kind of nice. (Laughter.)

I moved to Europe in '94 and I've been very busy since then. Pretty much non-stop busy. And the reason is: I tried to do whatever I was invited to do. So, the next year, for example, I was in the north-middle of Siberia, and... oh, I love this story: they took me on a picnic and it was minus 60° centigrade. It was horribly cold. I still have a dead finger from this picnic. We had some vodka, and we put it out in the snow away from the fire, and we couldn't pour it by the time we got our horsemeat ready to eat. We couldn't pour the vodka, it had frozen. Most marvellous picnic. (Laughter.) I was invited to do something for the new Sami Courthouse in northern Norway, in the Lapps. And I did something and the king and queen came and they had a special audience just with me. I suppose that will happen here too! (Laughter.) I like to engage and I like to stay busy.

Amy Sales: Jimmie, we may not remember absolutely everything you said, but we'll certainly remember this Friday event. Thank you very much.

Jimmie Durham: Thank you.

Jimmie Durham, geboren 1940 in USA, lebt seit 1994 in Europa | born in the US in 1940, based in Europe since 1994

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