

#7

Jimmie Durham and the Strange Brazilian Normalcy

MAÍRA DAS NEVES

MASP Afterall

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Art and descolonization

Afterall and Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP) are working together to explore new artistic and curatorial practices that explicitly question and critique colonial legacies in art, curation and critical art writing. The project Art and descolonization is building a critical forum for cultural theorists, curators and artists to raise questions and formulate proposals for the reinterpretation of exhibitions and museum collections in non-canonical ways by promoting workshops, seminars and publishing essays. It is intended that the events promoted by this collaboration will stimulate further discussion and research on decolonization, decolonial and post-colonial studies.



JIMMIE DURHAM
Untitled, 1992
Acrylic on canvas and plywood, 78 x 83 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

Jimmie Durham and the Strange Brazilian Normalcy

MAÍRA DAS NEVES

Having lived across several different worlds, Jimmie Durham provides us with a kind of parallax perspective, offering us access to non-Western thoughts through Western languages. His work operates like a multifaceted mirror that reflects multiple ways of thinking-feeling, distorting normality and allowing us to glimpse alternative possibilities of existence. Through his work as an artist and writer, the history of conquerors is called into question; the Western way of living and thinking is denaturalized.

Fundamental to the artist's work are pointed criticisms of the colonial process and of modern Western thought, making it extremely relevant for Brazil. On his rare appearances in the country, Durham has not commented on Brazilian art or the country's ideas of cultural anthropophagy, choosing to focus instead on the characteristics and consequences of Brazilian society's colonial mentality. This text brings together writings by the artist himself about Brazil, and examines two exhibitions of his work that took place in the country.

Durham's first activity in Brazil was in 2005. After refusing an invitation to participate in the International Symposium of the 27th São Paulo Biennial, he spoke at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and called for a boycott to the 2006 Biennale:

I want to try to speak to Brazil today. I want to speak to the people of Brazil, to challenge you; but in the spirit of solidarity. Here in Brazil there is a situation that must be seen as completely intolerable in the twenty-first century.

In the legal system of Brazil indigenous people are not regarded as human beings.

Let me say it again: Brazil does not see the Indians of the country as fully human, with full human rights. People here say, *os nossos índios, os nossos índios!*—"Our Indians!"

This situation exists nowhere else in the world. Indigenous peoples of the Americas are badly treated in every country, but only in Brazil are we legally seen as less than human.

I know very well the excuse, the history and reasoning behind this

phenomenon. I have heard the explanation from government officials and from anthropologists for more than thirty years.

I am here to say that now you must change.

Now Brazil has the opportunity to change.

There has been no future in the Americas for five hundred years. The U.S., of course, has convinced much of the world that it has the future, when all it has is money and guns. Brazil now has the opportunity to make a new future in the Americas.

There must be a better law. Indigenous peoples must be accorded full legal rights, human rights, as well as full protection under the law. No more "parks" where indigenous communities are treated like endangered species, and no more landless Indians. Indigenous communities must have territories that are theirs by every right, and the right to economic and cultural development; education both in Portuguese and their own languages through the highest academic levels. Yet, there must be even greater protection of these communities from exploitation, even greater legal protection of individuals' rights and lives, but with no more paternalism.

Because of the horrible history, this is certainly complicated, and cannot be approached simplistically or without thorough involvement by all Brazilians.

Here are some possible ideas for a beginning: recently in Australia I witnessed and participated in a new social tradition. Aboriginals ask all Australians to begin any public address with a state-

1. DURHAM, Jimmie. *The Second Particle Wave Theory*. Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2005, pp. 45-46.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

ment of recognition of which Aboriginal group once had the land. So that, for example, here in Porto Alegre I might have begun my talk by saying that I acknowledge that I am in the land of the Guarani. Australians also have a national "Day of Mourning," on which the general public is asked to apologize for treatment towards Aboriginals. Of course there is racist mockery of the day, and much ignorant behavior, but that can also serve, by its exposure.

One last thing: the São Paulo Biennale is known internationally. We imagine that if there had been a Johannesburg, South Africa Biennale during the Apartheid, most artists would not have participated. I am an American Indian, and stand before you to say that we are as human as you.

Why not boycott the São Paulo Biennale? How not?¹

The boycott did not happen. The idea was not well received in the Brazilian art circuit. Durham mentions in his essay, "The Second Particle Wave Theory:"

It was my first visit to Brazil, even though in the 1970s I travelled all over South and North America *except* Brazil. There was no reason to go there; one could meet with Indian groups only with government permission, and the government was the military dictatorship. [...] I went in '05 because I thought there was a chance to start something. Gilberto Gil [...] had become the minister of culture under the new government, and Maria Thereza Alves had been the Brazilian Workers' Party's [Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT)] first representative in the U.S. in the early 1980s. ²

It was a moment of optimism in the country. It was a time when more people had access to electricity and when more people were able to buy home appliances. Greater consumption would lead to the growth of the *classe C* (median income class). Few people wanted to criticize the government. Social change and better laws for indigenous peoples were not a priority. The will to defend the new Workers' Party government seemed to impede the understanding of colonial criticism. It is troubling for Brazilians to look into the

3. CUNHA, Manuela Carneiro da. "O futuro da questão indígena." In: *Índios no Brasil. História, direitos e cidadania*, São Paulo: Claro Enigma, 2012, p. 128.

4. *Ibid.*

5. CUNHA, Manuela Carneiro da. "Introdução a uma história indígena." In: *Índios no Brasil. História, direitos e cidadania*, op. cit. p. 21.

6. Law no. 6.001 of December 19, 1973.

7. INSTITUTO SOCIOAMBIENTAL. "Os índios não são incapazes," https://pib.socioambiental.org/files/file/PIB_institucional/Os_indios_nao_sao_incapazes.pdf (last accessed on 15 December 2018).

8. BRASIL, "Histórico da discussão sobre o Estatuto dos Povos Indígenas no âmbito da Comissão Nacional de Política Indigenista," http://www.funai.gov.br/arquivos/conteudo/presidencia/pdf/Estatuto-do-Indio_CNPI/Historico-Estatuto_dos_Povos_Indigenas.pdf (last accessed on 1 February 2018).

mirror of Durham's words. Is it really true that, legally, Brazilian indigenous peoples are considered less than human?

The legal status of indigenous peoples today has been defined by provisions in the 1916 Civil Code, the Estatuto do Índio [Statute of the Indian], and the 1988 Constitution. Indigenous people have constitutional rights. The Constitution addresses mainly indigenous lands, rights over natural resources, litigation rules and procedural capacity. Under the Constitution, indigenous lands are property of the Union, of inalienable possession, and of exclusive usufruct of Indigenous people. Therefore, indigenous lands do not belong to their peoples.³

The Civil Code focuses on tutelage, with the aim of providing special protection to indigenous peoples until they are fully integrated into the country's society. At the time of writing, it was thought (or desired) that indigenous people would eventually cease to exist. "Tutelage" implies that indigenous people are only "relatively capable."⁴ Legally they are considered humans, but they are humans of a limited capacity, like eternally irresponsible teenagers who need a tutor—an escort—to travel abroad, to buy condoms, to buy alcohol, and especially to do business. This tutelage is currently carried out by the Fundação Nacional do Índio or Funai [National Indian Foundation], a governmental indigenous affairs agency.⁵ The Brazilian state has a paternalistic attitude towards "our Indians" and actually legally considers them inferior beings, while guaranteeing sovereignty and ownership of the territory.

The Estatuto do Índio dates from 1973.⁶ It is outdated, but still in force.⁷ The document regulates details of indigenous rights following the Civil Code's principle that indigenous people are "relatively capable" and should receive tutelage until they are "integrated into national communion." The Constitution, however, has since abandoned the assimilationist perspective, recognizing indigenous to maintain their own culture.

Between 2006 and 2009 the Comissão Nacional de Política Indigenista [National Commission of Indigenous Policy] revised the Estatuto do Índio, resulting in the Estatuto dos Povos Indígenas [Statute of Indigenous Peoples]. However, the project soon was shelved rather than effectively replacing the previous one.⁸ The new Civil Code of 2002 had removed indigenous people from the "relatively capable" category and stated that their capacity should be regulated by a special legislation. Since the promulgation of the Constitution, propos-

9. FORSTER, Paula. "Um grito na paisagem." *Estado de S. Paulo*, 6 November 2017. <http://brasil.estadao.com.br/blogs/inconsciente-coletivo/um-grito-na-paisagem/> (last accessed on 1 February 2018).

10. FILHO, Antonio Gonçalves. "O americano que provoca na Bienal." *Estado de S. Paulo*, 19 October 2010. <https://cultura.estadao.com.br/blogs/bienal/o-americano-que-provoca-na-bienal/> (last accessed on 6 February 2018).

11. NAVAS, Adolfo Montejo. "Jimmie Durham desmistifica chavão estético." *ARTE!Brasileiros*, n. 8, March/April 2011, pp. 26-28.

12. MOURA, Irene Barbosa de. "O monumento e a cidade. A obra de Brecheret na dinâmica urbana." *Revista Cordis*, n. 6, 2011, p. 2.

als have been pending in Congress to revise the set of laws regulating their rights. In a country governed by agribusiness, the evangelical church and gun-rights groups, it is evident that such legal revisions remain on hold. "I defended the indigenous rights in our 1988 Constitution, but they keep being violated that I feel I've been fighting for the same rights to this day," comments the activist Ailton Krenak.⁹

Despite public debates, the organization of commissions and discussions between activists and politicians, the legal status of indigenous peoples in Brazil has not improved. In 2010, Durham changed his strategy towards the São Paulo Biennial and agreed to participate in its 29th edition. His work would "show Brazilians harmful elements of their own culture." In an interview, he stated that "Brazil is more or less similar to the United States with respect to the constant justification of genocide as a condition for the nation's development."¹⁰ The installation, *Bureau for Research into Brazilian Normality* is "a piece conceived as an attack on Brazil."¹¹

In an installation dedicated to the contemporary *bandeirantes*, Durham brought together elements of São Paulo's strange normality. Objects, images, newspaper clippings and printouts were arranged as if they were displayed in an ethnographic museum or study room. This space for documents, in vitrines and on tables, highlighted the influence of the United States on the values of people from São Paulo, and evidenced the current presence of the *bandeirantes* in the city: referenced are the São Paulo Government Palace, bridge, sculpture, street, avenue, hospital, communication company, school and especially the Monumento às Bandeiras [Monument to the Bandeiras] (1953). At the installation's exit, one last object faces us: a mirror. The artist clarifies any doubt one might have about today's *bandeirantes*. One of the last images we take from this presentation about Brazilian normality is our own faces.

The Monumento às Bandeiras is a landmark in São Paulo. Created by Victor Brecheret (1894–1955) in 1920 and inaugurated in 1953,¹² the monument affirms ideals of progress and entrepreneurship, following the modernist trends of the time. The monument frames the *bandeirantes* as heroes. To Durham, however, it has another function: "Anywhere," he says, "monuments are landmarks of faith and death, but in the Americas they are mostly and specifically *against* us. They celebrate our submission and alleged disappearance."¹³ The monument was supported by modern artists and earned nick-

13. DURHAM, Jimmie, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 49. Author's highlight.

names like “let me push”— the black and indigenous figures in the far end of the group are the only ones pushing the canoe. Its public acceptance and importance seemed unquestionable. Of course, I cannot prove the effect of Durham's installation, but I prefer to imagine that his work contributed to the resignification of the monument in the collective imagination. Three years later, a protest in defense of the demarcation of indigenous land ended strategically at the Monumento às Bandeiras. The sculpture was covered in red ink with the words “*Bandeirantes assassinos*” [*Bandeirantes Murderers*]. Durham published a letter of support at the time:

VANDALISM

In the Americas genocide is so celebratory. Of course it is denied, excused, explained. But at the same time it is celebrated. The brave killers who opened up the wilderness. The assassins, as they were so recently and aptly named by Indian people who had spray-painted on Victor Brecheret's large sculpture of *bandeirantes* just outside Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo during October 2013. When I heard this news my heart, my mind, my spirit lifted. In 2010 I participated in the 29th São Paulo Biennale and everyday had to pass what is to me, to us, this horrible monstrosity. I had often thought how nice it would be if a very long freight train were to accidentally de-rail and crash into this monument to murder. It is one of really very many such monuments; as though the citizens need constant reminders of their history, their guilt. By this essay I offer my most sincere gratitude to the people who defaced Brecheret's hard and ugly edifice.

In New York City there is a statue of Theodore Roosevelt Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) triumphantly astride a horse. Behind him are an Afro-American man and an American Indian man, walking humbly, not following where he might lead them so much as they signify being his property. This monument greets the public in front of the American Museum of Natural History.

In the 1960s American Indian people, friends of mine, threw buckets of red paint on it more than

once; a symbolic gesture that changed no attitudes among white people but gave courage to us.

A few years later, in the 1970s, I moved to New York City to work at the United Nations for the International Indian Treaty Council. A high priority was organizing a conference on Indians of the Americas at the U.N.'s Geneva headquarters. It was necessary to speak with Indian leaders in Canada, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. It proved impossible to contact anyone in Brazil. Indian people in Brazil were not free to attend international conferences or to form national organizations. Government agencies, anthropologists and Christian Church missionaries spoke for them, acted for them.

Even in the new century Indian people in Brazil have not been recognized as fully human under the constitution. This situation, which ought to be seen as intolerable, is at best excused as being good for the Indians, protecting them from the legal system. The excusers never seem to notice that this has not been working out at all; Indian people are persecuted, driven off their lands, killed on a regular basis. Much more important, and never looked at (except perhaps with a certain perverse pride of the type one encounters among Texans also) is the obvious subtext, which is the real text: it is being said that Brazil cannot protect indigenous people from Brazil, itself.

Brazil cannot protect indigenous people from Brazil. In that case, what? If Indigenous people were to take up sophisticated weapons and fight back in methodical ways, surely Brazil would retaliate with vengeance. In other words, Brazil would protect itself from Indians.

If the Americas were the home of normal, rational ex-European settlers as they pretend, some council of American nations could take up the dire situation. Even with the astounding improvement in some South American countries, such an organization would not take action on behalf of the rights of Indigenous people. In the twenty-first century we still live in primitive triumphalist, un-ra-

14. Getúlio Vargas ratified the Convention in 1952. See BRASIL. "Decreto N° 30.822, 6.5.1952," <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1950-1959/decreto-30822-6-maio-1952-339476-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> (last accessed on 1 April 2019).

tional countries that are the spoils of genocide. I imagine smug Brazilian guys sitting with their beer: one says to us, "You cannot call it genocide because genocide as a crime is a deliberate act. What happens in Brazil is just rough clumsiness. No one has ever set out to commit genocide against Indian people." Except I think that really he would speak in the past tense. I think he would say that what has happened has happened. Very sad, but now we must all move on.

For very many years I have been telling people that we are not in the past—our problems with the American countries in which we find ourselves are not in the past. The genocide of indigenous people of the Americas is not in the past.

The United Nations drew up a convention against genocide after the Second World War. This convention is explicit and detailed. Once U.N. conventions are drawn up they are then sent out to the member-nations for ratification. In those days, the U.S. had not ratified the U.N. Convention against Genocide.

In 1977 we had a document of solid facts and evidence of the U.S. ongoing genocide against Indian people, ready to present to the U.N. We did not exaggerate nor misstate the case.

I bet Brazil has not ratified the U.N. Convention Against Genocide either.¹⁴ And I bet, whether or not it has, if Indian people brought a case to the U.N. many Brazilian people would feel insulted. Many would feel betrayed.

In the Americas there are two giant countries, which have most made national narratives about their "early days:" the U.S. and Brazil. The myths they make of *bandeirantes*, pioneers, cowboys, are the operating engines that run their cultures. For this reason any challenge to any part of the myth is responded to with childish anger. Nevertheless, the stories of the pioneers and *bandeirantes* are destructively wrong.

The *bandeirantes* enslaved, raped, killed Indian people, stole the land and made monsters of their own offspring. If they did it with a cheerful bonhomie, so much the worse. So much the more hor-

15. DURHAM, Jimmie. "Vandalism." *Periódico Permanente*, v. 2, n. 4, 2013, <http://www.forumpermanente.org/revista/numero-4/textos/vandalism> (last accessed on 1 December 2017).

16. MOIROUX, Sophie. "Devemos imaginar a antropologia antropológicamente – Entrevista com Jimmie Durham." *Revista de Antropologia*, v. 56, n. 2., 2013, pp. 585-86.

17. GRIFFIN, J. "Elements from the Actual World." *Art in America*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/elements-from-the-actual-world/> (last accessed on 10 March 2019).

rible. If they, in their time, felt innocent, so much the more horrible. But their admirers today are not innocent. Stupidity is never innocent.

The *bandeirantes* are not the founders of São Paulo or Brazil. They are the founders of a bad situation that Brazilian Black people have to function around. And later poor Europeans, such as Ukrainians and Poles, have to function around. And most certainly Indian people must try to function around, to live poorly in, a country that celebrates their genocide.

The mayor of São Paulo should give awards—and more spray-paint—to the artist who intervened in Victor Brecheret's silly monument.¹⁵

In 2010, Durham displayed a more fictional, but no less critical, character in his solo exhibition *Provas circunstanciais do Brasil* [Circumstantial Evidence from Brazil] at Galeria Progetti (Rio de Janeiro). The artist combined appropriated materials, shaping narratives across the space. First-person texts gave voice to objects, as in these excerpts from *Petrônio Cortes* (2010):

Enecaaruca, fellow Brazilian and international guests and *enepytuna catu!* My name is Petrônio Cortes and I am a stone; *ita*, we would say in Tupi, of the porphyria family.[..]

Like basalt, we are, however, all volcanic in origin, so it can be said that we made Brazil. Most of my friends call me "Itaici." For many millions of years, *mutan!*, I lived in the *ybyty*, the *jopik oron*. (Of course, I also *nheen* in the Krenak language, *et bien-sûr un peu de français*.) [...]¹⁶

The long text mixes languages, exposing the ignorance of the reader. It is impossible to follow the stone for those who do not speak native languages. Durham doesn't translate—"What I want them to know is that they can't know that."¹⁷ This work points to one of the most urgent of the indigenous causes and also to one of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's proposals for decolonization: the need to both speak and think with native languages.¹⁸ That stone claims to have made Brazil, contradicting the *bandeirantes* narrative. In another essay, Durham comments on the exhibition:

18. CUSICANQUI, Silvia Rivera. *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa. Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2010, p. 73.

A change in my work happened with a show in Rio de Janeiro a few years ago. The Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves and I have been partners for thirty-five years, but I had been to Brazil only once before and not with her. Then we went together because we were both in the São Paulo Biennial. We stayed five months, in São Paulo and Ubatuba where her family is, Rio and Pernambuco. At the flea market in São Paulo I found a massive block of *jacaranda* (rosewood)—not a log but a squared block; that means that the outside part was trimmed away. It is about a 120cm high, by maybe 76 or 80 and 60 deep. Magnificent. It was like finding a giant diamond for me. I have carved small pieces of this incredible wood since the '60s, but did not know it could be so big.

It had been cut at least a hundred years before, probably much more, and for no known purpose or use. Must have been only the scrap end of some truly impressive beam. When I said that it was like finding a giant diamond, I was just trying to describe the intense feeling I had. The piece of wood is like a holy relic. More. There are no such trees in Brazil anymore, and hardly any *jacaranda* at all. They have all become fancy chairs and desks in Vienna and Boston.

The entire Atlantic coast forest of Brazil has been more than decimated, and the Amazon and inland forests are being rapidly cleared of trees. In warehouses of salvaged lumber, old beams and furniture parts all over Brazil, one finds beautiful old hardwood pieces, often of woods that are no longer easily identifiable, or from kinds of trees that no longer exist.

I decided that the show in Rio would be made of old wood, and that each piece would try to talk; that is, I would give each one a text—not about its history or predicament, but about something unexpected. My studio was in an old factory in Santo Cristo, and every day I worked on these beautiful relics. Every day I got sicker. I had skin rashes, my eyes swelled up, I had trouble breathing. It turns out that most of the South American hardwoods are poisonous to work with.

19. GAD, Amira; BLANCHFLOWER, Melissa (Eds.). *Various Items and Complaints: Jimmie Durham*, London: Serpentine Gallery, 2015, p. 142.

20. ANJOS, Moacir dos. "Arte india." *Revista Zum*, 9 June 2016, <https://revistazum.com.br/colunistas/arte-india/> (last accessed on 15 December 2018).

21. MOIROUS, Sophie, 2013, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

22. DURHAM, Jimmie. "O rei da Sardenha." *Caderno Sesc_Videobrasil*, n. 8, 2012–2013, p. 27.

After that show I began to work more with wood in Europe.¹⁹

Durham's exhibition in Rio de Janeiro digs into our colonial history with fictions and objects—"circumstantial evidence." If his work at the Biennial points to the agents of colonial thought, the exhibition in Rio de Janeiro evidences signs of its effects. Leftovers. As Moacir dos Anjos points out, just like the concrete and symbolic place destined for indigenous people. In his recent article "Indigenous Art," the theorist states that the erasures and exclusions, typical in the history of these peoples in almost every space of sensible representation, include the field of visual arts. Despite some minority voices that are partly or completely devoted to indigenous issues, they remains "almost entirely on the fringes of the realm of visual representations produced by the artists in this country."²⁰

In order to decolonize Brazilian society's ways of thinking, Jimmie Durham shows that it is fundamental to review the Western imaginary itself, the idea of a civilized and progressive culture. According to him, "it is not easy to be intelligent in the Americas because we are so overcolonized, while colonizers do not admit to being colonizers, so we do not easily admit that we are colonized."²¹ Our colonial process takes place internally and internationally:

Concurrent to immigration is colonization. In these days of international cooperation, direct colonization is no longer needed: recently, the British ambassador to Brazil arranged a meeting with President Dilma so that she could help him resolve a British economic problem. If I read the newspaper article correctly, England's credit rates will be negatively affected if its mineral industry is unable to drive profits up. This, in turn, falls on the opening of a new mine in Brazil. Due to the stricter regulations in Brazil, the English mine could not be opened; hence the ambassador asks for a special favor (for which, I think, he would have promised something in return in the near future).²²

Meanwhile, our internal colonialism can be seen, for example, in the composition of the House of Representatives, in which almost half of the representatives are heirs of families

23. ÉTORE, Medeiros. "As dinastias da Câmara." *Pública*. Agência de Jornalismo Investigativo, 3 February 2016, <https://apublica.org/2016/02/truco-as-dinastias-da-camara/> (last accessed on 5 February, 2018).

24. DURHAM, Jimmie, 2012-2013, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

25. Hans Staden was a German mercenary who traveled to Brazil twice. In one of these raids, he was captured by Tupinambás and lived for nine months under custody of these natives. Upon returning to Germany, in 1557, he wrote the book, *True Story and Description of a Country of Wild, Naked, Grim, Man-eating People in the New World, America*, also known as *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil*.

26. DURHAM, Jimmie. *Poems That Do Not Go Together*. Berlin: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2013, p. 93.

whose political power, in some cases, dates back to the colonial period.²³

This exploration seems perfectly natural to European peoples who call themselves Mexicans, Argentines, and so on. They have no other relationship with the land. American nations are colonial constructions against the land. Otherwise, is it not curious that every politician on these two continents who is called a "conservative" is also against the protection and safeguarding of the land? Why don't they want to preserve it? Their "conservatism" is always radically favorable to greater colonial-style preying.²⁴

Finally, a Durham poem written in the land where Hans Staden (1525–1576)²⁵ was not eaten:

What's the Best Thing to Eat?

What's the best thing to eat?
Okra fried in cornmeal.

No, wait; catfish fried in cornmeal.
A recipe for tartar sauce:

Whisk an egg in olive oil with
A few drops of lemon juice,
Until is thick.

Chop onions, capers, garlic,
Parsley and dried chili pepper.
Mix it up.

Which tartars, I don't know;
Are there catfish in the River Don?

Sturgeon, I know, with caviar.
Add chopped onion and parsley,
A little hot water,

To the left-over cornmeal,
Roll it into balls,
Fry it up.²⁶

MAÍRA DAS NEVES is a trans-disciplinary artist, translator, and researcher. She is graduated in Visual Arts at Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado and holds a master degree at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro. She participated in different exhibitions and art residencies, such as Universidade de Verão, Capacete (Rio de Janeiro, 2009); Z/KU Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (Berlin, 2014); and Programa de Exposições Centro Cultural São Paulo (São Paulo, 2013). She kept the Ateliê 1m2 at Bhering Studios (Rio de Janeiro, 2010-2013). She was founding member of the Agência Transitiva network (2013-2015). Currently, she is part of the founding group of the São Paulo Local Node of Faircoop, and of the study group of the Independent Studies Program of MACBA (Barcelona, 2019-2020), among other activities.

JIMMIE DURHAM (United States, 1940) is a Cherokee artist, activist, and writer. He draws upon his Native American heritage to create his works, challenging and deconstructing Western hegemony. His artistic practice—which encompasses sculpture, installation, drawing, video, performance, and photography—can be seen as an extension of his political activism. Durham was involved in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and served as a political organizer for the American Indian Movement. Through objects, images, and words, he reveals the prejudices and assumptions of a Western-centric view of the world and gives voice to alternative, non-Western modes of thought.

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