

Performing transformation in the Community University of the Rivers

DAN BARON COHEN
Community University of the Rivers, Brazil

So much partying, I almost didn't notice
the future already happening
right there, love, in front of us
enclosing our homes
and videoing our squares.

But love, when I heard the giants
in the voices of our dancing bulls
playing our tambourines
stained with *açai*, the penny dropped!
They're rooting themselves in our culture
and mining our dreams
to industrialize and steal the Amazon!
Let's rescue the future, love
and throw the spear for the River Tocantins!

In 1998, Dan¹ was granted a visiting professorship at the State University of Santa Catarina in Brazil to develop community theatre as pedagogy. This collaboration inspired artistic and cultural collaborations with Brazil's landless, indigenous, trade-union and university communities, and culminated in a series of national sculptural monuments. Dan decided to leave Wales in 1999 and in partnership with arteducator Manoela Souza, has dedicated his past 16 years to the development of a *transformance* pedagogy—artistic performance for transformation based in *cultural literacy*²—across Brazil and in collaboration with arts education networks and universities in Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe.

More recently, Dan's *transformance* pedagogy has been applied in the areas of health, security, sustainable agriculture, creative cities and special needs, in the constant (re-)search for an aesthetics of education which cultivates a paradigm of sustainable cooperation through the arts. Since 2009, Dan has lived in the

Dan Baron Cohen is a community-based arteducator and cultural activist of Welsh-Quebecois origin, who lives and works in the Brazilian Amazon city of Marabá. After completing undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Oxford University, he developed collaborations with young people and their post-industrial communities at risk in northern England and South Wales, and with conflicted communities in the north of Ireland and South Africa. Correspondence: Rivers of Meeting Project, Community University of the Rivers, Amazon, Brazil. Email: riosdeencontro@gmail.com

urban Afro-Amazonian riverside community of Cabelo Seco, where his project *Rivers of Meeting* forms children and young people as artists, capable of applying their performance confidence as community leaders and pedagogical practitioners inside their own schools. Deeply critical of the present industrialization of the Amazon, the *Rivers of Meeting* project has won six national awards from the Brazilian Ministry of Culture and UNICEF.

From 2004 to 2010, Dan served as President of the International Drama/Theatre Education Association (IDEA), co-founding and chairing the World Alliance for Arts Education (2006–2010). He is currently president of the Brazilian Network of Art educators (ABRA), member of the Latin American Network of Arts for Transformation and of the International Council of the World Social Forum, and part of the Latin American campaign for ‘Points of Culture’.

In addition to publications through community sculpture, mosaics, murals and photography, Dan has published essays, a collection of plays *Theatre and Self-Determination* (Derry, North of Ireland, 2001), the books *Alfabetização Cultural: a luta íntima por uma nova humanidade* [Cultural Literacy: the intimate struggle for a new humanity] (São Paulo, 2004), *Harvest in Times of Drought* (Belém, 2011), and most recently, the international-community CD, *Amazon Our Land* (Marabá, 2013). His current project can be accompanied in Portuguese on www.riosdeencontro.wordpress.com.

I

The afternoon before *Black Awareness Week 2013*, in the Afro-Indigenous community of Cabelo Seco, Camila comes to our window. *Mikael, you know, Eliza's 4 year-old brother, has died. We are stunned. What happened?* Camila, one of our teenage teachers, afro-contemporary costumes piled high in her arms, shrugs and disappears. We cancel her dance classes and all our courses. I text Eliza, one of our percussionists. *What happened?* She replies in seconds. *He died with a bloated belly. He went for surgery and didn't resist. I'll text after I feed the baby.*

In the narrow street, the community is huddled in groups, indignant. In this region of southeast Pará, where the largest iron and gold reserves in the world are about to be plundered, babies still die of worms! Yet, here in Marabá, third most dangerous city for young people in Brazil, where young people are twelve times more likely to be assassinated than in any other region, and where there is not enough space in the newspapers to report the daily genocide, the anger subsides before nightfall and the party quickly revives. The pain just ‘vanishes’. To where?

In our *Casinha de Cultura* (Cottage of Culture),³ Mano and I⁴ exchange messages with Eliza who has been moved with her own toddler son, her two sisters and her mother Elizângela, one of our community organizers, from this tiny *cabocla* (afro-indigenous) community between the River Tocantins and River Itacaiúnas to the distant neighbourhood of *Liberdade*, out of reach of the revenge of the man who has just been released for the murder of her teenage uncle. *How are you? And Elizângela? Shall we come over?* Not even time to wait for an answer. *As you like. João Pietro's asleep.*

How to respond, to mark *Black Awareness Week*? In our Community University of the Rivers, every day is dedicated to recovering, renewing and nurturing Afro-Indigenous identity, to question the accelerating industrialization of the rivers. It has taken us five years to transform scores of children and teenagers gyrating above empty upturned beer bottles into a community programme of youth-led music and dance projects, a street cinema and video collective, supported by the twice-weekly theatre intervention,⁵ and ‘dialogic english’⁶ courses they have requested. From night to day, the federal government program ‘My House, My Life’ transported a third of the community to a distant periphery, facilitating the transformation of Cabelo Seco into theme park for an international resort. Two of our youth action-researchers are among the disappeared.

I pick a photo of Toím, the teenage percussionist assassinated at the end of January, smiling into my camera, among his group of five *marked, considered* friends, index fingers and thumbs cocked in celebration of their friendships with those who rule the streets, and their knowledge of how to survive: brazen or naïve? Camila’s seventeenth birthday was Toím’s last party. Could this self-portrait be the image for *Black Awareness Week*, for our people’s gallery in the community square? I study a few other possible candidates, but I know this is the one⁷ (Figure 1).

I look deep into Toím’s eyes. I recall his stare of disbelief when I invited him to help me repair the roof of this cottage, just hours after he had slipped through its ceramic tiles, drugged, at five in the morning, to remove all our



Figure 1. Final portrait of Toím (far left) with his four close friends (2012)

technology, and twenty-five years of digital archives, to fund his addiction. *We returned it all Dan, for the first time in living memory, and you ask me to fix the roof!* I recognized the questions in his flickering voice, from Soweto, Derry, Moss Side, the Gaza and the Rhondda. The silences that lowered and lifted his eyes, his alert, on-stage *presence* even at dawn, and his subtle, *caboclo* frown of questioning *astucia* (canny intelligence), well-hidden behind inherited shyness: the only popular resources that might protect the open veins of the Amazon from their brutal industrialization by the largest mining companies in the world.

Brega from the square is already permeating every corner of our cottage. I begin to type a sonnet of questions that might accompany the collective portrait.

Guys⁸
 who erased my memory
 and enclosed me in shame?
 Who straightened my *Cabelo Seco*
 and called me ‘Francisco Coelho’?
 why do I always smile ‘yes’
 when I want to affirm ‘no’?
 In this week, my friends
 from the Barão, PAC and pontal
 let’s throw the spear
 for the life of our rivers
 sing our roots
 and celebrate
 our afro-amazonian beauty!

The next morning, Camila passes by. I invite her to look at the proposed intervention, and she reads it aloud. *Massa! Approved!* She rereads, now to herself. *I smile ‘yes’ when I should say ‘no’!* She understands. Zequinha passes to collect water. We invite the *mestre* of popular culture into the circle of chairs to study the proposal and he chews his upper-lip in a visceral mix of anger and panic. By the time he speaks, he has found safe, waist-high *capoeira* territory to avoid the risk of public humiliation that his enslaved great-grandparents left in the skin of his lyrics. He’d seen them plant the seeds they’d smuggled out in their hair and the hems of their dresses as they sang the recipes of their great-grandparents. He reads the rivers every day, to see when all this will turn to dust. *Toim’s daughter, Kaline, will suffer every day she walks by. It’s your decision, but think of the child. She still cries every night. She still thinks Toim is coming home.*

I try to reason with Zequinha. The community needs to see its vanished pain, through a portrait that celebrates and questions, so that it can read the centuries of internalized violence it writes into its children, through the compulsive intimate violence that we hear every night. But Zequinha cannot hear the proposal. Like so many parents on the street, one son has been assassinated and the other is consuming himself. He cannot be sure he will survive the reflection.⁹ And Toim was his brother’s son, an addict, who lived next door. In

the absence of police support, Antonio had walked a thousand metres, carrying his dead son from the public space of his spectacular execution to the community space where the journalists lifted him onto the front page of the papers. *Think of Kaline, Dan. Three years old.* Zequinha leaves, confident he has been heard.

Yolanda, Kaline's grandmother disappears into the small home of Crisiel which faces our cottage. If we now consult her and Antonio, we will undermine Zequinha, our project mediator, the *mestre*. Five years of confidence. I show the other photos to Camila and she goes to the window and whistles through her teeth. In seconds, Yolanda is in the circle, reading the proposed intervention, suffused with pleasure. I describe Zequinha's concern, as objectively as I can, and she interrupts me. *I've explained to little Kaline. She's was inconsolable. She suffered, yes, but she's calm now. She knows the police murdered her daddy.* She looks again at Toím and the marked boys. *You must publish that photo. It's so beautiful!*

Zequinha returns, chewing his upper lip, securing a river of grief. I begin to explain how the morning has unraveled. As soon as he recalls the moment Kaline heard Toím had 'traveled', Yolanda is reliving the sleepless months she held her granddaughter to her breast and Zequinha nods gravely to me. *Let's ask Kaline!*, says Camila. In a second, she is leading the child by the hand into the circle. *Who's that?* asks Yolanda, pointing at the photo. *Toím, my daddy!* Kaline smiles, at peace with the world. *And who killed him?* asks her grandmother. *The police.* We look at the *mestre*. He is watching, fascinated. *Sing your favourite song, my love,* Yolanda smiles. Kaline looks at us all.

in the sweet waters of the river
and refreshing waters of the rain
the hair of african humanity
never becomes wet, never becomes wet

Then she dances the choreography she has learned watching Camila dance in the little square with *AfroMundi* (AfroWorld). Zequinha roars with laughter and hugs Kaline. *Approved, approved!*

The last person we consult is Crisiel, a tall, handsome silent nineteen year-old who was obviously once a warrior, but who today just sits. No-one can remember seeing Crisiel lose his calm. *The only male here who never hit a woman*, Camila once remarked. He cannot read books or write with a pen, but he reads the surface of the river that runs behind his cottage, and composes silent poems into nets that he knows will never again catch fish. I call him in from the street and invite him into the circle. He stares at Toím. And he stares. Gradually, we all become aware of Toím's *presence*. Crisiel has brought him back to life. We all reread Toím in silence, his childhood, making kites, his first kiss. Even the sun stands still, suspended in respect above the founding community of Marabá, once a *quilombo*, now the vulnerable, contested *imaginário* of the region. Is Crisiel crying, inwards? Does he approve? His eyes never change their focus. Slowly, eventually, he walks backwards, out through the door, without removing his eyes from Toím.

II

We sit in a circle of tiny wooden chairs in the kindergarten, Elizângela and two mothers from our community development nucleus, their close friends, Zequinha, two of his brothers, his sister, cultural developers, community leaders, members of his band, and twelve English language students and their teacher from the Federal University. The mothers are exhausted from washing clothes in the river beneath the sun. The circle is tense with uncertainty, expectation, centuries of distance, betrayal and prejudice.

I ask Zequinha and Manoel Gato if they would like to sing, as the hosts. The brothers glance at one another and Zequinha chooses *Cabelo Seco* (Dry Hair), a lyric that he has composed from the introduction to our 2011 Calendar, a narrative poem about our second year of cultural action in the community.¹⁰ Like me, Zequinha wants the university students and teachers to feel the knowledges and literacies that pulse in his fragile but resistant riverside community, carried by the rivers. But he has chosen a gentle song, one that does not protest or confront, nor hide behind playful gesture. He knows that this will not be a course extending out from the university like a *xicote* (whip), held behind the back of a neo-colonial plan. It will be an exchange between cultures, between worlds of knowledge, a dialogue between a network of insecure power and a powerless community of solidarity. He chooses a song that might just create a living theatre of reflexive empathy.¹¹

Zequinha plucks a few strings and Manoel Gato smiles in recognition. *I haven't been here in 45 years*, he laughs richly, his bulky body spilling over the edges of his toddler's-chair. *Even these wee chairs are the same!* He will die of pneumonia, aggravated by diabetes, in a snap illness, in just a few months, leaving us all staring in shock at his empty chair of daily composition in Zequinha's doorway. He begins to sing, counter-tenor so pure, trembling with such operatic emotion, that in this very first class, the students struggle to reconcile such beauty emerging from such a huge African frame, in this derelict periphery:

Nas águas doce dos rios
 e refrescante da chua
 o cabelo da humanidade africana
 nunca se molha, nunca se molha.
 Meu cabelo é assim
 de mel com terra é pixaim
 exatamente como a natureza criou
 afro-tupiniquim
 filho do tocantins
 no encontro dos rios
 esse sonho se realizou.
 Pulsam nas veias ideais
 herança dos ancestrais
 a cultura viva remanescente a brotar
 tanto sonharam nossos pais

acreditando em quem traz
a força e a coragem para viver e lutar.

All the Cabelo Seco residents join in on the chorus of this landmark song, singing with a proud shyness, revealing their personal and community histories in their mixture of emotions, and the emotions of their day. Though they do not know how to read them, the Federal University participants all realize this is no *favela*. This will be like no other course they have given or suffered in class. They watch the two brothers, self-taught *mestres*, accentuating each word with the weight of centuries of exile, exclusion and simmering rage, cadenced in a complex grammar of exchanged glances, half-smiles and tentative celebration. Manoel Gato conducts an imaginary choir in a dialogue that few understand as pedagogy, making present that which ‘vanished’, transforming it into what might become.

I thank them both and Zequinha, with no request or verbal agreement necessary, holds out his guitar to the half-moon of students. Kenny, the youngest, almost reaches to take it, but his teacher Jairo, blinded by his desire to belong, grasps its neck and hands out a song-sheet that he has ‘prepared for this class’. As the social, political and pedagogical significance of the song is explained, everyone gradually lowers their eyes. Jairo begins to sing, struggling to recompose the circle.¹² He sings well, plays well, but he is climbing a steep hill. Felizmar unsheathes his guitar and sings the second voice. Gradually, effortlessly, the half-moons rejoin and a possible, new community returns.

I ask everyone to form into pairs, exactly where they are sitting, and to point their chairs to face one another, so the chairs conspire to motivate a first dialogic whisper. I then propose the residents invite a visitor from the university to sit beside them. In their first exchange, each pair exchanges the first nickname gained in life, and then, the most important quality each wants to see practiced in this circle. The laughter of intimate revelations, unexpectedly recovered, mingles with shared and new insights. The intimacy spills beyond each pair of wooden chairs, envelops the entire classroom and creates a stage of confidence,¹³ each person risking to share what was suffered in school, ached for, imagined, some in this very classroom. No-one is aware of the risk, or of how much time has passed, or that they have lowered barricades¹⁴ into thresholds, until the sound of spinning seeds of the *chek–chek* invites them to give their final two minutes to the person who has spoken least.

A fractional pause, an explosion of resumed conversation, and then, the pairs thank one other, in any appropriate way. That embrace, torture chamber of so many unspoken ‘nos’, backyard well of lost memory and first homes, unconditional offer of solidarity, defines new hope.

We return to the full moon and listen to a sequence of human and pedagogical rights, announced by each pair.

No need to explain how the complicity was created, nor how this community will be created. Each word is translated into English, *care, respect, patience, playfulness, cooperation, equality, generosity, exchange, affirmation, community* ... And we then turn towards the board, where I have chalked up lyrics that might be the participants here looking back through their ancestors’ eyes from the banks of Africa, or their ancestors, looking forward to reuniting with fragments of their families

in the diaspora. The black *gringo* lyric holds depths of vanished emotion in its beguiling simplicity.

I'm packin up
 gettin ready to go
 I'm goin to see
 my people over there
 I'm just packin up
 gettin ready to go ...

I sing, we sing, Zequinha reflects, we pause. I sing, we sing, now Elizângela reflects, we pause, Jairo and Kenny exchange a glance with Felizmar. I return to the beginning of the lyric, and as the dialogic pedagogy unfolds, we hear Manoel Gato's contralto voice finding the harmonies practiced for 45 years in the street, in Zequinha's doorway. We sing the entire verse again, more confident, opening our breasts into an experimental afro-indigenous blues, rhythms now pinpointing reflections, silences, a shared sense of the knotted street, the choking rivers, the stubbly forests, a region that still does not dare to know itself. Here we are, in the epicentre of the Amazon, the great-grandchildren of slaves have chosen to liberate¹⁵ themselves on toddlers' chairs, through *Dialogic English*.¹⁶

III

I touch the iPod. *Mindjer Dôce Mel* begins. Segun Adefila, our resident choreographer, stands in front of 32 aspiring ballet-dancers, all in black leotards with a splash of colour subversively braided into their hair, around their wrists, ankles or waists. He leans back, opens his chest and sensually begins to rotate his hips to the right, all the joints of his body synchronized to the circular rhythm of the music, while opening and closing his elbows like the handles on a vase, hands on hips, to the regular movement of his breathing. Behind him, as the young *cabocla* women mirror his movements, all begin to smile. Camila laughs out loud, a throaty eruption of joy and understanding spilling out of her loose hand-ripped yellow T-shirt draped across her honed body, imprisoned inside the taut leotard. The shyest laugh to themselves, two gay *caboclo* youth exchange glances of approval, all effortlessly find and integrate themselves into the playful improvisation.

Segun begins a new pirouette which brings him even lower to the ground, arches his back, enlarges the sensuality of his circling hips, brimming with a subtle but unmistakable seduction. In less than two minutes, centuries of internalized tuts and grunts of moral judgement in doorways, windows, mirrors and on street corners are being slinked off, changing the carriage of heads, the contours of backs, the scaffolding of shoulders, liberating breasts, and now more of the young dancers are laughing aloud, but to themselves. They appear a dance company that has been rehearsing for months. Their synchrony is uncanny, and they have all noted it and its celebration of the erotic, without taking their eyes off the body of their Nigerian teacher.

Two hours later, they sit in a circle, elegant, elated, alert. They have created a dance narrative about Cabelo Seco, each excavating and contributing elements of their childhood and adolescent experience and perception to the stage. The netting and cleaning of fish, the building and repairing of canoes, the sudding, scrubbing and wringing of clothes slapped onto the surface of the River Tocantins and River Itacaíúnas and then pegged between banana and *açaí* trees or electricity posts. Each gesture and fragment of lived experience.¹⁷ All have all been woven into a choreography of shared knowledges, values and pride of producing and sustaining life, lightened by hopscotch, flicking stone-marbles, jiggling kite-strings to play the wind and skipping elastic gates, even lowering their gyrating open thighs over upturned beer-bottles in a humiliating dance of impish sexual availability.

How do you feel, asks Segun. I translate. All the young artists have willingly dedicated themselves to years of silent, disciplined obedience and humiliating public castigation, but no-one needs to be coaxed. Words emerge from different points in the circle: *free ... elated ... liberated ... proud ... capable*. Camila smiles. *Now I know myself. I never knew my life could become dance. In reality, that there is so much dance in our life.* She begins to cry, too suddenly to conceal, but lets the tears fall. *I can breathe. My skin is lighter, looser. I feel so much ... desire!* A circle of laughter of complicity and recognition. *Like anything is possible!* (Figure 2).

A full year later, Camila stands poised in perfect stillness, on the points of her toes, her body that iconic symbol of authoritarian aristocratic grace. Lambarena's exhilarating transition *from Bach to Africa* begins to shake her statuesque purity, unsettling first her feet and then gradually pulsing through her ankles, calves and thighs, her belly, her breasts and her head, her entire being trembling into terrifying disequilibrium. Camila looks at her own body as it



Figure 2. Camila discovers transformance through dance (2011)

teeters into disorder and asymmetry, her hands, elbows and arms falling and opening to find a new centre and steadying herself from falling, a look of horror, shame and fascinated excitement flickering across her eyes and lips until she has discovered how to balance all the moving liquids within herself.

Her workshop of primary and secondary school teachers watch spell-bound, forgetting to breathe. Gradually, over what seems to be an eternity, balancing between helplessness and discovery, terror and intention, Camila descends to stand flat-footed on the stage, her arms and hands transforming her into a human vase. Her entire body begins to pulse, now from the abdomen and womb, as she throws herself to all the corners of the world, a bold declaration of fertility, daring anyone to ever again even try to imprison her needs and potentials in an icon of voiceless submission and subordination. *Ok. Before we talk about what you've read from the outside, let's read the interior, from within.*¹⁸ *Please stand up again, everyone, and find a place behind me.* The teachers fill the stage behind their seventeen year old teacher from the Community University of the Rivers. Camila has already warmed up the space, agreed principles and embodied the aims of tonight's workshop. The teachers are not afraid. Some of them taught her when she was a rebellious child. A few taught her this morning. None have ever seen her out of school uniform.

IV

Zequinha is late. However much he plans, the watch on his wrist still ticks to emotional rhythms which follow the tides of the Tocantins, Itacaiúnas and Araguaia, where arranged meetings by boat or on land were for so long determined by the confluence of the rivers, the movement of the moon and the fish. And tonight, Zequinha's rhythm is reflexive, slowed by an unexpected early afternoon meeting with the Secretary of Culture who has offered his homeless first-born son, Elvis, a new guitar, if he will give up *crack* and *cachaça* and realize his potential as a remarkable guitarist. Both Zequinha and his son know this gesture is calculated to enslave them to the Secretary and distance the *mestre* from the Community University of the Rivers, but neither can refuse. They need the patronage. This might be the final intervention that saves Elvis from demons that inspire and torture him, the muses of his remarkable creative intelligence and the chorus of accusation, judgement, complicity and self-hatred that compel him to be victim, despot, torturer and chronicler. And the *mestre's* wife wants an indoor toilet and needs to brick their backyard inside windowless walls to protect her from Elvis and the *considered* boys.

While waiting for Zequinha, Évany has tuned her guitar and is practising arpeggios and experimenting in how to translate *jongo* and *samba* into how she plucks the chords. Like her aunt, she may never grow taller than the adolescent she is now, but just in the last year, she has become a striking *cabocla* woman whose glowing beauty and fierce percussive intelligence create an onstage *presence* no audience forgets. The coordinator of the art education research nucleus from the nearby Federal University enters the workshop, followed immediately by a cultural entrepreneur, a teacher-mother returning to study and a mature student, and all unsheathe their guitars, mildly surprised to find Évany in the *mestre's* chair. They are immediately drawn to her unselfconscious intense and

virtuoso experimentation, forgetting that she is just 14 years old. Évany welcomes them with her dazzling smile and guides them with her eyes to sit in the circle of chairs. Just as Zequinha has guided her and his other pupils the day before, she then lures them into the rhythm of the exercise she has been rehearsing, transforming it into the pedagogical performance of an easy dialogue between *her* pupils and the creation of a community of exchange, solidarity and cooperation. She studies the strumming, plucking and fingering of the four as they watch hers, pausing to correct the position of the university professor's fingers, demonstrating the transition between arpeggios to the cultural entrepreneur and the teacher–mother, showing the student how to correct her posture to improve her coordination, and gradually leads them into an improvised *jongo* (Figure 3).

Zequinha enters almost at the very end of the workshop, too scarred by the violations he inherited and suffered to apologize, too respectful and aware of all that he sees before him to even smile his approval. He sits and watches. Technically, Evany is still finding the exercise, but she is also creating it. But she is also developing her own way of *teaching*, itself a manifestation of the confidence she has acquired onstage, based on Zequinha's five years of precise artistic formation within a pedagogical circle of storytelling and story-making, passed across centuries in backyards beside the river. Zequinha does not unsheath his guitar. He is learning from Évany, how to improve his teaching and how to integrate her percussive sensitivity into plucking techniques. They stop suddenly and Évany laughs out loud, a rich, throaty, uninhibited arpeggio of pleasure, shyness and pride, which mingles with Zequinha's laughter and then the laughter of all present. No need to speak. Everyone knows what this circle has created, is creating.



Figure 3. Évany teaches *mestre* Zequinha in a dialogic exchange (2014)

Zequinha nods, genuinely happy. *The confluence of the rivers. The rivers decided that I should arrive late.*

V

Grandpa, I adore immersing myself
 in your stories
 I'm able to imagine
 the childhood of Marabá.
 But grandpa
 I hear so often
 that everything will change
 and I ask myself
 when my river
 becomes a highway
 how will I play?

Kaline sits drawing in concentrated silence, in a circle of a dozen tiny girls and boys, all drawing cross-legged or leaning in different positions, around a sea of books of songs, short-stories and photos. Adriana, a brutally honest 12-year old with the *astucia* of someone ten times her age, coordinates her workshop within the outdoor community library *Folhas da Vida* (Leaves of Life). She offers words of support and glances of interest, while transforming the letters 'Culture and Art' into a sign which she has decided to peg to the clothesline that already carries many of the drawings that are being produced around her in response to Rafael's story-telling.

Rafael reads a story from books abandoned by and rescued from the Ministry of Culture's chaotic regional office, quizzing his larger circle of older children and young teenagers about its characters, themes, legends, narrative, new words and extraordinary phrases. He is alarmingly wiry for 15, effeminate in a fiercely homophobic culture, but respected. He walks in a circle as he reads aloud, followed by his assistant, Viviane, just ten, her darkly ringed eyes betraying a story of unspeakable violence towards her mother that she witnesses every night and promises never to tell. The two circle the drawing children, each in her world and the watching young teenagers, testing questions between them in dramatic whispers and then suddenly pausing to lance one unexpectedly at their alert audience.

It is a rapt universe. Everyone knows that at the end of an hour, there will be a literary lucky-dip for the most active, the most supportive, the one who scored the most correct answers. They are all so quick and have such a keen sense of injustice that with so many answers in the air, little Viviane struggles to keep a tally. But Rafael mediates with humour and he is fair. No-one looks away. Apart from the desire to return home with a book to build up their growing library, everyone wants to feel lucky.

I admire these three young coordinators building their community of 380 family libraries. But where do their participatory and dialogic coordination strategies and courage to constantly innovate come from? Are they African,

indigenous, Amazonian reflexes, an intuitive intervention which draws on centuries of processed but unspoken experience?

At a discreet distance, Manoela, sits reading with another small group of slightly older girls, prepared at any moment to intervene to offer pedagogical support to the coordinators or to protect the outdoor library. The week before, she had explained to an American journalist who had suddenly entered from the river, camera to his eye, that the workshop was not to be photographed or filmed without prior permission from the project's organizing nucleus, and from the young people and their families. When he asserted his right, she had raised her hand to cover his lens: *child and youth prostitution here in the region, friend, is the highest in Brazil. Few here have the confidence to say 'no'. Why not sit and talk to the children?* When he grabbed Manoela's arm and pushed her to one side, all the children had stood up. Some asked him to leave. The man had retreated and the story went viral in the streets.

Surveying the entire scene, ex-Coronel Stanislau Cordeiro, President of the Francisco Coelho Residents' Association, had glowered down from one of his mansion's balconies, furious that his American guest had been so abused. But he did not react. He is confident that his National Firemen's Training Programme for At-Risk Youth will discipline the illiterate truants, and his wife's street parties, baskets of free food and folk-dancing project will sweep this community university from the pathway of history, so that he can get on with the planned transformation of this small territory into a spotless heritage park, sustained by prestigious hotels. The mining giant Vale has already pledged the funds. He has the Senate in his sights.

A few months earlier, the ex-Coronel's wife, Maria Celia, had thrown nineteen black plastic bin-liners from one of her balconies, in protest against our open-air community cinema that was blocking the street. Évany, Camila, Rafael and Manoela opened them and sifting through the expensive garbage, found Cordeiro's credit-card receipts, his mason's conference tags and Maria-Celia's card-game accounts. By coincidence, the most able and courageous journalist in Marabá had been present, visiting the project. *Don't denounce them, I insisted. Our project needs to persuade Cordeiro and his family on the strength of its proposal, not through fear.*

Manoela handed copies of the tell-tale documents to the police for the record, and the project held its breath. Young *considered* teenagers like Luciel, Pablo and Carlinhos had understood the invitation. Zequinha chewed his upper lip. The teenagers did not break into the project's brightly painted cultural centre to torch its open-air library and to steal its equipment, or assassinate Manoela or me for 20 or 30 Brazilian *Reais*. That Cordeiro and Maria-Celia's children now insist in participating in Rafael's reading circle and Cine Coruja, also gives us hope.

Between Manoela's reading group and Adriana's clothesline exhibition, Luciel talks to Popopo, a mute adult with special needs, on the periphery of the workshop, looking through his collection of CDs. In his unpatronising, genuine and smiling manner, motivated by empathetic reflexes of community care, Luciel is improvising a communication strategy which includes *Popopo* into this circle of readers. No adult has ever managed this.

Rafael notes the initiative, and gestures to me to include it into my filming. In this past year, he has already distinguished himself as a remarkable linguist in our *dialogic english* project. Now I perceive his peripheral awareness, linked to a

sensitivity often found in gay intelligences. By example, Rafael is inspiring an entire community which sits at the back of the class, condemned as illiterate, to love literature, and to see books as a place where the imagination can be fed, nurtured and reclaimed. *Dan. I've just had an idea. Why don't we bring our literary lucky-dip into the cultural raffle at the end of each film, and integrate our library circles into the community caravan?*

I'm stunned by the quality of the proposal. Rafael has transformed *Folhas de Vida* into our first transversal project. He has grasped it is not enough to want to lose books rather than stamp them with return dates, and there is not enough time to visit every home in Cabelo Seco. He has seen the potential of the street and the community's little square as intimate spaces of public transformation.

When I show a video clip of *Folhas de Vida* to the Director of the National System of Public Libraries, during a national seminar in Belem, Rafael's idea becomes policy. Two crates of forgotten, mint publications arrive in Cabelo Seco, addressed to Rafael Varão, Community Librarian, Community University of the Rivers. It makes his day. It may have saved his life (Figure 4).

VI

In the first bike-ride, for peace
 I carried my assassinated brother
 and flying on the edge of the Tocantins
 we met Amazonian beauty.
 On the second, for life
 I carried my cousin in my lap
 and whistling together without fear
 we discovered the path to freedom.
 On this third, for the waters
 I will carry you, mum, to Amapá
 and creating our university of the rivers
 let's revive our Itacaiúnas.

Shall we hold the frontline, together? I look into the eyes of Luciel, Pablo, Carlinhos and three other youths whose names I cannot remember, all riding bikes which they've built from abandoned and, probably, some stolen parts. They use their flip-flops as brakes. Some wear painted crash helmets and dark glasses; others t-shirts, ripped and painted for the occasion. Many ride with cousins and siblings cross-bar, in baskets and back-saddle. All one hundred and fifty-odd cyclists peddle with our simple bright orange strip of linen wrapped around their wrists, ankles, necks, foreheads, handlebars, antennas of imaginary radios, and the accompanying police and firemen do too, attached to their motorbike antennas and mirrors. Proud tags of belonging and quest. *Will you help me?* I repeat?

I keep asking every few minutes, to keep the vital threshold between life and death at the front of their minds. These six have proven themselves in the first two bike-rides. They all love the rush of adrenalin, riding out of Cabelo Seco, a river of children, youth, some mothers and fewer grandparents, watched by



Figure 4. Bike-ride for freedom (2013)

hundreds of relatives and friends from windows, doorways and street corners. But these moments of centre-stage affirmation and recognition are the hardest. *Hold the line. Show them our leadership. Show them the beauty of our cooperation.* They smile, aware and visibly growing in stature in the gaze of their community. They tease the jealous few who could not find a bike on time, and throw out one-liners to the police officers who today see their restraint and care.

I can see they are saving themselves. They are already imagining the freedom of the motorway, yelling without inhibition beneath the overpass bridges, and the triumphant chorus of song as they enter another invisible community. *Listen to that river of freedom guys, and hold the line. We have the lives of them all in our hands.* A din of whistles, home-made horns, small drums, euphoric cries and chants, accompanied by the CD played on the bike-radio:

sou da raça negra
da raça africana
gosto do reggae
do reggae jamaicano
e no balanço do reggae
eu vou
todo mundo me segue
eu vou
eu dancei ontem
danço hoje
e amanhã, reggae

We pass through the old city, hundreds of shoppers clapping, acknowledging, smiling with approval and admiration, contaminated by the joy, community and dream. Throughout this river of life, born out of the assassination of our bassist at the end of last year, every cyclist is chatting in pairs, helping someone to recover their balance or inflate a flat-tire, exchanging stories, passing on news, comparing and analysing the bike rides and waving at astonished school friends. All are exhilarated by their own power to transform decades of cruel prejudice towards Cabelo Seco into recognition and respect.

The small group of coordinators beside me resists the temptation to burst the banks of this river of dialogue. They call out to those who spill over the frontline by name with a well-aimed affirmation or explanation, urging the angriest and most self-destructive, or most compulsive and least integrated to keep the collective rhythm and stay behind their moving community threshold. *Take a look at our wheels, guys. It's like we have an invisible chord. Who would've imagined this beauty last ride. Where will we ride to next month?*

Beauty was the last word I expected to hear on the bicicletada, Carlinhos smiled as we arrive in the Liberdade community centre. He had composed one of our CD's most popular songs four years ago, and suddenly traded the pleasure and affirmation of the experimental music workshop and community stage for the endless nights of crack-cocaine. I look at his self-consumed youth, not yet 18, and recall his easy self-confidence as a dancer and percussionist. Has the emerging eco-pedagogy of the *bicicletada* resonated within his needs? The unexpected visceral mix of personal autonomy and collective responsibility, well-being and sustainable transport, cultural production and community solidarity, has drawn him close again for the first time.

Though his body has been ravaged, Carlinhos' charismatic smile and generosity inspire by example all around him to lift instruments, speakers, oranges and bananas, vats of *caja* juice and our mobile library into the school playground. He places the chairs in concentric circles, reflexes from two years of creating a stage of inclusive human rights and ethical principle with the *Latinhas de Quintal*, and young observers gravitate towards him to lend a hand. Four younger children step into this new space to repair a bike, and with the same easy-going leadership, Carlinhos sits with them and creates a seven-minute workshop, showing them how to transform a coin into a screw-driver to repair jammed brakes. The bike is leaned against the wall as two of *AfroMundi* dancers and the young *Latinhas* musicians take their positions, and within seconds two hundred young people from Liberdade community have formed an active audience, singing and moving to Cabelo Seco's afro-amazonian culture. Our self-styled journalist, singer and dancer, Carolayne takes the mic. *Welcome Liberdade to the Community University of the Rivers! Let's begin with one of our first songs about solidarity in the car-boot of everyday life, written by Carlinhos at 12 years of age!* The lyricist smiles and blushes. He did not expect the recognition. Maybe he will come home, and live.

VII

Évany sets up the projector while Carol, Pablo and Adriana organize 50 chairs into the intimate half-moon auditorium of *Cine Coruja* (Cine Owl). Last night, the cinema was in the street, open to all, to view *The Whale Rider*, and everyone

brought chairs, sat in doorways, leaned out of windows, and even bundled children on their laps. Tonight is youth night, restricted to those over 12, and takes place inside the cultural centre. We expect the cinema to pack out after weeks of African films, chosen by the young coordinators in consultation with their community friends, their teachers and their families.

Araguaia: a Conspiracy of Silence is a risk. The film is overtly political and even shows a scene of execution by young people who have chosen to defend the Amazon with arms. It is a far cry from *Avatar* and even *Beloved*, epic films that our audience watched transfixed, shivering under blankets when the temperature suddenly dipped, or came back to see to the end after torrential rains interrupted the film and threatened to turn the makeshift screen into a kite.

It's worth a try, Évany affirms as she connects the speaker to the computer to welcome the audience. *Have you brought the goiaba and caju juice, apples and bananas?* she asks Carol. In its first year, *Cine Coruja* began with a string of lights hung on the walls around the open garden of the Cultural Centre, and suspended between banana trees, facing the River Tocantins. Camila and Carolayne had hired an old popcorn van and served litres of *Guaraná*, dressed as usherettes. They had even mounted a photographic exhibition. But when a *considered* teenager sought refuge inside the audience turning it into his terrified shield, and the growing numbers of diabetes cases claimed the life of Manoel Gato, the coordinators had to rethink all dimensions of security. Now in its second year, the audience expects Amazonian fruits and juices. *Ready to let everyone in?* Pablo nods. He rarely speaks.

The short begins, a brilliant Bolivian animation, with just three people in the audience. A growing despair seeps into the collective confidence of the young coordinators. They have facebooked their networks, postered the bakery, fresh water well, local bars and schools, blogged and even sent a ludic jingle through the community's two roads, by bike-radio. Resistance to a programme that dares to show films from outside Hollywood or London has long since melted, as children, youth and parents discovered Brazilian, Central and Latin American, African and Asian film. The indoor youth sessions are also now a place to be seen, to flirt by mobile in the dark, to steal furtive kisses, and to enjoy some relief from the tense, authoritarian and sometimes violent kitchens of so many fatherless homes. *Beloved* helped many to understand the accumulated, unvented violations in their lives. No, this absence is something else.

Maybe it's a kind of self-censorship, Évany speculates, messaging all the coordinators of the projects. *The word's out that it's about here. They don't want to face it.* The clarity of her analysis, marginalized and hidden in her school classroom, convinces all of them. Perhaps this is new. They had faced the question of censorship with courage, mothers and teenagers alike, in their weekly planning circles, as they debated how and if they should close the door of a community cinema, to meet the specific needs of young people and of the adults' hunger for 'thinking films'. They had considered everything, from a kiss in the shadows to explicit sex in the car, anti-heroes in conflict at home, in school and in church, to the portrayal of gay love.

Their discussions were often inflamed by so many unresolved histories and threatened to erupt into open conflict. But they had learned to listen, to risk taking a stand, to question and to mediate their differences in struggle to reach a democratic decision. One debate was interrupted by the assassination of a son on

a streetcorner, another by the cries of hungry children in the street. The street always focused the debate, at once threatening to revoke any risky decision and to taunt any fearful step-back. Patience had been tested. *Cine Coruja* had not just faced the profound challenge of censorship inside a religious, terrified poor community. It had come to be defined by it. This evening it is something else.

The film asks people to take a stand about the future of the Tocantins, explains Carol, and they know the Coronel's up there, watching all who enter and leave. They sit scattered throughout the auditorium, children watching the cartoon like a council of elders debating the future of the Amazon, oblivious of their unusual maturity and analytical precision. The short ends and Évany proposes they postpone the snack and distribution of the cultural raffle tickets. They quickly agree. Two adults from outside Cabelo Seco, participating in the Community University and a young teenage couple expecting their first baby drift in. Évany starts the feature and all focus. Though they know they are in permanent formation and are offering films which respect the life-experience of their community, the young coordinators are still disappointed.

Fifteen minutes into the film and suddenly there is a rush of teenage guys. Then a few girls enter and Carol shows them to their regular seats. Everyone is wired. In seconds, the explanation has circulated. The Residents' Association has deliberately scheduled a party outside their headquarters to clash with the cinema programme. Children and youth have been dancing *brega* above beer bottles, drinking beer and coke, devouring chocolate cake and crisps. But as soon as the free food has been consumed, all of the teenage cinefiles have raced over. A nervy energy of sugar-excess permeates the air, but the familiar streets and squares of Marabá on-screen have already excited interest and there's the hint of an emerging love-story which resonates with their needs. They are identifying. In the next 90 minutes, they watch the agony of a law student as he faces the slow death of a soldier he has executed to protect a local community, and the painful decision by people like them to implement a collective agreement, to send away a teenage guerrilla from the underground forest-camp, for becoming pregnant. All mobile phones are still. In a tiny riverside cinema, condemned youth are reflecting on their lives, history and choices. The ritual applause and Évany, Pablo and Carol walk to the front of the audience.

Thanks for coming, Évany smiles. What did you think? An edgy silence, not of shyness, but of calculating risks: the risk of appearing too serious on a Saturday night, of appearing too forward in a culture that chides originality and the courage to question, of just appearing, above the long-grass. But no-one leaves. *Many of us lived that story, says Zequinha from the back row. Akissiany, a large nineteen year old, balances in her chair. It's hard to believe that happened here in the Old City. Pablo looks at Zequinha. It's in your song, Alerta Amazônica. Simone speaks from the corner. This is the only community in Marabá that has the nerve to screen a film like that. We should make a film of what we're doing here tonight!* Laughter of agreement. *We need to install solar energy in Cabelo Seco, Pablo replies, to keep that dream alive.*

VIII

A full year later, Camila hugs Marina da Silva, former Brazilian Minister of the Environment and candidate for vice-president of Brazil in this year's elections.

Marina has opened an international conference of social movements, trade union leaders, policy advisers and NGO activists in Washington DC on the legacy of her close friend Chico Mendes, offering a reflexive celebratory portrait of the mythic assassinated rubber-tapper through a weave of stories, eco-social ideas and provocative new paradigm policy proposals. Camila will dance *Roots and Antennas* the following night, and has recognized her own experience and intelligence in Marina's voice. It is a remarkable hug, unimaginable seven years ago when Camila first danced beneath drying clothes in a Cabelo Seco backyard. *I am an afro-contemporary dancer and Amazonian arts educator, she tells Marina, in our community university of the rivers. I dance to research and transform memory of exclusion and hunger, to create imagined communities of choice.*

Marina's eyes well up with emotion. She recognizes herself in the dancer's struggle to arrange and articulate her thoughts, on her feet. Both value precision. They have suffered the power of words and silences. They know them as weapons, tools and bridges. Camila twice braved the prejudices of the American consulate in Brasilia to gain her visa, her tongue too swollen with the muscular reflexes of forbidden grammars and disappeared vocabularies to move elegantly inside a mouth crowded with teeth still being pushed forward by a lifetime of thumb-sucking. We have talked about how both dramatize a violated childhood she never had time to enjoy, and she knows braces will not conceal or heal the need. But right now, she is enjoying her momentum. In her interview for a travel visa, she convinced the consul, seated well below his gaze, that her life project would not allow her to become another young black prostitute on a Washington streetcorner.

Marina reads Camila's moment with genuine admiration and equality, a new symbol of the long, epic struggle of the urban Amazon to know and voice itself, narrated in the calendar she is being offered. She asks Camila perceptive questions about two of the photo-portraits in this artistic-pedagogic publication, and the two women hug again, close their eyes and slowly ease apart in silent synchrony. Marina disappears into a crowd of impatient journalists and activists, and Camila checks the photo of her meeting with Marina that we will send to local newspapers in Washington and Marabá.

We return to our host's modest home, a gesture of solidarity from a complete stranger. The kitchen and living room are large enough to each contain Camila's grandmother's home. She notes the shower and toilet annexed to each bedroom. When we arrived a few hours earlier, Camila wandered from room to room, noting every detail. She did not need to explain that she washes in the river every day, and squats in an outdoor toilet with a makeshift door to protect her from lascivious drunken uncles and pubescent cousins. It is all said in the way she looks, pauses, moves. She had touched the walls painted in bold vibrant colours, catalogued the hanging fabrics and sculptures from every continent and everyday objects from different centuries, and laughed aloud at the eccentric-finds in a lifelong collection.

But now, after two days of travelling, Camila is too exhausted to notice anything. She climbs the stairs and falls into a coma, without removing her clothes. Tomorrow, we have two international roundtables on Chico's life and on human rights violations. I chat with our host to make sure we will have time to visit to the Potomac River before Camila's evening performance so that its roaring cascades and gushing whirling currents infuse her solo. I turn off her light. Camila is already asleep, thumb in mouth.

I open the internet in my room and click on Mano's email. A gasp leaps from my throat too suddenly for me to conceal. I reread the detailed email as seven photos of Camila begin to scroll open. The first three to emerge show her honed dancer's body, naked from the waist up, a child smiling into a plush hotel mirror, presented by our embarrassed youth coordinators on their mobiles to Manoela, minutes after our send-off. I read on. They have already circulated the narrow streets of Cabelo Seco and its nearby schools and *quadrilhas*. Nausea and despair well up in me as two more selfies emerge. Camila is completely nude, the same smile, innocent, appealing for approval, her gaze angled down to the upturned mobile. I look away, trying to avoid complicity, recall Camila with Marina an hour earlier, and look back. In an instant, I can imagine the reactions of her grandmother *Dona Tonica*, her mother, her teachers, the parents of the children she is teaching. The photos are too naive to be seductive, but they will shock and provoke judgement. In one night, she has blurred her story.

I will tell her after her performance. No. After our workshop, the following morning. Three more photos unveil themselves. Camila in the mirror, looking up, breasts fuller, more womanly, photoshopped shadows insinuating availability. After the workshop, I will sit with her, alone. Ready to catch her when she falls.

I delete the photos and return to the email. Her elderly *cabocla* grandmother is passing from home to home in our street, insisting that each photo be deleted before her eyes. *It was an error of the heart*, she explains to the neighbours. *Don't we all have regrets?* A reflex of solidarity in a desert of despair. Our youth coordinators have met and reflected in their circle of decision-making. Numb with empathy, unable to meet each other's gaze, they will stand by her. They know they will not have the courage to ask friends to delete the photos.

Two years earlier, Manoela and I chatted easily with Camila about her coy self-portraits in bra and scant shorts she had posted on Facebook. *They'll cast shadows across your leadership and life-project, amiga*. We had felt a chasm of decades, centuries, but Camila replaced the portraits with powerful artistic narrative photos of her research into the memory of her skin. All her friends had continued posting selfies, but Camila had understood something. From within. *Our project has acquired a new frontier of knowledge and action*, we announced in our conference contributions and reports (Figure 5).

Following a brilliant solo performance and lucid workshop, we return to our host's home. I shut the lounge door and sit Camila down, and holding her hands, I tell her about the selfies. She falls. Hard. Her whole body cries. She lowers her eyes, for an entire night, ashamed, furious, vulnerable. The next morning, she cannot speak. We walk in silence in Washington's rain. Camila is desolate. She needs to be alone, but in open space. We find scant insight in the dark wooden carvings of indigenous leaders, imprisoned in the Museum of the American Peoples. The creative self-portraits of contemporary African artists fascinate and distract Camila, and in mute anger, she reads Lincoln's bold promise to all enslaved African-American peoples, written in stone in the vault of his tomb. *All my cousins*, Camila notes, beginning to glimpse the generations of dry tears in her swollen mouth. By good fortune, she is far from home. She retreats again into silence. On the plane, she chooses to watch *12 Years of Slavery*, her fork suspended between her plate and her open mouth until her food grows cold.

Two months later, we sit reading these words together, in our studio in Cabelo Seco. *Are you happy for these stories to carry your real name?* I ask. *Mine can*



Figure 5. Camila transforms historical narratives (2014)

stay, Camila states decisively. She has faced her vulnerability, in every gaze, on every stage that she enters and leaves in her life. She is stronger. I smile.

Camila stands. She gathers up her ample *quadrilha* costume into her arms. We have spent the week reinterpreting her solo performance of *Roots and Antennas*, working late into the night to transform her new harrowing insights into layers of performed memory and need, projecting film of riverside African life onto the surfaces of her body. But right now, this poetic experimentation has been left to dry in the sun, pegged onto the clothesline outside her home. The African textiles shimmer in the midday sun and explode with colour across the street. I show Camila but all she is thinking about is tonight's pre-performance in the main square of the old city. She has integrated afro-contemporary dance into the *quadrilha's* performance for this year's *festa juninha*. In the intensely competitive culture, only I have been allowed to know of this fiercely guarded secret. Camila reads my doubts and smiles. *I know it contradicts all we are doing, but it will enter the culture of the festa juninha. And it's my way of healing myself and regaining my community's trust. I want to take them with us.*

Notes

1. We join the words *art* and *educator* to affirm the importance of the arts as pedagogic languages, key to the development of a new paradigm of education and formation. In Brazil, we also identify ourselves as 'popular art educators', to connect with the collective struggles by social movements of and with the excluded, for human rights, social justice and participatory democracy, historically, through pedagogies and literacy processes for self-determination.
2. In 1999, we coined the term *cultural literacy* to refer to our pedagogy which aims to decolonize the memory and the imagination through dialogic processes of sensitization, decodification and collective recodification. Our cultural pedagogy seeks a questioning self-reading of our

- subjectivity to reveal the histories of subjugation, self-sacrifice and exclusion, recorded in our everyday gestures and reflexes, transforming their effects into resources of personal and collective self-determination. It is not proposed simply as a pedagogic option or new curriculum discipline, but as a way of life which decolonizes the political unconscious and body memory to intervene in the reproduction of the past, cultivating an intercultural sensitivity and performative awareness, necessary in the formation of new communities of empathetic and reflexive solidarity, and new democratic politics of liberation.
3. We understand *Culture* in its broad anthropological sense. I quote the definition that we cultural activists in the *2020 Vision* project formulated in Derry, North of Ireland in 1989, to intervene within a populist perception of Culture in communities like Cabelo Seco. *Culture is normally understood as art produced for galleries and theatres by creative geniuses in isolation. This belief has misled and subordinated peoples across the world for centuries. It has been used to convince us that culture is irrelevant to our lives, and to exclude us from the construction of ideas and interpretations. It has resulted in the idea that we do not possess cultural skills. But above all, this lie has been used to discourage us from participating in the making of our own culture and identity. Culture expresses our relation with the production and reproduction of life, for this reason, it comes from the verb cultivate. It interprets and defines our economic, political and social relation to the world. It is how we work, eat, think, dress, organize, feel, choose our lovers, love, relax, reflect, remember, talk, laugh, cry, make love, see ourselves, educate our children and bury our dead. It is how we understand ourselves in the world and live out this understanding. We are all the time inheriting, adapting, selecting, constructing and passing values and interpretation – even very contradictory – through our everyday culture. If we do not make our own culture, we can be dominated and used without knowing it. We can live – even work, love and dream – against our own interests.*
 4. My collaborator and partner Manoela Souza, arteducator and co-founder of the Community University of the Rivers and of the Rivers of Meeting project, who also lives in the *Casinha* of Culture.
 5. Transformance distinguishes between *intervention* and *interruption* to highlight opposing pedagogic methods. We understand *interruption* as a monologic authoritarian interference in the rhythms of a process and community, and *intervention* as a consultative dialogic proposal, concerned with exposing and valuing the process of a community. This reflects the aims and influences the form of any given cultural action.
 6. Our pedagogy aims to be *dialogic* as opposed to *monologic*. This affirms the principle of learning through the dialogue between individuals and their knowledges, and the practice of embedding this intersubjective dialogue and construction of identity in the interactive, dynamic and celebratory exchange of knowledges in the artistic languages and forms of their popular culture. In practice, *Dialogic English* uses the learning of English to provide and create a distanced, intimate and decolonizing stage of reflection for Cabelo Seco on Amazonian histories and identities, towards personal and collective self-determination. This process inspired the emergence of the concept of *trialogue* to define the interaction between two simultaneous processes: the dynamic public onstage dialogue that emerges through the *presence* of two intimate dialogues that are set in motion when two people meet in a historical and actual place of possible narratives; and the interaction between a narrator/author, a questioner and a focalizing listener (audience), who together enable a circle of story-telling to take place, through agreed principles, as the conditions for the performance of making a new collective story. This trialogic process-drama requires and cultivates the skills of performance-aware *reflexive empathy*, dialogic solidarity and ethical co-responsibility, with and through others, nurtured through the intercultural literacy techniques of *Transformance*.
 7. This decision is based on a number of coinciding pedagogical considerations. We are concerned that people empathize with the assassinated youth in the photo, despite their involvement in drug-running and armed protection of drug territories. We also need to empathize with the parents and extended family of the assassinated youth, who suffer the loss of their son and may not be able to grieve due to the silent judgement of the community. Finally, we need to stimulate a reflexive empathetic response in the community to enable it to look beyond the immediate cause of the death, to understand historic causes and interacting intersubjective effects, without losing sight of an ethic of individual responsibility. These considerations are guided by our distinction between *empathetic* and *reflexive identification*. We understand the first as an affective reaction, sentimental and manipulable, and the second as an affective response, analytic and self-aware. We associate *empathetic identification* with the tendency (of the victim) to erase the difference of identity of the other, and reflexive identification with the tendency to distance oneself in affirmation of the difference of identity of the other. These definitions imply very different models of solidarity and cultural activism, and are essential for the development of a politics of empathy. The same distinction applies for *empathetic* and *reflexive solidarity*.
 8. Barão is the poorest street in Cabelo Seco. PAC (Program of Accelerated Growth), is the government housing project. Francisco Coelho was the ‘founder’ of Marabá.

9. We define this 'fear of freedom' as a key element of the *resistance to liberation*, the psycho-emotional threshold of contradictions which define the personal and collective stage of transformation and self-determination. Typically, this occurs in the fear of jeopardizing solidarity, unity and the emotional security of the community; the intensely moral and explosively sensitive refusal to be judged, humiliated or rejected by the community; and the reluctance therefore to confront and dismantle, publicly, *barricaded* ways of being, in the quest to experiment with new identities and sensitivities. A threshold radically defined by the existential fear of isolation (social exile) and the loss of identity (social death), and by the need for empathetic- reflexive solidarity.
10. Zequinha acts as our *transcultural mediator*. His reflex to avoid the dangers of open confrontation has become a skilled capacity to mediate between us and his community (to guarantee the adaptation of the proposal, pace and methodology of the project to the realities and needs of the community); and the interpretation and facilitation of the relation (and tension) between the actual and emerging community cultures. This intercultural and intra-cultural role is essential to anticipate and understand whatever resistance as a resource of knowledge and transformation in the transition from one culture to another.
11. Our transformance pedagogy distinguishes between (crude, narcissistic) *sentimental empathy* and *reflexive empathy*. We understand the former as uncritical identification, and the latter as affective but questioning and analytic identification. The difference helps to define a politics of empathy, essential in this epoch of cultural micro-technology, unimaginable in the fascist period when Bertolt Brecht polemicized against (crude) empathy in the *Messingkauf Dialogues*. The artistic languages, theatre in particular, have a key role in the transformation of *sentimental empathy* into *reflexive empathy*.
12. Within cultural literacy processes, the distinction between the *barricade* (resistance which ranges from the self-aware to the self-destructive) and the *fortress* (the desensitized subjectivity of the protection, rationalization and justification of privilege in an unequal, exploitative and dangerous world), helps us to understand the complex subjectivities of the excluded and the included, and their psycho-emotional relation, and to avoid a simplistic binary opposition between *oppressed* and *oppressor*.
13. The collective creation of this democratic community stage depends on an understanding of *aesthetic space*, a potential itself created (in all public spaces), through the magnifying and focusing empathetic power of the directed and unified gaze of the collective *presence* of the audience. Becoming skilled in how to read and perform this public power is what we understand to be *performance literacy* and nurtures *performance-awareness*, the performative awareness of intracultural and intercultural dramas that occur in human interaction on all the social stages where we act. Without this literacy, teachers can be extremely inhibiting, authoritarian and abusive of human rights, and pupils learn to be compulsively collusive and complicit in maintaining injustice.
14. We understand the *barricade* as the subjectivity of resistance which is located between the two voices of self-defence in an exploitative world: a public, external, defensive oppositional and rhetorical voice of accusation, anger and unified collective resistance; and an intimate, internal, reflexive, poetic voice of self-doubt, fear, vulnerability, questioning, empathy and individual need. The two voices tend to live in a state of tension, and even conflict, manifesting themselves in terms of gender and generation, respectively.
15. We understand *liberation* in the Freirian sense, that *there is no personal liberation without collective liberation, and no collective liberation with personal liberation*. The double meaning of liberation is similar to the ethical-juridical concept of self-determination which we use to illuminate the dialectic relation between the individual and the collective (or the people).
16. In our 'dialogic english' workshops, we all became fascinated by the depth of reflection that the study of English stimulated, a *decolonizing* reading of the afro-indigenous Amazonian self, and particularly, of the practice of colonial and anti-colonial values within Brazilian Portuguese. Each singing, poetry and dance narrative workshop became a cultural process of understanding the psycho-emotional and psycho-social effects of the intellectual project of colonialism, and how these manifest themselves in our relations and social organizations, to transform them into a praxis of intercultural respect and pluricultural equality. All became aware of the importance of recognizing language, the unconscious and its corporal memory as archives impregnated by and perpetrators of colonialism, which require processes of sensitization and *reflexive identification* to transform.
17. Transformance projects have dedicated more than 25 years to the development of the *intimate object* as a key pedagogical resource, a physical object which concentrates and contains (like a text) the psycho-emotional and socio-historical experience of the objective world of its owner. (The concept deliberately brings together and shocks the subjective and objective worlds in a philosophically and pedagogically provocative dialectic relation. The *intimate object* can be codified and decoded through any expressive language, and adapted in education to create a cooperative environment or research any theme). In this workshop, we became aware of the

huge pedagogical potential in dance to extend the *intimate object* to include gesture and narrative movement, to bypass the self-censuring power of speech. This enabled us to avoid privileging articulate participants and the tendency of speech to 'fix' meaning, and instead to include intelligences and knowledges present in the body, and privilege the plurality of interpretation in dance.

18. The affirmation of embodied memory and knowledges and of visceral intelligence and empathy (felt in the skin), draws on the concept of the *mindful-body*, developed during my collaboration with Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, between 1981 and 1984. The concept affirms the interrelation between the mind and the body, and avoids their Cartesian, rationalist separation.