

Community University of the Rivers:

Cultivating transformative pedagogies within formal education in the Amazon

Dan Baron Cohen

1 Contexts

Stop, my brother, give-up that screen in your palm
retrieve the creative time of your imagination.
Now leap, and stand by my side
on the steel horizon where everything began.
Can you see, through the fumes
the indistinct contours of the River Tocantins?
See the boardwalk blurred by frenetic clouds
of crazed dengue mosquitos
reproducing in the fetid drains?
Now, fly, above the cement dam
camouflaged by murals and premiered graffiti
and see Cabelo Seco, before its 'revitalization'.

See the *Backyard Drums*¹ singing their alert
on the tilted stage of the little blue house?
And there, *AfroMundi*², beneath the trees in the little square
dancing a river-source on fire?
Now see *Leaves of Life*³, its portable library
passing from house to house, cultivating reading?
And there, a little plaza of children beneath the stars
mouth agape in front of the homemade screen of Owl Cine⁴
See "it's coming! *Radio Stingray*⁵... "
announcing the great bike-ride 'Let Our River Pass'?
And *Rabetas Videos*⁶ filming a gathering of families
their hair braided with the rays of the sun?

Now, beside the school, our well of pure water
can you make-out a wee girl, so thin
huge Afro, looking at us, filling plastic bottles?
Recognize her? Look carefully! It's me! Yes, your gran
dancer, reader and singer in the university of the rivers!
I cycled with my mum, our hair in flames!
I set up the cinema, even won a book in the raffle
on the last Saturday before that dawn
when we left with a multitude of people.
We knew we were exchanging
açai, jambú and Paraense rice festivals
for clean, air-conditioned dreams from overseas ...

But we never imagined the tension of that endless boredom
fenced by fear, in our *new habitat*.
Kissing on the river in Belém, we saw the ships, yes

but I never realized, they were actually mining the future!
 See that guy, staring at the immense desert
 looking at me from the horizon?
 Till today his questions echo
 in the craters of my stolen *imaginário*⁷.
Who is responsible for such devastation?
How will we survive such violence?
What project invites a community to gaze
at its revival in a museum where everything ended?

Leap now to 2015, my brother, to the world stage
 of that beautiful little square!
 Gather all the youth and children of the community
 and tell them all you have seen, at my side!
 They know that 2015 was declared 'year of light'
 and that Brazil will produce solar energy so cheap
 that there'll be no more argument for hydroelectric dams!
 Go, invite youth from projects around the world
 that have already lived green lies
 to meet between the Tocantins and Itacaiúnas Rivers
 and together, create a solidarity and generosity
 that fit in the palm of every hand!



2 More culture in school

The packed auditorium is a tense mixture of authoritarian threat and shy adolescent admiration. Teachers police pupils, parents threaten children, but today, a new project is

being born. Camylla stands in one corner, elegant, poised, her Senegalese costume glowing on the over-lit school assembly stage. It highlights her strong, long legs and curved muscular bottom, sculpted bare belly and proud, tapering back, erect shoulders and small, almost invisible breasts. Her body records the meeting of enslaved African warrior and silent indigenous planter, and her light complexion and Portuguese surname, the plantation where they met. The same rich fabric gathers her voluminous braided hair in an intuitive celebration of African femininity.

But this Camylla is not just a reinvention of traditional African aesthetics, viscerally studied through videos found on the Internet, interpellated into her body. She embodies an impossible dream: that a young *cabocla*⁸ woman can emerge from a wooden home without water, toilet or fridge, sustained by little more than rice and beans sauce, to create choreographies of hope, be respected for her intelligence and resilience, and become a new symbol of a vital, autonomous, sustainable Amazon. Everyone in the auditorium read photo and the caption that accompanied the interview in yesterday's newspaper or saw Camylla on TV. She has just won a national award to research the silent, invisible indigenous narratives of her *cabocla* history, as a radical metaphor for the violation of the rivers and forests of the Amazon, through workshops with Butoh and Maori dancers, from the most advanced indigenous urbanized cultures in the world.

Camylla looks out at the upturned faces. She recognizes children and adults from her *AfroMundi* dance school. She looks across at Reris, ready to film. She turns now to Elisa, Carol and Êvany, across the stage, their *drums of freedom* poised between their legs, also in African costume, ready to perform. She looks at the obese teachers seated at the end of each row in the auditorium. Gradually, they have come to recognize and understand their everyday aggression in the classroom and submission at home, and their compulsive eating as the performance of hidden, unresolved dramas of the feminine Amazon, that Camylla suffered in the everyday beatings from her mother. They know that today, they are transforming these dramas into a grammar and vocabulary of self-liberating Afro-Amazonian community dance. All recognize in Camylla, the celebrated, afro-contemporary dancer, their own gestures, silences and desires. But do they know that the tension that runs deep within her self-confident onstage identity, the energy of her poise and steely determination that aches in the *arca* just below her breasts, threatens to fracture her very life?

The children from *AfroMundi* dance school feel her tension, but Camylla knows the *Drums of Freedom*⁹ understand it. They know her as the glamorous nineteen year-old who beneath the costume and braids, compulsively straightens and tints her hair, and dedicates hours each day to perfecting another performance, virtual and weekend, to attracting male desire and the unconditional love of an absent father, and to healing a stolen, violated childhood.

Camylla nods at Reris. He starts his video. She glances at Carol, Elisa and Êvany, dressed in vibrant Senegalese fabrics of green and orange prints, djembes between their legs, and smiles. All are experimenting with lesbian sexuality, which threatens to flood rehearsals and subvert the weekly collective *formation*¹⁰ processes. But now, Camylla remembers them all on the opening night of the project, seven years earlier, all seated in the same positions, when she and two other eleven year-olds gyrated above upturned beer-bottles, in unconscious complicit celebration of child prostitution. She nods at them, and the percussionists begin a powerful Guinean rhythm. The entire school auditorium, even the teachers, erupt in adulation and appreciation. Some instantly stand up and dance, without even knowing why.

The live drumming intensifies Camylla's solo and the audience's collective, empathetic response generates another synergy, which inspires the percussionists. The school is transformed and the morning exceeds all expectations. Camylla sits exhilarated and recovers her breath. The percussionists caress bruised palms, exchanging smiles. Nilva, the head-teacher laughs out loud and takes the mic. *This is so much more than a celebration of black awareness or the launch of our new project collaboration 'More Culture in School'¹¹ with our Community University of the Rivers¹². She smiles at her teachers, animated, already sharing clips of the performance between mobile phones. She is dealing with chronic teacher absenteeism, her own ill-health and that of her most motivated, experienced teachers, and an apathy that permeates all the schools in Marabá. *This is more than a performance of our human rights. It is a performance that heals and transforms the imaginário, of each of us, those of us that carry the wounds of Araguaia¹³ and the threats of Belo Monte¹⁴. You give us hope that the Amazon will revive!**

Camylla smiles, but I recognize the tension that now hunches her shoulders and is spreading to the *Drums of Freedom*. All are desperate to recover their mobile phones in Mano's bag, to read the few hundred messages of the early morning¹⁵. In all her years of pedagogical coordination, this one responsibility tests Manoela's capacity to avoid turning a collective agreement into terse command. Nilva calls me to the stage and I embrace her and Camylla, and present the percussionists by name. *Thanks everyone for your focused energy and generosity! After the interval, we will work with all the teachers, and in the coming weeks, with you all, class by class, to transform the school into a huge workshop of dance, percussion, song, theatre and video, to create a festival of transformation through performance. Agreed?* Sustained applause.

But let me ask you one question. You know these performers. You know Reris. You have seen them all grow into arts educators. Is it fair that they, that you, are failed again and again, just because the pen, only one of our languages, just one of our intelligences, just one door into our imagination, is all that's valued? And that the knowledge of our ancestors, that comes from our hands, our bodies, our land, forests and rivers, has no place in school?

The auditorium is silent, reflexive, open. Two of the scores of young mothers present, who danced with Camylla above upturned beer bottles seven years ago, feel a rush of indignation. Their young sons sit beside them, already practiced in the armed poses of Toím, Douglinho and Renan¹⁶. *Please leave with this in your mind. You created this stage where we performed another kind of education, without walls, rooted in the culture of Cabelo Seco, past, present and future, and the celebration of our full intelligence!*

I look at Camylla. Her eyes brim with tears. She learned yesterday that she failed Portuguese and Mathematics, and is condemned to repeat and 'pay' her final year.



3 Universities

I create a kite
and see your care, mum
in my hands
cutting and sewing
my clothes.

I tie the ribbons of its tail
and see your wisdom, dad
in the dance of your fingers
weaving nets
in the shade of the square.

I fly my dreams
their cord vibrating
with so much history and desire
and though mute
failed and condemned
I read the future in the winds
and write
the ethics of the rivers
on the parched red sky
to reveal
the values of the giants
and keep safe
my life in my home.

Reris looks down over Cabelo Seco. He lifts the recycled pocket video camera to his eye. I film him, filming his community vanishing, as his world-view expands. He smiles to himself. *The ice in my belly has melted.* As we pass through the clouds, he turns to catch the last glimpse of Cabelo Seco, an arrowhead in the point where the River Itacaiúnas and River Tocantins meet. *The day I became an angel.* His distinctive ancient profile, more Indigenous than African, is sharply defined in the frame of the plane window. He is not just filming his first flight. He is filming for Toím, Douglinho and Renan, three of the five friends in an iconic photographic portrait that appeared in our third artistic-pedagogic calendar, all murdered before reaching eighteen. And he is researching the future, for those who survive in the 'red zone' of development, who will read and reread every nuance in his photos, imprisoned for being born black, poor and too literate about the languages of power and the health of the Amazon, to endure their fragility and complicity, or be allowed to move freely in Old Marabá at night.

Reris' features are almost inscrutable, an inherited, self-aware ancestral mask as dry as his spare words, but the emotions of his own stolen childhood, tremble in an almost perceptible smile. *What happens if you need the toilet in the sky?* Later he will smile at the radical innocence of his question.

We leave my bag in my room and go into his apartment. Reris opens the sliding glass door of his bedroom and looks out over a garden of native trees, contemporary ceramic sculptures and indigenous wooden carvings beside landscaped ponds, filled with more fish than our stretch of the Tocantins River. I'm glad his first hotel is an ecological retreat, deep in the old city of Recife. He studies every detail, recording everything in a finely gradated, acutely sensitive memory. He points at a huge majestic tree with bold, twined roots, across the gardens. *Isn't that the Baobá¹⁷ that priests brought over from Africa as seeds in their hair?* Reris opens the hot-water tap and lets the water run, noting its temperature, before we leave his room.

We descend antique wooden stairs and as we reach the garden, Reris turns suddenly. *Did we turn off the air-conditioning?* I smile at his economising reflex and nod. I open my camera-bag. When I look up, Reris is already in the garden beneath the Baobá tree. By the time I join him, he is on his knees, smelling the leaves and caressing the seeds between his forefinger and thumb. *These will not bud. But I'll take some back to show the Rabetas.* He films the thick roots, braiding out of the ground, the camera tilted up from the ground. This perspective, from below, is already an aesthetic reflex. He is nineteen, struggling to graduate primary school.

Camylla has agreed we can show Dry Tears¹⁸, I confirm to Reris, on his veranda, after lunch. He'd tried, in vain, to digest the rich white-wine sauce that accompanied the only dish with rice and beans on the menu, and almost fainted with cramps. But he is already deeply immersed in preparation for the National Forum on Audio-Visual Interaction with Education. His fine, steady forefinger accompanies the movement of his lips as he traces the shape and reads aloud every word. I browse the program. *You're on the roundtable I'm chairing, Reris.* He looks up, panic triggering decisive certainty in the fraction of a second. *I'm here to learn. I'm not ready to speak. I'll document.* I smile. *We'll speak to the organizers. They'll understand.*

My opening words on our Community University of the Rivers turn Rerivaldo into a celebrity. He lowers his eyes before the insistent gaze of well-intentioned university scholars and leaders of extension projects when they insist on being photographed with him, but by the

second day, he meets their gaze, for a few seconds, and replies with a phrase crafted to explain his presence and to avoid being turned into an exotic trophy. *I coordinate the audio-visual department of our university, the memory of our micro-projects, the formation of our coordinators, our work in the community and in schools, the graphic design for our billboard and our solar-powered radio-bike.* I complete his presentation: *Reris and his audio-visual collective won a national award from the Ministry of Culture, last year.*

Reris learns not even to smile in empathetic embarrassment when even scholars ask me if he speaks Portuguese, if his body is painted, if alligators walk our streets. In just hours he has travelled the vast distance from smouldering terse replies slapped out of him in the deserted midnight streets of Cabelo Seco by brutal military police, when asked to explain the *Reais* in his pocket. They trampled his scholarship into the dirt, then kicked and mocked him when he kneeled to retrieve it. A month later, it was the sergeant who looked away when Reris offered him a glass of water before the start of the community bike-ride. Rabetas Videos Collective named the bike-ride *Don't Kill Me: I am the Amazon*, in memory of nightly violence they suffer at the hands of the police. Astride their bicycles, in two and threes, all the kids noted Reris' lowered eyes and the officer's searching gaze, and the video-maker's outstretched hand that bridged the two worlds. The scene disturbed the teachers' conversation in the staff-room the next day, and then entered the collective narrative in the calendar in 2015, approved by the youth coordinators of the community university.

I step onto the stage, the forum program in my hand, and introduce two national video-makers. Reris films. *Our third panellist is Rerivaldo Mendes.* I gesture to the only youth in the forum. There is a palpable thrill of expectation. *Reris has asked me to thank you for the honour of being invited. As this is his first forum and the first time he has left his community of Cabelo Seco, he has chosen to listen. He will speak through video, and in intimate dialogues.* The disappointment is almost as visceral as Reris' refusal to speak. *It may take him many years to break the law of silence on public stage, a silence that keeps him alive today.*

The two video-makers are eloquent, calm, and coherent. They choose polemical themes and are experimental in their forms of presentation, but they are at home. They affirm an agreed consensus. Reris is bewildered by their video language, but open and intrigued. A few questions from an audience immersed in the mobile phones and netbooks in their laps, are answered with reasonable, rehearsed anecdotes. The video-makers return to their seats in the auditorium and I ask for the video fragments from *Dry Tears* and *I am the Amazon*. The first begins with the pulsing sound of crickets, and Reris' distinctive view, angled up from the cracked cement and stagnant puddles of Cabelo Seco. Fingertips suspended above keyboards...

A member of the audience takes the microphone and after a long comment, concludes with two questions. *Rerivaldo, how do you develop the narratives in your videos? And why did you choose video to transform yourself.* Reris lowers his camera and gazes at the questioner, the microphone in her outstretched hand invading his silence. She has already photographed him in the morning, and achieved a selfie with him before the session.

We exchange glances. I too am being coerced. If I mediate to protect Reris, I fulfil our agreed, shared principles, but in the public gaze, devalue his authority and contradict our university's pedagogy of self-determination and commitment to youth as co-researchers and community pedagogues. If I concede, I perhaps irretrievably betray my word and wound an emerging, still-fragile self-confidence, let alone the confidence between us. How to explain

our process of healing the hidden, inter-subjective labyrinthine wounds of centuries of colonization, exclusion and resistance, hunger and permanent, intimate betrayal, in just a few words? How to illustrate our territorial distinction between the *community*¹⁹ dramas of silent, lived, unresolved inarticulate intimate histories, and the *public* theatre of lucid, contested interpretations of distant, already documented narratives? How to defend Reris' right to be silent, and his huge post-colonial challenge and struggle to say *no*? I smile at Reris. He too is reading this threshold. I decide to trust his knowledge. *Your choice, amigo.*

Reris weighs the risk. In a split second, he steps away from the camera, takes the mic, and climbs onstage. *I didn't understand your question.* The woman rephrases, becoming more obtuse and seeking refuge in a theoretical language. Reris turns to me, and whispers: *what is she saying?* I build the bridge: *Rerivaldo, how do you use video to tell your stories, and why did you choose to make videos?* Without looking up, knowing the weight of each word, and the silence between, Reris replies. *I try to reveal what is hidden, from the ground up, to save our river, and all that our community knows.* He lifts his eyes to meet his questioner's. *If I were not making videos, I'd be involved in some scam, caught up in trafficking, and probably dead.*

I need to return to reality, Reris notes drily, as we stride through the airport.

4. Teacher education

Let our river pass

Even though there are no more fish
I will hold on to my grandpa's canoe
its *taúba* benches preserve
the curve of my learning
in his lap of how to read the rivers
the smell of *tucunaré* fish
drying on the clothes-line in our backyard
and of mum's peels of laughter, discovering
my first summer of love.

That world sustains the roots
of my hope
that the murder of life-sources
in the name of green progress
will open your nut-brown eyes
encourage you to fit your *rabeta*²⁰
and cross the Tocantins, again
at sunset, with me
to defend our Amazon.

Carol passes out drumsticks, while Elisa places thirty chairs in a circle. They are not lovers, but Carol gazes with unconditional love for Elisa who was raped at fourteen and at fifteen, gained Pietro and wounding judgement from two powerful women in Cabelo Seco. They tried to use Elisa's precocious pregnancy as evidence of the project's immorality, to destroy it. Instead, the two young women formed *Clothes to the Wind*, a percussion-based, song-writing micro-project for children, young girls and women, to turn violation into human

rights. Carol hands out the final drumsticks as Elisa completes the introduction. She then picks up her guitar and the two sing and drum the song *Cabelo Seco* to present who they are. They follow with a funk version, just with drumsticks. Amazed applause. *I taught you for five years, a senior pedagogue exclaims. I never knew you had so much culture!*

Carol also co-coordinates the children's library *Leaves of Life* and the community cinema *Owl Cine*, writes excellent poetry and short stories, but she never speaks in public, except to tell truths no one can bear to hear. Even at seven years of age, the youngest in the project, she was the same. But then, she had to overcome hysterical laughter to find and build the momentum to tell the truth. In a community and country that seeks refuge in saying *yes*, to avoid punishment, exclusion and execution, and to keep every doorway open to dribble starvation and rape, Carol's courage is rare. *Were the lovers active or passive, in that summer?* Carol asked when the poem was read, opening the pathways for the community university to talk about sexuality, and for Elisa to deny the rumour that she had exchanged her virginity for the brace on her teeth.

The teachers listen to the two girls with respect, and Elisa asks them to turn to one another in pairs. It is the first time all 30 teachers are present in a *formation* session, joined by other professionals who know *Rivers of Meeting* and are curious to see how teenagers form adults. Carol reads the poem and now that an environment of care, sensitivity and confidence has been defined, Elisa explains the structure of the workshop. She invites the teachers to form into seated pairs, turn their chairs towards one another, and exchange a story about the human right that most defines their needs. Within seconds, the circle is a polyphony of dialogues²¹. Carol and Elisa check that no-one is excluded, self-excluding or touching an unresolved, painful story.

After seven minutes, Elisa beats the *agogô*²², reminds everyone to share their dialogic time with care, and that she will call them together in a few minutes. When she judges the banter has almost subsided, she calls the taller teacher in each pair to stand. She and Carol demonstrate. Carol creates a human sculpture of the human rights story Elisa has shared, and Elisa reads herself in Carol's embodiment, and then adds emotional, psychological and narrative detail. The pair inverts, each actor now becoming active audience, and then the pairs embrace in thanks.

Now take your drumsticks, and accompany each of these rhythms. Carol beats out a rhythm of *funk*, and the teachers find the rhythm, the generational differences appearing with laughter. Elisa beats out a *samba*, and the teachers find the rhythm with more confidence. Carol creates a *carimbó*, and once the teachers find the rhythm, Elisa creates a *boi*. With each new rhythm, the pleasure visibly increases, the relationships between the teachers are being transformed, and the respect for two teenage arts educators deepens. Mano is supporting them invisibly, as one of the pedagogues. I am photographing. Reris is filming. But the pedagogic culture comes from Elisa and Carol's mutual respect, artistic confidence and thorough preparation.

Now please return to your pairs, smiles Elisa. She can feel the workshop is going well and risks a smile to Carol. *I'm really enjoying this!* Carol laughs aloud. *We invite you to create a lyric, based in your stories, and to choose a rhythm, to guide the improvisation and structure its..., well, just to structure its rhythm!* Both laugh and the entire workshop laughs with them.

Twenty minutes later, we listen to fifteen raps, each using a mixture of Amazonian rhythms. Carol and Elisa are stunned, but less so than the teachers. In the circle of reflection that concludes this first of twenty-four 80-minute workshops, apart from the candour and quality of the lyrics and collective self-confidence of the teachers, two insights stand out. *I've always condemned funk as violent, macho, irrelevant to the educational process*, says the pedagogical coordinator of the school. *This workshop has sensitized me to start from where my pupils are, culturally, and to work from their energy, their life experience, their pleasure. And frankly, I thought I had no rhythm!*

Carol offers her reflection on what the pedagogic coordinator has just shared. *As far as I can see, the relations of power, between the senhora [all laugh], and the different generations of teachers, have also become more aware, more equal and horizontal.* There is a hushed awe, as the teachers listen to the youngest pedagogue in the circle. *It starts from a mutual confidence, the sharing of intimate stories. But it's also the decision to experiment with the unknown, in public. And it's the rhythm itself. It creates more than a unity, how do you say, a synchrony? It creates the desire to walk together, to integrate, to support. And it's free of words!*

Everyone applauds, and a younger teacher risks the second insight that will appear in the report passed to the Ministries of Culture and of Education. *Carol has demonstrated what I have seen today: the capacity of young people to collaborate with us, as co-researchers, as co-pedagogues, as partners in the educational process. And this completely changes not just how we see young people, but how we all see education. And because their priority is on ethics, human rights and justice, the drama of becoming and determining the self, Carol and Elisa remind me of why I chose to become a teacher.*

And she cries.

5. Ethics

Reris is early. In the Amazon, that is remarkable. In the capital, people meet before or after the rain. On the river, the currents decide. And in these times of blind, unregulated industrial development and corruption, drought and minimal resources disturb the ancient equilibrium between the rivers and the rains. Leaves, rustled by a wind promising rain, are likely to be misread, even by the subtlest eco-cultural literate eye. So to meet, organize and create, is now more than ever a question of persistence, and respect for the time of others. For some reason, in a searingly poor family home depressed by an alcoholic father dying from starvation and a mother too pneumonic to leave her bed, Reris and all of his brothers and sisters arrive early. Even his sister arrives early to trade her teenage body for a burger, beneath the boardwalk, beside sewers spewing the city's waste into the River Tocantins.

Reris opens and dusts his Mac, and turns it on. He puts on his glasses, imagining the effects of real lenses that he is saving for, and reopens his monthly report. Two years ago, he wrote single words that stretched across two full pages, just as he spoke. *Like a long journey along the river.* Gradually, the words became organized into phrases and he randomly placed commas and full stops here and there, for effect, experimenting with their aesthetic effect. Gradually, he structured his phrases with punctuation as precise as his editing, integrating new concepts from the discussions about the weekly film the youth coordinators watch

together, and the videos he devoured about the Amazon. *You never stop asking questions, even with your eyes*, Camylla smiles, admiring his 3-minute videos of *AfroMundi*. They were born on the same day, same year, and both have remarkable memories.

Reris has arrived early to give his first tutorials. He has a pedagogic plan, which he has built through our dialogue, copied with painstakingly care so that it is clean and accurate. It guides him to enable Carol and then Êvany to discover how to edit. He sits beside each of them, gently pointing at each relevant key, his long left arm drooped casually across the back of the chair of his apprentice, his right hand toying with a pencil, smiling, playful, as each manipulates the tools he has taught himself to use. The ease and pace of the others' learning reflects their intelligence, but also Reris' pedagogy. He is patient, supportive, interested, empathetic. All that he has learned, he shares. Hours pass quickly, they learn together.

Reris has already filmed with Antonio and Brandon, and when they film, each too also places the camera on the ground, kneeling before the scene, reading it intently for social and poetic detail. They too are patient, perfectionist and as unhurried as waiting for a storm to pass before crossing the Tocantins. They are bound to one another, in unconditional solidarity, by the law of silence.

But each is very different. Brandon is fragile, sensitive, alert, fearless and unpredictable in his filming, but difficult to understand when he speaks. His words, smile and decaying teeth, are all constantly being hidden by his trembling hand, making it impossible to understand his speech. But when he films and edits, his fingers are steady. He taught me to edit with the same generosity that Reris demonstrates, but could not keep to our agreed times. He can't even remember the sequence of the days of the week and months of the year. It's too abstract. The movement of the river and its winds, the cycles of trees in constant flower and fruit, the rhythms of the wet and dry seasons, and the visceral memory that fixes his stare²³, are the cogs that will continue to organize time, long after the river's source dries up.

Antonio stares in intense concentration, alert to all detail. His back is hunched in silent, brooding indignation. His innocent openness has disappeared. *You don't need to be quoted by name, in the piece we write for the paper*, I reassure him. It was night when he was arrested for an armed assault that everyone knows he would not commit. A little more than a hundred days later, when he is found innocent and released from prison, he is still living the beatings at the hands of the police and older inmates. Was he raped for being pretty? *You have the right to compensation*, I explain, but I know his mother is terrified of police revenge. Antonio doesn't look up. *You can include my name. They need to know we're not afraid.*

In the little *Cottage of Culture*, the heart of our community university, we agree to include the photo of Reris teaching him to accompany the article. It will ease the pain and embarrassment of his family, and clear his name in the eyes of the community and of the future, a concession the news editor immediately agreed when I explained who Antonio is. It will also undo the devastating effects of his head teacher's angry prejudice, which marched her from classroom to classroom, newspaper in hand, pointing to what happens to vagabonds. But it will not enable Antonio to recover his academic year and graduate primary school before he is 19.



Antonio, Reris and Bryan return to editing the community library video. Reris has explained how it needs to show that *Leaves of Life* expands the definition of literacy to include all our human languages and integrated intelligence, valuing the knowledges of the community. They immediately understand. They are studying, together, through production, how to create an audio narrative to structure, complement and reveal the complexity of the video footage. They know a reading and drawing circle in the street, in the 'red zone', is profound.

Suddenly, they huddle close to the screen in intense debate. They rewind footage again and again. They call me over. Antonio points. *Should we cut this piece?* I watch an older youth arrive at the circle, look over, ask Alanes for a plain piece of paper, lie down among the children and begin to draw. I nod. *He stayed until it began to rain, and even then, continued to draw, using the cracked wall as his surface. What's the doubt?* Antonio explains. *If we include him, he might over-react.* They read my eyes. *Some will say he's using the children as a shield, even scouting for little planes and a future market.* A pause. *He could say this is how the police will read it.*

Community cultural literacy. No sociologist would even read a dealer lying among children. Or his intention. The *Rabetas* know he's recovering stolen childhood. He's found the only place where he can draw and imagine, a failed youth holding in thrall the living community that sustains him. He is more than a dealer. He is a son and grandson, a cousin and nephew, a shared childhood friend within a network of extended families, each a labyrinth of unresolved histories, suspended in a taut web of silences. A single loose photo or clip, with him just in the background, could have appalling human consequences. In a few frames, they've glimpsed the world, and the breath that separates them. *You're best to judge.*

We should consult him. Reris and Bryan are cousins, Antonio's uncles, but Antonio has just been released. His street status has changed. *I'll talk to him tonight.* I smile. *In just a few minutes, you've focused the ethics of image rights, multiple perspectives, community politics*

and the value of mediation to maintain the confidence of the community and authority of your video. Can I document this moment, with the clip in the background? I smile. Out of focus. They smile. They don't look at the camera. They know this photo of the process will have a pedagogic and historical value for the calendar and the community.

Bryan returns that night. *He loved the afternoon, but we can't use that clip.* Next morning, Reris notes the decision in his project diary. It will enter his monthly report. Unlike Bryan and Antonio, he has already made the decision to teach, and use video to transform. He needs a team, not just to record and edit all that occurs every week but to keep his childhood friends alive. He has reintegrated Antonio as an editor.

6 Literacies

Every Saturday
I go to the *centre*
enter a circle
hear stories
play with colours
and without *threat*
sing dancing
opening myself
with care
to read
and recognize
my stories.

And at sunset
right there
I pick up a pencil
which does not judge
or cut me
or fell
my calm
and I invent
without fear
the first comic-book
with afro-amazonian
pages of life.



Carol and Alanes select photos for their monthly report and site in the *Cottage* kitchen. They sit at the table where every week all the young coordinators of the university's micro-projects watch a provocative, independent film. At this old wooden table, they visit cultures of other peoples and extend the boundaries of their palate and imagination. Here, they also prepare their courses and workshops, learn to write academic essays and prepare for the exams to enter the federal university. We are torn about the value of formal education, but they would also change it, by entering it, and meet students and academics from across Brazil. Their chances are slim.

What's 12 x 20?, Camylla asks, entering the kitchen, completing her financial report. The two librarians look up. That's when we discover Camylla is illiterate in mathematics. We'd imagined that while we were taking care of the artistic and cultural *formation* of our young coordinators, at least the fundamentals of a high school education were being learned. Every day, we ask *how was school today?* Every day, they reply *normal*.

My worst enemy, Reris laughs, entering the kitchen. He has no times tables. I throw a simple multiplication at Carol and Alanes. Embarrassed laughter. In walks Êvany. I throw the same at her. *I refused to sleep with the deputy head*. She is serious. *Does everybody know this?* They shrug. *And no-one denounces it?* In seconds, we discover all our coordinators are likely to fail high school and have no chance of passing the university entrance exam. All use their fingers and toes, creating cakes and fences to make huge calculations. *But you make lightning calculations when you buy anything and count your change*, I declare in disbelief.

All abandoned maths at 8 years old, ring-fencing it in angry self-defence and *preguiça*²⁴ when humiliated in school. To gain the academic points to pass from year to year, they organize community raffles to fundraise detergents and sponges. Then they clean the school as part of a gymkhana. The fast-track option is to permit the school directors to molest them.

Outraged, we go to the school. The able pedagogic coordinator is depressed, suffering petty envy from alienated, passified teachers. I go to the newspaper, radio and TV journalists. *What did you expect?* asks Ulisses, the only critical, capable and collaborative journalist in the region. *An educated self-confident population expects human rights, justice, democracy. Our state education in the Amazon needs to be the most precarious in Brazil.* Not even geography teachers here know that Marabá is in the Amazon. Our young people didn't even know they are Afro-Indigenous. They think the Amazon is 'out there'.

Alanes and Carol post the photos of the library in the red zone: storytelling, *AfroMundi Kids*²⁵ presenting traditional Guinean dance, *Rabetas* projecting new community videos on cracked walls of the new houses. *Will we include photos from the kite festival?* Carol asks. She opens a selection of young people teaching children how to create the technology to write on the wind. As I photograph them working together, I notice cuts, extending from Carol's wrists up her inner forearms. I put down my camera and take her wrist in my hand. I've known her since she was six. *Carol?* She shrugs. *Why?* She glances at Alanes. I turn Alanes' hand over. She too is cutting herself. They see the shock and the questions in our eyes. Carol laughs, Alanes explains. *We are anaesthetized. It's a way to feel the pain of everyday life.* Évany is standing in the kitchen doorway. She turns her inner forearms toward us and raises her leather and woven bracelets. She too is mutilating herself.

All the cuts are raw, the scabs still forming. *When did this begin?* I ask. *Who knows?* Carol replies. *Does no-one notice, in your homes?* They shake their heads. *Show him,* Carol says to Alanes. She peels back the frayed hems of her shorts, and reveals the cuts on her thighs, not to be seen. Évany does the same. Different cuts, deeper. The tears well up in our eyes. The cuts look like indigenous markings. Centuries of unacknowledged violation of women in the Amazon are now perhaps finally being documented on the thighs and wrists of their descendants. *We discovered we are all doing it.* Alanes speaks objectively. *When the cuts heal, the pain writes a new page.*

These are among the most intelligent youth in the community, perhaps the most sensitive and supported. Why have they not spoken to us? *Do you write about this?* I ask. The question seems banal. *Can you show me your thighs again?* So many wounds, on the inner and upper thighs. Scars beneath scars. Shadows of pain. *You should photograph this, Carol, before it disappears. Or write lyrics. Have you written poetry to explain this, Alanes? You're writing the history of the Amazon onto your bodies. Do you know women throughout the world hurt themselves? Men hurt others. But there are other ways to remember, to achieve justice.*

They all know how to listen, to speak, to alert and to intervene when they are with the small children of the library. You cannot learn these empathetic reflexes of solidarity. Yet they are mutilating themselves. How to tell them? Alanes reads my eyes. *I know it's dangerous. I'm seeing a psychologist. She doesn't understand. But in explaining to her, I can now explain my madness to myself!* She laughs and turns to Carol. *Shall we finish our documentation, girl? We still need to go door-to-door before we set up Owl Cine!*

The next morning, Carol flies to Belém to receive a UNICEF award for Community University of Rivers. She is the only youth present amongst 150 head teachers and project directors. None can see her cuts. She presents the project with authority and insight, gained at that old wooden table in the kitchen. And she can't multiply to save her life.

7 | (too) am the Amazon

Évany texts us at midnight. *Carol has left Cabelo Seco*. I'm stunned. Twice, she has been our youngest *Young Nelson Mandela*²⁶, in 2014 and 2015, recognized for her courage, innovation and leadership by example, in every sphere of the community university. She has been at the heart of the project from its very first night. *What happened?* Évany responds by *zapzap*. *Too much to explain here*.

At 14 years old, just three years earlier, Évany enchanted a world congress of performing arts education in Paris, responding to my keynote with her *agogô*. Her courage and her pedagogic brilliance with any Amazonian percussion instrument, guitar and sax, cultivated a rare confidence between us. I persist. *Her gran beat her into the ground, then called a removal van and had all her possessions transported to her mother's home in Vila do Rato*. I imagine the humiliation. *Why?* Évany is already messaging. *She cut and shredded all her jeans*. An answer is already forming in my mind. *And Maestre Zequinha*²⁷? A pause. *Exactly. He turned his back*.

In *Drums of Freedom*, Carol and Évany are percussionists. In *Owl Cine*, the production pulse of the community's independent film culture. On the *Bikerides for Life*²⁸, they share a bike, shrieking and laughing with freedom beneath the motorway bridges, blowing whistles, and singing songs of freedom as we pass through the crowded streets. The project's earliest photos show Carol holding the mic to amplify Évany, eyes closed, playing recorder solo to the rapt community, and Évany holding the mic to Carol's drum and, later, to her sensitive acoustic guitar solos.

Perhaps they've always been lovers. But now, increasingly, in the street cinema and on the international tour of *Let Our River Pass*²⁹, their insatiable need for love, their transgressive desire, can no longer be contained beneath the old kitchen table during films of *formation* and mathematics workshops. It seeps across every threshold of caution and restraint. In the authoritarian post-colonial gaze of our Afro-Indigenous community, already tense with Catholic repression and labyrinthine jealousy, this compulsive love is dangerous. For them, and for a project that refuses funding or patronage from mining companies and their institutional allies, this is social suicide. Had Antonete and Zequinha intuited the truth of their granddaughter's choice? Had their patience snapped?

Do we have to wear jeans? Carol and Évany ask when we launch 24 performance workshops in Jose Mendonça Vergolino middle school. Both know workshop coordinators in a public space are examples, not just of a different kind of education rooted in popular culture and the valuing of arts-rich pedagogies, but of young people as co-researchers, pedagogic collaborators, and as arts educators. We talk it through together. *If we are committed to freedom of expression, diversity, self-determination, why another uniform?* Carol challenges everything, with respect, but with courage. Both wear project t-shirts with pride, themselves declarations of poems and songs they know by heart. But when Carol plays guitar in the *More Culture in School* workshops, and when Évany sits astride her *carão*, they want to be and display the freedom and independence they symbolize.

24 workshops later, Carol and Évany braid red, orange and yellow fabric into their thick afro-indigenous hair and twine the strands around their waists, foreheads and handlebars. They meet the 1200 pupils who have discovered through dance, percussion, song and theatre

that the Amazon is within them, where they live, study and play. They too are all desperate to become rays of the Amazonian sun that at 8 in the morning already throws bold shadows of their bikes across the street. While Camylla and Lorena prepare *AfroMundi Kids*, Reris and the *Rabetas* film, and Alanes reviews her poem. Carol, Évany and Elisa pass cheese bread and bananas to the military police and municipal guards, inviting them to tie the blazing streamers to the aerials of their motorbikes and cars. Together, the head-teacher, her pedagogic team and the young arts educators implement the collective decision of the teachers and parents who approved the project. Together, they create the itinerate human installation, *I am the Amazon*. As the *bike-ride for life* flows through the streets of Cabelo Seco, Vila do Rato and Santa Rosa communities, children, parents and teachers see the River Tocantins catching fire, transforming itself into vital solar energy.

But where was the art? rages the former Secretary of Education, a school pedagogue, two days later, inflamed by the politicians and mining companies in favour of the projected hydroelectric dam. *Why didn't we create a new play, through 24 workshops, to be performed by our most talented pupils on the Metropolitan University stage?* The young arts educators of the community university know the source of her anger is the news coverage that popularized pedagogic, eco-cultural and paradigmatic choices to more than a million people across the region.

Camylla responds live on TV and radio, a week after the human sculpture. *'I am the Amazon' is our pedagogic installation, a response to the multiple violences we suffer and will suffer. It is the performance of our personal and community transformation.* Carolayne, our social journalist, Camylla's co-singer and Évany's older sister, adds: *It is our popular culture, now as pedagogy in movement. We perform our values of care, solidarity and sustainable community³⁰, when we pedal, in synchrony.*

We cycle over to Carol's mother, in Vila do Rato, five minutes from Cabelo Seco. It's another world. Wooden shacks, no drains, even fewer men, far poorer. Here Carol is not the only grandchild. She is the oldest child, suddenly responsible for five brothers and sisters, more Indigenous than African, in the salacious gaze of a step-father. She emerges from the wooden house, tilted towards the Rio Itacaiúnas, whose life-source has already died. She smiles and embraces us. *Are you okay?* She nods and smiles, concealing a continent of uncried, invisible pain. Her shorts are shredded. *A perfect place for Leaves of Life.* We smile. No need for many words. *They're all waiting for us to organize Owl Cine.*

8 Well-being

Letter from Mariana

*My dear Marabá, Amazonian kin
Greetings from Mariana
your miner-sister
still trembling beneath the lava.
I write against time
within a labyrinth of shame without light
to disturb and encourage you...*

*Sister, even sensing it was a lie
I let green promises*

*seduce me to become human
and end once and for all my fear of hunger.
I won a home and became so consumed
by the dreams in the palm of my hand
I spent the future bit by bit, not noticing...*

*Friend, read the debris of my naivety
mocking my dry scream.
Learn from me, my cousin
the toxic cost
of saying 'yes' when you think 'no'.
Don't even hide behind the law of silence
that today shelters so many giants...*

*Marabá, when their ships pass
fat with so much iron, beef and wood
your chance will have already passed!
You will only have time
to take one last selfie
in front of a boat rushing
towards the source of the Tocantins in flames!*

*Sister, preserve the Lourenção Boulders
wise beings that will protect you
from the ships of death
and guide the rains of dawn.
If together we declare "not here, Vale!"
we can free ourselves of this dirty lava
and care for the vital Amazonian beauty!*



Scrambled eggs, sausage, toast and baked beans in the Community University of Hong Kong is a far cry from beans, rice and beef. But for Camylla, it's rain in the desert. She has been struggling with Chinese food for three days, indeed, has been unable to digest anything from the moment she boarded the plane in Dubai. She is not afraid to taste the unknown. In her first international trip, at 15 years old, a ten-day residency in Medellín, she closed her eyes and put *chicharrón* and *arepas* in her mouth, identifying and classifying each taste. She gave brave afro-dance workshops and received questions to Spanish speakers. It was not just to receive recognition as a dancer. *I saw our project 20 years from now*, she said in her community slideshow, when we returned to Cabelo Seco. *The arts can transform drug-abuse into projects, and drug-wars into community cooperatives.*

Smelling everything before risking tasting it, she astonished our hosts in Washington, at 17, spitting out quality vegetarian food, even forcing herself to vomit, before performing her solo 'Roots and Antennas' to an international audience at a congress on climate change in memory of Chico Mendes. Camylla shone in the healing warmth of recognition. She was creating international confidence to invite all the young coordinators. And she was performing the humanity of the Amazon, inspiring international solidarity and protection. But she was risking illness and living a permanent, tense state of distress.

Why have you chosen dance as your language? asks Professor Oscar Ho. Camylla is keen to find a new answer to a question she has received in so many interviews and roundtables. *I have always been more lucid, more analytical using my body.* She pauses, I translate. *I always let others speak.* He smiles. *You seem extremely lucid to me.* The Taiwanese academic and the post-doctoral Umbrella Movement activist are fascinated. The rhythm of translation gives Camylla the opportunity to select her words with great precision. *There's inherited ancestral knowledge, and more lived community intelligence in my body. I mean to say, in my visceral memory.*

She checks the new word with me. I'm astonished by her bravery. She has never risked this explanation, even in her reflexive reports. I remember to translate and explain my pause. Camylla picks a piece of chicken from my plate, unaware of the intimacy of her gesture and of its Cabelo Seco community reflex. The Taiwanese academic is enchanted. *What do you mean 'visceral memory'?* Camylla pauses again to reflect. The Dean has forgotten to eat.

As a child, we went hungry many nights, even days at a time. When my mother came home from partying, drunk, she would beat me, till she collapsed, exhausted. She forbade me to cry. I even had to thank her. Before the Rivers of Meeting project, I didn't even know I was the descendent of an enslaved African herbal doctor and of a raped Indigenous planter. I carry so many silences in my conscious memory. But these...legacies, she turns to me to confirm the word. *In my experience, it's more precise to research and narrate these legacies through dance.* She gives me space to translate. *They pass from generation to generation, through compulsive emotions³¹, muscular tensions, that bind my chest in knots.* The post-doctoral student is making notes. *If they inhabit the body, maybe these legacies can only be transformed through dance. Like massage. Loosening and restructuring history.* The Dean smiles. *Remember to eat!*

Camylla is suddenly crying. A respectful silence. I look again at her, still just 20, remembering the emotional and physical falls she has suffered to be here. I'm stunned at what she has learned from the creative research we completed together. Respiration as memory and echoes of undocumented histories. Respiration as narrative, passing through her resilient

but marked, aching body. Now I know the deep massage I gave during our research, created knowledge. I glimpse how she translates that into her dance performance.

It's one of my thresholds – she looks to confirm the word, I am struggling to cross. I cannot keep any vegetables or unknown tastes down. The tears fall again. My stomach knots. I feel nausea. But at least in 'Life-Source on Fire'³², our new solo, I can show this to my community. And women and children can interpret for themselves. Contemporary dance invites. It doesn't direct.

We return to our rooms to prepare, and then visit the spaces where we will work. Camylla's flu is becoming more bronchial by the hour, and threatens to become pneumonia. I prepare lemon, ginger and garlic tea for her twice a day, and retrieve the massages she received during research into her respiration. In the ten days we spend together, Camylla gives afro-contemporary workshops and performances of *Life-Source on Fire* to students at the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts and to activists and community arts groups from the Umbrella Movement, living on chicken soup I find in backstreet restaurants. She sucks every ounce of nutrition from the bones, then grinds them bite-by-bite into a pulp, which she spits onto the periphery of her plate.

Every morning and night, I bring her lemon, ginger and honey tea, and she begins to recover. But when we arrive in New Zealand, her health again becomes fragile. Her workshops and performances for Maori youth activists and later, for students at Auckland University Dance Academy inspire. But when she is forced to cancel a performance, we face a threshold that cannot be concealed. *We can't lie onstage, amiga. People believe in what we're proposing. And we cannot fly home. So we need a solution.*

We pass from extreme air-conditioning to humid pollution, every day. My body can't take it, Dan! I smile. You know that's not the whole story. Look at what you do to the bones. She smiles, looks down, aware. I know I'm addicted to foods that fill my belly but leave me weak, as a dancer, as a dance educator, as a person. But it's the only food that stays down.

I've an idea. *These next two weeks Camylla, you cook, for us. Experiment. Taste, as you cook. We're in this high-tech apartment. You have a dream kitchen. Take care of yourself. Care for me as I care for you. In exchange, I'll translate you, and mediate.* She nods and looks down at her mobile. Cabelo Seco is always present.

We're here to research the future of the Amazon, to sensitize everyone we meet about new emerging scientific evidence which indigenous peoples have known for millennia: that there is a huge river in the sky³³, which sustains the rains, rivers and continents of the world. We are here to learn from the most advanced urbanised indigenous people in the world. But we have stumbled across a simple insight, which illuminates many unresolved questions in our project. We prepare people to care for others, but they do not care for themselves. To research the future of Cabelo Seco and the Amazon, we need to research how Camylla will care for herself. I look at Camylla, imagining herself as a student in the School of Dance. She takes care of others by obligation, and in emergencies. *Prepare the lemon, ginger and honey tea for us both.*

Camylla cuts, experimenting, tasting.

Five months later, I read these stories to all the youth coordinators, at the wooden table of *formation* in the kitchen of our Community University of the Rivers. They have been writing

an essay on state high-school education, in preparation for university entrance exams in November. Free state education is threatened by privatization and cuts to the humanities, in the wake of the recent impeachment of President Dilma. Will our university survive this political-judicial coup d'état? They approve the stories and the inclusion of their real names.

I leave to visit Brandon in prison. He's been detained, to await trial, for being unable to say *no* when invited to assist an armed assault, with a toy gun. Camylla has shown us clips of him on her mobile, being beaten to a pulp by bystanders. *They don't know why they want revenge*. Brandon's gaze of shock and fury, as he looks up towards a police photographer who calls his name, is already another front-page portrait of 'black youth'. It passes, hand to hand, from mother to child, neighbour to neighbour, in silence, throughout Cabelo Seco.

Our project opens doors and Brandon enters the commander's office, shaven head and thin. He cries inside my hug. *The police punched me, then threw me to the crowd, Dan*. His national award as a video-maker has protected some of his human rights. Now we need to protect his fragile health. *Can I include you in our chapter?* I explain. He nods his authorization. This book may just save his life.

Dan Baron Cohen
Marabá, October 2016

¹ The original cultural group of children that emerged from community workshops in the backyards of Cabelo Seco in 2009 to develop into acclaimed percussionists and singers/organizer-producers that launched the CD *Amazônia Nossa Terra* in 2013.

² The first youth scholarship action-research project that emerged from the cultural group in 2012, coordinated by Camylla Alves, to recover traditional African dance.

³ The third youth scholarship action-research project that emerged in 2012, coordinated by Gilmaras Santos, to create a family-based community library in each of the 510 homes in Cabelo Seco.

⁴ The fourth youth scholarship action-research project that emerged in 2012 to screen independent Brazilian and international films in the Warehouse of Culture, then in the little square, and on walls of homes in the two streets of Cabelo Seco.

⁵ A transversal project that links nine action-research projects through a solar-powered community bike-radio, to demonstrate the potential of solar energy and disseminate all our cultural actions. This emerged in 2014 from the second 2012 scholarship project, *Not a Jot*, social journalism to value excluded youth perspectives.

⁶ The fifth youth scholarship action-research project that emerged in 2013, coordinated by Reris Mendes, to document, celebrate and disseminate the project, through audio-visual media.

⁷ *Imaginário* (port), the symbolic soil of our cultural consciousness, that simultaneously comprises and generates narratives carried within language, memory and the imagination.

⁸ The term given to Afro-Indigenous people in Brazil that conceals these two indigenous matrices of its history, sustains a national amnesia at the core of 'Brazilian' identity, and mystifies the truth of how these matrices met and meet, and their psycho-emotional and socioeconomic consequences.

⁹ The ninth action-research project that emerged in 2014, coordinated by Évany Valente of the action-research project *My Musical Diaspora* (2014), and by Elisa Neves and Carol Souza of *Clothes to the Wind* (2014). This second transversal project developed to extend the percussion repertory of Rivers of Meeting, and to affirm gender rights and sexual choice.

¹⁰ I use the pedagogical meaning of 'formation', the forming of the full human being, found in Latin-American cultures, as opposed to the more limited English concept of 'training'.

¹¹ *More Culture in School*, the program developed in 2013 by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, to value artistic and popular cultures as knowledges, pedagogies and key dimensions for nurturing social inclusion, human rights, citizenship and transformation.

¹² Our *Community University of the Rivers* was founded in 2013 from our *Dialogic English* course, in collaboration with Language School of the Federal University of Pará. Initially intended to value local

Afro-Indigenous knowledges produced and exchanged in every space in Cabelo Seco, our university today enjoys Unicef and international recognition, and challenges the political-industrial hegemony of and socioeconomic exploitation by the Mining consortium and its allies.

¹³ The River Araguaia and its surroundings border the River Tocantins. Its name is synonymous with armed resistance to the military dictatorship in the late 1970s, and the still unacknowledged and uncompensated State torture and disappearance of young people, within the gaze of Cabelo Seco.

¹⁴ Belo Monte, the third largest hydroelectric dam in the world, based in Altamira, northern Pará. Revived during the first mandate of President Lula and inaugurated during the first mandate of President Dilma, it is synonymous with political and economic corruption, violation of indigenous, river-dweller and constitutional rights, and environmental catastrophe.

¹⁵ *Culture in Network*, a program developed by the Ministry of Culture in 2015. The Rivers of Meeting project, co-founder of the Brazilian Network of Arteducators (ABRA), developed a national project to transform the mobile phone from addictive medium of compulsive, alienated and narcissistic self-isolating youth consumerism, into creative medium of cultural production for social transformation. The project is coordinated from within the Community University of the Rivers.

¹⁶ Three teenagers from Cabelo Seco, from the edge of the project, assassinated between 2013-14, in drug-related disputes, in a region where afro-descendent youth are 12 times more likely to be murdered than in any other region in Brazil. The mere presence of the university has gradually transformed Cabelo Seco from no-go favela into acknowledged territory of the region's *imaginário*, creating a climate of self-respect and citizenship.

¹⁷ The Baobab tree (Baobá, in Portuguese) is of African origin, lives for between one and six thousand years and is found in Madagascar. It is called the tree of life because in the savannahs of Africa the largest are known to hold up to 120,000 litres of water (and rain water for the local population). In the late 1500s, the Dutch occupied part of modern Senegal, hence the Baobá in the middle of Recife. Brought as seeds to Brazil by African priests who came as slaves, the trees symbolised resistance to slavery.

¹⁸ *Dry Tears* (2014), AfroMundi's second Afro-Contemporary dance performance, performed in the little square and then in Belém and New York. It dramatizes the violent industrialization of the Amazon and emergence of ecological sensitivity in Cabelo Seco.

¹⁹ We distinguish between *community space* (replete with living, unresolved histories and incomplete narratives, an extension of the front-room, kitchen and bedroom, where residents cross the street dressed just in towels or underwear to visit relatives' and friends' homes), and *public space* (a theatre of rendezvous, accidental encounters, overlapping disconnected narratives that from time to time, connect with more stable, monumentalized or documented narratives of the past). As descendants of the first community on the territory that contains the world's largest deposit of iron ore, contested by world economic powers, Cabelo Seco's residents are frequently photographed by institutions and politicians without their 'consent'. Most think 'no', but say 'yes', or seek recognition and opportunity in the presence of visiting promises. Even progressive local community artists, arts educators, writers and teachers are inter-culturally blind to their post-colonial complicity with this exploitation of Cabelo Seco, urging students and colleagues to develop their own 'public art' projects, sometimes with 'consent forms'. Our conceptual distinction is part of an empowering debate about cultural literacy and cultural self-determination in the Amazon.

²⁰ An outboard motor used by families, for fishing and emergencies.

²¹ Trialogue, the interaction between two simultaneous processes: 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 interaction between narrator/author, questioner and 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.

²² *Agogô*, percussion instrument made from two husks of the Brazil nut tree, now almost extinct in the South-East of Pará, the world's largest producer until the 1990s.

²³ The *deep time* that transfixes survivors of genocide and massacre, and is etched into the stare of their descendants (*Alfabetização Cultural*, 2004).

²⁴ The small hairy, monkey-like creature that moves in slow motion, whose name is synonymous with the easy-going, siesta-loving, relaxed passivity of many Brazilians. We understand this differently, as a challenge to the proactive, motivated self-determination that our youth coordinators and their community need to overcome, the psycho-emotional-social legacies of the recovering slave and manual worker. These are so embodied, compulsive, normalized and reinforced by immobilizing industrialized food as to be misunderstood by the exploited as 'my temperament', and condemned by the exploiter as 'good for nothing idleness'. It is also a powerful alibi for fear of failure, social death and the retreat from ambition and dream.

²⁵ Camylla Alves created this children's dance company in 2014. She works as its educator and artistic director, adapting her own dance research to develop its choreographies for community performance. In this space, Camylla increasingly confronts the authoritarian legacies of her own violated and stolen childhood, as she understands the need to develop affirmative, ludic pedagogies.

²⁶ An internal award we give every year to our two most outstanding young coordinators.

²⁷ Zequinha of Cabelo Seco, musical director of the Rivers of Meeting Project and co-founder of our university, who then became recognized as Master of Popular Culture by the Ministry of Culture in 2015. (*Performing Transformation in the Community University of the Rivers*, 2015).

²⁸ *Bikeride for Life*, a transversal project that emerged in the first Festival of Amazonian Beauty (2012) to transform the tragic assassination of Zequinha's youngest son into a celebration of care, community and Amazonian youth.

²⁹ In 2015, *Let Our River Pass* toured performances and workshops to 21 schools and 4 theatres within Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. More than 12,000 children, pupils and teachers celebrated the collective dedication of our youth. Despite this affirmation and careful preparation, we faced two similarly subversive 'backstage' challenges: the gay ego of four of the young artists whose constant need to occupy centre-stage conflicted with the collective agreements and culture of the project; and towards the end of the tour, their desire to disappear in New York to chance their future. Though all returned, we are still working out how to integrate such powerful individual desires that are being strengthened by micro-technologies of communication, inside our collective culture of choice.

³⁰ A year earlier, Carolayne moved the City Council to applause and tears when asked about the price of the CD that was being launched in the town hall, answered: *our Amazon is not for sale*. Will our youth have the same courage in today's climate of austerity-justified persecution, the dismantling of the Brazilian constitution and erosion of human rights?

³¹ In her pedagogic planning for and monthly reflexive reports on *AfroMundi Kids*, Camylla analyses with courage and honesty her occasional eruptions of verbal anger and gestural threat, when she is tense or impatient. She has dramatized her understanding of the origins and cure of these legacies in her 2015 solo *Life-Source on Fire*, discussing them openly in her 2016 Asia and Pacific performances.

³² *Life-Source on Fire*, AfroMundi's third Amazonian contemporary dance piece, was first presented in Belém, in December 2015. Based on a year of research into Afro-Indigenous histories of Amazonian women, the performance dramatizes the emergence and publication of an embodied poetics of eco-cultural intervention.

³³ See the TED talk *There is a River Above Us*, by Dr Antonio Nobre of the National Institute of Space Studies.