

Executive Summary: Indigenous Research Methods Case Study (Heritage/Takumã)

This case study documents the resonances and responsibilities that remain from a series of cultural exchanges between non-indigenous researchers (from the UK and from peripheral neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro) with the Kuikuro people from the Ipatse Village in the Xingu Indigenous Territories of Brazil (State of Mato Grosso). The engagement arose during two AHRC research projects: *The Art of Cultural Exchange* (AH/M003612/1) and *The Currency of Cultural Exchange: re-thinking models of indigenous development* (AH/P007708/1).

Five centuries after the first moment of cultural exchange between Europeans and the people who originally lived on a land that had not yet been named as Brazil, the collaborative projects described in this case study continue to pose questions about the translation of methods, heritages, beliefs, political economies, social practices, forms of governance and languages between indigenous and non-indigenous researchers. The process of mobilizing and sharing knowledge began with the first moment of contact, when Pero Vaz de Caminha wrote to the Portuguese King Dom Manuel I in a letter dated 1st May 1500 which inscribed the opening chapter in what was to become the story of Brazil. Through his documentary quill, Vaz de Caminha offers us a glimpse of indigenous traditions and processes that he seeks to understand as he brings his own cultural and social experiences into question. He wants to know what transformations are possible in the methodologies of exchange between such distant cultures. As he hesitatingly attempts to translate what he is seeing, he begins to recognise the inherent failure of his methodological endeavour. Vaz de Caminha, the official scribe of the largest expeditionary force yet mounted by the Portuguese on their voyages of discovery, knew instinctively in May 1500 that the only thing of which he could be certain was his inevitable betrayal of the gestures, words and acts he was interpreting. The letter read across five centuries is honest enough to state that the intentions of those who arrived from overseas are far less transparent than those who greeted them on the shore. In that very first encounter, Vaz de Caminha alerts all of us who subsequently read his letter – registered by UNESCO in 2005 as a World Heritage document¹ - how unsustainable the methodologies of translating cultures can be and this

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-5/letter-from-pero-vaz-de-caminha/> (accessed 30/06/19)

case study is therefore written in the form of a letter back to the man who brought Europe news of the first encounter with indigenous peoples in the land that became known as Brazil. It is accompanied by a documentary film by Takumã Kuikuro that offers a critical reflection on the impact that European researchers and artists - the contemporary 'discoverers' – have had on the Kuikuro community.

Aims and objectives of the original research projects: *The Currency of Cultural Exchange: re-thinking models of indigenous development* (2017/18) was a follow-on project from *The Art of Cultural Exchange* (2014-16) which had initiated an engagement between UK researchers and the Kuikuro people in the Upper Xingu region of Brazil. Both projects pursued new ways to explore, articulate and stimulate cultural exchange between contemporary Brazilian indigenous peoples and non-indigenous societies as a means of more equitable economic, social and cultural development. Project methodologies were practice-based using research tools familiar to the Kuikuro (documentary filmmaking) and to the Principal Investigator, Paul Heritage (Professor of Drama & Performance/QMUL and Director, People's Palace Projects²). *The Art of Cultural Exchange* investigated research visits by Simon McBurney – director, writer and performer from Complicite theatre company³ – and Heritage to a Mayoruna village in the Brazilian Amazon region (March 2014) and the Xingu indigenous territories in the State of Mato Grosso (August 2014). McBurney wrote a monologue based on his research entitled *The Encounter*⁴, which opened at the Edinburgh International Festival in August 2015 before going on a world tour. On *The Art of Cultural Exchange* project website www.inter-cultural.com there are links to audio visual materials and texts documenting McBurney/Heritage's visits to Brazil, as well as a selection of reviews for the production of *The Encounter*. There is also a link to the film, *Ete Londres* (London as a Village) written and directed by Takumã Kuikuro, which was produced for *The Art of Cultural Exchange* as a piece of practice-based research. Takumã spent 6 weeks in London with Heritage and the People's Palace Projects⁵ team in March-April 2015 producing a 20-minute documentary about London. McBurney and Takumã originally met in the Xingu and were together again in London for both the filming of the documentary and a public discussion event about their exchange of methodologies and processes (after one of the performances

² <http://www.peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk>

³ <http://www.complicite.org/>

⁴ <http://www.complicite.org/productions/theencounter>

⁵ Research Centre at the School of English and Drama, Queen Mary University of London

of McBurney's production *The Encounter* on the main stage of the Barbican Theatre). The film *Ete Londres*⁶ had its premiere in Takumã's Kuikuro village of Ipatse in the Upper Xingu in August 2015. It was subsequently exhibited at the Brazilian Embassy in London in February 2016 and at various film festivals and events across Brazil. The follow-on project, *The Currency of Cultural Exchange*, was devised in response to an initiative by the Kuikuro Indigenous Association of the Upper Xingu (AIKAX) to create a regular programme of residencies for non-indigenous artists and scholars within the Kuikuro village of Ipatse in the Upper Xingu region of Brazil (part of the Xingu Territories protected under federal law). The programme facilitated the building of an *oca* – an indigenous domestic structure first described by Pero Vaz de Caminha in his letter of May 1500 – and the setting up of a residency programme for artists from peripheral neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro and London.

The documentary film that comprises the main body of this case study is based on semi-structured interviews with artists, anthropologists and academics filmed by TAKUMÃ Kuikuro (Research Assistant: *The Art of Cultural Exchange/The Currency of Cultural Exchange*) and HERITAGE (PI: *The Art of Cultural Exchange/The Currency of Cultural Exchange*). It was shown at the AHRC / ESRC GCRF Indigenous engagement, research partnerships, and knowledge mobilization Workshop in Rio de Janeiro in March 2019 and is now available to be viewed at on PPP's website and YouTube channel⁷. The film reflects on the impact the projects have had on the Kuikuro community (including a partnership with the Horniman Museum in London, the expansion of their video-making capabilities to include virtual and augmented reality technologies, participation in the opening ceremony of the International Congress of Mathematicians 2018) and its purpose is to bring impact from the critical sharing of these reflections on the challenges of how indigenous/non-indigenous cultural exchange can achieve equitable economic, social and cultural development. The use of filmmaking as a methodology for knowledge mobilization respects Takumã's own skills as a scholar-artist⁸ and a cultural craft that is crucial for communication with the Kuikuro community and indigenous communities across Brazil⁹. Takumã uses the

⁶ <http://www.peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk/en/film-london-village-available-online-2/>

⁷ <http://www.peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk/en/ologiko-xingu-encounter/>

⁸ Takumã describes himself as an indigenous researcher rather than a filmmaker.

⁹ See Araujo, Ana Carvalho (org.). *Video nas aldeias – 25 anos: 1986-2011* (Video nas Aldeias, Brazil, 2011) for account of indigenous film making in Brazil over the last three decades that includes an interview with Takumã Kuikuro.

interviews to interrogate the different practices of anthropologists, artists and academics in their exchanges with indigenous communities.

On 1st May 1500 Pero Vaz de Caminha sent a letter to the King of Portugal informing him that Pedro Álvares Cabral had found the country that would later become known as Brazil. His letter describes the original encounter between the Portuguese navigators and the people they met on the shore.

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Rio de Janeiro

Brazil

1st October 2018

Dear Pero Vaz de Caminha,

Let me introduce you to two artists: the Brazilian filmmaker Takumã Kuikuro and the British theatre maker Simon McBurney. In 2014 Simon began a journey to the land you described so vividly to Dom Manuel I. Your letter began five centuries of documenting and reflecting on the engagement between the ‘invader/discoverer’ and indigenous communities. The questions you asked of yourself and the provocations you made to the King who had sent you on this mission are still the ones we need to ask when we seek to conduct equitable, context-specific, historically, culturally and linguistically sensitive research with those communities that survived the encounters which began in April 1500.

More than a letter, you wrote the birth certificate of Brazil as you described in extraordinary detail what happened during the first exchange with people from what Europeans were already naming as a ‘new world’. Over the course of two years between 2014-16, Simon McBurney and Takumã Kuikuro made artworks from their exchange across the new worlds they introduced to each other: Simon made a play and Takumã made a film. They established a methodology by which indigenous and non-indigenous artists could exchange practices and learn from each other’s contexts to address critical issues in social

development that were relevant to each other within their own worlds. In doing so, they set up a process which led to the creation of a residency centre for artists within Takumã's village which the Kuikuro people have established as a site for cultural exchange. The encounter between these two artists resonates with the fundamental questions that are inscribed in your letter, as you sent word of the first encounter between Europeans and indigenous people on this land. The methodologies which Takumã and Simon used to ensure a continuous flow in the mobilization of knowledge between each other as artists were set up within the framework of research projects that sought to maintain the integrity, interests and autonomy of local indigenous cultures and communities. In describing some of their processes here, I aim to explore issues that need to be addressed and lessons that can be learned from the attempt to create equitable research partnerships with indigenous researchers.

Your letter dated Friday 1st May 1500 arrived safely in Lisbon. Signed and sealed on the deck of a galleon anchored off the coast of a country you were never to hear named as Brazil, the letter was finally delivered fifteen months later to King Dom Manuel I of Portugal. The man entrusted with your letter - Gaspar de Lemos - was fêted as he arrived with the news that Pedro Álvares Cabral had confirmed the existence of a much rumoured and fabled new world. You had been dead six months by the time your letter arrived. Killed in Calcutta on 16th December, you were destined never to set up the trading post in India that had been the reason you travelled with Cabral on the new sea routes opened up by Vasco da Gama. But your legacy was to be the twenty-seven pages in which you described 10 days that changed the world. Your intensely personal reflections became a letter that served a very public function, laying the foundations for the contradictions inherent in the processes of colonisation and globalisation. Just like the Portuguese pilots and cartographers who expanded the physical understanding of the globe at the beginning of the Modern Age, your framing of the encounter with an unknown land and its people began to map the terrain by which the world would engage with Brazil and Brazil would engage with itself over the next 500 years. As you stood on deck with the sailors in April 1500 watching seaweed float past and herald the proximity of land, you were about to become a unique witness of an exchange between the methodologies by which indigenous and non-indigenous peoples understand and codify each other. I write to trace some of the threads that even now

connect two contemporary artists – one British, one Brazilian – to that first encounter. My interest reflects what seems to have been your own when you wrote your letter in May 1500: to reflect on processes, procedures and methods rather than to judge or draw conclusions about the results or even the meanings of what was produced. Here I attempt to describe the framework for cultural exchange which was at the heart of your letter and of our research projects.

In a rehearsal room in Bethnal Green in London on an unseasonably cold afternoon in June 2015, I watch as Simon McBurney unfolds how he is going to perform the encounters which formed part of the journeys to the Amazon region of Brazil the two of us had undertaken the previous year. Simon's rehearsal room is itself a place of encounter. Even though this is a monologue in the making, the room is full of people. The recorded voices of scientists, philosophers and political activists merge with the actual voices of the sound technicians and stage managers, overlaid with actor-friends who are there to interact with Simon the actor/director/writer as he develops, discards and discovers his ways of telling. It is also a place where I hear again the sounds of Amazonian nights which we spent motionless in the darkness of a forest, recording a world that seemed intent on biting us to infinity. In the centre of a room, that is both hi-tech and a child's play pen, stands the ominous life-size grey head that had travelled with us on our visit to a Mayoruna village in the Brazilian State of Amazonas the previous year. Placed on a pole on a forest path at night, the head - with its binaural technology - had recorded sounds that are now swirling a full 360° around us as we sit with our eyes closed in Bethnal Green. We are engaged in a collective act of imagination about an encounter that did not finish at that moment of its initial perception, but is part of our consciousness in London rehearsal room and will continue to be re-enacted for audiences from Paris to Sydney to New York. The methodology of the exchange is placed at the heart of the creative process.

Simon McBurney conceived Brazil and its indigenous peoples long before he visited for the first time as part of this research project. What you describe in your letter about the meeting with naked people in April 1500 became inscribed into the European imaginary of Brazil for the next 500 years. Simon's Brazilian horizon was fed by his reading of *Amazon Beaming*, Petru Popescu's account of the months in the 1970s that photographer Loren

McIntyre spent with the Mayoruna people on his search for the source of the Amazon. After two decades of holding the book in his head and heart, Simon asked me to set up a research visit to Brazil that could make possible an exchange with indigenous people that would inform and shape the stage adaptation he was planning of *Amazon Beaming*.

You estimate to have seen approximately 500 people on that beach during ten days in 1500. They were just a tiny proportion of an indigenous population that at the time of your arrival numbered over 5 million people, made up of countless different tribes occupying the territory that would later be named as Brazil. What happened to those people as they became Brazilian? Of all the questions that reach down the centuries from your letter, this is the one that will most persist and yet resist an answer. You never tried to name the people you met there. They were men and women; they were young and old. They were, as you repeatedly reiterate, just like us. But as much as you recognised the proximity of those on the shore to those who had arrived on the boat, you also calibrated the distance between you and them. That is perhaps the most obvious methodological consistency in all attempts by non-indigenous researchers to create and mobilize knowledge about, by and with indigenous communities. Exchanges performed during those first ten days in 1500 attempted to cross the distance but not to close the gap. Those people you never name became known in Portuguese as *índios*, and that is how I will name them here, even though it was another 50 years after your death before the name was used. Before they are *índios* they have the identity of their own people or ethnicity. They are Tupiniquim and Tupinambá, Yanomami and Yawalapiti, Pataxó and Kayapó, but it is as *índios* that they continue to provoke questions for us today, just as they did for Simon as he stepped off a canoe on the River Solimões to be greeted by young girls in a Mayoruna village as part of that research project in March 2014.

Índios have survived and become Brazilian, but their survival has to be set against the tragedy of the annihilation of 90% of the original population as a consequence of what happened after you and your fellow travellers left in May 1500. Their destruction was not the fate you would, I think, have either wanted for them or imagined. Nothing in your letter suggests that you anticipated the massacres, diseases or forced assimilations that would befall these people. The first days of the exchange in which Brazil was forged are ones of

hope and possibility, of an encounter that is best characterised by the moment when *índios* and Portuguese danced together on the beach: a methodological moment of exchange poised between different performance traditions. There were limits to what could be held in an equitable balance and you show that resistance was possible as a delicate engagement was established over the ten days. That balance was to be brutally destroyed within less than fifty years as the Portuguese colonisers, in alliance with the Catholic Church, reconfigured their relationship with the *índio* in the formation of Brazil. Despite being part of the historical narrative of Brazil, they passed from one century to the next without acquiring a past. War, legislation, catechism and capitalism established a trajectory that seemed to indicate the unstoppable and inevitable extinction of the *índio* in Brazil.

There can never be an exact calculation of how many *índios* there were then or are now, and this numerical ambiguity will always be part of the nuancing of indigenous identity within Brazil. In 2012, the Brazilian Federal Agency for Indigenous Affairs (FUNAI) calculated that there were approximately 900,000 *índios* from over 240 ethnicities. The end of the *índio* was always supposed to be imminent and extinction irresistible. Entire peoples like the Xetá or the Tupinambá have been eliminated; others have been so drastically reduced that their numbers have fallen below what makes it possible for an ethnic group to continue. Others like the Guató and the Puruborá have emerged from supposed extinction, with their elders still speaking their original language. Populations that had seemingly assimilated into riverside or agricultural communities have in recent years clawed back their indigenous identity, language and culture in a process of what anthropologists describe as ethnogenesis. Probably fewer than 30 of the ethnicities that survive today live entirely outside of the paternalistic structures that the Brazilian state created for the *índio* over the past century. The others have established and negotiated contact with the European and African settlers over five centuries. Against the odds they have developed resistance to disease, made extraordinary efforts to maintain their languages, and in different ways are discovering new means to strengthen their cultures. The people you met in April 1500 were probably Guarani and their population is growing again today, along with the Xavante, the Terena, the Guajajara and the Tikuna. All of them are *índios* and all of them Brazilian¹⁰.

¹⁰ See Gomes, Mercio P. *Os Índios e o Brasil: passado, presente e futuro* (Editora Contexto, Rio de Janeiro, 2012).

With your letter, the *índio* was constituted as a point of interrogation for the European traveller and coloniser over the next five centuries. Indigenous people that have survived the massacres, diseases and forced assimilations remain a puzzling question for contemporary Brazil. Mércio Pereira Gomes, the longest serving President of FUNAI and companion for Simon and me on our subsequent visits to indigenous territories, has listed just some of the seemingly infinite questions that haunt the methodologies of interactions with the *índio* since you first sent word of them: Who are the *índios* in Brazil? How many tribes are there? Where are they? How do they live? Where are their lands? Do they protect the environment? Do they also live in cities? Are they lazy? Are they Brazilian? Are there prejudices against them? How many are there and how many were there in Brazil in 1500? What happened to them? What is their future?¹¹ Even though there are fewer than a million *índios* in Brazil today, it is as significant to note that the population has increased dramatically since the 1950s, as it is to remember the decimation of their population from the 1500s. Data about indigenous people is best expressed as a vector rather than as a stand-alone number. Nor is it sufficient to note that indigenous people occupy 13% of Brazil's national territory, without observing that their presence reaches from the central core of Brazil to its remotest corners and to understand both *how* and *why* they inhabit that land. Their occupation expresses the preservation of what constitutes Brazil. Their survival continues to turn the indigenous question around so that the point of interrogation becomes not who they are on the beach, but who we are on the prow of the boat? Those *índios* who refused to disappear over the last 500 years are now emerging as active subjects and agents in the seeing, showing, translation and framing of the Brazilian story. They are studying and teaching in the universities, writing the theses and the histories, running their own organisations and negotiating their land rights. They are longer just being viewed but are registering themselves as the observers: as researchers who have their own methodologies of creating and sharing knowledge. No longer just in front of the cameras, they are taking the pictures and shooting the films. The non-indigenous viewer can begin to see the view from the beach because the *índio* is looking back at us and resists.

¹¹ Gomes, Mercio P. *The Indians and Brazil*, transl. by Moon, John W. (Florida University P, Gainesville, 2000)

In the rehearsal room in Bethnal Green, Simon McBurney works from the book *Amazon Beaming* to find ways to remind us that when the American photographer Loren McIntyre was 'captured' by the Mayoruna in the 1970s, he lost not only his watch but also all sense of the methodology by which he was accustomed to recognise the passing of time. Simon plays with time in the construction of his performance, just as he did with his own filming schedules to steal the days we spent in Amazonas and then later in the Xingu territories. Impossible as it would have been for him to carve out the weeks needed to get to the Valley of Javari¹², in March 2014 we travelled to the village of Marajaí on the banks of the River Solimões, where some of the tribe had relocated many decades before. It was there that Simon began to experience and record the specifics of the forest, whilst also experimenting with shared methods of storytelling. He acts out with mime all that my translation cannot capture. Lourival, the 80-year old *cacique* (headman of the village), acknowledges with simple gestures and a nod of the head that he recognises the story Simon tells as part of the history of their people. Simon introduces the grey head, binaural microphone that will capture the forest recordings, asking Lourival and his wife to close their eyes as he places headphones on them. Their smiles and astonishment grow as they swat away the birds, frogs and insects that Simon conjures for them in their imagination.

New stories form as we walk around the village over the next few days. The school with its internet connection, the health centre and its Cuban doctor,¹³ the condom wrapper on the pathway to the forest, the public phone and digital cameras. The original stories we brought with us are never enough, as we see the way in which this riverside community lives between worlds. *Índios* do not stay put in an unviable and inviolable myth of pure origin that has been created around them, but like other Amerindians across the Amazon region they live between a sense of holding on to and losing what has been taken from them by those they call the 'white man'. This means taking responsibility for the methodologies by which they re-produce their own identity. Just like Simon, they search for and record the dances, rituals, languages that they are in danger of losing. They are discovering their own

¹² The majority of the Mayoruna live in the Javari river region, on the border between Brazil and Peru.

¹³ Provided by the Brazilian government as part of a federal scheme known as *Mais Médicos* ('More Doctors') to ensure that there is medical provision in remote areas. For more information see Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization, Press Releases: Brazil's "More Doctors" initiative has taken health care to 63 million people". Washington, September 22, 2015.

http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11257%3Abrazils-more-doctors-initiative-has-taken-health-care-to-63-million-people-&Itemid=1926&lang=en

ways of sharing and telling their stories using the technologies of the 'white man'. They want to participate in the modern world – to be Brazilian – and they want to preserve their indigenous identities. Transition and translation are continuous, but contingent on contexts that they increasingly seek to control. All the complexities of those first ten days in April 1500 when Brazil was forged in the exchange that took place between two cultures, are still being played out in the village of Marajaí.

Brazil was born in a journey, a discovery, a crossing and an exchange. Similar processes incited the separate aesthetic and methodological processes by which Takumã and Simon undertook to produce work created from knowledge they forged in exchange with each other's worlds. In 1500, it took you 44 sea-weary days to travel from Lisbon to the land that Pedro Álvares Cabral sighted on 22nd April, claimed on the 1st May and which the subsequent 500 years have invented. Your letter gives scant detail of the sea journey, but your presence in the new land is always marked out and troubled by the distance from where you began. Always a traveller from a place to which you hoped you would return, you carved out the conceptual space of 'between' to where Takumã Kuikuro and Simon McBurney seek to take their audiences.

It was a mono-motor Cessna that took Simon and me to the Xingu five months after our visit to the Marajaí and to our first encounter with Takumã Kuikuro. We had been invited to the Xingu funeral ritual known as the *kuarup*, which in August 2014 would take place in the village of the Yawalapiti in the Xingu Indigenous Territories in the State of Mato Grosso. Created as a federal reserve by the Brazilian government in 1961, the Xingu territory today occupies an area that is approximately the size of Belgium. Although officially denominated as the *Parque Indígena Xingu*, the sixteen different indigenous peoples that are spread across this vast territory do not consider themselves to be in a park but cultivating lives on their own ancestral land. The Xingu is a place where the methodologies by which the narrative of Brazil was inscribed in the centuries since you arrived here with Pedro Álvares Cabral are now being re-written. Conceived by the Brazilian government as a territory for 'protecting' indigenous peoples from the encroachment of 'progress', the Xingu is now a site in which 16 indigenous peoples lead the fight to preserve their lands and therefore their cultures (and vice versa). A two and a half hour flight takes us from the jagged urban

landscape of Goiânia – home to those whose lives and disproportionate incomes depend on Brazil's agro-economy – across the gorged land of uninterrupted soya fields that will feed the cattle that produce the meat which is served at dinner tables across Europe and North America. The land will be nurtured with pulverised fish aggressively farmed from the oceans, and the toxic chemicals that enable the alien crop to proliferate on the unforgiving Brazilian savannah. As we reach the Xingu there is an abrupt, exact scar that separates modern Brazil from the ancestral forest. The line marks the point where the mono-colour soya fields give way to the multiple greens of the arboreal panoply and where the interconnecting loops of the rivers are broken only by irregular red dirt tracks that occasionally lead to the vast circular forms of the Xingu villages. These are the *aldeias* – villages - of the indigenous peoples that inhabit the territory of the Upper Xingu.

We land on one of the dusty roads that have served as airstrips for these *aldeias* since Brazil marched west to open up these lands in the 1930s. An *índio*, blackened with *jenipapo* and naked apart from his waist-band, helps us to step across the wing of the plane and down onto the Xingu lands for the first time. It is difficult for me not to think of your landing, Pero Vaz de Caminha, and of the Guarani *índios* who put down their weapons to help you from the rowing boats that brought you ashore from the Portuguese galleons. Simon and I remove our bags of food, clothes, hammocks and presents to be greeted by the representative of FUNAI, the government's agency for indigenous affairs. Simon is already attached to his recording equipment, capturing the sound of the Cessna as it immediately prepares to take off and leave us in such unfamiliar and yet very welcome territory.

A kombi van, stripped of most of its seats, takes us 30 minutes down a dusty, suspension-busting road where we reach the final stage of our journey as the sun begins its rapid descent. We are left on the edge of a mighty circle of nine long, tall *ocas* – the same huts that you recorded in your letter over 500 years ago. We are staying with Pirakumã and his wife Iamoni, who step out to greet us. Iamoni leads us into the darkened, cool air of their *oca* and Pirakumã shows us how to attach our hammocks between the wooden stakes that rise up the arching walls and the central pole of the hut.

From the ever-shifting uncertainty of our hammocks, Simon and I watch as two male flute players enter the *oca* with yellow plumed head-dresses, bodies blackened yet elaborately painted, hair caked flat and red by the juices of the *urucum* fruit, electric-coloured wool wrapped around legs that bear bells to beat an irresistible percussive step. The double-fluted instruments of the young warrior musicians stretch for almost two metres in front of them, impossibly suspended just above the earthen floor as they breathe long across the wide opening that hangs from their lips. Two young women follow close behind, each with one hand lightly held on the shoulder of the flute player in front of her. They are naked apart from the thin waistbands woven from the straw-like *buriti* plant, which reveal, rather than hide, their bodies. Heads bowed, faces hidden by black hair that has not been cut since their first menstruation, bodies almost whitened by reclusion, the young women follow the rhythmic persistent dance of the flautists who lead them repeatedly round the village, into and out of each of the *ocas*. As they enter the refuge of the darkness of the *oca* where we are staying, the young women detach themselves and face into the crevices of the sloping, wooden walls, averting their eyes from the powerful magic of the men's flutes. From the shadows, *lamoni* and other women emerge with water, combs, smiles, encouragement. The flautists pace the centre of the *oca*, push pulsing notes deep and high into the cathedral-like structure before turning to the fierce light of the low doorway. The young women attach themselves once more to the flautist for the journey to womanhood. This relentless, haunting dance procession will bind the four of them in a seemingly hermetic ritual through the daylight hours from sunrise on Thursday through to nightfall on Saturday. Simon lies in the hammock beside me: watching, listening, writing, recording. Being there. Tomorrow at 4am he will walk towards the sunrise across the dusty oval of the central ground between the *ocas* and whisper, "the best awakening of my life."

We have been invited to attend the *kuarup*: the annual Xingu ceremony of transformation. This most powerful of rituals is a binding tradition in the Upper Xingu, where different villages come together annually to perform ceremonies that mark the transitions of life and death, simultaneously releasing young women from the reclusion that follows menstruation and families from mourning those who have died over the previous year. There is no fixed liturgy, but a flux and flow of repeated actions, music and dances, in which it is difficult for us to understand how and why a movement ends or when another will begin. The *kuarup*

conjures a world of spirits that elude, spirits that attack, spirits that need to be appeased, spirits that evade and invade lives. Over the four days of the ritual, other villages are summoned and arrive from afar via boat, bicycle, motorbike and on foot. Simon joins them on a journey to a place where everything converges.

“Why are you here?” Simon recorded this question in field notes he made to recall our first meeting with the *cacique* of the Marajaí village:

Lourival, according to local protocol, talks to us as part of our welcome to the village – and has been doing so for the best part of an hour. The hut is crammed with people, and sitting between us like some twenty-first-century totem is a binaural head, the microphone that records in so-called ‘3D’...

- *So you have come all this way and I have one question...*

Lourival leans forward looking me in the eye.

- *Why are you here?*

I nervously lick the wet salt off my upper lip, and sweat stings my eyes as everyone’s eyes turn towards me.

- *I think you need to reply, says Paul.*

The sounds of the forest and the village become extremely loud all of a sudden. I clear my throat.¹⁴

The *índios* on that beach in 1500 must have been asking the same question in languages you didn’t understand when you stepped off the boat with Pedro Álvares Cabral: ‘Why are you here?’ Perhaps this question should be the starting point of all cultural exchanges but it is the one that can most easily get lost in the noise of translation, especially when those who arrive so often assume the right to be wherever they land. But when Takumã left the Xingu to travel to London he instead became the question: ‘Why are you – a Brazilian indigenous person – in London?’ His improbable displacement became the (unspoken) interrogation. When Simon and I arrived in a Xingu village, Takumã understood we were silently asking

¹⁴ Complicite and McBurney, Simon. *The Encounter* (Nick Hern Books, London, 2016). From the article, ‘You only see what you want to see’ Simon McBurney (no page numbers).

him and his people, 'What makes it possible for you people from another millennium still to be with us here and now?' Takumã's mission to make a documentary about London, within the research methodologies and framework that he brought from his village, enabled him to multiply and fragment the question of why each of us is here in relation to the other. His documentary *London as a Village* not only explores the exchanges that we make in order to shape our lives within the city, but rubs raw the illusory differences that insist on keeping London distant from his Kuikuro village in the Xingu.

The *índios* on that distant shore in 1500 remain silent in the pages of your letter, Pero Vaz de Caminha. Only recently have we begun to hear their voices, and to glimpse what they saw as you and the Portuguese sailors emerged on the horizon. Cameras, tablets and smartphones have replaced your quill so that during Simon McBurney's visits to the Amazon and the Xingu, he was photographed more than he photographed. *Índios* are filming, editing and showing their work not just in their own and each other's villages, but in festivals, via social media and even on Netflix. Much of this development has its origins of the work of *Vídeo nas Aldeias* (Video in the Villages), a Brazilian non-governmental arts organisation that was set up by Vincente Carelli in 1986¹⁵. The aim of the organisation is to enable indigenous people to develop video-based research methodologies they can use as a means to strengthen their identities, enabling them to preserve their ancestral territories and cultures through sharing both the technologies and production of video and cinema. I do not need to describe this, because we have Takumã's own words:

My name is Takumã Kuikuro. I am from the Ipatse Village in the State of Mato Grosso, from the Upper Xingu. I am 31 years old. The Upper Xingu means that we live where the River Xingu begins and from where the water descends. I do not consider myself an indigenous filmmaker. I think of myself as an indigenous researcher. I record and research everything we have. Beyond the Xingu, I train others in the skills I have learnt from Vídeo nas Aldeias, so that I can pass them on to other indigenous peoples and so that they can do the same thing as me in their villages.

¹⁵ <http://www.videonasaldeias.org.br>

I began this work when I was about 16. I knew nothing about 'research' but I learnt that when we begin to record things we are researching them. In order to do my work, I started to understand how to research stories, rituals, myths. My father was training me to be a fighter. I spent a lot of my youth in 'reclusion' to gain strength. Our ancestors were always concerned that our young people should grow up as strong, tall fighters.

When the team from Vídeo nas Aldeias arrived in our village to run their first workshop, the village did not choose me to take part. I was ashamed to get close to these people and pick up the cameras. But I was drawn to look. I thought the cameras were amazing and I wanted to film. I wanted to pick one up. And that was how I started. People started to drop out, and I began to take part in the workshop. Even though I did not speak Portuguese, I understood when the teacher explained about the camera, how to focus and to frame a shot. I learnt Portuguese as I learnt to use the camera. I began to study. I began to travel. Another reality opened up. I do not want to be a researcher just of my village. I want to research everybody, everywhere¹⁶.

The act of indigenous people registering their own cultures has become an act of preservation. Carelli describes one of his first experiences of filming with the Nabiquara people in the north of Mato Grosso. In the process of recording a young women's ceremony, the village decided to revive another related ritual, involving the piercing of nose and lips, which their village had abandoned over twenty years before¹⁷. The subsequent showing of the films between villages then became part of an intercultural exchange between different peoples, which goes beyond the audio-visual and insists on the physical presence in each other's villages¹⁸. That is why we invited Takumã to London. We wanted him to be present in our 'village' just as we had been in his. Perhaps, as he researched our culture, he would reveal rituals, myths and stories that we have forgotten to perform.

¹⁶ Takumã's words are taken from two interviews conducted in Portuguese by Heritage on March 14th 2015 and André Piza on April 27th 2015.

¹⁷ Araujo, Ana Carvalho (org.). *Video nas aldeias – 25 anos: 1986-2011* (Video nas Aldeias, Brazil, 2011), p.46.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.47.

London as a Village (dir. Takumã Kuikuro) is a 20-minute documentary that was made possible by a travel grant awarded to Takumã by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, which enabled him to spend four weeks filming in London in April 2015. The production costs of the film (including the subsequent editing in Brazil) were supported by People's Palace Projects as a practice-based research project for *The Art of Cultural Exchange* (funded by AHRC and British Council). The financial framework for the making and showing of this documentary is important because it locates Takumã as an artist in whose development the Brazilian Federal government and an international cultural agency (the British Council) are investing, and also as a researcher whose work is supported by a foreign higher education research agency (AHRC). To reinforce this location (or is it dislocation?), Takumã's visit to London in April 2015 began with an event hosted at the Brazilian Embassy in London. After a showing of his award-winning film *As Hiper Mulheres (The Hyper Women)*¹⁹, Takumã took part in a panel discussion with Professor Jaime Ginsburg (Rio Branco Chair in International Relations, King's College London University) and Simon McBurney (internationally renowned theatre maker and film actor).

Takumã is very clear not only about why he was in London, but also about the distance he had travelled to get there. As he explains below, not everything which separates the Xingu from London is physical:

It was very hard. I was trying to imagine getting here. I had no passport. Because I have no income, I do not have a tax number. I had to set up a bank account even before I could start the rest of the bureaucracy. But I did it, didn't I? Communication beyond my village is difficult. There is no electricity, no phone signal. Sometimes – but not every day – the generator is switched on for an hour or so, which means we have brief Internet access. But I got through each stage. First sorting out my tax situation and the bank account, afterwards the Federal Police, then physically going to get the passport when I travelled out of the village to go to an Indigenous Film Festival in Bahia. I never imagined that it would all work out. It was so incredibly hard to sort everything out that I could not imagine actually getting here.

¹⁹ *As Hiper Mulheres*, directed by Takumã Kuikuro and Carlos Fausto (*Video nas Aldeias*, Brazil, 2011)

It was also difficult to explain what I was going to do to the people in my village before I left. I was travelling to make a film called London as a Village. Even I did not understand. I was lost. I had no idea how I could begin this work. But as I started to research, to look at things, I began to focus on the search for something that could represent London. I began to film things as if they were from my culture. In my head I was imagining things as if they were taking place in my own indigenous community. For example, who is their cacique (headman), what are their rituals, what games do they play? I was looking for all these things in London in order to make the film. We have rituals that happen in the sequence of our everyday lives: how we wash and fish, where we look for and where we plant our food, where we make our rituals and what happens in them, what the function of the cacique is and how he organises things. That was what I was looking to show in London: the myths that people told me.

The researchers that come to our villages enter into our rituals. They incorporate themselves as indigenous people within the rhythm of that ritual. I was trying to do the same here in London. I wanted to incorporate myself into that community, just as the non-indigenous person does with us. I was trying to understand the culture of non-Brazilians, of other sorts of 'white people'.²⁰

Takumã identified three aspects of London which he 'discovered' as a means to represent the city as a village: London's Indian community; people who live on boats on London's rivers and canals; and people who play rugby.

[At the beginning] I was filming everything, trying to watch. In the first week, it was still very difficult. I was recording lots of streets, neighbourhoods, all different sorts of communities. I found it very difficult to understand anything and I had no idea how I was going to construct this film. How could it mean anything? But when I first saw some Indian dance, I began to find a focus. I could see how I could get two or three

²⁰ *Os brancos* (white people) in indigenous cultures always refers to non-indigenous people regardless of their colour. In *London as a Village*, Takumã refers to the British and other Europeans or North Americans – of all colours – as *hiper-brancos* (hyper whites). Their knowledge is passed on to the *brancos* in Brazil who then pass it on to indigenous people. They are more white than white, more powerful than the powerful people they already know.

people to tell the story of their community, to represent their neighbourhood, their village as I might say. Indian dance speaks through gesture, just like we do. We have the dance of the fish, the monkey, and other types of animals that we represent in dance and in painting. And these Indians in London do the same thing. They represent their gods within their rituals. That is why I was interested in comparing what they do with our rituals. I filmed them telling their stories, their myths and got them to tell me which gestures they use to represent them during their dance rituals.

Then, as I was walking around the city, I saw the people who live on the boats. They do not live in buildings. I went to visit some of them because I thought it was an interesting way to create a community. So I began to research this, to understand what their 'village' is like. I asked if they had a cacique (headman) or a pajé (healer) and they said yes. But when I asked if they had people who cast spells, they said they do not have anyone who does these things. When I asked about how they live, mark out their territory, defend themselves from being removed, they told me about all the things that unite them. And how their cacique leads them in their fight for their rights. I thought it was so important to tell this story, because we live in exactly the same way. We fight for our rights. The leaders of the Xingu peoples get together to represent us in meetings with governors and mayors, so that we can get their support for indigenous peoples. I researched these people who live on boats, filming their everyday lives, where they get food, exactly as if I were looking at us in our community. We live as if on an island and they live in the same way. They know each other in the same way we do. 'This one here mends things for all of us, this one does something else, we all know each other and everybody has a function'. It is a real community.

It is not so hard to understand why London's Indians fascinated Brazil's *indio* or why the man who lives, eats, travels and survives because of the River Xingu should be fascinated by Londoners who live on boats, even though they shop in Tesco's. But rugby?

I watched rugby on YouTube and saw men showing off their strength, as if they were going to fight with enemies. "We are strong. We are going to defeat you. We

are going to win". That is like the huka-huka, our fight in the Xingu. Or almost. We do not fight for a ball. We fight to bring down another person. When they fight for a ball they end up on top of each other, a pile of bodies that becomes a mountain. When they lose hold of the ball, they get up, separate out and it all begins again. I thought it was great and wanted to compare it to our huka-huka, even though I did not understand their rules. I had no idea what was happening, especially as every time they score they seem to add three goals. The score keeps going up so quickly!

After the silence of 500 years, Takumã's voice speaks of the historic absence to which his seemingly impossible presence bears witness. When we showed his films at the Brazilian Embassy in London, he commented that everyone wants to know where he is from, as if he has come from somewhere beyond time and place. Audiences keep asking him if it is really him that has made these films, because they have no idea that an *índio* could be a filmmaker. Everywhere he goes, there is a moment of exchange that speaks to his reason for making not only the film, but also the journey:

I think that it is important to understand non-indigenous cultures in our communities. How they live, what they do, how they make their politics, all these things. And we also have to show our culture to non-indigenous people. And the best way to show them is on screen, not speaking in public. We are trying to be respected by the non-indigenous world. When I began these journeys in Brazil, there was no respect for índios. We were shouted at in the street as índios. It still happens today, but people are beginning to understand who we are. We want to show what índios are doing. They believe that we do not do anything, that we are lazy, that the índio just spends his time doing his rituals and paintings. That is why we show what we are doing in our daily lives, so that they can see what is important to us in our communities. That is why we are trying to get into the non-indigenous head, so that they can think about the importance of what we do and who we are.

As I close my letter to you, Senhor Vaz de Caminha, I recall Simon McBurney on stage at the Barbican in London in February 2016. He finishes his performance in his role as the photographer Loren McIntyre by writing a letter to Barnacle, the leader of the Mayoruna

people with whom McIntyre had been 'lost' in the Amazon. Barnacle is of course not the *cacique's* real name, because the two men had no language to share each other's worlds, much less to know each other's names, but they exchanged thoughts and memories in a way that McIntyre was convinced went beyond their cultural differences. McIntyre could no more write to Barnacle, who had died as they parted in the 1970s, than I can write to you 518 years after you sent the first letter from the land that was to become Brazil. But in our letters we seek the private intimacy and creative imagination on which even the most public acts of cultural exchange depend. McBurney as McIntyre writes to Barnacle, whispering privately to each of us in the audience through the individual headphones with which we experience the play that night, "there will be a consequence to our association."

As you wrote to Dom Manuel I, you seemed to sense the magnitude of the consequences of the association that Pedro Álvares Cabral made with those *índios* on a beach in 1500; intimate moments that became a public exchange between cultures which still frame the world in which Takumã and Simon can meet. Your letter continues to speak to us, across the centuries, of an encounter in April 1500 that defined both a new world and a destiny which seemed determined to frame us. Globalisation supposedly brings people and lands closer, and yet our translations and exchanges become ever more disjunctured as we inhabit and construct places of exclusion where nothing converges. Like you, Simon McBurney and Takumã Kuikuro are travellers who have invented mutually reflective methodologies to navigate, decipher and translate incommensurable worlds. Through theatre and filmmaking they speak of journeys across distant lands and the constructs of time, refusing to accept the limits of how we create and share our knowledges. As Davi Kopenawa Yanomami writes:

...I am a son of the ancient Yanomamis

I live in the forest where my people have lived since I was born and I do not tell white men that I discovered it!

They were always there from the beginning of time.

I simply say that I eat them, that is all.²¹

²¹ Cited in *Amazônia: Catalogue for an exhibition by Gringo Cardia*. (Production: FareArte, 2004). Originally from Kopenawa, David. and Albert, Bruce., *A queda do céu*, transl. by Perrone-Moisés, B. (Companhia das Letras. Rio de Janeiro. 2015).

Let all our encounters be a mutual feast.

A kiss of your hand,

Paul Heritage

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