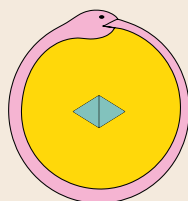
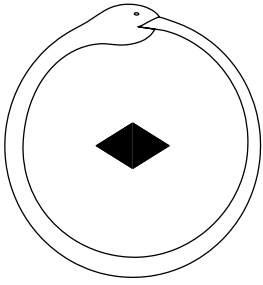


BETWEEN LANGUAGES

Cristine Takuá and
Leda Maria Martins



notebooks
SELVAGEM



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On January 24th, 2024, the VIVA VIVA ESCOLA VIVA [Long Live the Living School] exhibition closed with a celebration of the Living Schools organised by Selvagem, at Casa França-Brasil. The event was open to the public and began with an extensive guided tour through the works in the exhibition led by Anna Dantes and Cristine Takuá, in addition to a participation by Leda Maria Martins. During the guided tour, Francisco Fontes Baniwa presented the watercolours painted by his son Frank Baniwa, which are also part of the book Umbigo do Mundo [World's Navel], by Francy Baniwa. Here are excerpts from Cristine Takuá and Leda Maria Martins' speeches.

CRISTINE TAKUÁ

The *Maxakali* elders say that *Mõgmõgka Tap*¹, the hawk, is the being that most feels the pain and longing for the big trees.

The territory of Minas Gerais was one of the first to be torn apart by agribusiness and mining. The large trees were disappearing, just as the rivers were being contaminated. The *Maxakali* Living School in Minas Gerais does a very strong work of, through chants and drawings, activating this very vivid memory of a forest that no longer exists. This is a work of resistance that reforests these indigenous lands with the support of the Living Schools project, along with the work of *Hãmhi* - Terra Viva [Living Earth]. The desire is to replant the great forest.

To arrange and organise the exhibition, Sueli and Isael *Maxakali* prepared many workshops with young people, children and the elders – because everyone likes to paint in the *Maxakali* villages. On each one of our visits, we gathered the children together while the elders told stories or sang. From then on, children, young people, and even shamans, who paint a lot as well, began creating these canvases, specifically for the exhibition.

Here the focus is on *Mõgmõgka Tap*, the hawk, who has this remarkably strong story of remembering big trees, and further up we have the

spirit of Manioc. The *Kutex* is the house of prayers where *Yãmĩy*, the spirits of the forest, come to sing, dance and heal. In the past, when there were cougars, spotted and black jaguars, the *Kutex* were protected with these animals' skins. Nowadays we no longer have jaguars in the *Maxakali* territory. This painting was made by Sueli, based on a story told by elder Mrs Delcida, Isael's mother. We made a circle around Mrs Delcida, who has this very active memory of her grandmother's and mother's chants and stories. It was from these memories that Sueli created these two works.

In *Nhee'ẽrỹ*, the Atlantic Forest, all the resistance of the *Guarani* and *Maxakali* people took place through spirituality. It is truly strong to see how these people have resisted for more than five centuries in such difficult conditions: the *Guarani* who are at Pico do Jaraguá, in the city of São Paulo, and the *Maxakali* who are in Pradinho, at Água Boa, territories surrounded by farms and cattle. It is such a strong resistance to find an elderly *Guarani* woman in Jaraguá who does not speak Portuguese. If you go to the *Maxakali* villages, almost no one speaks Portuguese. And what strengthens this is the power of the *Yãmĩyxor*, these are the *Yãmĩy* who are present in everything that exists.

There are children who have never seen an agouti or a paca, who have never seen the diversity of native bees that exist, but they know all the chants. And when the elder or when the *Yãmĩy* come and start singing, everything is seen in the world of the spiritual invisible.

The spiritual resistance of the *Maxakali* and *Guarani* peoples is very strong, because they are people who lost their forests but kept their sacred word, their language, and their chants. These paintings are spiritual arts, because they are chants transformed into images. And when the reforestation takes place, these chants will be increasingly alive and strong. This is the Living Schools' dream: a time of living and active memories.



LEDA MARIA MARTINS

The exhibition calls us and the interesting thing is, we often have the habit of thinking that the exhibition is there and we pass by it. In fact, I think the exhibition calls for us to listen. Hence Viva Viva Escola Viva calls for us in order to have the possibility of duration, of a certain permanence.

Today we received an invitation from Mr Francisco Baniwa and we need to fulfil this request for duration. I don't know if you noticed what Mr Francisco told us. First, he presented the relationship between the visual image and the sound image. He said it like this: these stories are here in the book, but I think it is necessary to explain, present and retell them.

First comes the voice. And he didn't create any conflict between the book and orality. Nor between orality, the book and the visual image. He drew our attention to the fact that there is a way of contact, right? In the case of his people, this way precedes alphabetical letters and drawings. There is a kind of first age, which is the foundation of that people. All the time, when he tells us the stories in the book and in his son's watercolours, he does a triple translation exercise.



There would be a first age for the Baniwa people that is translated into voice, vocality, in that which we call orality or *oralitura*².

After this first age, even out of necessity, another code and another system were imposed. The stories he tells are in the book, printed, written in another code, another system. There is this exercise: trying to tell them using this other code, the written language.

All of our codes are incomplete and imperfect. To become complete, they always require further knowledge. Knowledge does not ignore knowledge, knowledge is not excluding *per se*.

Thus, look how interesting: we have oral storytelling, which takes place in an environment, which happens with other ways of operation, integrating voice and gestures, body movements, spatiality. And we also have written storytelling, which takes place in another system, another record. Oral storytelling must have an interaction of bodies, voices, and looks. From closer or further away, oral storytelling involves smells, aromas, colours and flavours. In addition to singing and dancing. The importance of singing was mentioned on several occasions, also playing

a role in building experience, life, the experience of knowledge and even the building of memory.

The chants for black peoples are highly important: where there are black peoples there is chant. And where there is Maxakali there is chant too.

Cristine Takuá sings.

When I met the *Maxakali*, I remembered *Reinado*³ a lot, of which I am a part. At *Reinado* we sing for everything. Everything is in the chant.

When observing Mr Francisco, I spoke of the first original age, which contains the sounds and sonorities of that cosmos, of that environment. He is talking about a time where a mythical and also mystical world was founded, but it is also a time before colonisation. It was colonisation that brought about the need for this other code. Therefore, it's in the book, but it's also in the visual art. And what does Mr Francisco do? Knowledge, translated by the gestures of orality, by the chants of orality, which is then also installed in the alphabetic letter, which is installed in visual images. When he speaks, he brings the flavour of the oral system. Mr Francisco brings back this knowledge as sound, as speech, in the form of words and listening, this first oral age of the deities themselves. He presents himself to us as this medium, this means. Even though he doesn't use the word "translate", Mr Francisco talks about the need to add to the book, to explain, and also show what is not there. Always acknowledging that lack is also constitutive, hence it forces us to look for something else.

He starts from the voice, goes to the spelling, proceeds to the visual design, because the spelling is also a visual design, isn't it? But then he brings back the knowledge and the flavour of the voice between languages. Between languages.

He also bears the languages of his people. Mr Francisco could present all this knowledge back in his vernacular language, but his generosity makes him present it between languages. We hear Portuguese, but this is also an invitation to hear his native vernacular language. It matters a lot not just what he brings us, but how he brings us.

Tá caindo fulô ê ê [Flower is falling, eh eh]

Tá caindo fulô [Flower is falling]

Lá no céu, lá na terra [There in the sky, here on earth]

Ê, tá caindo fulô [Eh, flower is falling]

When we talk about our memories and remembrances, and when we talk about these broken fragmented bodies due to colonisation in the Americas, when we remember the black diasporas, it really impresses me how all this knowledge was able to not only survive, but to continue existing. We are not talking simply about survival here. This knowledge was able to remain, to exercise its power of reconstitution, its power of transformation, its power of permanence.

It's so spectacular when Cristine talks about the *Maxakali*, and this experience is also very similar to the black experience. Look, the Maxakali child draws a variety of bee species, many of which no longer exist, they are already extinct. They draw spirits, animals, trees, and everything you can imagine that no longer exists, who would already be extinct. Are they really? As long as it exists standing, be it the memory of animal species, be it the memory of plant species, be it the memory of waters, stones, birds and worms... As long as this memory exists in the chant and in the drawing, there is the dream and the possibility of their return.

These teachings come a lot from indigenous peoples and peoples of diaspora: memory is not simply a kind of affective symbolism. Remembering is also the way to avoid disappearance, and therefore, to avoid death. Remembering and building memory make it possible to dream. And here, dreaming means desiring and acting. Dreaming is being certain of the possibility of my action to the extent that there is no disappearance. May disappearance always be incomplete. Because it is memory that guarantees life in a certain way. And memory is not a souvenir.

Therefore, whenever we see all these systems and ways of installing memory and knowledge, of installing the desire for life in all these forms of support indicated by Mr Francisco and Cristine, we are not dreaming just in the sense of daydreaming. We are also including the forest, the fauna, the waters, the minerals, the colours, the odours, the

chants as existence. These are the expectations we have thus there is no complete erasure. And, consequently, all our gestures are so for existence to continue. Let there be room for this existence, because the sacred dwells in it.

And what existence is this?

We forgot that we are plant, stone, water and earth. We forgot what we are. It doesn't matter that we have forgotten, as long as we can remember. Because memory is furthermore not just what you remember. In memory there is also what is forgotten.

There is a chant from *Reinado* that I always like to sing, because it's the song of the crossing. The chant recalls the despair in the middle of the sea. I think we must ask for help, asking for help is asking the divinities, our ancestors, our sacred, to remember us, to not forget about us. I always say that the risk is not that we forget our ancestors. When I talk about our ancestors, I talk about people, the animals, our plant ancestors, our waters ancestors. The risk is not that we forget them, the risk is that they forget us. And then we will be lost. When our ancestors, all of them, forget us, then there will be no more. That's when existence actually ends. When we sing or pray, we are actually asking that the deities and all ancestors, in their variety of being, not forget us.

Zum zum zum, lá no meio do mar

[*Zum zum zum, there in the middle of the sea*]

É o canto da sereia faz a gente entristecer

[*It's the siren's chant that makes us sad*]

parece que ela adivinha o que vai acontecer

[*It seems like she guesses what's going to happen*]

Ajudai-me rainha do mar

[*Help me queen of the sea*]

Que manda na terra e manda no ar

[*Who rules the earth and rules the air*]

Ajudai-me rainha do mar

[*Help me queen of the sea*]

1. MŌGMŌGKA TAP by Paula Berbert

On the canvas, we see *Mōgmōgka Tap* in two of the different forms his image can assume: on the left, as a spirit, dressed in straw and with his skin painted red, the way he comes to sing in the village; and on the right, in the body of a bird, which we don't know if it's landing or taking flight from his *Mīmānān* [ritual pole]. *Mōgmōgka Tap* stands out in the *Maxakali* worldview for being one of the memories from the disappearance of the forests that covered the traditional territory of these people.

One of *Mōgmōgka Tap*'s chants tells how he once went out into the world to see other forests, and when he was far away he missed the forest where he lived, especially his favourite tree. *Mōgmōgka Tap* decided to return home and told, in the chant, everything he saw from above during his return journey: the sky, the clouds, the mountains, the rivers, the animals. But when he got closer, he soon realised that everything was different: there were no more big trees or hunting animals, but only grass. When he reached the place where he expected to find his favourite tree, *Mōgmōgka Tap* landed sadly on the post of a barbed wire fence that marked the boundary of one of the white invaders' farms.



Painting: Sueli Maxakali

2. *Oralitura* is a concept created by Leda Maria Martins and it refers, in theatrical writing, to a poetics of orality that needs the body and voice to constitute itself as language. Reference: 'Oralituras: poéticas da oralidade' [*Oralituras: poetics of orality*], **Mirada 2018 Sesc SP**. Accessed in: 15 May 2024, <<https://mirada2018.sescsp.org.br/pt/programacao/atividades-formativas/oralitura>>. (T.N.).

3. The *Reinado* is a popular cultural religious manifestation of Afro-Brazilian Catholicism and occurs in the context of celebrations in honour of the so-called Black Saints, especially Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Benedict. The *Reinado* is the part of the festival in which ancestry is revered from the coronation of kings, which recovers their origins in African kings. Reference: SÁ, Marco Antonio Fontes. 'Congadas e Reinados: Celebrações de um Catolicismo Popular, Africano e Brasileiro.' [*Congadas and Reinados: Celebrations of a Popular, African and Brazilian Catholicism*]. **Revista Mosaico**, PUC Goiás, v. 12, p. 286-302, 2019. Accessed in: 16 May 2024, <<https://seer.pucgoias.edu.br/index.php/mosaico/article/download/7713/pdf/27172>>. (T.N.)

CRISTINE TAKUÁ is a Brazilian writer, artisan, decolonial theorist, activist and a teacher from the *Maxakali* people. She has a degree in Philosophy from Unesp was a teacher for twelve years at the *Txeru Ba'e Kuai'* Indigenous Public School. Currently, she coordinates the *Escolas Vivas* [Living Schools] and is a member of *Selvagem*. Cristine is a representative of NEI (Nucleus of Indigenous Education) within the State Education Department of São Paulo and a founding member of FAPISP (Forum for the Articulation of Indigenous Teachers of the State of São Paulo). She is the director of the Maracá Institute, which is currently responsible for the administration of the Museum of Indigenous Cultures, in São Paulo. She lives in the Ribeirão Silveira Indigenous Land, located in the municipalities of Bertioga and São Sebastião, in the Brazilian state of São Paulo.

LEDA MARIA MARTINS is a poet, essayist, playwright and teacher. She has a post-doctorate in Performance Studies from New York University and in Performance and Rite from Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). In her thinking and theoretical propositions, epistemologies and worldviews from various cognitive matrices intersect. Leda established contact and coexistence with the *Maxakali*, studying the expressions of their rituals as collections of mnemonic reserves and cultural procedures expressed by the body.

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More information at selvagemciclo.com.br

All Selvagem activities and materials are shared free of charge. For those who wish to give something back, we invite you to financially support the Living Schools, a network of five educational centres for the transmission of indigenous culture and knowledge. Find out more at selvagemciclo.com.br/colabore

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