Photo Credit: Nádia Lima (2021), I Expo Art - Munduruku Village, Bragança, Município de Belterra, Brazil. Mobile phone image courtesy of the photographer.

Event: Representing Craft/Crafting Representation: DHS Dialogues
Panel: Digital Agency
Paper: Critical Ethics for Communicating Indigenous Craft Practices
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Abstract:
This presentation raises questions about the roles that critical ethics and communication design practice play in a process of representation of indigenous craft knowledge and traditional cultural heritage. In an impassioned call to be prepared for an uncertain future, (chief) Cacique Domingos Munduruku of the Brazilian Munduruku peoples, who live remotely on an Amazon tributary, remarked: 'Families don't have access to information...we need a project to improve communication...we know the importance of education.' (2021) To address this challenge, a unique partnership was formed between the village inhabitants in Bragança, Marituba, Brazil, design educators at the Royal College of Art (RCA), and Universidade de Brasília (UnB). The project 'Building a Library for the Future: Munduruku Craft Practices and Indigenous Knowledge' is funded through the British Council's Crafting Futures Digital Collaboration Grants scheme. One aim of the project is to develop, through agreed actions, a 'way of doing', leading to a cooperative approach in fostering other 'ways of knowing'. The hoped-for result is a sustainable process through which a repository of craft practices and knowledge can be created, and eventually incorporated into a village library for the future.

An ongoing dialogue between the project's three partners, has already led to recognizing the importance of local cultural practices and protocols in communication research processes. For example, this includes consideration of orally recorded informed consent and '…group culture communities recognizing the leader's authority'. (Brazil's National Commission of Ethics in Research, 2012) Local telecommunications practices are central to the project's documentation (e.g., WhatsApp, mobile phone recordings). This process takes into consideration what craft practices are foregrounded and how participants represent these through chosen means of documentation modes and methods. These processes ultimately inform the representation and interpretation of Munduruku indigenous knowledge, crafts processes, and their place in history.

This 10-minute paper was presented by the three named authors in keeping with promoting equality of their processes in the wider project: 'Building a Library for the Future: Munduruku Craft Practices and Indigenous Knowledge'.

Teal

Thank you, Claire for your thoughtful introduction.

Before we begin, Celia, Matt and I would like to acknowledge our positioning as educators working within established universities and, in a research project, supported by government funding. This brings certain complexities to craft-based community partnerships in ways that might challenge western-centric approaches to thinking, making, and our practices as co-researchers. We acknowledge the complexity of communication processes, and especially those which reach across geographies, languages, cultures, and traditions.

This presentation raises questions about the roles that critical ethics and communication design practice play in a process of representation of indigenous craft knowledge and traditional cultural heritage.

To help elucidate some of these complexities, we highlight a few salient ethical questions from our current research project. Funded by the British Council, our six-month pilot project aims to build a virtual library for the future by bringing together the inhabitants of the Munduruku village located on a tributary of the Amazon River, in partnership with the RCA and the University of Brasilia.

Our questions for the purposes of this presentation revolve around the ethics of consent, co-researching, storytelling, and digital responsibility.

Rooted in cooperative practices, this project responds to an impassioned call from (chief) Cacique Domingos Munduruku who remarks: 'Families don't have access to information...we need a project to improve communication...we know the importance of education.'

Our research sets out to address an already co-identified need for the development of cooperative communication practices and digital inclusion methods to foster new ways of shared learning that build upon and 'rediscover' local craft traditions and indigenous knowledge. These things are in danger of being lost in the face of a changing political landscape.

I'd like to now turn to Celia.

Celia

Who are the Munduruku

In the first half of the nineteenth century the Munduruku were among the peoples of the Brazilian lowlands best known in Europe. They were not only admired for their capabilities as warriors, but first of all for the beauty of their feather work, their artistic tattoos (or body paint), and their mummified head trophies. The territory inhabited by them was larger than at present. The knowledge relating to the manufacture and use of their traditional feather ornaments has disappeared among the Munduruku of today for more than one hundred years.

Nowadays, within the population of 13.755, 38 clans live on the bank side of Tapajós river, Amazon, where the cultural life has undergone changes. The school became very important for Munduruku and they have also been concerned with improving the indigenous school education system. Together with indigenous organisations, literacy must also become the main instrument of indigenous ethnic and political reaffirmation.

As a material culture, the production of basketry and braiding, male common activities, the making of baskets in which women will use to carry the fruits and products of the land, from the small swiddens. Household utensils are the responsibility of women, being made with natural fibres as arumã, a plant found in flooded areas such as springs and banks of streams and in forest areas. Men and women

share the making of necklaces with figures of fish, alligators, turtles, snakes, etc. Many of them are made using tucumã seeds, a typical palm tree from the Amazon.

Pottery is an activity that has almost disappeared in the Munduruku culture. In the village of Bragança, where our project is situated, some efforts have been made to strengthen this practice, which is still quite rudimentary compared to the past. Weaving, which uses cotton nets, is also in disuse. Some activities are still preserved, or even recreated with new meanings, respecting the hunted animals, in the daily practices of hunters to obtain food. Fishing is one of the most important Munduruku cultural practices.

I'd like to turn to Teal….

Teal
Co-Researchers
We propose that everyone involved in this project is a co-researcher. The project aims to develop, through agreed actions, a 'way of doing' leading to a cooperative approach in fostering other 'ways of knowing'. Though we are working together, ethically, we must ensure a sustainable process through which the repository continues to build toward a village library for the future.

Consent
The consideration of orally recorded informed consent and '…group culture communities recognizing the leader's authority' (Brazil's National Commission of Ethics in Research, 2012), has been key to the project's processes. Informed consent is integrated into every stage of the project. Process work and documentation, resulting from digital based participatory workshops, audio-visual inclusive storytelling sessions, evaluative interviews, podcasts, photographs, drawings, and observations, are 'co-curated' between partners including Cacique Domingos and authors of these works to ensure appropriate representation on the virtual repository.

I'd like to turn to Matt….

Matt
Storytelling
Storytelling is key to this research alongside an awareness of visual and oral traditions of the Munduruku. Robin Wall Kimmerer proposes in her book Braiding Sweetgrass, that 'there is power in the telling' though she rightly asks: 'who will tell them?' (Kimmerer 2013: 9) We would add, there is equal power in 'showing' or the play of.

Virtual Library as Repository
The project seeks to evaluate the process of indigenous Education, considering the use of technological devices connected to the internet such as mobile phones, pads and computers. The main objective is the implementation of an indigenous public library model that will assist elementary and high school students. Besides that, contribute to the development of the pedagogical use of technology, in order to help the learning process, and at the same time give the excluded population access to digital inclusion.

Digital Methods and Responsibility
Local telecommunications practices are central to the project's documentation. The preferred digital platform is Google Meet for meetings. WhatsApp is our go-to place through which *undirected* video audio, mobile phone recordings, photographs and descriptive texts are sent ad collected.

These platforms though very useful in terms of offering forms of connection and communication for the collaborators are nonetheless problematic. The compression algorithms employed by platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams are predilected towards the production of highly standardised, compressed, and normative listening and viewing experiences. The functional rationale for the audio processing for example is to optimise speech intelligibility. Drawing on knowledge long used in hearing aids, telephones, and audio file compression formats such as MP3, the online platform default is to cut out background noise, filter sounds outside of the range of human speech perception, and

take out any information that isn't needed so that data can be transferred as efficiently as possible. Much is lost in these forms of communication and collection and although they have allowed us to act expediently, we also need to reflect on what the machines have edited out.

The teachers in the community have asked us to produce short 'how-to' podcasts around basic skill sets (e.g., computing, photography and music) to help students in the Village school with English skills as well as basic operating of computers, cameras, and so forth. The short process film and photographs are currently produced without direction.

This raises interesting tension between a western way of photographing demonstrated through knowledge of technical skills development and the ways in which the community is already representing craft and its processes by providing imagery from their mobile phones. What might change if a Western-centric view of representation is introduced through these videos and podcasts?

And secondly, by introducing enhanced forms of digital technologies into the Village, what is our role in terms of knowledge about digital responsibility and, how can we ensure sustainability of access to these technologies? Access that goes beyond a tokenistic taster of tools of production and reproduction?

Matt
Conclusion
As this research is an ethnographic approach focused on the Munduruku culture, the investigations carried out so far face us with a sad reality experienced by these traditional peoples. The intricate relationships of identity conflicts, lack of subsistence, health, education and the constant threats to their territories by loggers, land grabbers and farmers. Turning our attention to indigenous peoples today is crucial. However, the work directly related to this population is not simple. When we talk about ethics in conducting ethnographic research in design, the challenges become very broad.

"Each ethnical group is distinguished by its own cultural personality, whose unique nature is not limited to understanding attitudes and reactions to new and strange things." (EGON SCHADEN). The understanding of this specific nature is a task of utmost importance for those who seek to understand this reality. In addition, it is a fundamental focus on the concern with protecting the environment, cultural and religious values and maintaining the integrity of the peoples of the Amazon, their cultural legacy, their material and immaterial heritage, in addition to strengthening actions that can prevent the destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

Thank-you.

End.