

2010

## **Beyond Words: Nonverbal Communication, Performance, and Acculturation in the Early French-Indian Atlantic (1500–1701)**

Celine Carayon

*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Indigenous Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Carayon, Celine, "Beyond Words: Nonverbal Communication, Performance, and Acculturation in the Early French-Indian Atlantic (1500–1701)" (2010). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1539623569.

<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-rszp-zq95>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

Beyond Words: Nonverbal Communication, Performance, and Acculturation in the  
Early French-Indian Atlantic (1500-1701)

Céline Carayon

Montpellier, Hérault, France

Maîtrise, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III, 2004

Licence Histoire, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III, 2002

Licence Archéologie, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III, 2002

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

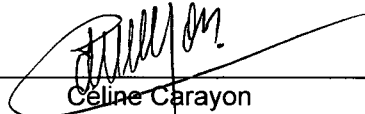
Lyon Gardiner Tyler Department of History

The College of William and Mary  
August 2010


# APPROVAL PAGE

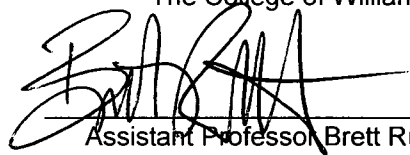
This Dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of


Doctor of Philosophy

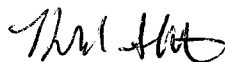
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Celine Carayon

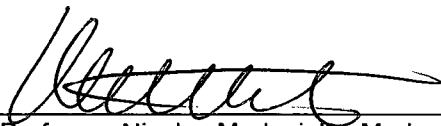
Approved by the Committee, May 2010

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair  
Professor James L. Axtell, History  
The College of William and Mary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant Professor Brett Rushforth, History  
The College of William and Mary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Professor Paul W. Mapp, History  
The College of William and Mary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Professor Ronald Schechter, History  
The College of William and Mary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant Professor Nicolas Medevielle, Modern Languages  
The College of William and Mary

## ABSTRACT PAGE

This dissertation is a study of nonspeech communication and its significance for mutual acculturation and colonial power dynamics in the context of French-Indian contacts across the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most scholars have considered sign-language, pantomime, and other nonverbal means of communication (visual, sonorous, tactile, etc), as temporary, imperfect, and insignificant solutions to the lack of mutual linguistic understanding during early colonial encounters. It is also often assumed that these means of communication, combined with seemingly insurmountable cultural differences, inevitably promoted misunderstandings, incomprehension, and violent conflicts between early colonists and native populations. Seeking to challenge these assumptions, this work closely analyzes the nature, origins, change over time, and cultural implications of nonverbal and paralinguistic forms of communication, which I argue importantly contributed to the accommodation process and the emergence of cultural hybridity in the early French-Indian Atlantic.

This dissertation offers to expand and refine our understanding of cross-cultural communication and miscommunication in various colonial settings. To do so, it brings in a comparative perspective the experiences of a wide range of French explorers, missionaries, colonial officials, mariners, soldiers, and settlers with a variety of native peoples, cultures, and societies in Brazil, Florida, the Caribbean, Canada, and the Upper Mississippi Valley, from 1500 to the conclusion of the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701. Research for this project was conducted in both published and archival sources, using the original French language versions of the sources, for which I provide new or first translations. The comparative scope of this work brings into question the predominant Canadian-centered chronology that has lead past studies of French America, and seeks to put greater emphasis on the influence that local indigenous cultures and contexts had on colonial developments and in shaping the alliance.

Through five thematic/chronological chapters, my work traces the emergence of a culturally-syncretic repertoire for communication in the early French Atlantic, in which non-linguistic elements were at least as important as spoken words to mediate relations between individuals and groups. Starting with the emergence of shared nonverbal codes during first contacts, the project then explores the process of acculturation as a sensory journey through otherness, then demonstrates the permanence of nonverbal means of communication during and after the mutual acquisition of language by French and Indians. It provides an in-depth look at the role of nonverbal performances in ceremonial oratory in seventeenth-century New France with particular attention to the contest between Jesuit and Indian orators. The dissertation ends with a comparison of nonverbal dimensions of diplomacy in New France and the Caribbean, until the eve of the eighteenth century.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Dedication   | ii  |
| Acknowledgements   | iii |
| List of Illustrations  | iv  |
| Introduction: Communication in the Early French-Indian Atlantic  | 1   |
| Chapter One: Non-Verbal Communication in Sixteenth-Century French-Native Encounters (1503-1563)                      | 21  |
| - Sign Language  | 35  |
| - Performative Language  | 57  |
| - Senses, Misunderstandings, and Conflicts   | 82  |
| Chapter Two: Sensory Journeys and Culture Change (1555-1620)   | 92  |
| - Jean de Léry's Sensory Journey to Métissage  | 100 |
| - Samuel de Champlain's Multisensory Exploration of Native America   | 121 |
| - "You will become Carib": A Frenchman's Sensory Tale of Caribbean 'others'  | 151 |
| Chapter Three: Nonverbal Elements of Language-Learning and Use   | 179 |
| Chapter Four: Eloquence, Power, and the Theatrics of Oratory in New France (1630-1680)                               | 233 |
| - A Multimedia Eloquence   | 247 |
| - Trust, Deceit, and the Power of Nonverbal Eloquence  | 271 |
| Chapter Five: Nonverbal Diplomacy and the Symbolic Language of the Alliance (to 1701: Great Peace of Montréal)"      | 314 |
| - Practices  | 323 |
| - The Calumet: Meanings, Limits, and Successes of a Native North American Diplomatic Tool in Cross-Cultural Settings | 346 |
| Conclusion: Understanding Misunderstandings  | 367 |
| Selected Bibliography  | 375 |

*À mon père, Louis Carayon, grand conteur d'histoires.*

*And to Jason with my eternal love.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the community of scholars gathered at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA, at the Lyon G. Tyler Department of History, and at the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. This dissertation would not be the same without the steady flow of constructive criticism, challenging ideas, guidance, and encouragements of the members of my committee. At the top of the list is my advisor, Dr. James Axtell, to whom I am forever grateful for opening the doors of the College and of a world of ethnohistorical inquiries to me. His thorough editorial remarks, the model he provided as a teacher and scholar, and the intellectual freedom he granted me throughout the dissertation process constantly raised my standards of scholarship. I am equally thankful for the patience, time, and invaluable contributions to my reflection of Dr. Brett Rushforth. I want to thank the rest of my committee for their availability and precious feedback on parts of my draft: Dr. Paul W. Mapp, Dr. Ronald Schechter, and a special “merci” to Dr. Nicolas Medevielle for jumping on board on such a short notice. Many other fellow graduate students and professors have enriched my graduate career at William & Mary in various ways. I want to thank in particular Rhys Isaac, Leisa Meyer, Chris Lane, Andy Fisher, and Charlie McGovern for the knowledge, humanity, and humor they shared so graciously. Thanks to Gail Connor for all her help and kindness.

I have been fortunate enough to gain experience in a number of institutions and places outside of the History department during my years of graduate training. I am particularly thankful to Laurie Koloski for her inspiring leadership and work ethic at the Reves Center for International Studies at the College of William and Mary; to Phil Daileader for teaching me first that teaching can be fun; to the staff at the APVA Jamestown Rediscovery project for welcoming me on their incredible site, with special thanks to Eric Deetz; to the Virginia Historical Society and in particular to Jim Kelly for the opportunity of participating in the making a wonderful exhibit; The last two chapters of this dissertation would not have come to life without the generous support of the American Historical Association: the Michael Kraus Research Grant in American Colonial History, and the Bernadotte E. Schmitt Grant for Research in European History allowed me to conduct crucial research at the Centre des archives d’outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence, France. Thanks to everyone on both sides of the Atlantic who contributed to making this research trip a success.

Mental support and love are equally important in making me complete this project. I want to express all my gratitude and love to Jason, to my in-laws James and Fran Boroughs, and the entire Boroughs-Sorrell-Stephens family for accepting our hectic schedules and providing priceless and often tasty respites. Un énorme merci à ma famille et mes amis en France qui sont restés prêts de moi malgré la distance et ont toujours cru en moi plus que moi-même: Maman, Fabie, les deux Eric, Chantal, Mélanie, Richard, Christophe, Pauline, Cédric, et les autres, MERCI !

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| Figure   | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. “René de Laudonnière and Chief Athore, 1564 | 23   |
| 2. Louis-Henri, Tupinamba Indian               | 247  |
| 3. Mât de Cocagne                              | 307  |
| 4. The Calumet ceremony as symbol of peace.    | 349  |



## INTRODUCTION

### Communication in the Early French-Indian Atlantic

“Notre vue sur l’homme restera superficielle tant que nous ne remonterons pas à cette origine, tant que nous ne retrouverons pas, sous le bruit des paroles, le silence primordial, tant que nous ne décrirons pas le geste qui rompt ce silence. La parole est un geste et sa signification un monde.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, [1945] 2005), 224

[“Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2004), 214]

In the spring of 1564, Captain Hernando Manrique de Rojas sailed to the coast of the Spanish-claimed territory of La Florida on a mission to find and eradicate a rumored French settlement established two years earlier by a small contingent of Huguenots. The information he received about the elusive French colony from the Spanish officials in Cuba who dispatched him was slim and imprecise. His only resource, when he reached the peninsula, was thus to inquire from local native inhabitants about the presence of other white men in the area and the location of their fort, through a mixture of signs and Spanish words. The language barrier, however, hindered his plans: “he communicated with the Indians, but as neither he nor any of his men could understand their speech he could not learn *anything* from them about the matter.”<sup>1</sup> This was but a temporary setback, however, and Rojas eventually located the already deserted Charlesfort settlement, destroyed what was left of it, and victoriously returned to Cuba with a French

---

<sup>1</sup> “Expedition of Hernando Manrique de Rojas to search for evidence of French occupation on the Florida coast,” in David B. Quinn, ed., *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, 5 vols (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 2: 310 (hereafter cited as Quinn, *NAW*). Emphasis is mine.

prisoner in his custody, Guillaume Rufin [Rouffin], who had been living with a neighboring tribe after his fellowmen had relocated the moribund colony.

Rojas was not the first, nor would he be the last European to experience the frustration and incapacity that resulted from the absence of mutual linguistic understanding with the New World's natives.<sup>2</sup> Communication was at the center of all preoccupations in the American colonial world, regardless of the goals, hopes, and means of the colonists. The Europeans' dependency upon native knowledge of the land and local geopolitics could have significant repercussions for the international contest of power in the early Atlantic. Reciprocally, as soon as the unexpected silhouette of the ships came into sight on the horizon, Native Americans knew they had to communicate with the strange newcomers if only to find out who they were, what they wanted, and tell them to go away, and later to benefit from their presence commercially and militarily. Throughout the colonial period, efficient communication remained the primary condition for survival, peaceful encounter, trade, land acquisition or retention, alliances in peace and war, conversion, and the mutually satisfactory settlement of conflicts. As Norman Fiering noted, it is now clear that "the burden of overcoming language barriers was a problem faced by all peoples of the New World in the early modern era."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Columbus, often complained about the difficulty encountered in communicating with indigenous peoples in the Caribbean: "nor did he understand them well, nor they him." "[H]e and his tutor and counsellors were very troubled because they did not understand me nor I them." Despite many efforts to communicate through signs, Columbus concluded that only time and mutual linguistic understanding would do: "Although he wished to speak to the people of that island, it would have been necessary for him to stop a few days in that harbor;...He hoped that the Indians he brought would learn his language and he theirs, and that later he would return and would speak with those people." Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley Jr., eds., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America (1492-1493)* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1989), 207, 243.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Gray and Norman Fiering, eds., *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), vii.

With reason, then, scholars' exploration of intercultural communication has been essentially centered on the ongoing efforts and struggles by both Europeans and Indians to acquire and use mutual linguistic understanding, with the underlying postulation that relations and exchanges between the groups gained in complexity and significance as verbal proficiency spread.<sup>4</sup> Early communicational means, upon which both groups supposedly relied at least for as long as mutually-intelligible language was not available, are still poorly known and have not yet been the subject of any systematic study. As if victim of scholarly ellipsis, the issue of communication in early colonial America, as it appears in most historical studies, usually starts with a brief acknowledgement of the daunting and omnipresent "linguistic barrier" facing colonial officials and explorers like Rojas, before leaping directly to the seventeenth century and the seemingly sudden appearance of bilingual agents and satisfactory *lingua franca*.<sup>5</sup> As a result, communication in the indefinite period of time preceding and accompanying the acquisition of language has consistently been conceived, and dismissed, as temporary, remedial (rather than significant on its own terms), irremediably flawed, and thus

---

<sup>4</sup> In her study of communication between the Dutch and Indians in New Netherlands, historian Lois M. Feister for instance mentions nonverbal communication as an early and negligible stage of the cultural and material exchanges between the groups. In an evolutionary perspective she argues that the forms of linguistic contacts became increasingly elaborate, first with the creation of trade jargons, and then with the appearance of interpreters, as the nature of colonial relationships became more complex. Lois M. Feister, "Linguistic Communication between the Dutch and Indians in New Netherlands, 1609-1664," *Ethnohistory*, vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1973): 25-38.

<sup>5</sup> With a few exceptions, such as: James Axtell, "Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians," in *Native and Newcomers: the Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 46-75. Axtell dedicates part of his study to non-linguistic means of communication, such as sign-language, pidgins, and jargons, and to the process through which Indians and Europeans went from the latter to mutual linguistic understanding.

Studies of early colonial linguistic communication include: Ives Goddard, "The Use of Pidgins and Jargons on the East Coast of North America," in *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000): 61-75; Frances Karttunen, "Interpreters Snatched from the Shore: the Successful and the Others," in *ibid.* (New York, 2000): 215-29; Ives Goddard, "Pidgin Delaware," in *Contact Languages: a Wider Perspective*, ed. Sarah G. Thomason (Amsterdam, 1997): 43-98.

conducive to misunderstandings and conflicts. From that perspective, misunderstandings are seen as results of inadequate medium of communication and insurmountable cultural differences and need not be further explained, and successful exchanges are perceived as products of chance or favorable confusion, also referred to as “creative misunderstandings.”

Seeking to complicate this narrative, this study expands the boundaries of the definition of communication in early America by tracing the multiple nonverbal resources that mediated relations between the French and the many Indian groups they encountered in the first two centuries of colonization. Rather than dismissing early encounters as subordinate preludes to a richer history of intercultural exchanges in the “mature” colonial period, *“Not able to be expressed with tongue”* goes beyond words to explore the nature, evolution, failures, and successes of nonverbal communication between the French and Indians in Brazil, Florida, the Caribbean, Canada, and the Upper Mississippi Valley, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In doing so, this project challenges the idea that a typical encounter between Europeans and Indians without the mediation of an interpreter was “a complete blank, a brute clash of bodies in which the invaders, hopelessly outnumbered would certainly be destroyed.”<sup>6</sup> This study contributes to ongoing debates about the possibility of “real” communication taking place between groups separated by cultural and linguistic differences in the New World, and to discussions about what constituted “successful” exchanges during the colonial period.<sup>7</sup> Through a systematic look at sign-language, pantomime, ritualized

---

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 138.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, while contradicting Todorov’s claim that Indians were incapable of improvising, repeatedly doubts that systems of meaning can be bridged. He thus sees in signed communication by the

performances, the use of material relays, pictographs, and more generally at the way people used their bodies to express and perceive the new reality around them, this dissertation argues that non-linguistic exchanges yielded meaningful information and crucially impacted the reciprocal perceptions of the groups, and the nature of their relationships, beyond early contacts into the eighteenth century.

Rojas's claim that he and his men could not understand "*anything*" from the natives can be questioned for several reasons. Even during this early phase of colonial interactions, Rojas had several devices at his disposal to communicate, inquire, and gather information. First, the Spaniards could, and may have although the scribe did not record it, have used the widespread practice of gift-giving to put their Indian informers in a favorable disposition to answer questions. Evidence also suggests that Indians and Europeans could exchange at least approximate directions, by pointing with their fingers or arms, and repeating the name of a location or group. In order to ask the whereabouts of the French, the Spaniards would have had to show that they were looking for men who looked quite similar to themselves to the Indians, like "bearded men" for instance, which could be achieved through signs and touch.<sup>8</sup> Ships and Christian symbols (like the cross) were also characteristic identifiers of white men in the New World, which could be used as material supports for nonverbal exchange. More likely, therefore, Rojas could not understand "what he wanted to know" or failed to comprehend "with certainty" what the

---

natives: "appropriative mimesis, imitation in the interest of acquisition. As such it need not have entailed any grasp of the cultural reality of the other, only a willingness to make contact and to effect some kind of exchange." Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, op.cit., 99.

<sup>8</sup> "Speaking by signs with the *micoo*, he learned from him and from the other Indians that the aforementioned ships had been in the harbor and the Christians, whom he described by signs as bearded as we are, had been in the village and had gone away northward up the coast. (...) they gave it to be understood that they wished the captain and other people to go to their village, and they pointed with their hands to show where it was. The captain made signs to the effect that he would go there at once." "Expedition of Hernando Manrique de Rojas," in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 311.

Indians told him. But if indeed he was unable to gather *any* information, this could actually signal a conscious effort on the part of the Indians to dissimulate the location of their French allies to the Spanish aggressors, or an attempt at quickly disposing of the strangers. Indeed, this failed encounter strongly contrasted with the next exchange Rojas had with a different group of equally unintelligible Indians. This time, however, “from [the natives] signs, he learned that there has been on that river three ships of Christians and that these [had] gone northward to where the point and river of St. Helena are said to be.”<sup>9</sup> Uncooperativeness, rather than absence of language, seems to have constituted the true obstacle.

Nonverbal communication in early encounter settings may have been less *ad hoc* as one may think. Although the absence of indigenous records makes the task of demonstrating it with certainty arduous at best, the existence of pre-contact nonverbal communication strategies among the natives of the Americas is more than likely.<sup>10</sup> Basing his analysis upon the better-known case of the Plains Indians sign-language, Allan R. Taylor suggests certain conditions for the emergence of nonverbal communication means in native cultures that fit the geopolitical, social, and economic conditions of other regions of native North and South America.<sup>11</sup> “[I]t may be originated in the

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 311. The exchange that followed further supported the fact that nonverbal communication was efficient when both parties were cooperative: “That same day the captain went ashore and found three Indians two of whom came willingly with him to the frigate. From their signs it was learned that ships of Christians had been in the harbor of St. Helena and had gone to an Indian village, which, these Indians said, was called Guale, and which is situated on an arm of a river that flows out of another that is north of this harbor. This they indicated by signs and by speaking the name.”

<sup>10</sup> An interesting work, focused on Spanish North America and the Southern Plains is: Susan Wurtszburg and Lyle Campbell, “North American Indian Sign Language: Evidence of Its Existence Before European Contacts,” *International Journal of American Linguistics*, Vol 61, No. 2 (April 1995), 153-67.

<sup>11</sup> “family resemblances [between native languages] did not always make it possible for the speakers of one language to make themselves understood by their conversing cousins,” noted historian James Axtell. “Just as in Europe, dialects and patois muted exchanges between countrymen.” Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 47.

communication needs of deaf individuals, or in the spontaneous signing of other particular contexts: war and hunting situation where silence was mandatory, face-to-face contact between persons of different languages, or situations where distance prevented adequate verbal communication.(...) Trade may have been an important stimulus in the development of the sign language.”<sup>12</sup>

Native nonverbal communication strategies can be divided into several categories: first, sign-language, understood as a corpus of more or less standardized and mutually intelligible signs and gestures, which can be either iconic or symbolic, but are often conventional and arbitrary.<sup>13</sup> Second is distance signaling of various kinds, such as the use of sonorous warnings and smoke signals, widely attested by early French sources in parts of both Brazil and northeastern America. Lastly, pictography and other figurative representations, such as the drawing of maps and the painting of clan symbols on shields and in front of dwellings, which are also attested at least in Canada.<sup>14</sup> Some early French

---

<sup>12</sup> Allan R. Taylor, “Nonspeech Communication Systems,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 17, edited by Ives Goddard (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 17: 275.

<sup>13</sup> Iconic signs are the most successful in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural settings because the signifier (sign) resembles in some ways the signified (word or concept). A common iconic sign is to extend one’s arm to the left to signify the direction “left.” Symbolic signs, on the other hand, have more elusive relations to the words or ideas they express. Allan Taylor explains: “Sign language, to a much greater degree than spoken language, can make effective use of iconicity, because it is easy to devise and use gestures that have iconic resemblance to their referents. This explains why individuals without a common verbal language universally resort to gestures, and why they often communicate so well in this fashion. And in fact the Plains sign language is overwhelmingly iconic, though this does not mean that convention has not been a significant factor in its evolution and use. On the contrary, many signs are purely conventional, while others that are basically iconic have to be understood in terms of culturally dictated conventions.” *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>14</sup> F. Gabriel Sagard Théodat, *Histoire du Canada et Voyages que les frères mineurs recollects y ont faits pour la conversion des Infidèles* [1636] 4 vols. (Paris : H. Schoutheer, 1895), 2 : 413. “Ils ont diverses enseignes et drapeaux faits, (pour le moins ceux que j’ay veus) d’un morceau d’escorce rond, attaché au bout d’une longue baguette, comme une cordelette de cavalerie, sur lequel sont depeintes les armoiries de leur ville ou Province.” And “Les Voyages du Sieur de Champlain” in H.P. Biggar, ed., *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, 6 Vols (Toronto : The Champlain Society, 1922), 1: 334-35. “Après leur avoir depeint avec un charbon la baye et le cape aux isles, où nous estions, ils me figurerent avec le mesme creon, une autre baye qu’ils representoient fort grande, où ils mirent six caillous d’esgalle distance, me

chroniclers described nonverbal practices that clearly originated in local native cultures and probably pre-dated the arrival of Europeans.<sup>15</sup> Observing how natives communicated while remaining under cover during hunting or war parties, a Jesuit missionary for instance stated that “it is the custom of the Iroquois and of the other natives to call out to each other using owl calls at night, and the chirping of some other birds by day.”<sup>16</sup>

But sign-language was often easily overlooked by the French and other European visitors because of its resemblance to miming or improvisation. Proficiency in sign-language and other nonverbal strategies could vary greatly between tribes and within members of a tribe, particularly if it was associated with gendered activities like warfare or hunting.<sup>17</sup> Even if the French encountered a sophisticated corpus of native nonverbal signifiers, it would have appeared inconsistent or non-homogenous to them, making it unlikely for them to identify these signs as a “system” in their writings. Many French-native communications are thus forever lost to the modern reader, and those that did make their way into the narratives are often disguised. We must search between the lines for evidence of these mute dialogues, since colonial writers commonly used the

---

donnant par là à entendre que chacune des marques estoit autant de chefs & peuplades : puis figurent dedans ladite baye une riviere que nous avons passee, qui s'estent fort loing, & est batturiere.”

<sup>15</sup> Also for the evidence of sign language, see Pierre Esprit Radisson, *Being an Account of His Travels and Experiences among the North American Indians, from 1652 to 1684; transcribed from original manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and the British Museum*. (New York: Burt Franklin [1885] 1967), 36. “the day following we proceeded on our journey, where we mett [*sic*] 2 men, with whome [*sic*] our wild men seemed to be acquainted by some signes [*sic*]. These two men began to speake [*sic*] a long while.”

<sup>16</sup> Reuben Golden Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vols (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company Publishers, 1896-1901): 32: 32 (hereafter cited as *JR*). “car c’est la coutume des Hiroquois & des autres Sauvages de s’entr’appeller [*sic*] les uns les autres par des cris de chahuans pendant la nuit, & par le gazouillis de quelques autres oyseaux pendant le jour.”

<sup>17</sup> Allan Taylor, “Nonspeech Communication Systems,” *op.cit.*, 275. While sign language was the Plains lingua franca, there were differences in proficiency among tribes: “The Kiowas are frequently mentioned in the nineteenth century as excellent sign talkers, and this tribe was certainly a center of dissemination of sign use in the Southern Plains. The Comanches in the south, and Cheyennes and Arapahos in the Southern and Central Plains, were also highly regarded (Mallery 1881: 318; Dodge 1882: 385; Clark 1885: 39; Critchley 1939: 44).”



terminology of speech to report conversations with the Indians that actually involved more sign-language than mutually understandable words. They “told us,” “declared to us,” “gave us to understand,” “saying that,” are recurring expressions that do not necessarily signal the use of words. On the other hand, an Indian salute and welcome simply described as “in their manner” or “barbarous fashion,” and “in the fashion of the country,” involved in all likelihood an extended oration rather than sign-language alone.<sup>18</sup>

The Frenchmen and women who came to the New World in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were no strangers to the world of nonverbal communication either. Before the famed Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée published in the late eighteenth century the alphabet that became the foundation for most modern deaf-mute sign-language systems, forms of standardized sign-language were already known in Europe (and had been for centuries), not only in relation to deaf-mute communities, but also in monastic contexts.<sup>19</sup> Many of the soldiers who composed early colonial contingents in the Americas would also have had chances to experience the use of sonorous and visual signals on the battlefields of Europe. Mariners, who spent months, sometimes years at a time on the ocean, were skilled at deciphering the elusive signs that surrounded them,

---

<sup>18</sup> We are fortunate to have two different records of the French expedition and settlement in Florida in the years 1562-63, which allow us to witness this type of narrative ellipsis. Jean Ribault, in his *True discoverie of Terra Florida* [1563], mentions that during the very first contact of the French with Florida natives the local Indian leader “receved [him] genttlyes and rejosed after there mannour.” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 288. René Goulaine de Laudonnière, the other chronicler, reports about the same encounter that the Indians “came of purpose to that place to receive the Frenchmen with all gentleness and amitie, as they well declared by the Oration which their king made, and the presents of chamois skinnes wherewith he honoured the Captain.” In Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 295. The frequent ellipses of discourses become clear through immersion in a large number of sources, as well as familiarity with native diplomatic and social practices.

<sup>19</sup> Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée, *La véritable manière d’enseigner les sourds et muets: confirmée par une longue expérience* [1784] (Paris : Fayard, 1984). Among his predecessors in codifying deaf-mute sign-language was Juan Pablo Bonet, who published in 1620 in Madrid: *Reducción de la letras y arte para enseñar a hablar a las mudos* (Madrid: Francisco Abarca de Angulo, 1620). On sign-language among monks who had taken a vow of silence see: Scott G. Bruce, *Silence and Sign-Language in Medieval Monasticism: the Cluniac Tradition c.900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

about approaching weather, their geographic position and direction, and even the presence of Good Fortune by their side. The Captain of a fishing boat roaming the coasts of Newfoundland in the early seventeenth century thus knew that he was approaching the Grand Banks, and, literally, a wealth in cod, when he spotted flocks of a “certain type of birds.”<sup>20</sup> More generally, the French shared with the natives the belief that the world and bodies surrounding them could be “read” by using one’s senses in search for subtle clues of one’s intentions, of the presence of supernatural spirits or powers, and, most of all, of lurking dangers.

Communication is, by definition, a multi-sided human process that can only be understood at the intersection of cultures and peoples, and cannot be properly conceived by looking through one lens only – whether European or indigenous. As an exchange, communication must be seen as simultaneously belonging to the various sides of the colonial encounter. As with all ethnohistorical work, the task of reconstructing native communication and Indian understanding of the newcomers’ efforts at communicating are rendered more challenging by our dependence on French records and the absence of indigenous equivalent. But careful attention to various systems of meanings and a systematic search for comparable descriptions of gestures and signs across multiple sources reveal new aspects of native aesthetics and nonverbal modes of expression and perception. In focusing on the exploration and settlement of multiple parts of the New World by the French, this project does not presume any type of French colonial “genius” or unique Gallic skills at nonverbal communication and intercultural accommodation.

---

<sup>20</sup> Only then did he order his men to sound the bottom of the ocean in search of the edge of the Banks. Sagard, *Histoire*, 1:135. “Avant que de venir à ce grand Ban de 25. a 30. lieües de loin, il se voit certains oyseaux par troupes, qui s’appellent marmets, qui donnent une certaine cognoissance au Pilote qu’il n’est pas loin de l’escore ou bord dudit Ban, et qu’il est tempts de tenir le plomb prest, pour sonder des fois à autre, iusqu’à ce que l’on parvienne à cette escore où l’on trouve fond.”

Because it stretched from the extreme North of the continent to the southern regions of modern Brazil through the Caribbean, The French colonial example offers an insightful case-study of communication and acculturation in the early Atlantic world. By using the French as common denominator, this study is able to emphasize the transmission of certain practices from one part of the New World to the next, as well as to reveal more fully the diversity and unique influence of distinct indigenous cultures upon the newcomers, and, reciprocally the various impacts that the French had on the communicational practices of different societies in various regions of the Americas.

The range of French colonial situations and writers (missionaries, officials, explorers, colonizers, even simple soldiers) illustrates that the practical forms taken by paralinguistic communication, and the stakes it carried, were as varied as the motives and fates of the individuals who practiced it, thus emphasizing the importance of both local and regional contexts for our understanding of early America. To each stage of the French colonial undertaking – from exploration, to trade, to settlement, to mission, to westward expansion – and to each particular native social context, corresponded different communicational needs and tools. At every stage however, communication was entwined in complex power relations between French and natives, between various French parties, and among Indians (inter- and intra-tribal). Observing and analyzing the selective use of certain nonverbal means of communication by colonial actors can thus reveal new aspects of changing power dynamics across the period. The very particular choices made by some Jesuit missionaries in seventeenth-century New France in their accommodation efforts, for instance, reflected the predominance of Iroquois diplomacy during the period, and the move away from Huron and Algonquian norms.

In particular, nonverbal communication patterns illuminate the sources, manifestations, and consequences of mutual trust and distrust in early colonial America. During early encounters, both groups used “signs of friendship” to initiate peaceful contact while keeping an eye out for more subtle, unconscious “signs” of potentially hostile intentions from the other party. A few decades later, while in the difficult process of learning Indian languages, French colonizers would rely on their careful observations of visual, sonorous, and sensuous clues during native ceremonies to challenge the translations of interpreters they distrusted. In the later part of the seventeenth-century, after both groups had refined their knowledge and understanding of nonverbal rituals, Indian and French individuals would craft careful performances that combined speech with nonverbal cultural markers like accessories and gestures, with the ultimate purpose of gaining the trust of their audience across cultural boundaries. Throughout the period, nonverbal signs and practices were also manipulated to surprise, deceive, and injure opponents.

This study argues that, during the first two centuries of colonial contacts, French and Indians elaborated complex syncretic repertoires for communication in which nonverbal elements were at least as important as words in mediating all aspects of their relations both locally and across regions. This unusual look at intercultural relations brings nuances to previous narratives that emphasized language and literacy as the keys to colonial domination, while redefining in important ways the nature of both understandings and misunderstandings in early America.<sup>21</sup> Because nonverbal

---

<sup>21</sup> In this sense, this study is inscribed in the line of recent studies that challenged the strict binary paradigm between orality/literacy, and that redefined native communication practices as multimedia forms of literacy. Pauline Moffit-Watts, “Languages of Gesture in Sixteenth-Century Mexico: Antecedents and Transmutations” in Claire Farago, ed., *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin*

communication implied much mimesis and the “enactment” of cultural difference, this project also speaks to a rich and growing literature on colonial hybridity/creolization, and the blurry process known as “acculturation.”<sup>22</sup> In contrast to studies that emphasize European conceptions, intellectual histories, and literary representations of ‘native otherness,’ this is a cultural history of practice that gives equal attention to both sides of this multi-sensory encounter from the angle of “performance.” Philosopher Merleau-Ponty reminds us that “it is through my body that I understand the other, as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’.”<sup>23</sup> Considered as a bundle of signs and symbols, a culture could be experienced, imitated, appropriated, understood, challenged, and transformed.<sup>24</sup> Through the analysis of early colonial communication, it is therefore not

---

*America 1450-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 140-52; Pauline Moffitt Watts, “Pictures, Gestures, Hieroglyphs: ‘Mute Eloquence’ in Sixteenth-Century Mexico,” in Fiering and Gray eds., *The Language Encounter*, 81-101; Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Cohen redefines the nature of “communication technologies” in colonial New England, emphasizing that both oral and literate systems of communication mediated relations between English settlers and Indians. Cohen proposes “a theoretical reframing of the question of the production of textuality that addresses how literatures of encounter are analyzed and taught by amplifying the analysis of the material, sonic, and performative contexts of the production of social experience and knowledge in the seventeenth century.”

<sup>22</sup> Among the many works that inspired and enabled this study are: James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1987] 2003); Colin G. Calloway, *New Worlds for All : Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Laurier Turgeon, Denys Delâge, and Réal Ouellet, eds., *Transferts culturels et métissages Amérique/Europe, XVIe-XXe siècle: Cultural Transfer, America and Europe : 500 years of Interculturation* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996); James Lockhart, “Double Mistaken Identity: Some Nahua Concepts in Postconquest Guise,” in *Of Things of the Indies: Essays Old and New in Early Latin American History*, ed. by James Lockhart (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 98-119; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> “C’est par mon corps que je comprends autrui, comme c’est par mon corps que je perçois des ‘choses’.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception* [1945] (Paris : Gallimard, 2005), 226.

<sup>24</sup> “Une culture est un système de signes et de symboles, le rapport à l’autre se situe sur plusieurs dimensions, et l’acculturation n’induit pas une identification totale, elle conduit à l’interprétation de certains signes, à l’adoption de pratiques mixtes.” [“A culture is a system of signs and symbols, the relation to the other is situated across several dimensions, and acculturation does not lead to total

only the practical means of conversation that we observe, but the ways in which different cultures became merged, the avenues in which individuals found a door inside each other's world.<sup>25</sup>

In early French colonial America, there were rarely purely non-linguistic exchanges, or purely linguistic ones. Early explorers spoke and gathered isolated words while communicating with their hosts and trading partners through gestures, facial expressions, objects, and a whole array of shared sensory perceptions. In parts of Brazil and the Caribbean, in particular, where the French relied on native hospitality for long periods of time, daily interactions provided unique opportunities for the French, as a non-threatening and dependent minority, to experience and understand foreign Indian cultures through essentially sensory means and through daily practice. Cultural differences and similarities were both experienced through the observation, emulation, appropriation, and sometimes subversion of nonverbal practices.

The more Frenchmen learned to master native languages, the more they also learned to master the codes that presided over the public performance of speech, and

---

identification; It leads to the interpretation of certain signs, and to the adoption of mixed practices.”] Philippe Jacquin, *Les Indiens Blancs: Français et Indiens en Amérique du Nord (XVI-XVIII siècle)* (Paris: Payot, 1987), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Phenomenology proves particularly valuable for studying this subject because it reestablishes the importance of the body and of the human senses as cognitive tools. Through their physical journeys in unknown lands and cultures, colonists incorporated places and peoples within their own beings – often bringing them back with them to Europe – while infusing new meaning into these locations and individuals. “To be in a place is to know,” emphasizes philosopher Edward S. Casey following Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. “[It] is to become aware of one’s very consciousness and sensuous presence in the world.” By being in the New World, by sensing the other and its “otherness,” Frenchmen in the Americas did not only understand the native world: it became part of them and they became part of it, actively acting in it and leaving their mark. In this sense, attention to communication and its multifaceted sensory components may help us discover new aspects of the colonial experience, its psychological impact on the various protagonists, as well as the true humanity and individuality of a world that eludes us. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series, 1996), 9.

therefore, the more their words were accompanied by signs, pantomime, and culturally appropriate material referents. The best French orators in the New World, such as Jesuit father Pierre Marie Joseph Chaumonot, who, according to his peers, “[spoke] Iroquois as well as the natives of the country,” was also the best performer, skilled in emulating nonverbal aspects of native ceremonies while infusing them with Catholic elements that could strengthen the impact of his words.<sup>26</sup> Confronted with the enduring lack of a *lingua franca*, Indians and colonists found efficient remedies by putting all their senses to work to express their intentions and will, to make sense of the unknown in their own cultural terms, and to find an acceptable platform for peaceful interaction. These “remedies” simply did not disappear once mutual linguistic understanding was achieved. On the contrary, as the Jesuit and native orators knew well, non-verbal codes of interaction such as music, costumes, objects, and pantomime, were essential to the efficient delivery of speech.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, this study challenges the idea that nonverbal communication was but a temporary and imperfect solution to the lack of linguistic understanding. Instead, it emphasizes the permanence and multi-sided importance of the realm of the nonverbal throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a mode of mutual discovery, contest, and accommodation between the groups.

*“More than can be expressed with tongue”* highlights subtle connections between the actions of colonial protagonists across the Americas. For many decades, the study of French America has been driven by a Canadian-centered perspective that relegated the colonial attempts made by the French in Brazil, Florida, and the West Indies to the status

---

<sup>26</sup> *JR*, 14:168.

<sup>27</sup> We could even go as far as affirming that language without signs and bodily expressions is more subject to misunderstandings than signs alone. As proof, the fact that we feel the need to add emotions to our dehumanized electronic messages with the help of a few characters, often for fear of misunderstanding: :- ) ; ) :(

of negligible or quaint prologues to the formation of a successful empire in North America. In many ways, this narrative is the result of a disproportionate amount of sources available on seventeenth-century Canada compared to other parts of the Americas. It is also guided by hindsight and the notion that the French were only able to maintain a durable and political impactful presence in the northern part of the continent. More attention to the Caribbean, which has been chronically understudied, brings a degree of nuance to this version of events. By replacing longevity with new criteria for the significance of the French colonial experience (such as the degree of acquired knowledge and intercultural communication with local indigenous groups), and by bringing to light connecting threads between the various French sites of settlement that remain obscure if considered in isolation, this project offers to challenge the “Canadian model.” This does not mean contesting the significance of New France, but instead, enabling a fuller and more complex understanding of the origin of certain cross-cultural patterns, and adding an insightful comparative component to determine the reasons and means for uneven French success in certain contexts and regions.

In the following chapters, I invite you to join Verrazzano, Cartier, Ribault, Roberval, Champlain, Léry, Biard, Sagard, and many more Frenchmen as they discover the New World, and themselves, while establishing communication with the natives. I invite you to follow as well Donnacona, Patetchouenon, Mayon, Stalame, Choumin, “La Foriere”, Avoindaon, Membertou and other Native Americans as they, in turn, communicated with the newcomers while negotiating the changes affecting their world in ways both familiar and new.



The first two chapters of my dissertation demonstrate that nonverbal codes were not as defective as previously thought. In Chapter One, I offer to redefine what “successful communication” meant for both sides during early encounters. This chapter questions the common preconception that early colonial encounters were characterized by misunderstandings (both linguistic and cultural), which in turn led to irremediable and often violent clashes between Europeans and Indians. By analyzing the exact nature of the information exchanged, the essentially nonverbal means used by the protagonists to communicate across linguistic boundaries, and the efficiency of these means in conveying certain information, I have begun to suggest that not only were misunderstandings not as widespread as traditionally assumed, but incomprehension and misinterpretations rarely led to open conflict during the early years of French-Indian interactions.

The senses and sensory perceptions were also crucial in shaping mutual understanding and misunderstanding between the groups during the early phase of interaction. In Chapter Two, I describe the sensory journeys of three Frenchmen—Jean de Léry, Samuel de Champlain, and an anonymous French soldier—respectively in Brazil, Canada, and the Caribbean. Their bodily experiences of native cultures inform us about the complex ways in which ideas about the “other” were created, undermined, and remembered. Methodologically, this chapter explores new interpretive directions for sensory history, beyond the achievement of a more “vivid” picture of the past and against the illusion of “recreating” historical sensations. As grounded in specific historical and cultural context, and especially in contact situations, the senses provide insights into the

tastes and practices of past societies and reveal the importance of daily practice and the nonverbal in the process of colonial creolization.

In Chapters Three and Four, I also argue that, far from disappearing with the emergence of mutual linguistic understanding, early nonverbal codes remained crucial for Indian-French communication and interaction throughout the entire seventeenth century, particularly in the religious and diplomatic realms. Chapter Three considers the importance of prosodic and paralinguistic features of speech in the process of language-learning (Indians learning French and French learning various native languages), and demonstrates that, in seventeenth-century America, being proficient in a foreign tongue meant mastering subtle cultural and nonverbal codes as much as grammar and conjugation. Nonverbal communication shaped the language learning process for both Indian and French individuals, and remained essential to the efficacious delivery of speech in ways that reveal connections between paralinguistic media and power dynamics.

Continuing the narrative into the period when both sides had mastered linguistic and nonverbal communication, Chapter Four focuses on Indian oratory and its emulation by French missionaries who attempted to gain ascendancy over their native audiences by combining Old World techniques with New World influences. A careful look at the nature and functions of native verbal art reveals that it was much more dynamic and flexible than the Westerners believed, which opened the door to innovations and the introduction of new nonverbal relays of speech during the colonial period. In seventeenth-century New France, Jesuit missionaries tended to perceive Indian ceremonial oratory as theatrical performances. A crucial tension arose between the

French perception and emulation of native oratory as artificial and manipulative, and the importance of the rhetoric of Truth and Trust in Indian verbal art and diplomatic principles. Confronted with the paradox of the ‘eloquent barbarian,’ the Jesuits both attacked and found inspiration in the performances of Indian orators, while native converts developed syncretic discourses and performances through which they challenged traditional power boundaries. Centering around exhaustive analyses of intercultural orations and ceremonies, this chapter alters our way of interpreting cultural contacts and the formation of hybridity in colonial America.

Chapter Five, in direct continuation to the previous chapter, deals with nonspeech rituals in diplomatic settings. Narratives of the period, especially descriptions of native councils, abound with traces of the nonverbal clues French observers used to decipher the meaning of Indian proceedings, and which they later emulated for their own benefit. This chapter explores the emergence of culturally syncretic nonverbal signs and performances in the realm of diplomacy, and particularly inquires into the possibility that the French unwittingly contributed to a certain “homogenization” of native practices by transporting these nonverbal “codes” with them as they reached further south and west into the North American continent. Rather than another study of the famed “middle ground” of the eighteenth-century, this chapter explores how attention to nonverbal exchanges and their selective standardization during the first two centuries of contact can transform or complicate our understanding of French-Indian diplomacy, culminating in the settling of the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701. Together, Chapter Three, Four, and Five investigate intersecting issues of power, trust, and deceit, demonstrating that manipulations of the

nonverbal were instrumental in the changing balance of power in the early French Atlantic.

In early French-Indian America, communication therefore consisted of much more than words and as such did not know insurmountable linguistic barriers. Considered as a process, a dynamic and constant exchange through which natives and Frenchmen came to construct new codes to interact peacefully, communication cannot be judged as either effective or inadequate.<sup>28</sup> Even misunderstandings and misinterpretations contributed to establishing a bridge between the two cultures. As shaky as this footbridge may have been, metaphorically crossing it with words, signs, and things considerably impacted the view each group had of the other and determined the ways in which they interacted for years to come. I hope to show that nonverbal communication is a crucial key to the multiple and complex dimensions of French-Indian relations and the changes they experienced during the colonial period, and to entice other students and scholars to dive into a very rich and fascinating body of evidence on the early French Atlantic.

---

<sup>28</sup> In other words, whether the information made it from point A to point B without distortion is irrelevant. What counts is that the information traveled, that it established a connection. The recipient may not have learned the exact content of the original message, but he/she still learned something about the "sender".

## CHAPTER ONE

### Nonverbal Communication in early Sixteenth-Century French-Native Encounters (1503-1563)

French artist Jacques (de Morgues) Le Moyne was a member of Jean Ribault's 1564 expedition to the New World, the second French attempt at founding a permanent settlement in Florida to challenge Spanish claims and create a haven for Huguenots at a time of intense religious strife. Le Moyne produced a collection of fifty-nine watercolors of the Floridian fauna, flora, native peoples, and landscapes, including one of the very few representations of an early communication event between Europeans and Indians. This illustration, entitled "Rene de Laudonniere and Chief Athore, 1564," depicts the second-in-command of the French expedition, René Goulaine de Laudonnière, followed by his men in arms, standing by an imposing and tattooed Timucuan chief (Atore or Athore), near the stone column bearing the royal crest of France that had been erected by Ribault two years earlier to assert his land claim [see Figure 1].<sup>29</sup> On the left, a group of kneeling Indians are gesturing toward the column, which is adorned with flower wreaths and at the foot of which are gathered baskets containing Indian foodstuff, a bundle of Indian corn cobs, a longbow, gourds, and two copper pans.

As an artist, Le Moyne faced challenges similar to those he experienced as a participant of an early colonial encounter. Without the recourse to language and words, he could only turn to signs, symbols, bodily attitudes, and objects to convey ideas, events, intentions, and emotions. Le Moyne expressed the friendliness of the encounter by the

---

<sup>29</sup> Although the original watercolor and gouache painting by Le Moyne survives today [Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division, The New York Public Library], his work is best known through the engravings of Theodor de Bry, which were published in 1591 under the title *Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americae Provincia Gallis acciderunt*.

subtle positioning of Chief Athore's left arm on Laudonniere's back. Athore's eyes are looking towards the impassive French leader, and his right arm is lifted in the general direction of the pillar, which suggests that the chief was artistically captured pronouncing an unintelligible discourse concerning this landmark. A number of scholars have critically commented on this painting as reflective of French colonialist attitudes because it seems to depict the natives "worshipping" the column, while the objects at its foot appear to be "offerings."<sup>30</sup> But the scene was not pure propaganda, and the French may actually have perceived more complex layers of meanings in the Indians' actions. In other words, our current reading of the drawing may be as skewed, and our modern interpretations of nonverbal and bodily signals as supportive of the idea of Indian reverence towards the column, as Le Moyne's.

The French observed the "manifestations of joy," dances, various postures, and "warm welcome" of Indians across the Americas and generally interpreted them as positive "signs of friendship." They also understood, albeit imperfectly, that the ceremonies they witnessed bore deeper meaning for the Indians at the social, spiritual, and political levels, and accordingly chose to comply with local etiquette. They suspected that there was more to the Indians' attitudes than a "worshipping" of the object in the European sense, if only because they knew native beliefs and practices strikingly differed from their own. The elements given by Le Moyne to evoke the atmosphere and general message of this scene to his European audience were thus the same that the French had at their disposal to decipher native meaning during the actual historic encounter. In both the pictorial and textual descriptions of the scene, no misunderstandings are apparent,

---

<sup>30</sup> Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 58. "Jacques Le Moyne believed that the Timucua 'adored the column as an idol.'

although the presence of the French soldiers on the far right suggests that distrust lingered. The specific content of the message delivered by Athore and the true significance of the Indians' gestures ultimately mattered less than the overall friendliness and aesthetic quality of the encounter. Overall, the encounter appeared satisfactory to both parties, and cultural differences seemed to be successfully bridged through material and physical communication.

**FIGURE 1:** “René de Laudonnière and Chief Athore, 1564” (Theodor de Bry, *Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americai Provincia Gallis acciderunt, 1591*)



Early French writings about the New World resemble Le Moyne's watercolor in that they suggest that peaceful encounters could be successfully mediated through

nonverbal means. The French who explored and attempted to settle in the Americas in the sixteenth century indeed hardly complained about the problems posed by the language barrier. Instead, while making their way along the coasts and rivers of what is today Brazil, the Carolinas, Canada, and Florida, French explorers and early colonists regularly manifested their faith in the efficacy of nonverbal means of communication in exchanging precious information with local populations, particularly when it came to obtaining geographical knowledge or to expressing mutual friendship. With the exception of a few rather resigned remarks about their incapacity to understand Indian public and private speeches, the French overall seemed both satisfied and confident about their ability to communicate with and understand the peoples they encountered in the Americas during the early period of contact.

A leading member of the colony of French Huguenots that had recently settled on Port Royal Sound (modern day South Carolina, then part of Spanish “Florida”) noted that the French captain had to listen to a long Indian oration in 1562 “with no great pleasure, because hee [*sic*] could not understand [the Indian orator’s] language, and much less his meaning.”<sup>31</sup> This remark, while acknowledging the impermeability of Indian discourses, suggested unquenched curiosity and the possible tediousness of the event more than it raised the many tribulations attached to the lack of common language. In numerous other instances, moreover, the French expressed little doubt about their success in understanding the signs and attitudes of the natives.<sup>32</sup> The phrase “*signes évidans*” or

---

<sup>31</sup> René Goulaine de Laudonnière, “L’histoire notable de la Floride,” in David B. Quinn, ed., *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*. 5 vols (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 2: 295 (hereafter cited as Quinn, *NAW*). Laudonnière also claimed the French were “marvelous sorry [*sic*]” to not be able to understand the “1000 discourses” made to them by two Indian captives (*Ibid.*, 2: 298).

<sup>32</sup> Out of fifty-four occurrences of Indian “signs” in the corpus of sources used for this chapter, the French offer a specific elucidation of the meaning of the said signs in fifty-one cases. I understand, by



“evident signs” appears three times in two narratives separated by nearly thirty years, to describe the various gestures used by the natives to communicate with the French.<sup>33</sup> Leaders of French expeditions to the New World, apparently content with non-speech means of communication for the time being, did not attempt to rely on interpreters until Jacques Cartier placed two young French boys among a group of St-Lawrence Iroquoians during his third and last voyage to Canada in 1541.<sup>34</sup>

Even when the French acknowledged the flaws of nonverbal exchanges, they seemed satisfied overall with the results of these bodily conversations. Jean Ribault, the leader of the 1562-63 French expedition to Florida, reported that the Indian inhabitants he questioned about the location of the mythical town of *Sevola (Cibola)* “shewed us by signes which we understode well enough, that they might go thither with there [*sic*]

---

“occurrences of Indian signs”: explicit mentions of “signs,” descriptions of the signs, or references to implicit signs introduced by phrases such as “showed us,” “gave us to understand,” etc. Whether the French interpretations were accurate and the exchanges ultimately successful, this demonstrates the reluctance of the French to admit total incomprehension. It also reveals a particular effort on the part of the French to understand and to gather useful information despite the imprecision and flaws of the means they used to communicate with the natives.

<sup>33</sup> The phrase appears twice in Jacques Cartier’s travel narratives and once in Laudonnière’s account of the founding of the Florida colony. H.P. Biggar, ed., *Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Ottawa: Publications of the Public Archives of Canada, 1924), 142-3 (hereafter cited as Biggar, *Voyages*). “y vint un grand seigneur du pays, lequel fit un grand sermon, en venant et arryvant à bord, monstrant par signes évidans avecques les mains et aultres serymonies que ledict fleuve estoit, un peu plus en amont, fort dangereulx.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 164. “Après qu’il [chief in Hochelaga] eut fait son signe de salut audict cappitaine et à ses gens, on leur faisans signes évidans qu’ilz fussent les [très] bien venuz.”

René de Laudonnière, “L’ histoire notable,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2 : 299. “Besides this proof, thos [*sic*] which were left in the first voyage have certified me, that the Indians shewed them by evident signes [*sic*], that farther within the land towards the North, there was a great inclosure or city, where Chiquola dwelt.”

<sup>34</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 257. He left the two young boys in *Hochelay*. This practice, which later became a staple of French-Indian relations in both Brazil and Canada, only occurred once the French determined to settle permanently in Canada. During his first two voyages, Cartier did kidnap a number of natives (and claimed that certain young Indians were also “offered” to him by the local chief) whom he took to France. However, there is little evidence that Taignoagny and Dom Agaya, the two Iroquois who spent eight months in France then returned with Cartier during his second voyage, spoke French well-enough or were willing to become interpreters. They returned to their own people immediately after landing in Canada.

boates by rivers in xxviie days.”<sup>35</sup> While Ribault did not obtain a precise answer to his geographical inquiry— and certainly not one expressed in the familiar European terms of longitude, latitude, and cardinal directions — he nevertheless seemed content with learning the general direction and distance of the town. The possibility that the Indians directed him to a different town which name sounded like the French pronunciation of Sevola, or that they invited him and his crew to a twenty-seven-day-long journey to an altogether different location, seemed to elude him.

The French undoubtedly overestimated their ability to understand the natives in the absence of a common tongue. One cannot rule out the importance of wishful thinking in perceiving Indian gestures as encouraging answers to pressing questions about local profitable resources. Nor should we ignore the possibility that the French chroniclers knowingly inflated the scale of their successes and the certainty of their knowledge of the New World for the purpose of pleasing their European readers and sponsors. However, neither should we dismiss this unusual aspect of early French narratives as the sole product of French imaginations and oversized egos. Since the perspicacity of the Frenchmen was hardly exceptional, we are left to wonder: what, in the nature and working of nonverbal communication between the French and Indians in the sixteenth-century Americas, justified the degree of confidence and satisfaction expressed in French narratives? Why could misunderstandings be so readily ignored? Do we have any clues about whether the natives felt the same way about their success in communicating with the newcomers?

This chapter offers a close comparative analysis of the various non-linguistic

---

<sup>35</sup> Jean Ribault, “The True Discoverie of Terra Florida,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 289. The only surviving version of Ribault’s narrative is in English, which makes it impossible to check the accuracy of the translation.

means of communication used by the French and Native Americans during their earliest period of contact, between 1503 and 1563, before the establishment of a successful permanent settlement in the New World and the development of sustained relations between the groups. It will outline what type of information the French and Indians attempted to communicate to each other, how they went about it, and their various degrees of success in these attempts. Some sporadic scholarly attention has been given to the topic of early communication in first contact settings, but detailed analysis of the various types of “signs”—or nonspeech strategies—used by both parties during early encounters and of the relative success of nonverbal communication has been generally limited.<sup>36</sup> Two remarkable, yet unfortunately brief studies attempting the systematic observation of the role of signs and sign-language between French and Native Americans each focused exclusively on Jacques Cartier’s *Voyages*, a particularly rich source for this theme.<sup>37</sup>

While the French encountered many different Indian cultures and peoples across North and South America, and despite the fact that they themselves represented a culturally and socially diverse group, they generally behaved similarly everywhere they went, asked similar questions, in similar ways, and came to similar conclusions about the natives.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, facing a relatively homogeneous set of behaviors on the part

---

<sup>36</sup> James Axtell, “Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians,” in *Native and Newcomers: the Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 46-75; Edward Gray and Norman Fiering, eds., *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Réal Ouellet, “Gestualité et perception de l’autre dans les *Relations* de Cartier,” in *Culture et Colonisation en Amérique du Nord*, eds. Jaap Lintvelt, Réal Ouellet et Hub. Hermans (Sillery : Septentrion, 1994), 27-48 ; Gilles Thérien, “Jacques Cartier et le langage des signes,” *Colloque Jacques Cartier: Histoire, Texte, Images* (Montréal : Société Historique de Montréal, 1985), 229-267.

<sup>38</sup> About the cultural heterogeneity of the French explorers, we can cite the fact that Giovanni da Verrazzano was a Florentine mariner in the service of Francis I; Binot Paulmier de Gonneville’s crew on the expedition that accidentally landed in Brazil in 1503 included two Portuguese mariners who had

of the French intruders, the various native groups reacted in varied fashions and used a complex assortment of signs and rituals – each pertaining to their unique cultures and traditions – to deal with the newcomers. The comparative unison of French signs and symbols, however, combined with the frequent recourse to imitation during nonverbal exchanges, drove groups of Amerindians who lived thousands of miles apart from each other and had little in common with one another to perform similar acts. As the French tended to conceptualize Indian signs and rituals under large, generalizing labels, their writings implied more similarities in Native American behaviors across the continent than there really were. This fact allows us, to a certain extent, to generalize about French attitudes and conceptions of early means of communication in the New World, although each expeditionary crew possessed unique goals and circumstances.

The “signs and gestures” used by both groups, far from consisting of a succession of clever improvisations and random gesticulations, constituted a complex set of practices, one that seems to have become standardized at a very early stage. French narratives illuminate three distinct types of “signs” that Frenchmen, and their native counterparts, could use individually or in combination to gather information about and communicate with each other. The first type was sign-language, consisting mostly of hand and arm gestures, and generally used as a substitute to specific words or ideas. The second type was performative in nature and encompassed a large variety of rituals, symbolic behaviors, and theatrical-like ceremonies which primarily found their origin in Indian cultures but were soon adopted by the French for diplomatic purposes. The final kind of sign was sensory and often did not include conscious, semantic signs. Rather, it

---

previously sailed to the East Indies; the colony of Charlesfort in Florida comprised a majority of Protestants. Jacques Cartier’s crew was very likely to include mariners not only from his native *Bretagne*, but also from other regions of France and Europe (Norman, Basque, Portuguese, etc).

essentially consisted of the bodily observation and experience of the other and its “Otherness,” through which information could be gathered and conclusions drawn about the attitudes, customs, and intentions of the opposite group. The French were particularly adamant to differentiate this type of nonverbal information from the conscious, performative messages sent to them by the Indians through signs and ceremonies. They believed that they could, based on a subtle and distrustful observation of Indian unconscious or “natural” behaviors, go beyond the official Indian messages to perceive “true” intentions that were disguised. I argue in this chapter that, while the early standardization of sign-language and the use of performative signs offered relatively successful grounds for nonverbal communication between the groups, the French ultimately chose to trust the last, potentially most unreliable, source of information, therefore endangering the nonverbal codes that were being created.

The analysis of nonverbal communication, its successes and failures, raises questions about the commonly assumed connection between misunderstanding and conflict. This early period of contact can at first glance appear as more potentially volatile because more misunderstandings seemed likely to take place in the absence of common language, possibly leading to tensions and mutual hostility as a result. However, it seems that not only did the French and Indians prove rather successful at communicating through nonverbal means, but instances of mutual misunderstanding or complete incomprehension did not constitute a major occasion for open arguments. Instead, it was the distrustfulness of the French for Indian signs, even when these signs seemed unambiguous, and their choice to trust instead their own judgment based on observable, unintentional clues from the natives that more often caused antagonisms.

Although the French regularly misidentified one type of sign for the other in their narratives and did not always distinguish them conceptually, the evidence suggests that most chroniclers were at least conscious of the existence of three separate sources of nonverbal information, each with its distinct qualities and shortcomings. In fact, while words remained mostly hermetic, signs were considered as a different set of codes, one that could be broken. Several particular characteristics of these three groups of signs contributed to the French belief that they could gather reliable knowledge about the natives and communicate certain important things to them in return. Distinguishing these three levels of signed communication also allows us to capture the true complexity and diversity of misunderstandings occurring between the groups. Misunderstanding a gesture did not have the same cause and consequence as misinterpreting an involuntary attitude or altogether missing the ritual and religious value of an Indian ceremony. Many essential aspects of nonverbal encounters also elude us that could have contributed to the choice of nonverbal devices used by the groups to communicate in specific contexts, and to misunderstandings. The distance at which the protagonists were standing from each other, which could be of crucial importance for the efficacy and nature of the exchange, was often omitted from the accounts. In some instances, loud sounds and wide arm gestures were used because the two groups were simply too far to use other strategies. Distance was also critical in terms of mutual trust and fear. The timing of the exchanges often remains elusive as well, while it holds many keys to understanding the proceedings.<sup>39</sup>

\* \* \*

---

<sup>39</sup> An encounter that seems to occur over a short period of time in the narrative may have lasted several days. Many elements of the exchange, including shared signs and much waiting around, are often missing, giving the illusion of a rapid succession of events.

One particular episode, which occurred during Jacques Cartier's first voyage to Canada in 1534, exemplifies the diversity, complexity, successes, and failures of nonverbal means of communication in early encounter setting. On Monday 6 July, 1534, Cartier and a number of his men were exploring the *Pointe de Paspébiac* onboard their longboat, on the St-Lawrence River, to "see in which direction the coast ran." Suddenly, a relatively short distance away from their own craft, the reconnaissance party spotted an intimidating "two fleets of Indian canoes (...) which numbered in all some forty or fifty canoes."<sup>40</sup> Far from being tentative toward the newcomers, some of the Indians went ashore and immediately started shaking "some furs on sticks" and making what Cartier described as a "great clamor," clearly inviting the Frenchmen to land and trade with them. However, because they were in reduced number aboard a single *barque*, the rather inexperienced Frenchmen feared a closer encounter and proceeded to row away as fast as they could. They did not count on the Indians' perseverance and superior speed. Seven canoes soon followed, then surrounded, the French craft, while their occupants shouted messages of friendship to the runaways and continued to show trade items to signify their desire to barter for European goods. Cartier soon learned that signs, as clear as they might seem, could easily be ignored by the opposite party, thus calling for more drastic measures:

And seeing that no matter how much we signed to them they would not go back, we shot off over their heads two small cannons. On this they began to return toward the point, and set up a marvelously loud shout, after which they

---

<sup>40</sup> "And when we were half a league from this point, we caught sight of two fleets of Indian canoes that were crossing from one side to the other, which numbered in all some forty or fifty canoes." Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 299.

1 league= 3.248km (before 1674)- so, half a league is about 1.5Km or a little over a mile away. Distance is important when trying to reconstruct the conditions and nature of early communication because it affected the volume of the sounds, the ability to see the exact gesture, and the possibility of using certain means of nonverbal communication.

proceeded to come on again as before. And when they had come alongside our long-boat, we shot off two fire-lances which scattered among them and frightened them so much that they began to paddle off in very great haste, and did not follow us anymore.<sup>41</sup>

The failure of the encounter – which did not result in the two groups trading and setting the bases of peaceful relations but instead led to a benign but nonetheless real display of force on the part of the French – can in no way be attributed to misunderstandings. The French understood very well the meaning of the signs the Indians made from the shore to invite them to land and trade, since Cartier felt compelled in his narrative to justify twice his decision to row away.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, we can confidently assume that the Indians, Micmacs who had certainly had previous exchanges with European fishermen in the region, made no mistake about the sense of the French tentative escape, especially after the Frenchmen fired two shots over their heads. The natives possibly believed that the French misunderstood their intentions and signs. For this reason, they may have thought additional signs of peace and friendship would reassure the newcomers and convince them to trade. This could explain why they came back after the first aggression until the escalating violence forced them to give up. This passage serves as a revealing window into the complex structure of French-Native nonverbal communication during sixteenth-century encounters, and into the true sources of tensions between the groups, beyond the mere inefficacy of the means of communication.

Sign-language is omnipresent in this episode. It was first initiated by the Micmac Indians who combined loud shouts with the presentation of their trade goods on wooden

---

<sup>41</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 299.

<sup>42</sup> “But as we were only one boat we did not care to go” Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 299. And “But for reasons already stated, that we had only one of our long-boats, we did not care to trust to their signs.” *Ibid.*



perches to capture the attention of the French, who stood nearly a mile away on the river. Cartier reported that the Indians simultaneously made “several signs” to them “to come on shore.”<sup>43</sup> After the French proceeded to row away, the pursuing Indians continued to signal to the strangers their sociable and commercial intentions, “showing many signs of joy, and of their desire to be friends.” Finally, the French also turned to sign-language to convince the Indians to stop following them before resorting to violence, although all we know about these signs is their ultimate futility, since “no matter how much [the French] signed to [the Indians] they would not go back.” The signs used by the French were probably arm- and hand-gestures signifying to the Indians to go away and expressing ideas essentially in the negative. Cartier did not give any clues about whether the Indians continued to follow the French because they chose to ignore their signs as the French had ignored theirs, which is likely, or because they did not understand them. How can we be sure that the Indians could decipher apparently simple signs expressing rejection and refusal to trade, since even the most basic signs for “yes” and “no” are not universal?<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 299. The translation of this passage provided in Quinn’s edition is misleading because it suggests the rhythm of the signs rather than their diversity. The English version has: “a large number of Indians, who ... made **frequent** signs to us to come on shore, holding up some furs on sticks.” The French version states: “fessoint **plusieurs** signes, que nous allissions à terre, nous montrant des peaulx sur des bastons.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 49. A more accurate translation would be “several signs,” which I use here. I tend to see this as evidence that there was not one single sign among the Micmacs to mean “come” or “trade” and that various individuals were signing the same idea in different ways.

<sup>44</sup> Although nodding is equated with “yes” in a large part of today’s world, the meaning of the sign is far from universal. In Bulgaria and Sri Lanka, for instance, nodding is usually associated with the negative, while shaking one’s head sideways is understood as positive body language, expressing agreement and acceptance. Some scientists, including Charles Darwin, have suggested that nodding as a sign of agreement is at least partly innate. While working on his 1872 book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin asked friends and contacts around the world (missionaries and colonial officials in particular), to fill out a questionnaire he had elaborated to collect evidence about the ways various indigenous groups expressed similar emotions (such as anger, sadness, joy, contempt, astonishment, etc). He suggested that the association of nodding with acceptance emerged in infancy, when babies spontaneously tended to move their heads up and down when they wished to accept the food given to them, and sideways when they rejected it. Darwin argued that physiological reactions determined most of human and animal body language: “the chief expressive actions, exhibited by man and by the lower animals, are innate or inherited, -- that is, have not been learnt by the individual.” However, he also noted

This episode also reveals the true complexity and ubiquity of performative nonspeech communication: The “great clamour” emitted by the Micmacs upon sighting the French boat was a sonorous expression of this second type of nonverbal communication. When Cartier described the natives “dancing and showing many signs of joy,” he could already sense that the signals sent by the Indians were not of the same nature as more practically grounded sign-language.<sup>45</sup> To a certain extent, the Frenchmen’s rambunctious display of force, when they first fired two cannon balls then two fire-lances to disperse the natives, can also be identified as an essentially performative message. Ritual and other performative practices offered unique insights to each group into the other’s culture, tastes, beliefs, and society. But many questions remain as to the nature and efficacy of this sensory means of communication. Did cultural biases prevent any solid mutual understanding? Was a superficial perception of an action as symbolic enough to promote accommodation, without further need for specific understanding of its meaning? What, in the nature of these performances, were conducive to mutual distrust?

---

the influence of habit on certain expressive emotions. “Certain other gestures,” argued Darwin, “which seem to us so natural that we might easily imagine that they were innate, apparently have been learnt like the words of a language. This seems to be the case with the joining of the uplifted hands, and the turning up of the eyes, in prayer. So it is with kissing as a mark of affection; but this is innate, in so far as it depends on the pleasure derived from contact with a beloved person. The evidence with respect to the inheritance of nodding and shaking the head, as signs of affirmation and negation, is doubtful; for they are not universal, yet seem too general to have been independently acquired by all the individuals of so many races.” Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898): 350, 352.

<sup>45</sup> Historian Réal Ouellet distinguished between “expressive or functional gestures” and “ceremonial” ones. He pointed to Cartier’s mistake in perceiving certain native behaviors as simple practical ‘signs,’ notably when native women greeted the strangers by dancing in the water while others rubbed their arms. Ouellet thus suggested another level, or type, of communication, one that is ceremonial (I prefer the word performative) rather than practical. Elsewhere in the article, he also mentions that the gestures of trade could also have been symbolic rather than purely commercial. “Cartier se trompe, il me semble, quand il voit dans ces démonstrations spectaculaires des signes de même nature que dans le geste craintif de fuite. À mon avis, on n’est plus dans la gestuelle expressive ou fonctionnelle, mais dans le cérémoniel.” Réal Ouellet, “Gestualité et perception de l’autre dans les *Relations de Cartier*,” in *Culture et Colonisation en Amérique du Nord*, eds. Jaap Lintvelt, Réal Ouellet et Hub. Hermans (Sillery : Septentrion, 1994), 31-32.

Sign-language and performance both seemed to offer successful grounds for mutual understanding between Cartier and the Micmacs. If not misunderstandings, what, then, motivated Jacques Cartier and his men to fire twice towards the Indians who peacefully pleaded to trade with them near St. Martin's Cove? It was fear and a type of distrust so ingrained in French mentalities that the slightest sensory "red flag" could trigger it. Both native sign-language and performative signs were telling the French that the Micmac traders had only peaceful intentions toward them. But simultaneously, their senses and cultural prejudices were telling them that they were threatened by a much stronger, much more numerous group of natives. A nervous Cartier vividly recalled that "[The Indians] paddled so hard that they soon surrounded our long-boat with seven canoes.<sup>46</sup>" In this situation as in many others, the outnumbered Frenchmen seemed to trust their senses much more than they trusted Indians. This last type of sign hardly qualified as a means of communication because it consisted of unilateral, deeply biased observations and deductions made by the French during their dealings with natives. Yet the French seemed to have given it much credit and relied on it confidently to gather information about the New World's inhabitants.

By crossing multiple sources in several regions of the Americas, this chapter attempts to gain a more nuanced understanding of these three types of nonverbal communication, which the French seemed to differentiate and rely upon in various ways.

### **Sign-Language**

Consistent evidence throughout sixteenth-century French colonial sources suggests that Frenchmen and Native Americans could easily communicate to each other

---

<sup>46</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 299. Biggar has "with their seven canoes." The rest of the translation is identical. Biggar, *Voyages*, 50.

ideas related to bodily movement, such as “stop,” “come,” “go away,” or “sit,” and shared similar codes for expressing the affirmative and negative. Cartier’s travel narratives state that Donnacona, the chief of Stadaconé (present-day Québec City), “nodded in assent,” in response to an invitation to trade symbolized by an axe held up by the French. Moreover, when asked whether copper came from the direction to which the French pointed, three Indian guides in Hochelaga (present-day Montréal) “shook their heads, saying no and showing that it came from Saguenay.”<sup>47</sup> In multiple instances, Indians guided the French through a landscape familiar to themselves, through paths and stops infused with ritual meaning. On their way to Hochelaga, Cartier and his men were thus compelled to stop in the woods to hear a welcoming speech after the orator “made signs to [them] that [they] should rest at that spot near a fire.” Later, they were conducted to the center of the town of Hochelaga, where their guides, reported Cartier, “signed to us that we should come to a halt here, which we did.”<sup>48</sup> Later still during this visit, the French refused to partake of the feast prepared by the Hochelagans, which drove the local women to “place themselves in [the Frenchmen’s] way,” in an attempt to make them stay and eat, to which the French responded “by making signs that [they] were in no need of refreshments.”<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 302. My translation. Biggar, *Voyages*, 171. “et ils commencèrent à secourré [sic] la teste, disant que non, en monstrant qu’il venoyt du Saguenay.” “They shook their heads to say no, showing us that it came from the Saguenay.”

Cartier also wrote : “If one shows them something they have not got and they know not what it is, they shake their heads and say, nouda, which means, they have none of it and know not what it is.” Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 301.

<sup>48</sup> “lequel nous fict signe qu’il se falloit reposer audict lieu.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 153-154 and “lesquelz nous firent signe que nous arrastacions audict lieu, ce que fymes.” *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>49</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 167. “Voyant ce, les femmes se mirent audavant de nous pour nous arrester, et nous apporterent leurs vivres (...) et pour ce que lesdictz vivres n’estoient pas à nostre goust, et qu’il n’avoit aucune saveur de sel, les remerciasmes, leur faisans signes que n’avyons besooing de repaistre.”

French chroniclers also expressed steady confidence about identifying the salutes and expressions of gratitude from native chiefs, although they rarely described the signs in detail.<sup>50</sup> In Florida, such a salutation was made by the elders of the town by “lifting up both their hands twise [*sic*] as high as their face, saying, ha, he, ya, and the rest answer ha, ha.”<sup>51</sup> These points may appear as trivial details, but their significance is revealed when placed in the wider context of French-Indian interactions. Both groups apparently had reasons to feel confident in their understanding of the other’s agreement and disagreement, which could go a long way to secure the illusion of mutual understanding. The problem that remained was to successfully express what ought to be agreed or disagreed upon.

Besides these relatively simple notions, sign-language was primarily used between French and natives in two main circumstances: to initiate the very first contacts and to foster peaceful interaction. Once the two groups had become more familiar with each other, often through ceremonial exchanges, it was also used to ask and answer questions relative to specific, practical, and often local knowledge. Both groups first turned to sign-language to express reassurance and gauge the strangers in the process. Fear was the prevailing feeling during early encounters of the type explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano experienced during his first expedition to the eastern coast of North America in 1523-24. When the Florentine captain, sent on a reconnaissance mission by the French king, Francis I, reached the shores of what is likely modern North Carolina, he observed the full power of that emotion on both sides of the encounter. The natives’ behavior

---

<sup>50</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 164. “Après qu’il eut fait son signe de salut au cappitaine et à es gens, en leur faisant signes évidans qu’ilz fussent les [tres] bienvenuz.” When French chroniclers described such signs in more details, it was often because the welcoming “sign” was in fact more symbolic and performative than purely figurative/iconic.

<sup>51</sup> Laudonnière, “L’histoire notable,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 282.

seemed to indicate a mixture of terror and irrepressible curiosity: “we had seen many people coming to the seashore, but they fled when they saw us approaching; several times they stopped and turned around to look at us in great wonderment.”<sup>52</sup> His own men were prone to imagine the worst, fearing an encounter with cannibals of the kind they had heard through many popular stories circulating in Europe.<sup>53</sup> While tension was palpable, Verrazzano chose improvisation: “We reassured them with various signs” wrote the captain, “and some of them came up, showing great delight at seeing us and marveling at our clothes, appearance, and our whiteness.”<sup>54</sup> Supposedly, the overall ‘positive’ attitude of the natives was able to reassure the sailors. Sign-language could also unambiguously express the natives’ disregard for the European intruders: “we found no courtesy in them,” reported Verrazzano about another band of Indians who seemed very reluctant to converse with the newcomers, “and when we had nothing more to exchange and left them, the men made all signs of scorn and shame that any brute creature would make (such as showing their buttocks and laughing).”<sup>55</sup>

First encounters also provide clues as to how culturally syncretic codes may have emerged at this early juncture, by shedding light on the imitative nature of early attempts at sign-language. During another encounter, this time with twenty canoes loaded with native men and women coming to inspect the newcomers and their ships, Verrazzano turned to mimicking: “we reassured them somewhat by imitating their gestures and they

---

<sup>52</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 281.

<sup>53</sup> Reports of cannibal Indians may have followed Pedró Alvarez Cabral’s official discovery of Brazil in 1500. During another meeting, shortly following this first one, Verrazzano caused a young sailor to be sent to shore to take gifts to the Indians. After the natives rescued the young shipman from nearly drowning, they took his clothes off and lit a fire, most likely to warm him up. Immediately, the rest of the crew deduced they were about to roast their comrade and eat him, which provoked a wave of panic onboard. Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 283.

<sup>54</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 281.

<sup>55</sup> Quin, *NAW*, 1: 287.

came near enough for us to throw them a few little bells and mirrors and many trinkets, which they took and looked at, laughing, and then they confidently came on board ship.”<sup>56</sup> Friendly gestures (not precisely described in the account), gifts, and mutual close observation were sufficient to ensure safety and to allow Verrazzano and his men to pursue their exploratory goals further north. The Micmac Indians Jacques Cartier encountered on the shores of the St. Lawrence River on July 7, 1534 also initiated contact by “making signs to us that they had come to barter with us; and held up some furs of small value with which they clothe themselves.” The French responded by “likewise [making] signs to them that we wish them no harm” and sent two men on shore as scouts to begin trading while the rest of the crew kept away at a safe distance.<sup>57</sup> It is likely that most of these signs of reassurance involved the visible display of gifts, and maybe other positive emotional expressions such as shouts of joy and the waving of arms. Possibly, putting away weapons, or laying them down by one’s side, like the Indian principal in Florida who met with Ribault in 1562, could also be a sign of peace.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the tendency of French colonial chroniclers to homogenize their descriptions of native attitudes, it is difficult to know with certainty whether the French came into contact with Indian groups who possessed a full-fledged sign-language system similar to the elaborate codes witnessed in later periods among Western Plains Indians.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 284.

<sup>57</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 300.

<sup>58</sup> Ribault, “True discoverie,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 290. “we passed the river to there [sic] shore where we founde them tarring for us quietly and in good order, trymed with newe pictures upon there[sic] faces, and fethers upon there [sic] heddes, their [sic] king with his bowes and arroweds lying by him, sett on the ground, strewed with baye bowes, bitwen his two brethren.” This gesture is more performative than strictly figurative, because it involves a significant degree of symbolism, and was certainly part of a ritualized diplomatic etiquette rather than an improvisation.

<sup>59</sup> Plains Indian Sign Language was identified in the nineteenth century as a remarkable pidgin language devised by natives in the Great Plains to allow for inter-tribal communication. In 1885, it was estimated that there were over 110,000 “sign-talking Indians,” including Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapahoe.

At the very least, the native groups encountered by the French used codified gestures and behaviors to signify particular things, for instance, to salute and welcome people, and relied on specific signs to evoke familiar objects, emotions, or beliefs. Regardless of the existence of pre-contact indigenous sign languages, the colonial encounter may have allowed new, or at least modified, nonverbal codes of communication to emerge.<sup>60</sup> French and Indians entertained many “conversations” using signs familiar to their respective cultures. When a sign seemed to be understood by the Other, it was probably re-used in subsequent conversations with the same and perhaps with other groups, thus becoming more familiar to both parties and potentially spreading geographically. Rather than originating in a single culture, sign-language thus seems to have been mutually initiated by the protagonists of these early encounters, although native pre-contact practices offered an important foundation for the elaboration of this new syncretic repertoire.

Verrazzano reported that, as his ship stayed anchored in the same location on the Carolina coast for a while in the spring of 1523, one of the local Indian leaders “often came...for the pleasure of seeing [the French].” The natives used some of their own diplomatic practices to initiate the visit: “at first, recalled Verrazzano, they always stopped on a piece of ground about two hundred paces away from us, and sent a boat to warn us of their arrival, saying that they wanted to come and see the ship.... And once

---

See William Tomkins, *Indian Sign Language* [Originally titled *Universal Indian Sign Language of the Plains Indians of North America*, 5th ed. 1931](New York: Dover, 1969): 7; See also W.P Clark, *The Indian Sign Language*[1885] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). Plains Indian Sign Language is still used in some native communities today for storytelling purposes, notably among the Wiyuta Assiniboines. For an anthropological and sociological study of sign-language in an Assiniboine community (Fort Belknap Reservation, Montana) see Brenda Farnell, *Do You See What I Mean? Plains Indian Sign Talk and the Embodiment of Action* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> “Social interaction and migration bring change to both signed and spoken languages. Equally if not more influential is change in the culture of the language’s users.” William C. Stokoe, *Language in Hand: Why Sign Came Before Speech* (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2001), 157.



they had a reply from us, they came immediately, and watched us for a while....”<sup>61</sup>

Evidence elsewhere suggests that northeastern native diplomacy sometimes included a gradual approach to the location of an arranged ceremonial encounter (whether a native settlement or a French ship) with one or more ritual stops along the way.<sup>62</sup> Verrazzano believed that “they did this as a kind of precaution,” and, indeed, the lead canoe could also have served as a scout to identify potential danger. Once onboard the ship, however, signs of both French and native origins were shared to discuss practical and nautical knowledge:

the king remained a long while, discussing by signs and gestures various fanciful notions, looking at all the ship’s equipment, and asking especially about its uses; he imitated our manners, tasted our food, and then courteously took his leave of us.<sup>63</sup>

The limits of sign-language quickly emerged from such exchanges. Whereas one could make himself relatively well-understood by pointing to an object and asking about its use through mime, discussing more abstract notions, or evoking objects, peoples, and places that were not within visible reach could prove much more cumbersome. French explorers, like their missionary successors in the seventeenth century, quickly realized the difficulty of spreading or collecting religious knowledge among and from the natives.

---

<sup>61</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 285.

<sup>62</sup> Initial contact between the groups generally took place on or near the water, and involved relatively simple performances that expressed, like their accompanying sign-language, peaceful intentions and the desire to barter and be friends. The first encounter was often followed by further celebrations in the symbolic space between the water edge and the limits of the forest, which involved further dances, singing, and the sharing of food. An altogether other level of shared performances was reached once the French were taken to a native settlement. There, celebrations were intertwined with more practical trading sessions and sign-language-based conversations, but generally lasted several days and ended around a gargantuan feast. For a detailed example of this choreographed movement through native ritual space, see Biggar, *Voyages*, 148-68. The Charlesfort colonists were also led by their Indian hosts through a ritual tour of four nearby settlements, where they met various Indian “kings.” This closely monitored journey had undeniable political, commercial, and symbolic stakes, which largely eluded the Frenchmen. See Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 302-5.

<sup>63</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 285.

Verrazzano concluded in the latest part of his account: “Due to the lack of [a common] language, we were unable to find out by signs or gestures how much religious faith these people we found possess.”<sup>64</sup> Jean Ribault courageously or naively tried to communicate to an Indian leader some basic notions of Christianity during their very first encounter. After the French captain and his men ostentatiously prayed a little distance away from the Indian audience, Ribault attempted to rely on sign-language:

And as I made a sygne unto there king, lifting up myne arme and stretching owt one finger, only to make them loke up to heavenward, he likewise lifting up his arme towards heven, put fourthe two finge[rs] wherby it semed that he would make us to understand that thay worshipped the sonne [sun] and mone [moon] for godes [*sic*], as afterwards we understode yt so.<sup>65</sup>

We will never know what the Indian leader understood in the French pointing to the sky, nor what he countered with an additional finger. The lesson that was learned was that sign-language worked much better with material, concrete supports than to express intangible matters.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 287.

<sup>65</sup> Jean Ribault, “True discoverie,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 288. Anthropological research suggests that Ribault may not have been totally mistaken in his analysis of the Indian leader’s gesture. One of the features of early native cultures in the American Southeast seems to have been the “close association of the Sun with a culture hero or Creator.” Jason Baird Jackson and Raymond D. Fogelson, “Introduction,” in William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 14, “Southeast,” edited by Raymond D. Fogelson (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 14: 3-5.

<sup>66</sup> The apparent lack of words to express abstract and religious concepts was the major complaint about native languages expressed by seventeenth-century French missionaries to Canada. Father Pierre Biard thus famously wrote: “les mots leur défailent des choses qu’ils n’ont jamais veues ou apprehendées. D’avantage, comme rudes et incultes qu’ils sont, ils ont toutes leurs conceptions attachées aux sens et à la matière ; rien d’abstrait, interne, spirituel ou distinct. *Bon, fort, rouge, noir, grand, dur*, ils le vous diront en leur patois ; *bonté, force, rougeur, noircissure*, ils ne sçavent que c’est. Et pour toutes les vertus que vous leur sauriez dire, *sagesse, fidélité, justice, misericorde, reconnaissance, pieté*, et autres, tout chez eux n’est sinon *l’heureux, tendre amour, bon cœur*.” Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1897), 2: 10 (hereafter cited as Thwaites, *JR*). On the same topic see Margaret Leahey, “Comment peut un muet prescher l’évangile? : Jesuit Missionaries and the Native Languages of New France,” *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), 105-131.

This may partly explain why a disproportionate number of references to sign-language in sixteenth-century French narratives were tied to geography. Most of the signs described and elucidated dealt with the expression of locations, directions, and distances. Undoubtedly, this trend reflected the explorers' own agendas. Both Verrazzano and Cartier were looking for a western passage to Cathay, the name given to China in sixteenth-century Europe. Additionally, the one common drive behind every French expedition to the New World, and potentially all European ones, was greed. Cartier's obsession with finding the reputedly affluent "kingdom of Saguenay" soon rivaled his search for the Western Passage. After Jean Ribault returned to France, leaving behind thirty men in charge of the Charlesfort colony, the soon-starved colonists never gave up their search for easy wealth. While visiting a distant Indian settlement to obtain precious food supplies, the hungry French primarily rejoiced when they learned that crystal and silver ore were within accessible reach, "being joyfull to understand so good newes, and to have come to the knowledge of that which they most desired."<sup>67</sup> Tales of profitable resources were incentives powerful enough to make the French disregard their empty stomachs.

However, the predominance of geographical use of sign-language did not solely reflect French exploratory and economic dreams. It may also have indicated that it was in this realm that the French had some of their most compelling successes in communicating with native groups through nonverbal means. In fact, much of the confidence in nonverbal communication may be attributed to the fact that both parties managed to exchange rather precise information with real success when their conversations revolved around the expression of movement and space. In the previously-discussed Cartier

---

<sup>67</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 305.

episode with the Micmacs in July 1534, the exchange began with the natives “making several signs to [the French] to come on shore.”<sup>68</sup> These “signs” were a staple of native-French encounters throughout the Americas. The Indians routinely indicated to the newcomers the best location to land, either from the shore or from their canoes, sometimes even escorting the ships.<sup>69</sup> The French never seemed to doubt or distrust these specific directional signs. This practice may already have been in use among Indians during their interactions with other native groups, or when welcoming a returning hunting or trading parties of their own. It could also have been reinforced as a shared code during regular exchanges between natives of the lower St-Lawrence and Breton, Basque and Portuguese fishermen and whalers during the first thirty years of the sixteenth century.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 299.

<sup>69</sup> Verrazzano’s account is particularly rich in this type of exchange: “They showed us by various signs where we could most easily secure the boat,” Verrazzano, in Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 281; “they came toward us joyfully, uttering loud cries of wonderment, and showing us the safest place to beach the boat.” *Ibid.*, 1: 284; “They brought us some of their food, and showed us by signs where we should anchor in the port for the ship’s safety, and then accompanied us all the way until we dropped anchor.” *Ibid.*, 1: 285; “A man came in sight who ran after our long-boats along the coast, making frequent signs to us to return towards the said [Indian] point.” Cartier, in Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 298. Surprisingly, the French most of the time had no difficulty trusting these signs.

In the seventeenth century, Champlain confirmed the persistence of this practice, even writing that the Indians guided the foreign boats by lighting fires, working as beacons to guide the French to safe harbor. “*Les Voyages du Sieur de Champlain*,” in H.P. Biggar, ed. *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, 6 vols (Toronto : The Publication of the Champlain Society, 1922), 1: 332, 336, 334 (hereafter cited as Biggar, *Works of Champlain*).

<sup>70</sup> A rare narrative (whose authenticity has been questioned by historians) of the voyage that Captain Paulmier de Gonneville allegedly made to Brazil in 1503-1504, states that French fishermen had been dealing along the North American coast for several years: “[le] pays des Indes occidentales où d’empuis aucunes années en ça les Dieppois et les Maloüinois et autres Normands et Bretons vont quérir du bois à teindre en rouge, cotons, guenons et perroquets et autres denrées.” M. D’Avezac, ed., *Campagne du Navire l’Espoir de Honfleur 1503-1504 : Relation authentique du voyage du Capitaine de Gonneville ès nouvelles terres des Indes (...)* (Paris : Challamel Aîné, 1869). This narrative supposedly reemerged in the seventeenth century during a law suit involving Gonneville’s descendents. The original document was a legal statement made in court by Gonneville and some of his crew upon their return to France, after their ship had been attacked by English pirates off the Brittany coast and their entire bounty stolen. In the nineteenth century, scholars suggested that the document was a fake written by members of the Gonneville family for the purpose of gaining tax exemption in their own lawsuit. Many minute details, particularly pertaining to nonverbal communication, tend to convince me that this is an authentic account. However, since the reliability of this source has been questioned, I only use it here as supportive

Few facts about native culture were more securely understood by the French across the Americas than the way Indians expressed months. This allowed Frenchmen to also grasp distances, expressed in terms of the time traveled to reach a given location. This certainty contributed greatly to the trust placed by the explorers in geographical exchanges with Indians and provided French writers with concrete ethnographic evidence of their successes. According to the account of the fortuitous landing of a French expedition in Brazil in 1503, when the French party decided to take a few local Indians back to France, they promised the native leader to bring them back “in twenty moons at the latest; because this was how they expressed the months.”<sup>71</sup> French chroniclers almost always retained the native way of expressing months in their writings, instead of transcribing it directly into the familiar European terminology. This is one of the earliest instances of the lasting tendency of French colonial chroniclers to include traces of nonverbal elements in their written renditions of conversations with natives, perhaps as added touches of ‘exoticism’ and authenticity to the account. René de Laudonnière reported on mourning rituals in Florida that “during the space of sixe Moone (so they reckon their moneths [sic]) there are certain women appointed which bewaile the death of this king.”<sup>72</sup> Evidence also suggests that the French understood that moon cycles stood for months better than they did other signs indicating shorter time-periods. We can only imagine that the sign for moon – perhaps a crescent-like sign made with one’s hand while pointing to the sky – offered less opportunities for misinterpretation than other numbers

---

evidence rather than main argumentative proof. Other evidence, both archaeological and textual, has confirmed the presence of Europeans in Newfoundland in the early sixteenth century.

<sup>71</sup> M. D’Avezac, ed., *Campagne du Navire l’Espoir de Honfleur*, 102. “Parce qu’on promettoit aux père et fils le ramener dans vingt lunes au plus tard ; car ainsi donnoient-ils entendre les mois.” My translation.

<sup>72</sup> Laudonnière, “L’histoire notable,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 283.

expressed by words or hand gestures.<sup>73</sup> Cartier thus experienced mixed success in his dealings with three Indian guides on top on Mount Royal (present-day Montréal) when he interrogated them about the profile of the river to the West: “it was told us and made clear by signs (...), that there were three more such rapids in that river, like the one where lay our long-boats; but through lack of an interpreter we could not make out what the distance was from one to the other. Then, they explained to us by signs that after passing these rapids, one could navigate along that river for more than three moons.”<sup>74</sup> Cartier may not have been able to grasp the distance between the “*saults*” because it was too short to be expressed in months, or even days. Cultural differences in expressing time and distances therefore represented an inconsistent obstacle to communication between the groups.

---

<sup>73</sup> Expressions of time abound in the narratives: Cartier claimed Donnacona informed him that he would be gone with a hunting party for two weeks and only returned two months later, which suggests a misunderstanding on the part of the French in terms of the time expressed by their allies: “Et nous fut, par Dom Agaya et aultres, dict qu’ilz ne seroient que [environ] quinze jours; ce que nous croyons; mais ils furent deux moys sans retourner.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 217. Laudonnière reported that an Indian leader tried to convince the French to stay by “shewing him by signes that he should stay but that day onely [*sic*].” Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 297. Ribault tried to set a meeting date for the following day: “And so makying him understand that we would see him agen [*sic*] the next daye, we retired agayn to our shippes.” Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 289.

In the early seventeenth century, Recollet friar Gabriel Sagard mentioned that the Montagnais expressed “days” by nights, and years in terms of “winters.” F. Gabriel Sagard, *Histoire du Canada et voyages que les frères recollects y ont faicts pour la conversion des infidèles*, 4 Vols. (Arras : H. Schoutheer, 1865), 1 : 444. “l’ay dit vint Hyvers pour vingt années, c’est la façon de parler des Montagnais, lesquels voulant dire, quel aage as-tu, disent combien d’Hyvers as-tu passé, de mesme au lieu que nous dirions deux iours, trois iours, ils disent deux nuicts, trois nuicts, comptans par les nuicts qu lieu que nous comptons par les jours.”

<sup>74</sup> “nous fut dict et montre par signes, par les troys hommes [du pais] qui nous avoyent conduictz, qu’il y avoyt troys ytieulx saultz d’eaux audict fleuve, comme celluy ou estoient nosdictes barques; mais nous ne peusmes entendre quelle distance il y avoyt entre l’un et l’autre [par faute de langue]. Puis, nous monstroient [par signes], que lesdictz saultz passez, l’on pouvoit naviguer plus de troys lunes par ledict fleuve.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 169-70. “par faute de langue” (literally “for lack of language”) is translated as “through lack of an interpreter.” It is important to note that the original text has no mention of interpreter there, only of the lack of mutual linguistic understanding (which may suggest that the Indians were speaking words that the French could not understand even with the help of gestures). Also, *ibid.*, 202 “Oultre nous ont donné à entendre, que ou lieu où avions laissé nostre gallion quant fusmes à Hochelaga, y a une rivière, qui va vers le Surouaist, où semblablement sont une lune à aller avec q leurs barques depuis sainte Croix jusuques à une terre, où il n’y a jamais glace ny naiges.”

Scholars have increasingly emphasized the degree of sophistication of Native American cartography and discussed the extent of native knowledge of the continent.<sup>75</sup> Elaborate native ways of picturing and signing directions and geographical features of the landscape pre-dating the encounter may also have favored the French acquisition of such information. During his third voyage to Canada, in 1541, Cartier described in detail how the people of *Tutonaguy* answered his questions about a water route to the rumored riches of the Saguenay. By then, Cartier may have known a few words of Iroquoian (such as the one for “*sault*” or rapid), or used the same signs he had seen his guides use in Hochelaga seven years earlier. The passage provides great insights into how such geographical exchanges took place:

After that the Captaine had enquired of them as well by signes as words, how many more saults wee had to passe to goe to Saguenay, and what distance and way it was thither, this people shewed us and gave us to understand, that wee were at the second Sault, and there was but one more to passe, that the River was not navigable to goe to Saguenay, and that the sayd Sault was but a third part further then, we had travailed, shewing us the same with certaine little stickes, which they layd upon the ground in a certaine distance, and afterward layde other small branches both representing the saults.<sup>76</sup>

In this instance, one can easily picture how material representations of the landscape with sticks, associated with pointing to visible features of the river, and the mutually understood expressions of negative and affirmative could combine in the Frenchmen’s view as more than satisfactory means of communication. Indians also

---

<sup>75</sup> G. Malcolm Lewis, *Cartographic Encounters: Perspectives on Native American Mapmaking and Map Use* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Barbara Belyea, “Inland Journeys, Native Maps,” *Cartographica* 33 (1996); Barbara Belyea, “Amerindian Maps: The Explorer as Translator,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 18 (1992). Paul Mapp emphasized the crucial importance of verbal elucidation for the comprehension and efficacy of Indian maps; It seems that nonverbal elucidations could also be used. Paul Mapp, “Exploring Indigenous Geographic Understanding,” *The Elusive West* (unpublished draft).

<sup>76</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 258.

routinely used markings on trees and ground to record routes to their destinations.<sup>77</sup> Accounts from the Spanish expedition led by Manrique de Rojas in Florida to destroy the French Huguenot colony of Charlesfort in 1564, further suggest that similar successful geographical conversations with natives were achieved without the recourse to words. The initially hapless Rojas interrogated several groups in an effort to check the accuracy of the information he was collecting. Numbers seemed to be understood and, as in the French narratives, the reliance on visible objects (in this case the Spanish ship to symbolize previous Christian ships that had visited the river), mime, and pointing in cardinal directions were solid features of the exchange.<sup>78</sup> Rojas also indicated that the Indians he met used signed representations of “beards” as a metonym for “Europeans” or “Christians.” Words were also significantly involved, with the natives mapping the surrounding Indian communities through gestures and naming: “From the signs made by the *micoo* and the other Indians it was learned that the Christians had gone to the village of Guale and had not come to this one not to any of the seventeenth which, according to the signs they made, are in this harbor. They pointed with their hands to show the directions in which these villages were located and spoke their names. Other Indians who came in canoes and by land to see the frigate confirmed by their signs what the first ones had said.”<sup>79</sup> Despite these successes, Rojas was unable to identify the precise location of

---

<sup>77</sup> Despite the elaborate character of Indian cartographic system, there was much room for misunderstanding. For instance, a notable aspect is that “the few surviving maps drawn by Indians during the colonial period make no pictorial distinctions between rivers and trails in their representations of travel routes (Tanner 1989; Waselkov 1989a; De Vorsey 1998; G.M.Lewis 1998: 177)” Gregory A. Waselkov, “Exchange and Interaction Since 1500,” in William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 14, “Southeast,” edited by Raymond D. Fogelson (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 14: 686.

<sup>78</sup> “There he found about eighty Indians, and from their signs, he learned that there had been on that river three ships of Christians and that they had gone northward to where the point and river of St. Helena are said to be.” Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 311.

<sup>79</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 312.



the French fort. The conflicting information he received, however, may have derived from the natives' ignorance of the fort's location rather than from the inefficacy of sign-language. The Indians may also have favored the French, with whom they may have already concluded an alliance by then, and thus purposely misdirected the Spaniards. Only when they brought to him a Frenchman, who had been living with them since the departure of his fellow colonists, was Rojas ultimately able to discover the location of the abandoned French colony and erase all traces of it.<sup>80</sup>

Both natives and French, especially seamen who constituted the bulk of early exploratory parties, relied on astronomy for orientation and travel. Pointing to the sky may also have been commonly used to communicate direction. When René de Laudonnière sought to gather more information about two Florida Indian captives who had been taken on board the French ship, he “began to shew them al [sic] the parts of heaven, to the intent to learne in which quarter they dwelt.” Once again, questions about directions seemed to provide an adequate setting for successful communication since Laudonnière observed that, as a response to his inquiry, “straightway one of them stretching out his hand shewed [him] that they dwelt toward the North.”<sup>81</sup> However, pointing to invisible things in the distance was less reliable than pointing to nearby visible or audible rapids. If the answer seemed clear, we still do not know whether the question was understood. Similarly, despite Laudonnière's confidence in his ability to communicate with his two prisoners, his transcription of what they said to him through signs and incomprehensible words revealed that his understanding was limited to certain

---

<sup>80</sup> The Frenchman, Guillaume Rouffin (or Ruffin), chose to stay behind and to live with the natives when the rest of the colonists left on a highly hazardous journey back to France onboard the ship they had built with recycled materials. Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 313-15.

<sup>81</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 299.

specific gestures. Notably, height and size were predominant in his account. He probably interpreted the most evident gestures based on his own conception of the subject at hand and a great deal of wishful thinking: “they gave me to understand that they would bring me to see the greatest Lord of this country which they called Chiquola, which exceeded them in height (as they told me) a goode foote and a halfe. They said unto me that he dwelt within the land in a very large place and inclosed exceedingly high, but I could not learn wherewith.”<sup>82</sup> From Laudonnière’s transcription, we can almost picture the gestures made by his two Indian informers, and hear them pronounced *Chiquola*, the only word Laudonnière was able to discern. A close, attentive reading of the sources may thus allow historians to reconstitute the conditions and means used during exchanges with Native Americans as well as illuminate new sources of misunderstanding.

French colonists were conscious of the limits of nonverbal communication and therefore generally used sign-language to obtain information about resources that they could, for want of words to name and describe, concretely show to the Indians. “The Captain showed them some red copper, which they call *caignetdazé*, and pointing towards the said region, asked by signs if it came thence,” recalled the chronicler of Cartier’s first voyage.<sup>83</sup> In some instances, the French were even more prepared: Jean Ribault relied on both the precious materials brought to him or worn by the Indians, and on samples that he and his men had brought with them for the specific purpose of inquiring about the location of similar resources in the New World. The Indians, Ribault said, offered to the French “littell bagges of redd collous and some smale peces like unto oore, perceving also amonges them faire thinges paynted as yt gad byn with grayn of

---

<sup>82</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 298.

<sup>83</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 171. “Ledict cappitaine leur monstra du cuyvre rouge, qu'ilz appellent caignetdaze, leur monstrant vers ledict lieu et demandant par signe, s'il venoyt de la.”

scarlett, shewing unto us by signes that they had within the lande Gould, silver, and copper whereof we have brought some muster; also leade like unto ours, which we shewed unto them, turqueses, and a great abundaunce of perilles, which, as they declared unto us, they toke owt of oysters.”<sup>84</sup> Pointing to visible objects and expressing agreement were two simple signs securely understood by both parties. The French could therefore feel confident that the natives understood their requests and gave them proper answers. Even more rewarding was the exchange when the Indians spontaneously used this type of sign-language to indicate to the French that resources were available. Jacques Cartier strongly insisted on the fact that “without our asking any questions or making any signs,” his Indian guides reached for “the chain of the Captain’s whistle, which was made of silver, and a dagger-handle of yellow-copper-gilt like gold, that hung at the side of one of the sailors” before pointing in a general up-river direction.<sup>85</sup>

The disproportionate use of this type of communicative methods by the French must have made the newcomers’ goals and weaknesses particularly clear to the natives. It is very likely that they told the French what they wanted to hear in at least some instances, and often used this knowledge to direct the strangers where they pleased for their own political and commercial agendas. Despite undeniable limits and recurrent misunderstandings, the French expressed their continued trust in the adequacy of sign-language, particularly to gather information about local geography and the location of valuable resources. Although this confidence certainly derived more from the illusion of successful mutual understanding than from actual unequivocal communication, the

---

<sup>84</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2 : 290

<sup>85</sup> “sans que [nous] leur fissions aucune demande et signe, prindrent la chaisne du sifflet du cappitaine, qui est d’argent, et ung manche de pongnard, qui estoit de laitton jaulne comme or, lequel pendoit au coste de l’un de noz [compaignons] mariniers, et monstrentent que cela venoyt d’amont ledict fleuve.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 170-1.

French did have valid reasons to believe their exchanges with natives were effective. Many signs made by the Indians seemed familiar enough, the natives themselves seemed to understand the newcomers' questions and gestures, and, most of all, the French felt they could obtain the type of information that was most valuable to them at the time. They may simply not have felt a real need for further, more elaborate, mutual understanding that would have required much more intense effort on their part.

At this early juncture, the French seldom attempted to learn native languages or to rely on interpreters in any systematic manner. Although Jacques Cartier did establish a succinct lexicon of a St.Lawrence Iroquoian dialect during his first two travels, the words gathered seemed to have been the product of circumstantial communication rather than of a formal and systematic effort to learn the local language.<sup>86</sup> The words and phrases that they learned were mainly the ones that were frequently repeated by the natives and that the French could therefore make out in the midst of other, incomprehensible discourses. The meaning of a given word, moreover, was essentially deduced from the nonverbal elements accompanying its utterance. This is how, for instance, Cartier and his men learned that a leader of the Iroquoian peoples of the St.Lawrence was known as *agouhanna*, a word that was probably pronounced while pointing to a man whose demeanor (and that of the rest of the people toward him) and dress suggested his position. Bartering sessions helped the newcomers to learn that a hatchet was called *cochy* and “a

---

<sup>86</sup> Terms included in Cartier's lexicon (second voyage) pertained to the following categories: numbers (one through ten); human body parts (legs, feet, nails...); names of animal and vegetal eatable resources (salmon, whale, squirrel, figs, grapes, nuts...); Indian terms used to name European attire and objects (shoes, robe, shirts...); as well as phrases directly connected to the type of activities shared by the two groups, such as: “give me to drink,” “let's go to bed,” “come talk to me,” “be silent,” “give me a hatchet,” “let's go hunting.” Words associated with native ceremonies are also present: “to sing,” “to dance,” “to laugh,” “much thank;” Some words may testify of geographical communications between the two groups: “sun,” “stars,” “waves,” “wind,” “island,” “mountain,” “snow.” The only words associated with less practical matters are “cudonaguy” and “agojuda,” respectively identifying a deity and the Stadaconeans' enemies. Biggar, *Voyages*, 241-6.

knife, *bacan*.”<sup>87</sup> One night, while the natives were holding a loud ceremony on shore, the French, anchored at a distance on the river, were able to discern the frequent and collective repetition of the word *aguyase*, which they elucidated as “their term of salutation and joy,” probably partly because of the celebratory atmosphere surrounding the scene, and also because they may have previously heard it upon meeting new local groups.<sup>88</sup>

This approximate understanding of words and signs was enough to guarantee peaceful relations between the groups. The short-term goals of sixteenth-century French explorers, and more particularly the absence of any serious ambition to convert the natives to Christianity, may also explain why sign-language and nonverbal communication in general sufficed to satisfy the French. Even potentially damaging misuse of native signs and words could be overlooked as long as the French fulfilled their mission of exploration and peaceful contact with the Indians. The French first heard the Iroquoian word *agojuda* during an informative conversation they held with three Hochelagans on top of Mount Royal in 1535. Their three guides made signs of anger and displeasure, miming warfare and acts of cruelty, pointing to nearby materials such as wood and ropes to describe the armor and disposition of their enemies, whose dwellings

---

<sup>87</sup> The Indians probably used analogies to name the new objects brought by the French. It is likely that the word *cochy*, for instance, was the same used for a stone axe, or was based on the material or function of the new element of material culture. Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 300. In his analysis of early European recordings of Iroquoian languages, linguist Wallace Chafe pointed to the fact that “there are various examples of miscommunication between the elicitor of the words and his source (Mithun 1982, 231-33). The elicitor asked for the word for ‘salmon’ but was given the word for ‘pot’, presumably because he was pointing to a salmon in a pot. He asked for ‘bronze’ but was given the word for ‘ring’, presumably because he was pointing to a bronze ring.” Wallace Chafe, “The Earliest Encounters with Iroquoian Languages,” in *Decentring the Renaissance*, eds. Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 254.

<sup>88</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 151. “Durant laquelle [nuit] demoura icelluy peuple sus le bort dudict fleuve, au plus pès desdictes barques, faisant toute nuit plusieurs feuz et dansses, en disant à toutes heures, *aguyase* qui est leur dire de salut et de joye.”

they also vaguely situated by pointing up river. The people of Hochelaga certainly conceived of the military advantage they could have over their enemies if the newcomers allied with them and used their powerful weapons to help them gain victory. For the French, from this time on, *agojuda* was to be a synonym for bellicose “*mauvaises gens*,” bad people.<sup>89</sup> The French then stretched the meaning of the word, using it during a later exchange to describe a local deity of the natives, *Cudouagny*, and to “show them their error” in believing in him.<sup>90</sup> Later, the French claimed that the same word was used by a neighboring chief to warn them against their ill-intentioned allies in Stadacone (Donnacona, Taignoagny and Dom Agaya). When Cartier finally confronted the three men about the rumors, he very likely used the word *agojuda* to call them “traitors and rogues.”<sup>91</sup> However, the probable misuse of the word did not lead to any conflict.<sup>92</sup> Instead, even loosely used words empowered the French in their relations with the other.

---

<sup>89</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 171. “et qu’il y avoyt des *agojuda*, c'est-à-dire de mauvaises gens, qui estoient armés jusques sus les doigz, nous monstrant la façon de leurs armiures, qui sont de cordes et de boys, lassez et tissuez ensemble; nous donnant à entendre que lesdictz *agojuda* menoyent la guerre continuelle, les ungs es aultres; mais par deffault de langue, ne peusmes avoyr cognoissance combien il y avoit jusques audict pays.”

<sup>90</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 179-80. “Cedict people n’a aucune créance de Dieu qui vaille. (...) Apres qu’ilz nous eurent donné ces choses à entendre, nous leur avons remontré leur erreur (...) et leur fut remontré plusieurs autres choses de nostre foy ; ce que facilement ilz ont creu, et appelé leur Cudouagny, *agojuda*, tellement, que plusieurs foys ont pryé le cappitaine de les faire baptiser.”

<sup>91</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 187-88 and 190. “[Le capitaine] fut adverty par ung seigneur de la ville de Hagouchonda, qu’il se donnast garde de Donnacona, et desdicts deux meschants [Taignoagny et Dom Agaya], et qu’ilz estoient *agojuda*, qui est à dire traistres et meschans.” There is also a possibility that the Natives, aware of the extremely limited French understanding of the native languages, themselves stretched the meaning of some words to convey a general idea. *Agojuda* may not have been the appropriate term to talk about Donnacona’s plans, but it was known to be understood by the French as synonym for “bad.” This is how pidginized versions of Indian languages were often formed. “Et ledictz cappitaine leur respondit qu’ils n’estoient que traistres et meschans, ainsi qu’on luy en avoyt rapporté.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 190.

<sup>92</sup> The Indians themselves may have used the same word to designate various enemies. This seems to have been a common practice among Carib Indians on the island of Martinique as recorded in the mid-seventeenth century. A French observer commented on the fact that his Carib hosts called a semi-legendary tribe of “giants” who lived in the mountains and regularly raided the coastal villages by the name *inibis*, which they also used to speak of their enemies on the mainland. The author remarked: “we do not know if they are of the same race than the ones they fight in Pérou, whom they also call *inibis*, or if

With time and more frequent practice, and as “signs” of various sorts became increasingly codified, both groups (and particularly a few individuals within each group) became more adept at communicating through nonverbal means. In the early seventeenth century, Samuel de Champlain thus displayed remarkable achievements in the realm of non-linguistic understanding with several groups of Indians in Acadia, around modern-day Québec, and along the coast of New England. As explorer and official cartographer of several Crown-supported expeditions to settle Canada after 1604, Champlain felt, perhaps more than anyone else, the pressure and importance of obtaining geographical knowledge from the natives despite the language barrier. But while he proved very successful at gathering information from his Indian guides, he also successfully deciphered nonverbal clues on different topics.<sup>93</sup> In July 1605, Champlain was surveying the coast of New England in the hope of finding a more propitious location for a French settlement than the current precarious *habitation* in Sainte-Croix, where the colonists had endured terrible hardships that winter due to the cold and to deadly cases of scurvy. Near Nauset Harbor, Champlain inquired from the local Indians about the typical climate of the region: “We asked them if they had their permanent residence in this place, and whether it snowed much; but we could not find this out very well since we did not understand their language, although they attempted to explain it by signs, taking up sand in their hand, then spreading it on the ground, and showing it to be the color of our collars, and that it fell on the ground up to one foot in height. Others indicated that it was

---

it is because of their hatred against them that they call them as their enemies, because when they want to insult someone or something, be it stone or wood, they call it *inibis*.” My translation. Jean-Pierre Moreau, ed. *Un flibustier français dans la mer des Antilles, 1618-1620* (Paris: Seghers, 1990), 216.

<sup>93</sup> Champlain’s gathering of geographical knowledge and his communication with Indian guides through essentially nonverbal means will be analyzed in detail in Chapter Two.

less [than a foot], and also gave us to understand that the harbor never froze over.”<sup>94</sup> Despite Champlain’s disappointment to not have been able to discover “whether the snow lasted long,” this episode testifies of the creativity and ingenuity that went into such nonverbal conversations.

Around Massachusetts Bay, the Indians spoke to Champlain about a bird he had never seen or heard of before: the American turkey. It is astonishing to observe how accurate an image of the turkey Champlain was able to construct solely based on nonspeech communicative means. Through pantomime, vocal imitation of the bird’s song, and a few material clues such as feathers, Champlain gathered that this large, migratory, and, according to the consensual descriptions of the Indians, very tasty bird resembled France’s *coqs d’Inde* (large wild partridges). He also wondered if it was not the same bird he had seen in Mexico during his 1599 visit. However, he noted that this Latin American bird was smaller, did not sing nor tasted as good as the Indians seem to say their mysterious bird did. If we identify the “Mexican” bird as a turkey buzzard based on Champlain’s description, then the French explorer was very successful indeed at understanding Indian signs and nonverbal communications outside of the geographical sphere.<sup>95</sup> During the same expedition, Champlain was also able to understand from an

---

<sup>94</sup> “Voyages du Sieur de Champlain,” in Biggar, *Works of Champlain*, 1 : 352. My translation. “Nous leur demandasmes s’ils avoient leur demeure arrestee en ce lieu, s’il y negeoit beaucoup ; ce que ne peusmes bien sçavoir, pour ne pas entendre leur langage, bien qu’il s’y efforçassent par signe, en prenant du sable en leur main, puis l’espondant sur la terre de la hateur d’un pied : & d’autres nous monstroient moins, nous donnant aussi à entendre que le port ne geloit jamais.”

<sup>95</sup> “Voyages du Sieur de Champlain,” in Biggar, ed., *WSC*, op.cit, 1 : 360-361. “Les sauvages en toutes ces costes où nous avons esté, dissent qu’il vient d’autres oiseaux quand leur bled est à maturité, qui sont fort gros ; & nous contrefaisoient leur chant semblable à celui du cocq d’Inde. Ils nous en montrerent des plumes en plusieurs lieux, dequoy ils empannent leurs flesches & en mettent sur leur testes pour parade ; & aussi une maniere de poil qu’ils ont sous la gorge, comme ceux qu’avons en France : & disent qu’ils leur tombe [sic] une creste rouge sur le bec. Ils nous les figurerent aussi gros qu’une outarde, qui est une espece d’oye ; ayant le col plus long & deux fois plus gros que celles de pardeça. Toutes ces demonstrations nous firent juger que c’estoient cocqs d’Inde. Nous eussions bien desire voir ces oiseaux,



Indian chief named Anassou—and from signs only, for the lack of interpreters—that a foreign fishing ship anchored in a nearby river had killed five Indians. “And according to the way he depicted the men of the ship,” reported Champlain, “we judged they were English.”<sup>96</sup> A contemporary English account confirms that an English ship named the *Archangel* was near Champlain’s location at the time, and that captain Waymouth and his men kidnapped five Indian.<sup>97</sup> We may never know what signs, gestures, or mimes allowed the Indians to give an image of the nearby Europeans nuanced enough for Champlain to be able to correctly identify their nationality. They may have drawn the flag on the sand, or showed by signs a type of clothing or hat that was typical of the English and not of the French. In any case, these examples, and others in seventeenth-century sources, confirm that sign language was far from being as inadequate as previously thought, and that significant information could be accurately transmitted through non-speech codes, even as some degree of mutual linguistic understanding was being pursued through interpreters.

### **Performative Language**

Both groups also found a second, perhaps even more significant, ground for gratifying nonverbal communication. Emerging alongside sign-language, and quickly becoming increasingly elaborate in the hands of both parties, performative

---

aussi bien que de la plume, pour plus grande certitude. Auparavant que j’eusse veu les plumes & le petit bouquet de poil qu’ils ont sous la gorge ; & que j’eusse oy contrefaire leur chant, je croyois que ce fussent de certains oiseaux qui se trouvent en quelques endroits du Perous en forme de cocqz d’Inde, le long du rivage de la mer, mangeans les charognes et autres choses mortes, comme font les corbeaux : mais ils ne sont pas si gros & n’ont pas la barbe si longue, ny le chant semblable aux vrais cocqs d’Inde, & ne sont pas bons à manger comme sont ceux que les sauvages disent qui viennent en troupe en esté ; & au commencement de l’yver s’en vont aux pays les plus chauds, où est leur demeure naturelle.”

<sup>96</sup> “Voyages du Sieur de Champlain,” in Biggar, ed. *WSC*, op.cit., 1: 365. My translation. “Il nous dit qu’il y avoit un vaisseau à dix lieues du port, qui faisoit pesche de poisson, & que ceux de dedans avoient tué cinq sauvages d’icelle riviere, sous ombre d’amitié : et selon la façon qu’il nous depeignoit les gens du vaisseau, nous les jugeasme estre Anglois. “

<sup>97</sup> See note 1 in Biggar, ed., *WSC*, 1: 365.

communication offered a layered and omnipresent venue for successful communication and interaction. Performance as communication was more difficult to identify and define than sign-language because it consisted of a large variety of bodily behaviors, almost systematically collective, always intentional, and bearing a strong symbolic and ritual value.<sup>98</sup> Performances as means of nonverbal communication emerged early during the colonial encounter and remained core features of French-Indian relations throughout the colonial period. In fact, this kind of nonverbal communication may arguably have been the pillar of native-French diplomacy and an essential window into the relations the two groups forged with each other into the eighteenth century.<sup>99</sup>

North American native societies, while profoundly distinct from one another, were all structured around the collective performance of a number of religious, political, and social ceremonies: every aspect of life, from commercial bartering to the mourning of the dead, the yearly harvest, and the welcoming of strangers, were cause for ceremonial demonstrations in the community.<sup>100</sup> Despite the fact that French culture did offer remarkable and surprising foundations for the appreciation, understanding, and ultimate emulation of such performative communications, the ceremonies, gestures, and behaviors that formed this complex set of signs were and remained native in essence. Ethnographic

---

<sup>98</sup> I call “performative communication” all communication that involves more than simply figurative/iconic sign-language and has a ritual and/or symbolic meaning attached to it. The term does not suggest the untruthfulness of the actions, although this type of sign was often perceived as an “act” by French observers.

<sup>99</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) esp. chapter two; Gilles Havard, *Empire et métissages: Indiens et Français dans le Pays d'en Haut 1660-1715* (Paris: Septentrion, 2003), esp. chapters two and eleven.

<sup>100</sup> Mourning rituals left a particularly strong impression on the French, although they may not have been totally strange to them. Verrazzano wrote: “we consider them very compassionate and charitable toward their relatives, for they make great lamentations in times of adversity, recalling in their grief all their past happiness. At the end of their life, the relatives perform together the Sicilian lament, which is mingled with singing and lasts a long time.”Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 286.

and archaeological evidence confirmed that the various groups who met the French all possessed elaborate ceremonial practices, which could serve as windows into local traditions and beliefs for foreign observers. The St. Lawrence Iroquoians with whom Cartier had extensive dealings during his first two voyages, were semi-sedentary agriculturalists who closely resembled, culturally and socially, the peoples of the Great League of Peace that emerged a century later.<sup>101</sup> Their lives were deeply steeped in ceremonies and ritual celebrations closely associated with the maintenance of balance and order between humans, nature, and other mythical beings thought to inhabit it. The presence of early forms of wampum beads (called *esnogy* in Cartier's accounts), and the sheer number and astonishing designs of the pipe bowls recovered in some archaeological sites (such as the Mandeville site in Tracy, Québec where over 365 pipe fragments have been found), notably reveal the importance of gift-giving and ritual smoking for diplomatic, political, and religious proceedings.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Little is known about the people Cartier encountered around the present locations of Québec City and Montréal, essentially because, by the time the French returned with the firm intent to settle in Canada sixty years after Cartier's voyages, the inhabitants of Stadacone and Hochelaga and the surrounding towns within their area of influence had disappeared. Various hypotheses divide scholars about what happened to these people and their settlements: devastating epidemics, migrations, annihilation through warfare with neighboring groups, have been proposed as possible explanations. I use the word Iroquoian instead of Iroquois because we know that they belonged to the Iroquoian linguistic family, and to avoid confusion with the Iroquois people of New York (in a later period). An excellent and accessible work on this topic, which offers a good overview of both archaeological and historical studies of the people Cartier encountered is: Roland Tremblay, ed., *Les Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent: peuple du maïs* (Montréal: les Éditions de l'Homme, 2006); For an overview of the origins and fate of the Great League, see Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, eds. *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

Ethno-linguists have also confirmed that the dialect recorded by Cartier among the Stadaconans "belonged to the group of languages now classified as constituting the Northern Iroquoian branch of the Iroquois language family." Wallace Chafe, "The Earliest Encounters with Iroquoian Languages" in *Decentring the Renaissance*, 252-61.

<sup>102</sup> Tremblay, *Les Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent*, 67-72, 92-93. This is confirmed by Cartier's narratives, in which he recalled his first experience of smoking: "Nous avons expérimenté ladictte fume. Après laquelle avoir mys dedans nostre bouche, semble y avoir [mys] de la pouldre de poivre, tant est chaude." Biggar,

The location of the French Huguenot colony of Charlesfort on Port-Royal Sound in modern South Carolina, placed the French near the Guale, Yamassee and Cusabo people.<sup>103</sup> Laudonnière, who founded short-lived Fort Caroline to the south in 1564, at the mouth of the St. John's River in modern Florida, could have had dealings with Timucua Indians and other sparsely documented groups of central and southeast Florida. Although each of these cultural groups, and their individual tribal components, possessed their unique particularities, they all shared larger socio-cultural patterns together with the rest of southeastern natives, such as a system of relatively simple "life cycle ceremonies centered on the family," and more spectacular "calendrical rituals [that] were typically community events."<sup>104</sup> Laudonnière's account suggests that the French colonists were invited to visit a nearby Indian settlement at a particular time of the ritual calendar, and witnessed an important ceremony, which they called the "feasts of Toya." The celebration lasted several days and included public elements involving feathered and painted body adornments, dances, and songs as well as secret shamanic practices taking place away from the intruders' sight.

---

*Voyages*, 184. For a general and insightful overview of the cosmology and beliefs of northeastern Indians, see: George R. Hamell, "Mythical Realities and European Contact in the Northeast During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." *Man in the Northeast* No. 33, (Spring 1987), 63-87. "The assurance of physical, spiritual, and social well-being, long life through spiritual resuscitation, and success, especially in the conceptually related activities of courtship, hunting, and warfare" was ensured by frequent and diverse rituals. *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of the beliefs and ritual practices of the Natives of Florida, see Robert C. Galgano, *Feast of Souls: Indians and Spaniards in the Seventeenth-Century Missions of Florida and New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Comparing native beliefs in Florida and New Mexico, Galgano noted: "To create stability in their inconstant world, and to safely negotiate potential pitfalls, Indians relied on strictly arranged patterns of practices and beliefs to direct and protect them. While each group had its own rituals, values, and political autonomy, the native peoples of Florida and New Mexico – who numbered approximately 30,000 and 75,000 souls in each region – shared general cosmological concepts." *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Raymond D. Fogelson, ed., *Volume 14: Southeast*, in William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, 20 vols., op.cit., 14: 9.

Native ceremonies, albeit often unsettling to the French, immediately appeared to them as a particularly propitious setting to learn about native ways while strengthening ties with a given group. The importance of performance was a common feature through which all native cultures could be conceptually regrouped and ways to interact with them systematized. The fact that French chroniclers gathered much of their knowledge about Native Americans during ceremonies and through nonverbal, essentially sensory means, may partly explain why their descriptions of the indigenous people tended to be generalizing and largely oblivious of native individuality.<sup>105</sup> While sign-language was often an individual mode of expression, rarely involving more than two participants at a time, performative communication was an expression of the community in which everyone played a role. This collectivity held challenges for the French who were used to a more elitist diplomacy, centered on the interaction of leading individuals speaking in the name of their groups. While the French captains bestowed special gifts upon Indian leaders, they often had to stand quietly while the natives celebrated them and their crew, equally and without discrimination.<sup>106</sup>

Sixteenth-century French explorers expressed remarkable ambivalence in their attitudes towards nonverbal, performative signs. They considered them as both a convenient way to cement friendly relations with Indians, and a dangerously deceitful means of communication that could not be trusted. This dual judgment drove the French, paradoxically, to participate, often enthusiastically, in native ceremonies, while never

---

<sup>105</sup> In this sense, the nature of the signs through which the French deciphered native behavior profoundly determined their perceptions and depictions of indigenous societies, an aspect that has been largely overlooked by scholars of the period.

<sup>106</sup> For one example among many, see Biggar, *Voyages*, 162.

fully trusting or comprehending the full symbolic meaning of the rituals in which they shared.

The omnipresence of ceremonialism in native-French dealings must have been overwhelming, and perhaps exhilarating, to the newcomers. Although French explorers may have exaggerated the “great joy” manifested by the Indians upon their arrival, they did receive friendly, enthusiastic welcomes almost everywhere they landed, which no doubt contributed to their notions about the Indians’ submissiveness and the idea that the locals saw them as supernatural beings.<sup>107</sup> The primary appeal of performative signs was indeed sensory. Early encounters brought French and native bodies close together, creating opportunities for the French to observe and participate in Indian protocols. The spectacle offered by crowds of animated native groups during shore-side encounters was often visually, and audibly, appealing.<sup>108</sup> In some instances, French observers even found them significantly entertaining. The French sometimes used these ceremonies as edifying examples of the natives’ childishness and simplicity. Cartier for instance noted that, as he and his crew approached a local fishing party near Gaspé Bay, the Indians “showed great joy, and the men all began to sing and to dance in two or three groups, exhibiting signs of great pleasure at our coming.”<sup>109</sup> Performative signs, although clearly perceived as ritualistic and symbolic, seemed straightforward to the French, whose egos they repeatedly flattered. During early encounters, therefore, native performances were almost

---

<sup>107</sup> The issue of whether natives did perceive Europeans as deities and their material culture as bearing spiritual and magical powers is still open to debate. For an introduction to the question, see Bruce M. White, “Encounters with Spirits: Ojibwa and Dakota Theories about the French and their Merchandises,” *Ethnohistory*, 41: 3 (Summer 1994), 369-405. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984); Christopher L. Miller and George R. Hamell, “A New Perspective on Indian-White Contact: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade,” *The Journal of American History*, 73:2 (September 1986), 311-28.

<sup>108</sup> “They came toward us joyfully, uttering loud cries of wonderment, and showing us the safest place to beach the boat.” Verrazzano in Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 284.

<sup>109</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 301.

systematically deciphered as expressions of happiness, welcome, and gratitude.<sup>110</sup> This comforting interpretation in turn led the French to participate in other native protocols.

While early French explorers often dismissed Indian diplomatic codes as mere “signs of joy,” they also seemed to appreciate the metaphorical nature of the ceremonies of which they were the object. Cartier thus described a sort of aquatic ballet performed by “some of their women, who (...) danced and sang, standing in the water up to their knees.”<sup>111</sup> While the French ignored the exact meaning of sonorous signs commonly used by the natives, they nevertheless clearly realized that the startling “three shouts” that “the whole of Donnacona’s people cried out all together” and in “such a loud manner that it was awful to hear,” were performative in nature and bore a strong symbolic meaning.<sup>112</sup> A far cry from English depictions of the Indians’ “devilish” ceremonies, Verrazzano admired and was personally gratified that his hosts “had painted and decorated their faces with various colors, showing [the newcomers] that it was a sign of happiness.”<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> “Interpreting natives’ gestures, shouts, and apparent emotional states as signifying contentment with the French presence further confirmed belief in the assent of New World peoples to their colonial rule.” Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession: Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 60. Seed also expresses doubts regarding the veracity of French reports: “That so many Frenchmen, encountering so many diverse peoples of the Americas, could have nearly always encountered joy should create considerable suspicion.” *Ibid.*, 60. Rather than to doubt the actuality of these manifestations of joy, I believe we should try to elucidate their symbolic and ritual meaning among the natives. It is clear that what the French identified as “joy” were in fact more complex ceremonies that did not necessarily reflect the Indians’ happiness at the arrival of the whites.

<sup>111</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 300. The comparison of the native women’s performance to an “aquatic ballet” is borrowed from Réal Ouellet. Several French chroniclers during the colonial period did compare native dances and ceremonies to the ballet. This will be further developed in Chapter Four.

<sup>112</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 130. “avant despartir dudict lieu, firent une assurance lesdicts cappitaine et seigneur, de sorte merveilleuse ; car tout le peuple dudict [seigneur] Donnacona, ensemblement, gectèrent et firent troys criz, à plaine voix, que c’estoit chose orrible à ouyr, et attant prindrent congés les ung des aultres.” Loud repetitive shouts occur in several occasions through the sources; Verrazanno said: “they raised a loud cry,” Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 284.

<sup>113</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 285. John Smith, in contrast, wrote: “[They] cast themselves in a ring, dauncing in such severall postures, and singing and yielding out such hellish notes and screeches; being strangely painted...” John Smith, *The Generall Historie*, in *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith*, ed. Philip Barbour (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 2: 148. Negative descriptions of native music and dances are also found in the writings of William Strachey: “But their chiefs instruments are

Sensory satisfaction even extended to the taste buds of the explorers, with Ribault expressing his delight at the feast that was presented to him and his men during an otherwise routine encounter in Florida: “Thus being amonges them they presented us with their meale, dreassed and baked, verry good and well tasting and of good nurishment, also beanes, fishe, as crabbes, lopsters, crevices and many other kindes of god fishes, shewing us by signes that there [*sic*] dwellings were far of, and that if there provision had byn nere hande, they would have presented us with many other reffreshinges.”<sup>114</sup> Overall, the French felt honored by native ceremonial displays and appreciative of the easy access these pre-existing practices offered to mutual accommodation.

The physical and sensory appeal of Indian ceremonies became even more potent when native women ritually touched the newcomers, a gesture which may have served both as a symbol of the connection and close relations that native groups hoped to have with the strangers, as well as, perhaps, a way to magically appropriate some of the qualities or powers attributed to the visitors. In a memorable episode taking place in the Iroquoian town of Hochelaga in 1535, the French were treated as the bearers of great religious and magical power, when “at once, all the girls and women of the village, some of whom had children in their arms, crowded about [them], rubbing [the Frenchmen’s] faces, arms and other parts of the upper portions of [their] bodies which they could touch,

---

rattles made of small gourds or pumpions shells...These mingled with their voices, sometimes 20 or 30 together, make such a terrible howling as would rather affright than give pleasure to any man.” William Strachey, *The History of Travel, Caput 6*, in Edward W. Haile, ed., *The Jamestown Narratives* (Champlain: Roundhouse Ed, 2001): 642.

<sup>114</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 291.



weeping for joy at the sight of [them] and giving [them] the best welcome they could.<sup>115</sup>” This experience was all the more noteworthy that native women and children were often kept away from the visitors as a precaution during early encounters. However, it was not uncommon for a small group of chosen women to be actively involved in the ceremonial welcoming of the French. This was particularly true among the Iroquoian tribes of Canada, which happened to be matrilineal, and in which, therefore, women played an essential role in the political and social cohesion of the group. What the French saw as a charming *comité d’acueil* (welcome committee) was in fact a crucial clue of the important position of native women. While some women “danced and sang” in the cold waters of the St. Lawrence, another group “advanced freely towards us,” recalled Cartier, “and rubbed our arms with their hands. Then they joined their hands together and raised them to heaven, exhibiting many signs of joy.<sup>116</sup>” In another instance involving the same Indians from Hochelaga near Chaleur Bay, the men, we are told, “had made all the young

---

<sup>115</sup> “tout soudain, s’assemblerent toutes les femmes et les filles de ladicte ville, don’t l’une partie estoient chargees d’enffans entre leurs braz, qui nous vindrent [frotter] le visaige, braz et aultres endroiz de dessus le corps, ou ilz pouvoient toucher, pleurant de joie de nous veoyr, nous faisant la meilleur[e] chere qu’il leur estoit possible, en nous faisans signes qu’il nous pleust toucher leurdictz enffans.” Biggar, 162-3.

An ethnographic explanation for this behavior is provided through northeastern Indian cosmology as described by historian George Hamell: “The northeastern Woodland Indians share a traditional anthropocentric cosmology that places each community of real human man-beings at the center of the world, which itself is perceived as a great island at the center of a great lake. There are seven cardinal directions – centerness, belowness, aboveness, eastness, northness, westness, and southness. All manner of man-beings inhabit these realms, of which true, genuine, or real human man-beings, dwelling at the center, are one kind....Kinsmen and other man-beings, who live beyond the woods edge or the waters edge and who seek proper entry into the community of real human man-beings, must be greeted at the threshold and be (re)made fit to enter through rituals or physical, spiritual, and social transformation. The creation or reaffirmation of kinship and kinship responsibilities are the purposes of such rituals, purposes confirmed by the reciprocal exchange of gifts.” Hamell, “Mythical Realities and European Contact,” 68-9. This set of beliefs emphasizes the importance of “borders” such as the water’s edge or woods’ edge where most ceremonies took place between the French and Indians. It also explains why the Indians almost always asked the newcomers to come on shore previous to performing such rituals. The women described by Cartier were thus probably performing a propitiatory dance to incorporate the strangers, belonging to the water realm, to the tribe, on land.

<sup>116</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 300.

women retire into the woods, except two or three who remained, to whom [the French] gave each a comb and a little tin bell, at which they showed great pleasure, thanking the captain by rubbing his arms and breast with their hands.” These women may have held a certain rank or influential position in the group. Following this initial tactile exchange, another group of twenty women came out of the woods and “crowded about the captain and rubbed him with their hands, which is their way of showing welcome.” The small gifts offered by Cartier generated more songs and dances.<sup>117</sup> As a result of these experiences, the French came to see in the presence or absence of women at such ceremonies a reliable signal indicating either the peaceful or potentially hostile atmosphere of the exchange. They, however, failed to comprehend that native women were more than mere “supporting actresses” in these performances.

These physical manifestations were not simply pleasurable, they also bore meaning. Although the French frequently missed the full symbolic or diplomatic implications of native ceremonies and ritual behaviors, they did recognize in them a crucial source of information about local populations and their cultures, and a key to peaceful accommodation. The French felt comfortable with the degree of formality they encountered in their dealings with the natives. Welcome, exchange of gifts, joy, and gratitude were sources of emotional displays, but they always appeared more choreographed and orderly than chaotic. Laudonnière described native official protocol as up to the highest European standards. When the French delegation approached the native “king” and his company, “two of his sonnes which were with him, being goodly and strong men saluted them againe in a very good sort, and used very friendly entertainment on their part.” Immediately following these formal greetings, “the king

---

<sup>117</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 301.

(...) began to make an oration in his Indian language,” which Laudonnière elucidated, without any actual linguistic understanding but maybe thanks to nonverbal clues, as a cordial expression of “the great pleasure and contentment which he had to see them in that place.” “After these speeches,” Laudonnière continued, the king “led them toward his house, where he sought to entreat them very courteously.<sup>118</sup>” Formal salutations, oratorical greetings by a foreign “king,” and convivial entertainment around a great feast: Laudonnière was on familiar ground.<sup>119</sup> The relative passivity of the French and their submissiveness to Indian etiquette during early encounters was not the product of self-preservation alone. The Frenchmen also recognized certain aspects of Indian diplomacy as similar to their own, and therefore adjusted spontaneously and without much difficulty to the new protocol. In this sense, performative communication played an essential role in mutual accommodation. The strict choreography of native ceremonies also facilitated the French learning process, and left little room for rogue behavior, which may have reassured the newcomers.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 304.

<sup>119</sup> Focusing on the English colonization of North America, Francis Jennings argues that early observers did not intend to compare or equate in any way Indian chiefs with the kings of Europe when they used the term “king” to refer to Indian leadership. Emphasizing Anglo-Saxon semantic traditions, he points to the fact that “through the fourteenth century the native Irish chiefs of kindreds styled themselves kings of nations and were so described by Anglo-Norman colonists, who simultaneously asserted that these Irish kings were vassals of the king of England.” The use of the word “king” should thus not be seen as a mark of the Europeans’ inability to understand Indian politics: “Whatever the defects in observation of these adventurers and colonizers,” Jennings stresses, “they knew how to discover holders of power and they were adept at dealing with them.” Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 113-115. I think observations of the demeanor and appearance of the Indian leaders played a crucial part in identifying them as “kings.” For a discussion of French perception of Indian leaders as “kings,” see Peter Cook, “Kings and Captains and Kin: French Views of Native American Political Cultures in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries” in Peter C. Mancall, ed. *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 150-1624* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 307-40.

<sup>120</sup> Jean Ribault took particular notice of the stern countenance and orderly behavior he witnessed among the Indians, with which discipline among his own men compared poorly. The first Indian leader he met, wrote Ribault, “set fourth and received me gentlyes and rejoiced after there mannour, all his men following him with great silence and modesties, yea, with more then our men did.” During other

During this period, the French also began to pay particular attention to the nonverbal components of Indian discourses as a way to break the language barrier. This still inconsistent effort was only the first step in what would become a significant and increasingly elaborate practice, with the development of long-term, sounder French-native relations in the seventeenth century. While North American Indian groups greatly valued oratory and eloquence, the nonverbal elements of public discourses (gestures, dancing, pantomime, mnemonic devices, dress, etc) were far from subordinate to the spoken word. Indian diplomacy exposed the intruders to elaborate and animated native speeches on a regular basis. Some of these speeches went almost unnoticed in the narratives for lack of linguistic understanding. However, whenever meaning seemed to be accessible through the elucidation, even far-fetched, of the nonverbal elements surrounding the oration, the French did reach for it.

One of the most famous occurrences of this important aspect of intercultural communication occurred after the French planted a large cross in Gaspé Bay in July 1534. The French based their interpretation of the speech given by Chief Donnacona in reaction to the planting of the cross on the most transparent gestures he made, the tone of his voice, and to a certain extent, on their own projected anxiety regarding the probability of a diplomatic incident. The chief, described Cartier, “made us a long harangue, making the sign of the cross with two of his fingers; and then he pointed to the land all around about, as if he wished to say that all this region belonged to him, and that we ought not to set up this cross without his permission.”<sup>121</sup> The sign of the cross seemed clear enough to

---

encounters, he also noticed “a shewe of great obedience to there kings, superyours, and elders,” as well as “a good and grave fashion and behavior, right souldier like with a warlike a bouldnes as might be.” Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 288.

<sup>121</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 302.

identify with certainty the subject at hand; the pointing to the landscape around was, as we have observed, not a novelty of French-native nonverbal exchanges, and clearly had something to do with geography and territory; the tone of Donnacona's harangue must have strikingly differed from that of his previous "welcoming" speeches, since the French did not consider the possibility that the *agouhanna* was simply saying that the cross would be visible from a vast distance. Instead, his position – farther than usual from the French boats – and his overall attitude may have combined with the oration to shape the negative French inference. Subsequently, Cartier almost systematically overlooked the specific meaning or function of the official speeches he witnessed, qualifying them of "*long sermon et preschement*," "in the fashion of the country," and simplistically equating them with a traditional form of welcome.<sup>122</sup> But more importantly, the French did seem to realize that the harangue itself, as a whole, functioned as a "sign," which bore meaning and consequences for the relations of the two groups. Donnacona was perfectly aware of the fact that the newcomers would not be able to understand the literal his speech, which was therefore intended as a symbolic performance directed to both his people and the Frenchmen. Before the French were able to grasp the specific content of Indian oratory, they were mindful of its performative value.

The French navigated constantly between the recognition and appreciation of native protocols as worthy and familiar diplomatic codes that needed to be honored, and

---

<sup>122</sup> Biggar translates "*preschement*" and "*sermon*" as "speech" and "harangue", which does not do justice to the clear religious parallel drawn here by the author between Indian oratory and the "sermons and preaching" the French heard in church. This comparison had probably much to do with the length and passion of native orations. Biggar, *Voyages*, 125, 142-43. In fact, Cartier may have consciously omitted valid reasons the Indians may have had to be angry at the Frenchmen, which could have helped explained Donnacona's attitude and discourse. Also : "Et lors commença ledict seigneur a faire ung long sermon et preschement, comme cy davant est dit, estre leur coustume de faire joie et congnoissance, en faisant celluy seigneur chere audict cappitaine et sa compaignie." Biggar, *Voyages*, 154.

the perception of all Indian ceremonies as suspicious theatrical acts. When Cartier and his companions were formally guided to the central open ground in Hochelaga and made to sit on mats while several hundreds inhabitants sat at a distance all around them, the French chronicler chose to draw a parallel between the staging of this historic encounter and the staging of *mystères*, which were edifying religious plays of the time: “The men made the women retire, and themselves sat down upon the ground round about us, as if we had been going to perform a miracle play.”<sup>123</sup> The French felt they were not only the center of attention, but also the prime actors of an elaborate act. The degree of codification the French witnessed in Indian social gatherings, while somehow familiar and reassuring to them, also brought doubts about the genuineness of native actions. Collective rejoicings seemed disproportionate in regards to the “trifles” distributed by the French. Mourning ceremonies involved the entire group and powerfully emotional outpours. In many ways, Indian reactions appeared exaggerated or hard to read to the French. The newcomers also clearly saw in native ceremonies theatrical aspects that made them equate rituals that bore deep religious and political meanings with simple forms of entertainment.<sup>124</sup>

In Florida, the Charlesfort colonists, who had been summoned to attend an important ritual celebration in a nearby Indian village, reacted more like the spectators of

---

<sup>123</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 163. “les hommes firent retirer les femmes, et se assirent sus la terre, à l’entour de nous, comme si eussions voulu jouer ung mistère.” *Mystères* or “miracle plays,” were in the Middle Ages and early modern period theatrical shows with a religious, and often moralizing theme. Their origin goes back to Greek and Roman plays, although after the tenth century, the content of the plays was generally borrowed from the Old and New Testament and the Lives of the Saints. In the fifteenth century, many such plays were dedicated to the Virgin Mary. By the time Cartier sailed to Canada, traditional religious *mystères* were usually preceded by a sermon in prose, and followed by a *Te Deum* sang by the church choir. The fact that the Indian ceremonial choreography evoked such familiar theatrical shows for Cartier can explain his readiness to perform an oration (reading from book of prayers), and to make his men sing the *Te Deum* later that day in the presence of the Hochelaga natives.

<sup>124</sup> This point will be more fully developed in Chapter Four.

a classic Greek drama than like the respectful allies their hosts expected them to be. The stage of this three-day long “feast of Toya” was “a great circuit of ground with open prospect and round in figure.” The costumes lent themselves to the general theatrical atmosphere, with “all [who] were chosen to celebrate the feast, being painted and trimmed with rich feathers of divers colours.” The principal “actors,” who the French later discovered were known as *Jawas*, were also easily identifiable. The French chronicler was particularly careful in recording the various entrances and exits of the participants, their accessories, and the sounds and gestures emanating from the native women, who resembled, in French eyes, the choir of a Greek tragedy:

When they were come they set themselves in order, & followed three Indians, which in painting and in gesture were differing from the rest: each of them bare a Tabret on their hand, dancing and singing in a lamentable tune, when they began to enter into the midst of the round circuit, being followed of others which answered them again, After that they had sung, danced, and turned three times, they fel on running like unbridled horses, through the midst of the thickest woods. And then the Indian women continued all the rest of the day in teares as sad and woful as was possible: & in such rage they cut the armes of the yong girls, which they lanced so cruelly with sharpe shells of Muskles that the blood followed which they flang into the ayre, crying out three times, *He Toya*.<sup>125</sup>

At no point in the narrative did the French seem to have taken seriously the events and emotions portrayed by the natives. Instead, they kept a safe conceptual distance by treating the ceremony as an entertaining, though sometimes puzzling or intimidating, show. The cynical colonists even got in trouble with the local chief who “was exceedingly offended when he saw them laugh.”<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> In Florida, for instance, the French colonists witnessed elaborate and important ceremonies but were more amused by them than they understood their meaning. They observed attentively the costumes and behaviors of the participants, trying to elucidate century-old dances and religiously-loaded practices as simple mimes with single evident meaning. Laudonnière, “L’histoire notable,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 303-4.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

This constant ambiguity between ritual and theatre in French conceptions of native ceremonies seriously undermined their ability to fully grasp the meaning of the messages conveyed to them. While they seemed able to identify the performative value of a ceremony and often complied for accommodation purposes, they failed to trust the messages when they understood them, and often did not even consider the possibility of a serious matter being expressed through this means. A perfect illustration of this attitude and its consequences for intercultural relations occurred while Cartier and his men prepared to sail up-river from Stadacone, where Chief Donnacona and his people resided, to Hochelaga, another major settlement and a potential political competitor of the former. Donnacona, together with two fellow tribesmen who had returned from their eight-month journey in France, Dom Agaya and Taignoagny, repeatedly tried to dissuade the French from making this trip.<sup>127</sup> Finally, on September 18, 1535, three local shamans enacted an ominous ceremony, which may have aimed to convey to the French the warnings they had received in their dreams about the dangers involved in a trip to Hochelaga.<sup>128</sup> The ceremony included a great deal of miming, the use of costumes and accessories, extensive although incomprehensible dialogues, as well as what would have appeared to the French as a final *deus ex machina* to close the act. This, however, did not undermine the significance the inhabitants of Stadacone attributed to the ceremony. The performative aspects of the message did not, in their view, make it less authentic. On the

---

<sup>127</sup> Scholars have debated the reality and reasons for their insistence. They may have feared that the Hochelagans would reap the benefits of the alliance with the French and take the commercial advantage over them. They may also have wished to conclude a solid alliance with the French, who failed to comprehend or answer their repeated invitations to come to Stadacone. Lastly, they may have tried to warn the French about the timing of their projected trip, which threatened to extend past the first snows and therefore endanger the newcomers and compromise their ability to return.

<sup>128</sup> This is what the Indians told the French, probably honestly: "The Captain asked them what was the trouble. They answered that their god, Cudouagny by name, had made an announcement at Hochelaga, and that the three above-mentioned Indians had come in his name to tell them the tidings, which were that there would be so much ice and snow that all would perish." Biggar, *Voyages*, 139.



contrary, according to native oratorical traditions, they were supposed to make it all the more convincing.

But to the French, Indian shamans, as the prime “illusionists,” were the most deceitful actors of all. Cartier thus reported that the masterminds of the plan (supposedly Donnacona and his two sons), “dressed up three Indians as devils, arraying them in black and white dog-skins, with horns as long as one’s arm and their faces coloured black as coal.”<sup>129</sup> From the start, the French therefore suspected an intentional “staging,” with the leaders of the group as sole “directors” of the deceitful play. While the rest of the Indians remained at a short distance in the woods (as if backstage, awaiting to enter), the three performers passed near the French ship in a canoe: “And as they drew near, the one in the middle made a wonderful harangue, but they passed by our ships without once turning their faces towards us, and proceeded to head for the shore and to run their canoe on land.”<sup>130</sup> The scene grew stranger to the French: once on shore, the three masquerading Indians fell motionless in the canoe and were transported into the woods by the rest of Donnacona’s people. For the next half-hour, the French could only hear the performance, reporting a long “preaching and speechifying” taking place behind the forest screen. Finally, Dom Agaya and Taignoagny emerged, probably as the most appropriate emissaries because of their familiarity with the French and their language. They then put on an essentially French performance, mimicking the religious gestures they had observed among the strangers, in an effort to convey more efficiently, in appropriate cultural terms, their message:

Taignoagny and Dom Agaya came out of the wood, walking in our direction, with their hands joined, and their caps under their arms, pretending to be much

---

<sup>129</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 136.

<sup>130</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 137.

astonished. And Taignoagny began to speak and repeated three times “Jesus,” “Jesus,” “Jesus,” lifting his eyes towards heaven, Then Dom Agaya called out “Jesus,” “Maria,” “Jacques Cartier” looking up to heaven as the other has done.<sup>131</sup>

Although the French scornfully dismissed these “grimaces and gesticulations,” the potential for mutual understanding through cross-cultural performances was real. The natives knew the French words and bodily behavior that were attached to the subject of religion and the summoning of God’s protection when facing difficulties. The French actually managed to make some sense of the three Indians’ performance, although they chose to ignore their warning. In the end, Cartier assured his Indian allies that the Christian God would preserve them on their journey, and that the native deity was mistaken in predicting a harsh winter. Interestingly, Cartier did not simply disregard the Indians’ beliefs. Instead, he went along with what he perceived as a childish performance and affirmed that he had spoken to Jesus through his own priests “and there would be fine weather.”<sup>132</sup>

To the French, sounds, physical touch, the sharing of food, songs and dances, orations and other Indian ceremonies were all codes, which, as such, could be deciphered, used, and broken. The French conception of Indian ceremonies as theatrical acts thus favored both successful accommodation and increasing confrontation. Because performances seemed easy to understand and to participate in, the French often spontaneously emulated some aspects of native rituals when they did not conflict with their own values and etiquette. But, for the same reason, the French also felt that they could as easily deceive the natives through performances that fit their own goals. Lastly, because they never seemed to consider native ceremonies as strictly diplomatic or

---

<sup>131</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 138.

<sup>132</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 139.

political in nature, the French missed essential elements in native communications, which bore potentially devastating consequences for the emerging relations between the two groups.

Not only did the French perceive the informative potential of native ceremonies, but they also used their own rituals and staged their own performances in an effort to communicate specific notions to the natives and to favor accommodation. One of the first things that Jean Ribault did upon making contact with the first group of Indians he met in Florida, was to stage a short Christian ceremony: “we fell to the grownd a littell waye from them, to call upon the name of God, and to beseche him to contynewe still his goodness towards us, and to bring to the knoweledg of our Savior Jesus Christ this pooer people.”<sup>133</sup> While the prayers were genuinely directed to the Christian God, the spectacle was also clearly intended for the nearby Indian audience who, Ribault happily reported, “beheld and herkened unto us very attentively, without eyther speaking or moving.”<sup>134</sup> When Jacques Cartier ordered the large cross to be planted on the Gaspé, he also made sure his men acted the Christian rituals for the Indian observers: “we erected this cross on the point in their presence and they watched it being put together and set up. And when it had been raised in the air, we all knelt down with our hand joined, worshipping it before them; and made signs to them, looking up and pointing towards heaven, that by means of this we had our redemption, at which they showed many marks of admiration, at the same

---

<sup>133</sup> Ribault, “True Discoverie,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 288. Patricia Seed explores various aspects of “theatrical rituals of French political possession” and the unique importance and meaning of “*cérémonies*” in sixteenth-century French culture but misses the reciprocal influence of native rituals and practices upon colonial actions. Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, op.cit., 41-68, esp. 48-56.

<sup>134</sup> Ribault, “True Discoverie,” in Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 288

time turning and looking at the cross.”<sup>135</sup> The entire ceremony was clearly conceived and enacted as an intentional, visually striking showcase of Catholic religious principles.

French use of performative signs often mirrored Indian practices, while introducing specifically French cultural elements. Although evidence is missing on how the natives perceived these foreign, yet not unfamiliar signs, we can suspect that they did interpret French performances as equivalent to certain of their own practices. The French, for instance, repeatedly noticed that Canadians they encountered in the 1530s vocally expressed their satisfaction and agreement with three collective and extremely loud shouts.<sup>136</sup> During such a celebration, while the natives danced and sang at the edge of the woods, Cartier thus fired a dozen small artillery pieces in the forest, as his own brand of sonorous rejoicing.<sup>137</sup> In Hochelaga (modern-day Montreal), the French emulated the musicality of Indian ceremonies by playing trumpets “and other music instruments,” and singing psalms.<sup>138</sup> French performances therefore fulfilled both French, Christian functions and native protocol. In another instance, Cartier gave a crucifix to an Indian

---

<sup>135</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2 : 302.

<sup>136</sup> “Et lors, tous les gens dudict seigneur se prindrent à faire troys cris [et hurlements], en signe de joye et d’alliance.” Biggar, *Voyages*, 133.

<sup>137</sup> This was actually a French military practice. As early as 1557, a traveler to France Antarctique, as was known the French colony in Brazil, reported that it was “the custom” to “fire a few canon shots to warn the inhabitants” of the French arrival, after what the locals came to the shore to welcome the expedition. Jean de Léry, *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, ed. Frank Lestringant (Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 1994), 147.

Early seventeenth-century documents also suggest that the firing of weapons was already becoming codified as a shared sign of rejoicing among French and natives. See Sagard, *Histoire du Canada*, 48. Later in the seventeenth century, Father Louis Hennepin, traveling in the Great Lakes region, reported that to celebrate the launching of their new ship, the French “fired three salutes with [their] cannons, and sang the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving, which was followed by several *Vive le Roy!*” F. Louis Hennepin, *A Description of Louisiana* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilm, Inc, 1966), 85. It is possible that the sonorous code evolved from an essentially French practice into a more syncretic one, for instance by firing the cannons three times instead of once and adding a song at the end of the ceremony, to emulate certain equivalent native codes. Because none of these practices would have conflicted with French rituals, it is difficult to assess the extent of native cultural influence.

<sup>138</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 167. “Ce fait, le cappitaine [*sic*] commanda sonner les trompettes et aultres instrumens de musique, de quoy ledict people fut fort resiouy [*sic*].”

orator, and made him kiss it before hanging it around his neck.<sup>139</sup> Although the French may not have been fully conscious of how the Indians could perceive their actions as slightly different versions of the same core rituals they themselves performed, they did realize that performances were a successful means of communication and accommodation. French-Indian ceremonies were not simply opportunities for unwitting “creative misunderstandings.” They were also the stage for what one could call “unintentional understandings.”

During their visit to Hochelaga, Cartier and his men found themselves at the heart of some of the most elaborate and symbolic Indian ceremonies they ever experienced. When the chief, who Cartier described as partially crippled, communicated by signs his desire that the French captain touch his legs and arms, Cartier got a chance to perform a symbolic act that was meaningful to both Indian and French cultures, although in different ways. It is likely that the fact of touching a person upon meeting was a sign of respect and humility in Iroquois culture, a first step toward trust and friendship. Cartier, on the other hand, believed that the Indian asked him to cure his crippled members. In France, only one person was believed to receive the power from God to heal and cure the sick and the invalid. The King of France, on the day of his coronation and during a few religious celebrations throughout his life, was said to be capable of accomplishing miracles by touching “*les écrouelles*,” the sick members of his people.<sup>140</sup> In his home country, Cartier would certainly have been charged with sacrilege for acting as he did. But among the Indians, his actions were not only accepted but celebrated.

---

<sup>139</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 154.

<sup>140</sup> Marc Bloch, *Les Rois Thaumaturges : étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Paris : A. Colin, 1961).

Reassured in the power he thought he gained over the locals, Cartier further adopted the Indian codes for symbolic communication in order to introduce Christian notions: he thus imperceptibly transformed a traditional native ceremony into a Christian one by reading out loud St. John's Gospel and a book of prayers.<sup>141</sup> From the native point of view, the incomprehensible discourse performed by Cartier could be understood as the French equivalent of Indian harangues and could therefore fulfill important native ceremonial and diplomatic etiquette. Cartier then chose to perform with his men the traditional Christian hymn of praise known as *Te Deum* (or *Te Deum Laudamus*), which customarily closed French religious plays (the *mystères*) evoked earlier by Cartier. This suggests that it was the performative aspects of native ceremonies that inspired the French to turn to their own ritual drama. In this instance, the accommodation resulted less from a convenient and unintentional misunderstanding than from a conscious, performative effort of the French, which led to mutual, if partial, understanding. Both groups essentially agreed on the symbolic function of the discourse and of the music that followed. The French could not possibly have imagined that the natives would understand the actual Christian content of the readings. Instead, there is a chance that Cartier realized that his speech itself was an effective sign to accommodate Indian diplomacy, while pleasing his French sponsors with Christian overtones. Although there is more evidence of French effort to emulate native ceremonies than of the other way around, it is likely that the natives perceived French diplomatic codes as close enough to theirs, despite essential differences, to also make an effort to adjust to them. There was a true intentionality in the fact that one of the native leaders met by Giovanni da Verrazzano "imitated [the visitors'] manners, tasted [their] food, and then courteously

---

<sup>141</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 103-4.

took his leave.”<sup>142</sup> Historical interpretations that reduce mimesis during early encounters to a sign of the failure of efficient cross-cultural communication in the absence of language thus miss important dimensions of nonverbal exchanges and accommodation.<sup>143</sup>

Some of the most potent testimonies to the success of performative communication were the culturally-syncretic ceremonies that took place in this early period of contact. Just as Cartier thirty years later set up a cross in Donnacona’s territory, and as Ribault planted two engraved stone pillars in Florida thirty years after that, the small French party who allegedly landed in Brazil in 1503 determined to plant a large wooden cross before sailing back to France. The crew’s carpenter apparently took great care in crafting the “well-painted” cross measuring thirty-five “*pieds*” in height, which bore “on one side, the name of our Holy Father the Pope of Rome, of the King our Lord, of His Highness Admiral of France; of the Captain, bourgeois and companions from the greatest to the meanest.”<sup>144</sup> One of the *gentilhommes* of the group composed a Latin verse, which cleverly revealed the date of the planting while celebrating its initiators, which was engraved on the other side of the cross.<sup>145</sup> Captain de Gonnevillle actively sought to integrate their local hosts to the grandiose ritual surrounding the planting of the

---

<sup>142</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 285. Verrazzano also saw a promising sign for future conversion in the fact that the natives often “imitated everything that they saw us Christians do with regard to divine worship, with the same fervor and enthusiasm that we had.” Ibid, 1: 287.

<sup>143</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 99. “appropriative mimesis, imitation in the interest of acquisition. As such it need not have entailed any grasp of the cultural reality of the other, only a willingness to make contact and to effect some kind of exchange.”

<sup>144</sup> The *pied* is the old french foot (or *pied du Roy*), equivalent to 1,066 feet. The cross therefore measured over 35 feet, or 10.66 meters.

<sup>145</sup> The verse read: HIC SACRA PLAMARUS POSVIT GONIVILLA BINOTUS; GREX SOCIUS PARITER, NEVSTRAQUE PROGENIES. (“This monument was here devoted by Binot Paulmier de Gonnevillle, in the company of both the indigenous and the Normand population” my translation). There are, in this verse, one M, three C, three L, one X, seven V, and nine I, which, in Roman numerals, makes 1504 (1000+300+150+10+35+9), the year the cross was planted. M. d’Avezac, ed., *Campagne du navire l’Espoir de Honfleur 1503-1504 : Relation authentique du voyage du Capitaine de Gonnevillle ès nouvelles terres des Indes...* (Paris : Challamel Aîné, 1869), 79.

cross, which symbolically took place on Easter 1504. “And was the said cross carried by the Captain and principals of the ship going barefoot; with the help of the Lord Arosca and his children and other Indian Lords, who were invited as an honor, of which they showed themselves content. Following was the crew in arms, singing the litany, and a large crowd of Indian people of all ages, to whom we had celebrated this moment far in advance, who remained silent and attentive to the *mistère*.”<sup>146</sup> This elaborate ceremony involved the indigenous Brazilians as more than mere spectators. After the cross had been set in place, the French fired several pieces of artillery and offered a feast and some “honorable” gifts to those they perceived as the local aristocracy, while the rest of the native inhabitants received smaller “trinkets.” The trumpets and drums, the singing, the procession, the colorful decorations on the cross, the discourse probably pronounced by the French captain, and the sharing of food and gifts all represented acceptable and meaningful elements for both cultures, linking them more tightly than many commercial accomplishments.

Because of their tendency to equate Indian ceremonies and theatre, however, Frenchmen also used performances in deceitful ways. Ironically, French chroniclers repeatedly justified the use of deceiving performances as a necessary protection against potential native trickery, although throughout the period, there were no clear incidents of Indian betrayal or surprise attack. In the winter of 1535-1536, Cartier and his scurvy-stricken men went through much trouble to hide their diseases and weaknesses from their neighbors for fear that the natives take advantage of the situation to attack them. To

---

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-1. My translation. I kept the word *mystère* (see note 95), which I prefer to “miracle play,” the translation offered by Biggar and Quinn for the Cartier narrative.



convince the Indians that everything was as usual inside the fort, Cartier, serving as the lead actor and director, used mimes, sounds, exaggerated gestures, and even accessories:

And to hide the sickness, our Captain, whom God kept continually in good health, whenever they [the Indians] came near the fort, would go out and meet them with two or three men, either sick or well, whom he ordered to follow him outside. When these were beyond the enclosure, he would pretend to try to beat them, and vociferating and throwing sticks at them, would drive them back on board the ships, indicating to the Indians by signs, that he was making all his men work below the decks...And the Captain had the sick men hammer and make a noise inside the ships with sticks and stones, pretending that they were calking.<sup>147</sup>

By this time, Jacques Cartier had already proven himself an adept actor. As early as 1534, during his first voyage in Canada, he demonstrated not only that he conceived of non-linguistic signs as an efficient means of communication, but that he knew the codes well enough to break them. In order to take several captives among Donnacona's entourage, he used a sign that he knew would be understood as a peaceful invitation to trade: "when [Donnacona] had finished his harangue, Cartier recalled, we held up an axe to him, pretending we would barter it for his fur-skin." There was no misunderstanding there. The French were intentionally misleading the Indians, and Donnacona and his people approached the French ship, confident in the meaning of a well-known sign. Suddenly, "one of [Cartier's] men, who was in [the] dinghy, caught hold of [Donnacona's] canoe, and at once two or three more stepped down into it and made the Indians come onboard our vessel."<sup>148</sup> To reassure the "astonished" Indians and maintain

---

<sup>147</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 209. "Et pour couvrir ladicte maladie, lors qu'ils venoyent près de nostre fort, nostre cappitaine, que Dieu a tousiours preservé debout, sortoyt audavant d'eux, avecq deulx ou troys hommes, tans sains que malades, lesquels il faisoit sortyr après luy. Et lors qu'il les voyoit hors du parc, faisoit semblant de les voulloir battre, en criant et en leur jectant bastons après eulx, les envoyant à bord, monstrant par signes esdictz sauvages, qu'il faisoit besongner [tous] ses gens dedans les navires. (...) Et faisoit ledict cappitaine battre et mener bruyr esdictz malades dedans les navires, avecq bastons et caillouds, faignant gallifester."

<sup>148</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 302.

peace, Cartier and his men then further manipulated communicative codes, showing their unsuspecting captives “every sign of affection,” and offering them food and drinks. Eventually, after more ceremonies and conversations, the French offered to take Donnacona’s two sons to France.<sup>149</sup> Dom Agaya and Taignoagny were among the very rare Native Americans to visit Europe and live to tell their people about it. They returned to Canada on Cartier’s second expedition nearly a year later.

### **Senses, Misunderstandings and Conflicts**

It was neither the breach of nonverbal codes by the French nor the inefficacy of performances and sign-language as communicative means that was cause for conflict and the failure of accommodation in early sixteenth-century America. Without a doubt, the French were often mistaken about important aspects of Indian diplomacy and made some serious blunders. Gift-giving, for instance, was a difficult concept to grasp, because of its manifold meanings, as act of barter and trade, fulfillment of implicit reciprocal obligations, the sealing of alliance, or ritual exchange preceding further ceremonies.<sup>150</sup> Repeatedly, the French distributed gifts to the natives following their own traditional gendered and hierarchical divisions, although the Indians, for whom European objects had different uses and values, may simply have been unaware of the attempted favoritism.<sup>151</sup> When an Indian on shore held up “a burning stick” to Verrazzano and his

---

<sup>149</sup> In fact, Donnacona’s two sons were in effect kidnapped by the French, which may explain why the relationship between the groups rapidly deteriorated afterwards.

<sup>150</sup> On the potential misunderstandings surrounding colonial gift-giving and their consequences, see Seth Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke and Jamestown* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006).

<sup>151</sup> In Hochelaga, Cartier physically separated men, women, and children and gave them different gifts, which were supposed to fit their status and primary social occupation in society: Biggar, *Voyages*, 166. “The Captain had all the men range themselves on one side, the women on another and the children on

men, they were puzzled and in return fired their muskets, failing to understand the meaning of what may have been a diplomatic presentation of a calumet, or an attempt to guide the visitors to shore with fire.<sup>152</sup> Although Cartier understood that objects made of *esnoguy*, or white shell beads, were of high value among the natives, he recurrently failed to comprehend that the exchanges that involved such forms of wampum bore a unique symbolic meaning for their Indian counterparts.<sup>153</sup> Surprisingly, however, these major and potentially consequential misunderstandings did not lead to violence or the unraveling of native-French relations. In many ways, misunderstandings between French and Indians in the early sixteenth-century were anticlimactic. Miscommunications, errors in interpretations, and even more serious cultural offenses were not as damaging as one might predict. Perhaps the mutual knowledge that communication was still precarious

---

another, and to the headmen he gave hatchets, to the other knives, and to the women, beads and other small trinkets. He then made the children scramble for little rings and tin *agnus Dei*." The original French version has: "fist ledict cappitain ranger tous les hommes d'un cousté, les femmes d'un aultre, et les enffans d'aultre, et donna aux principaux de hachotz; es aultres des cousteaulx, et es femmes des patenostres et aultres menus choses; puis gecta parmy la place, entre lesdictz [petits] enffans, des petites bagues et *agnus dei* d'étain."

<sup>152</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 284. "he approached to within two fathoms of us and showed us a burning stick, as it to offer us fire. And we made fire with powder and flint, and he trembled all over with fear as we fired a shot." The members of the French-sponsored expedition fired their firearms because the only thing they clearly perceived in the Indian's behavior was the display of fire. They were therefore actively trying to respond to the incomprehensible Indian performance with a performance of their own and did not mean to actually hurt the Indian. In effect, however, they answered a sign of peace and alliance with aggression and violence.

<sup>153</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 252. During his third voyage to Canada, Cartier received such honors that he had to improvise in order to make sure he did not usurp the King of France's role: "the said Agona tooke a piece of tanned leather of a yellow skin edged about with *esnoguy* (which is their riches and the thing which they esteeme most precious, as wee esteeme gold) which was upon his head in stead [sic] of a crowne, and he put the same on the head of our Captaine, and tooke from his wrists two bracelets of *Esnoguy*, and put them upon the Captaines armes, colling him about the necke and showing unto him great signes of joy." Flattered by the honor, Cartier nevertheless returned the crown to the chief's head, as a result of taking the "crowning" a bit too literally, perhaps. The significance of wampum beads were linked to color symbolism. See George Hamell, "Mythical Realities and European Contact," op.cit., 67. "The most widespread and behaviorally evident manifestation of this role of color is in wampum ritualism and symbolism – in the differing context-defined, functional usages and meanings of white shell and black (dark purple) shell wampum belts and of white, sky blue-green, or red painted wampum belts."

contributed to make both sides more tolerant of potential misunderstandings. In any case, misunderstandings typically had benign consequences.<sup>154</sup>

Throughout the Americas, French explorers expressed confidence in their ability to decipher Indian feelings and thoughts, even as the natives attempted to dissimulate them. Early French narratives were riddled with careful observations of sometimes minute details about Indian actions and behaviors, such as tenuous signs of fear, admiration, and disloyalty. The French seemed to think that they could “read” native bodies like they could “read” the lush American landscape, foresee the benefits that would be reaped from local natural resources, and anticipate the twists and turns of the coast.<sup>155</sup> French narratives suggest that “sensory” signs were conceived as unique, secret keys into Indian life. Ribault’s and Laudonnière’s assertions about the civility of native socio-political systems and hierarchy were essentially based on the spatial positioning of the Indians (with the chief sitting and others standing behind him), and the facial expressions and general demeanor they observed during their contacts with native Floridians. The French almost systematically put the natives’ “signs of joy” in this last category of sensory messages, missing the core performative function of these familiar celebrations. Moved by fear and, perhaps a certain taste for intrigue, Cartier claimed to be able to identify “fake” manifestations of joy from genuine ones. When he returned from Hochelaga, he thus observed, Donnacona “accompanied by Taignoagny, Dom Agaya, and several others, [came] to see the Captain; to whom they gave a hearty welcome, feigning to be

---

<sup>154</sup> Examples of inconsequential misunderstandings include: the confusion by the French of Indian descriptions of a hurricane for the description of a specific island named “hurricane” in the Caribbean; misdirection and wasted time; failed rendez-vous because of unclear time and place; mistaking the name of a person for that of a people or a place, or the contrary;

<sup>155</sup> This will be the focus of Chapter Two.

much pleased at his return.”<sup>156</sup> More generally, misunderstandings attributed to the inefficacy of nonverbal communication may have been, in reality, the product of French deductions based on their individual sensory perceptions rather than on actual conversations with the Indians.

This kind of pervasive distrust, justified through the reading of native behaviors, clearly undermined otherwise effective signs and codes and continued to do so during the following century of contact. In September 1606, the Sieur de Poutrincourt, leader of the first permanent French settlement in Canada, and his loyal cartographer Samuel de Champlain developed some doubts regarding the intentions of a nearby group of Massachusetts Indians while exploring the coast of New England. The trigger to the colonists’ suspicions was the fact that the Indians had sent away in the woods all the women, children, and elders along with their food provisions, and were taking down their cabins as if preparing for war. Despite French attempts at securing peace through gifts and visible displays of dissuasive strength, a few days later four Frenchmen who had failed to return to the ship were killed on the shore by a large party of Indian warriors.<sup>157</sup> Following this violent event, well-known signals and codes for accommodation were systematically distrusted. When a small group of Indians made signs to guide the French to their settlement as it was then common place, the French refused for fear of an ambush.<sup>158</sup> The traditional sign for peaceful intentions, laying down bows and arrows and

---

<sup>156</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 175. The French version has “luy firent une merveilleuse feste, fignant avoyr grande joie de sa venue”, which is more accurately “feigning to be much pleased that he had come.”

<sup>157</sup> It is also possible that Champlain wrote of his suspicions (and the signs that triggered them) retrospectively to emphasize his qualities as a leader and strategist after the attack had taken place.

<sup>158</sup> “Quelques jours après que ces choses furent passees, il vint des sauvages trois à trois, quatre à quatre sur le bort de la mer, faisans signe que nous allassions à eux : mais nous voyions bien leur gros qui estoit en embuscade au dessoubs d’un costau derriere des buissons, & croy qu’ils ne desiroient que de nous

presenting oneself without weapons, was perceived as a “trick” and not acted upon.<sup>159</sup> The French derived pride from their ability to identify familiar signs and codes as misleading or treacherous: “we then fired a few musket shots, seeing that their intention only tended to deceive us by cajolery. In this they were mistaken, because we saw clearly what their intent, which had only mischief in view.”<sup>160</sup> In a New World controlled and manipulated by the natives, Frenchmen did not want to be the tale’s fools and instead emphasized their perspicacity. Tensions and conflict seem to have arisen less from basic misunderstanding or incomprehension of sign-language than from the refusal to trust the authenticity and trustworthiness of the message carried by a well-known sign.

French relations with Donnacona and his people steadily deteriorated between their initial encounter in 1534 and the departure of the explorers at the end of Cartier’s second voyage in 1536. Despite real successes in communicating and accommodating with the Indians of Stadacone, the French grew increasingly suspicious of their neighbors, and the sources suggest that the relations between the groups came to a near deadlock in the winter of 1536. Tensions first emerged over the issue of the French journey to Hochelaga. Cartier started calling the Indians, particularly Taïnoagny and Dom Agaya, “traitors and rogues,” because of their conflicting reports about the willingness of the Stadaconans to accompany them to the town.<sup>161</sup> However, little in the

---

attraper en la chaloupe pour descrocher un nombre de flesches sur nous, & puis s’en fuir.” *Voyages du Sieur de Champlain*,” in Biggar, *WSC*, op.cit., 1 : 429.

<sup>159</sup> “*Voyages du Sieur de Champlain*,” in Biggar, *Works of Champlain*, 1 : 416-417, 430. “Que si d’aventure ils les trouvoient sur leurs gardes, ils viendroient en signe d’amitié comme il souloient faire, en quittant leurs arcs et leurs flesches.” “taschant de nous attirer en signe d’amitié à eux, sans armes.”

<sup>160</sup> Biggar, *Works of Champlain*, op.cit., 1: 431. “nous tirasmes quelques coups de mousquets, voyant que leur intention ne tendoit qu’à nous decevoir par caresses, en quoy ils se trompoient : car nous reconnoissions bien qu’elle estoit leur volonté, qui ne tendoit qu’à mauvaise fin.”

<sup>161</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 190. “et y vindrent lesdictz Donnacona, Taïnoagny, dom Agaya et aultres, plusieurs foys, parler audict cappitaine, une ripvière entre deulx, demandant audicts cappitaine, s’il estoit marry, et

actual behavior and the nature of the ceremonies of the Stadaconans during this period marked a major change in their disposition towards the French. Cartier's suspicion seemed to have been essentially founded upon the same third type of unconscious bodily signs through which the French claimed to be able to detect the Indians' true feelings. One of the foundations for Cartier's distrust of Taignoagny and Dom Agaya thus lay in the fact that, during one of the visits that Donnacona and his people made to the French, the two men and their "band" remained at a distance with a stern attitude, while the rest of the "joyful" Indian villagers traded and interacted freely with the French near their ships.<sup>162</sup> In another instance, the two men refused to come on board the French ship.<sup>163</sup> Cartier chose to ignore the possibility that Taignoagny and Dom Agaya were simply wary of being kidnapped again as they had been the previous year, labeling them traitors instead.

Another reason for the failure of French-Indian relations at the deeper political level was the profound lack of consideration of Europeans for native societies. No matter how much the French strove to accommodate native diplomacy, they continued to conceive of all *sauvages* as culturally, politically, and socially subordinate to Europeans. In multiple instances, Donnacona seemed to have sought to initiate a full-fledged alliance with the French. The close succession of visits made by the Stadaconan leader and his People to the French ship in September of 1535 seemed all connected around a single

---

pourquoy il n'alloit à Canada les veoir. Et ledict cappitaine leur respondit qu'ils n'estoient que traistres et meschans, ainsi qu'on luy avoyt rapporté ; et aussi qu'il avoyt apperçu en plusieurs sortes."

<sup>162</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 128. "se rendirent audavant de nous, grand nombre des gens du pays, et entre aultres lesdicts Donnacona, nox deulx hommes et leur bande, lesquels se tindrent à part, soubz une pointe de terre, qui est sur le bort dudict fleuve, sans que aucun d'eulx vynt envyron nous comme aultres, qui n'estoient de leur bande, faisoit."

<sup>163</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 127. Their refusal to come aboard was understandable since they had previously been captured and forced to sail to France.

purpose, although this clearly eluded the French observers. During one of these visits, involving songs, dances, the sharing of food and the exchange of gifts, Donnacona reportedly “had all his people place themselves on one side, and having made a ring in the sand, caused the Captain and his men to stand inside it.” The symbolism of the circle traced on the ground appeared somehow clear to the compliant Frenchmen. Followed an oration of particular importance, during which Donnacona “holding by the hand a girl of about ten or twelve years of age,” presented the girl to Cartier, after which “the whole of the Chief’s people raised three shouts and cries in sign of joy and alliance.”<sup>164</sup> Similar words and gestures were repeated, when Donnacona this time gave two young boys to Cartier, and the rest of his people uttered the same three loud shouts. The French clearly perceived the diplomatic nature of the ceremony and even explained it as the sealing of an alliance, which it very likely was intended to be. They understood many crucial nonverbal elements of the performance, and responded by performing adequately, taking the children into the French ship and offering Donnacona as expression of their gratitude particularly valuable gifts: “two swords, a large plain, brass wash-basin and one that was worked.”<sup>165</sup> The Indians sang and danced, the French fired artillery pieces as signs of celebration, and a great feast concluded the proceedings.

The French thus undeniably understood the Indian ceremony despite the language barrier. They consciously concluded an alliance with the natives by following the foreign diplomatic etiquette. They simply did not endow it with any long-term, deeper meaning.

---

<sup>164</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 132-3. “fict mettre tous ses gens d’un cousté, et fict ung cerne sur le sablon, et y fict mettre ledict cappitaine et ses gens.” “tenant une fille d’envyron de l’aige de dix [à douze] ans, en l’une de ses mains ; puis vint la vint présenter audict cappitaine. Et lors, tous les gens dudict seigneur se prindrent à faire troys cris [et hurlements], en signe de joye et d’alliance.”

<sup>165</sup> Biggar, *Voyages*, 134. “deux épées, ung gand basin d’arin, plain et ung ouvré, à laver les mains, et en fict présent audict Donnacona, qui fort s’en contenta, et remercia ledicts [sic] Cappitaine.”



No sense of duty or commitment resulted from these successful exchanges on the part of the French. Donnacona probably felt secure that his new French allies would first visit his own town and winter among his people before going to rival Hochelaga. Cartier proved him wrong, and eventually profoundly disrupted local politics by kidnapping Donnacona and several of his people with him to France at the end of the second voyage. When the French explorer returned in 1541, without Donnacona who had died in the interval, a new leader and a new geopolitical situation were in place.

\* \* \*

In the early sixteenth century, the French were only passing through the Americas. The various explorers and colonists had short-term, practical goals, which may have caused them to conceive their encounters with Native Americans as independent events bearing no lasting consequence. Failing to grasp the larger diplomatic schemes of Indian leaders such as Donnacona, the French instead responded to each Indian initiative, often in appropriate fashion, but as single, unrelated episodes. Survival, finding resources, collecting food, and further exploring the river were their goals. During this period, French-Indian exchanges were essentially successful. Both groups managed to maintain peace, learned precious information about each other, and even initiated significant material and cultural exchanges. From the French point of view, nonverbal communication offered concrete and immediate gratification. Despite its shortcomings, sign-language provided real opportunities to learn about local resources and geography. Performative language allowed and probably stimulated both groups to build deeper relations based on common ceremonial traits. Perhaps because misunderstandings and the limits of nonverbal means of communication did not have direct violent repercussions,

the French thus expressed a steady confidence in their ability to communicate with, understand, and manipulate Native Americans. It is likely that these limited but nevertheless tangible successes in nonverbal exchanges also convinced local native populations that the prospect of solid commercial and political alliances with the newcomers was realistic.

Close observation of early nonverbal means of communication reveals that their significance went far beyond that of ad hoc and imperfect solutions to the lack of mutual language. The nature and complexity of the signs used by both groups profoundly affected the content of their exchanges and the perception each party had of the other. Performative signs, in particular, offered pleasurable, accessible, and culturally acceptable means of communication for both groups. The role of shared performances in Indian-French accommodation may have derived from specific resemblances between French and native ceremonial elements. Interestingly, Frenchmen who later visited the New World rarely shared the enthusiasm of the early days of exploration regarding the alleged ease of communicating with locals. Seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries, in particular, may be responsible for much of the scholarly assumption that no efficient communication and accommodation could be achieved without learning native languages.<sup>166</sup> It will be crucial to observe whether some of the nonverbal patterns that emerged during early contacts survived the emergence of jargons, interpreters, and the gradual appearance of mutual linguistic understanding in the following century. The French also tended to trust their senses more than they trusted the nonverbal codes they established with Native Americans. The next chapter will consider exactly why and how

---

<sup>166</sup> This will be developed in Chapter Three.

sensory perceptions determined Indian-French relations and explore the theme of changing colonial identities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Sensory Journeys and Culture Change (1555-1620)

“On conçois généralement les voyages comme un déplacement dans l’espace. C’est peu. Un voyage s’inscrit simultanément dans l’espace, dans le temps, et dans la hiérarchie sociale. Chaque impression n’est définissable qu’en la rapportant solidairement à ces trois axes, et comme l’espace possède à lui seul trois dimensions, il en faudrait au moins cinq pour se faire du voyage une représentation adéquate.”<sup>167</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris : Librairie Plon, 1955), 92.

In the year 1583, two men were absorbed in an animated conversation in the French town of Châlon-sur-Saone. There, in the heart of Burgundy, through their complementary recollections, the distant and exotic land of Brazil came to life. Naming in turn the “sea ports, places and villages” in southeast Brazil that they had each visited at different times, they discovered that they had common acquaintances among Indian locals, although they themselves had never met before. They proceeded to evoke “specific memories of the Savages whom [they] had known name by name, and particularly of [their] *Atourassave*, that is to say, [their] perfect allies who had welcomed [them] in their houses.”<sup>168</sup> At this moment, they were two veteran travelers finding a

---

<sup>167</sup> “People generally think of travel in terms of displacement in space, but a long journey exists simultaneously in space, time, and in the social hierarchy. Our impressions must be related to each of these three before we can define them properly.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. by John Russell (New York: Criterion Books, 1961), 89-90.

<sup>168</sup> Jean de Léry, *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil [1578]* (Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 1994), 442. Hereafter cited as *HVTB*. “mesme baillé bonnes enseignes des Sauvages que nous avions cogneus nom par nom, et sur tout de nos *Atourassave*, c’est-à-dire, parfaits allies qui nous avoyent reçeus en leurs maisons.” “*Enseignes*” is an ancient word (originally used to refer to troops in the Antiquity) with multiple meanings. In the sixteenth century, its most common usage was in the sense of “sign, mark, or particularity that distinguishes something, makes it recognizable.” It could also have the meaning of “trace, testimony, memory” of something that had disappeared and of “indication, information.” The expression “à bonnes enseignes” meant “with good reason, with guaranties” while “à fausses enseignes” meant falsely. I chose to translate the sentence as “specific memories” to express the notion of authenticity and to connote the idea of “traces, distinctive signs” through which the Indians were identified and remembered. See Edmond F. Hugué, ed. *Dictionnaire de la langue française du XVIème siècle*, 7 Vols. (Paris : M. Didier, 1925-1973), vol. 3.

hard-to-define satisfaction in summoning memories of a place and people of which they each had a similar yet unique experience, one that distinguished them from the rest of the French men and women obliviously attending to their daily business around them.

One of the two men was Jean de Léry, a Calvinist shoemaker turned pastor and best-selling author, who had resided in the French colony at the mouth of Guanabara Bay, the modern Bay of Rio de Janeiro, some twenty-six years earlier. By the mid sixteenth century, after decades of unofficial but profitable trade along the coasts of Brazil, French minister Admiral de Coligny had determined to create a royal French colony that could undermine Iberian hegemony in South America. The French post would generate profits from the extraction of precious resources such as brazilwood, while requiring minimal investment and French labor force thanks to a well-rounded cooperation system with local Tupinambá Indians. The colony would also reinforce the French commercial

---

These *Atourassaves* were the Brazilian equivalent of the Canadian *compères*, Native American men, often prominent within their respective tribes, who served as hosts, providers, and protectors of French visitors, usually in exchange for a steady supply of goods. Frenchmen often developed close relationships with their Indian hosts, from whom they acquired most of their knowledge about local native culture and ways. In Martinique, the indigenous name for these Indian hosts was *banari*. See Jean-Pierre Moreau, ed., *Un Flibustier Français dans la Mer des Antilles 1618-1620* (Paris : Editions Seghers, 1990), 116. In his relation of the French attempt at settling and Christianizing the region around Maranhão (*Maragnan*) in Northern Brazil in 1614, Capuchin Father Yves d'Evreux describes a very similar system and called these Indian hosts '*chetouasaps*' : "we scattered some of the Frenchmen in the surrounding villages for them to live according to the custom of the country, that is, with *chetouasaps*, who are hosts or *compères*, and we gave them merchandises in lieu of money. This hospitality or *compérage* represents in their society a thing very tight, because they consider you like their child while you are with them, and they go hunting and fishing for you. Even more, they had the custom of giving their daughters to their *compères*, and the daughters would then take the first name Marie and the surname of the Frenchman to designate the alliance with such or such Frenchman, so that to say "Marie so and so", was like saying "so and so's concubine." Yves d'Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil fait en 1613 et 1614* (Paris : Payot, 1985), 39. My translation.

Because the missionaries, for moral reasons, often preferred to live apart from native families, they regularly failed to develop the same type of personal ties described by Léry. This type of relationship is one of the most constant elements of French-Indian interactions across seventeenth-century America, both North and South, and in the West Indies. The practice may have been Indian in origin, although the French certainly also have contributed to homogenizing its practice and expanding it in the regions where they settled.

position against local Portuguese competitors and their native allies.<sup>169</sup> In 1555, Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon became the first commander-in-chief of the newborn *France Antarctique*.<sup>170</sup> Léry, who came with a small contingent of Calvinists to “reinforce” the French post, lived in Fort Coligny (situated on an island in the Bay sometimes referred to as “l’isle de Villegagnon”), and among neighboring natives on the Brazilian mainland during one year in 1557-1558.

By the time Léry reminisced about coastal Brazil with his new friend and fellow traveler, a *Flamand* (Dutch), the ostentatiously named colony had long collapsed. Over twenty years of epidemics and incessant guerilla warfare between the French-allied Tupinambás and the Portuguese and their own indigenous allies had nearly exterminated the native tribes that Léry once encountered on the southeastern coast of Brazil.<sup>171</sup> Léry’s memories of the year he spent in the small French enclave, however, were as vivid as his 1557 journey: “during that year or so when I lived in that country,” he wrote in his 1578 *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, “I took such care in observing all of

---

<sup>169</sup> For a classic history of early colonial Brazil, see John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500-1760* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Alida Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005). Brazilwood was used in Europe as a prized dye and as a material to make fancy furniture. By the mid-sixteenth century, many Frenchmen, often from the French region of Normandie, were living among native tribes along the coast and in the interior. These Norman “*truchements*” not only served as translators and mediators between French merchants/captains and the natives, but also organized the cutting and gathering of brazilwood by the natives. In exchange for regular supply in European goods and military alliance against the Portuguese and their native allies, the Tupi gathered the wood and loaded it on the French ships when they arrived. Other resources extracted from Brazil and shipped to Europe included feathers, parrots, monkeys, animal pelts, peppers, oils, and, to some extent, Indian slaves.

<sup>170</sup> Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, also sometimes spelled Villegaignon. Villegagnon was a member of the Order of the Knights of Malta. During his youth, he may have frequented the same college as Jean Calvin. In 1555 he received the charge of commandant of the fleet given by King Henri II to Gaspard de Coligny to found a permanent French colony in Brazil. He was famed for his naval and military achievements but also infamous for the tough discipline he imposed on his men.

<sup>171</sup> The region had since then become the Portuguese captaincy of São Vicente. John Hemming, *Red Gold*, op.cit., 119. Villegagnon seems to have alienated surrounding tribes through his harsh rule and the colony became subject to famines and attacks from enemy tribes. The Portuguese finally ceased and destroyed the already weakened Fort Coligny in the late 1560s.

them, great or small, that even now it seems to me that I have them before my eyes, and I will forever have the idea and image of them in my mind.”<sup>172</sup>

At last, on that day in Châlon-sur-Saone, Léry had found someone whose first-hand experience of Brazil made him more capable of sharing these vivid recollections. Léry was careful to point out that his Dutch companion was, like himself, a “*temoing oculaire*” (eye witness), in opposition to the people Léry “knew well” and clearly despised, who “spoke about it from hearing” only.<sup>173</sup> Léry and the Dutchman had once belonged to the same places and peoples, and these places and peoples, in turn, had become part of them. The transformation effected upon them by their experience of colonial Brazil brought them closer to each other for a brief moment and irremediably set them apart from the rest of their people. Years before this chance encounter, Léry already reflected on the incommunicability of the colonial experience in his travel account, which had been printed twice and widely read by 1583. “Their gestures and expressions are so completely different from ours,” he explained about his Tupi hosts, “that it is difficult, I

---

<sup>172</sup> Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*. Translated and edited by Janet Whatley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 67. Hereafter cited as Léry, *HVLB*. I will use Whatley’s English translation when I find it satisfying, or will signal any changes I made to it, and will provide the reference in the original French edition as well. “*Finalemēt combien que durant environ un an, que j’ay demeuré en ce pays-là, je aye esté si curieux de contempler les grands et les petits, que m’estans advis que je les voye toujours devant mes yeux, j’en auray à jamais l’idée et l’image en mon entendement.*” Léry, *HVTB*, 233-34.

<sup>173</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 442. Léry is concerned throughout his narrative with distinguishing himself from “false” and “mistaken” stories circulating in Europe about Brazil and the events that occurred in the French colony in the 1550s. Léry asserted his ability to recognize that the *Flamand* was not lying about his voyage to Brazil, based on his knowledge of the men who spoke of Brazil from hearsay only, including the renowned (and incidentally Catholic) chronicler André Thevet: “*car je cognois bien ce qui en parlent par ouï-dire.*” Léry finally gave a copy of his *Histoire* to the Dutchman, who became in turn a witness to Léry’s accuracy and credibility. “*Je lui baillai la presente histoire ja imprimée pour la seconde fois, laquelle ayant leuë, il me dit quelques jours apres, q’ils estoit tesmoing oculaire des choses que j’avois deduities.*”

confess, to represent them well or by pictures.”<sup>174</sup> “To have the pleasure of it, then, you will have to go see and visit them in their own country.”<sup>175</sup>

This remark was not unique to Léry. Many explorers and chroniclers mused about the difficulty of accurately portraying the New World and its people to readers in their home countries. As abounding with details as an account may be, it could not reconstitute the physical and personal experiences at the core of the knowledge that the authors attempted to transmit in writing. Upon first sighting the coast of Florida on a beautiful April day of 1562, Jean Ribault felt the full sensory impact of the unknown land, as he later recalled: “with wynd at will we sailed and viewed the coast all along with an unspeakable pleasure of thoderiferous [the oderiferous] smell and bewtye [beauty] of the same.”<sup>176</sup> While attempting to meticulously picture the places, natural resources, and peoples he saw, Ribault repeatedly commented on the difficulty of doing so, writing about his experience as “a thinge inspeakable,” that gave him and his crew “a pleasure not able to be expressed with tongue.”<sup>177</sup>

This incommunicability may have derived from the fact that the acquisition of knowledge about the New World was considered by these early voyagers as simultaneously and equally cognitive and sensory. The information and understanding of the landscapes, resources, and peoples of the Americas that writers strove to recapture

---

<sup>174</sup> “à cause de leurs gestes et contenancez du tout dissemblables des nostres, je confesse qu’il est malaise de les bien représenter, ni par escrit, ni mesme par peinture.” Léry, *HVTB*, 234. My translation.

<sup>175</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 67.

<sup>176</sup> Jean Ribault, *The True Discovery of Terra Florida*, in David B. Quinn, ed., *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, 5 vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 2: 287 (hereafter cited as Quinn, *NAW*).

<sup>177</sup> Quinn, *NAW*, 2: 289. This physical, emotional, and intellectual reaction is what historian Stephen Greenblatt identifies as “wonder.” He writes: “Wonder is, I shall argue, the central figure in the initial European response to the New World, the decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference.” in Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 14.



were the results of multisensory experiences that words and writing often fell short of rendering. It was through the multiplication of these experiences and practices that sensory oddities eventually became bearers of meaning and started to ‘make sense’ to Europeans. While the meaning could be transmitted, the process by which the unfamiliar became familiar and the incomprehensible became meaningful, could not. This highly textured and multidimensional sensory education, from ignorance and incomprehension to knowledge and cultural expertise, is at the heart of this chapter. Because senses are contingent historical and cultural products, exploring the sensory perceptions that two groups and different individuals had of each other and the meanings they attached to these sensations is a significant window into these respective cultures.<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>178</sup> “Sensory history” is a burgeoning field, but one that is still loosely defined and therefore produced uneven bodies of work. In his overview of the historiography of the sense, Mark M. Smith points to the fact that inquiry into the history of the senses must, first and foremost, derive from the recognition that “the senses are historical, that they are not universal but, rather, a product of a place and, especially, time, so that how people perceive and understood smell, sound, touch, taste, and sight changed historically.” Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3. Because the way people “sense” and interpret their sensations is culturally and historically contingent, a sensory reading of historical sources offers new keys to understanding past cultures and peoples’ interactions. Therefore, “sensory history” is less a separate field of its own, than a method, or, in the words of Mark M. Smith, is “more properly conceived as a habit, a way of thinking about the past, and a way of becoming attuned to the wealth of sensory evidence embedded in any number of texts (...) What are usually considered historical “fields” of inquiry – diplomatic, gender, race, regional, borderlands, cultural, political, military, and so on – could all be written and researched through the habit of sensory history.” Ibid, 5. To counterbalance the predominance of “sight” and visuality in historical writing (an often unconscious legacy of the Enlightenment and scientific rationalism that emphasized the search for “focus” and “observable truth”), an adequate history of the senses should aim to be truly multisensory, emphasizing the interplay of the senses and how people understood their articulation. At its best, sensory history “stresses the role of the senses...in shaping peoples’ experiences in the past, shows how they understood their worlds and why, is very careful not to assume that the senses are some sort of ‘natural’ endowment, and strives not to reify the senses, but, rather, locate their meaning and function in specific historical contexts.”Ibid, 4. In recent years, two studies of colonial America attempted to pay attention to the senses: Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). While Rath’s study has many qualities, he considers soundways and hearing in colonial America in complete separation from the other senses. He also tends to fall into the traditional and flawed divide between a predominantly “visual” Europe based on literacy and print, and a primarily “audible” Indian world based on orality/aurality. Peter Charles Hoffer’s study is more problematic because it fails to recognize the historicity of the senses. Instead, sensory elements are used as quaint details to make our imagination of the past more “vivid” and “textured.” This

The type of sensory journeys occurring in the early colonial world and their impact on French-Indian relations is perhaps nowhere more visible than in Jean de Léry's writings. More than a factual narrative of the events that took place in the young French colony, Léry's *Histoire d'un Voyage* is a wealth of sensory and emotional reminiscences.<sup>179</sup> In the twentieth century, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who kept a copy of Léry's book with him while he conducted research in Brazil that would lead to his influential book *Tristes Tropiques*, branded Léry's evocative prose as "sorcery." Through his ability to make things past seem alive and palpable to us, Léry offers readers a "formidable spectacle," said Lévi-Strauss.<sup>180</sup> What makes Léry unique among writers of his time is the constant, and often self-critical, dialogue he maintained between his current, experienced "self" at the time of the redaction of his account, and his past, ignorant and awkward "self" at the time he arrived in Brazil. This dual characterization is present in many, if not most, colonial accounts, but is rarely as explicit as in Léry's case. Colonial chroniclers commonly wrote about the things they experienced through the lens of the knowledge they had accumulated throughout their travel. The interpretation of a single event or of given Indian attitudes is therefore not necessarily the one the Europeans made at the time the said event or interaction with natives took place, but rather, the product of multiple subsequent experiences (as is sometimes indicated by the phrase "as

---

implies the illusion that, as twenty-first century citizens, we can re-experience past sensations just like early colonial visitors and Indians did. Mark M. Smith rightly suggests that "the desire to 'experience' the sensate past in this fashion tells us more about our modern conceits and attitudes toward consumption and the 'use' of the past than it does about how people – and not "us" – experienced and attached meaning to sensory worlds." *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>179</sup> Frank Lestringant, preface to Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (Paris : le Livre de Poche, 1994) : 33-4. Lestringant writes that the relation « abounds in phenomena of involuntary memory, from olfactory, gustative, or auditory origin." My translation.

<sup>180</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss quoted in the introduction to Léry, *HVTB*, *op.cit.*, 6. "C'est comme de la sorcellerie. Tout à coup, Léry fait revivre au présent et devant nos yeux un formidable spectacle." In *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss called Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage*, a "masterpiece of anthropological literature."

we understood later”). Léry is unusual in that he unequivocally outlined the process by which he acquired his expertise.

Throughout his book, Léry insisted upon his observational skills and the accuracy of his comments. He did so principally in response to the writings of a contemporary chronicler of the colony, Franciscan friar André Thevet, who had published a widely-read account, *Singularités de la France Antarctique* in 1557. Thevet’s account, which he expanded in 1575 as *Cosmographie Universelle*, included an offensive version of the Protestants’ behavior in Brazil, although Thevet had in fact returned to France by the time Léry and his fellow-Calvinist colonists reached Fort Coligny. Léry’s *Histoire d’un Voyage* was conceived as a way to counter these previous allegations and the author incessantly tried to win the readers’ confidence by providing a new interpretation of native activities and physiques to challenge Thevet’s eminence. What distinguished his relation from those of Thevet and others, Léry implicitly argued, was his careful and personal experience of Brazil, the fact that he shared his life with the Tupi Indians rather than confining himself to the French fort, and that he actively and not without difficulties learned to understand and sometimes emulate native ways. In this sense, the recollections that Léry shared with the readers, as acute and vivid as they were, were not only expressions of the feelings and thoughts he experienced during his various adventures, but also the result and proof of an acquired knowledge that had transformed him.

The process through which Léry acquired knowledge and understanding of the other, centered around sensory experiences, is far from unique. We find strong echoes of this process and its crucial importance in shaping French-Indian relations in different areas of French colonization, at different times, in different economic and demographic

contexts, and in the writings of various authors, from all classes of French society. This chapter explores three separate sensory journeys that demonstrate the physicality of communication and acculturation in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century encounters, and the changes these nonverbal experiences effected upon the individuals, both French and Indian, who shared them. The first sensory journey is that of Jean de Léry in Brazil in 1557-1558. The second is that of Samuel de Champlain during his early voyages, first to the West Indies, then to Acadia and Canada between 1599 and 1610. The third is that of an anonymous soldier participating in a buccaneer expedition which, after ill-fated efforts at making profits off the coasts of West Africa and Brazil, ended up shipwrecked in the Caribbean islands of Martinique and Dominica for eleven months in 1619-1620.<sup>181</sup>

\* \* \*

### *Jean de Léry's Sensory Journey to Cultural Métissage*

Jean de Léry's first direct contact with Brazilian Indians occurred on 20 February 1557. For the *Margaia* Indians who traded with the French on that day, however, this was far from a "first encounter." Léry's account reveals how codified the exchanges between the French and Brazilian natives had become by the mid-sixteenth century. The same process of elaboration of mutually understandable nonverbal signs that was at work in Canada at the time of Cartier's expeditions had also taken place in similar ways in

---

<sup>181</sup> These three examples, while involving very different peoples with various goals and circumstances, can all be seen as part of a similar stage in French-Indian relations. The three examples occurred at times and in places where French presence was regular and consistent (more so than during an earlier 'exploration' phase), but not large enough to pose a real threat to local populations, and in a highly competitive international context, in which native allies were particularly critical to the colonists' survival and well-being.

Brazil.<sup>182</sup> After anchoring “half a league” from the coast, the French fired a few cannon shots, “according to the custom when one arrives in that land...to warn the inhabitants.”<sup>183</sup> Recognizing the standard audible signal that Europeans had arrived and wished to interact, a large number of Indians appeared on the beach. They were soon identified, supposedly based on their appearance, as members of the Margaia tribe by some French mariners “who had in the past traveled there.”<sup>184</sup> Although the Margaia Indians were Portuguese allies and therefore traditional enemies of the French, nonverbal codes for interaction successfully mediated the exchange. Léry suggested that both sides carefully tried to dissimulate their enmity for the purpose of this exchange.<sup>185</sup> A mask of friendship and careful etiquette could diffuse potential conflicts by providing common ground and keeping each other’s actions in check. With mutual suspicion at a height, a few French crewmembers – among whom the foreman (*contremaître*) who could “jargon their language” (“*gergonner leur langage*”) boarded a smaller boat to approach the shore, while carefully staying out of reach of potential volleys of arrows, and proceeded “to show from a distance the knives, mirrors, combs, and other trifles, for which, calling to them, they asked for [food] supplies.”<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>183</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 147.

<sup>184</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 147.

<sup>185</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 148. “nonobstant ceste inimitié de nos Margajas à l’encontre des François, laquelle eux et nous dissimulions tant que nous pouvions.”

<sup>186</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 148. Léry also described a similar nonverbal process taking place between enemy Indian tribes when they wanted to trade “local goods” for European goods. Because of distrust, distance, bodily attitudes and positions, and sign language were crucial. The trading process between enemies went as such: “Luy montrant de loin ce qu’il aura, soit serpe, cousteau, peigne, miroir ou autre marchandise et mercerie qu’on leur apporte par-dela, luy fera entendre par signe s’il veut changer cela à quelque autre chose. Que si l’autre de sa part s’y accorde, luy montrant au réciproque de la plumasserie, des pierres vertes qu’ils mettent dans leurs levres, ou autres choses de ce qu’ils ont en leur pays, ils conviendront d’un lieu à trois ou quatre cens pas delà, où le premier ayant porté et mis sur une pierre ou busche de bois la chose qu’il voudroit eschanger, il se reculera à côté ou en arrière. Après cela l’*Ouetaca* la venant

In response, six native men and one woman launched a canoe and came on board the French ship. Léry witnessed the typical and inseparable elements of Euro-Indian relations: trade, first by obtaining food supplies from the natives in exchanges for European goods of small value, and then through the offer made by the elder Indian to provide brazilwood to the French; and a dose of Indian etiquette represented by the Indian official delegation and harangue.<sup>187</sup> But learning or analyzing these codes of cross-cultural interaction was not Léry's main concern at that moment. Instead, sharing with the reader the feelings that overcame him, he wrote: "because these were the first savages that I had seen up close, you can well imagine than I looked at them and studied them attentively."<sup>188</sup> Through his eyes, the reader was invited to exercise the same. One can almost follow the movement of his eyes from one Indian feature to the next. He first noted the Indians' complete nudity, reminiscent of "when they came out of their mother's womb," then observed that their bodies were fully painted "and blackened."<sup>189</sup> After describing their hairstyles in great details, he concentrated on one of the most puzzling and impressive ornaments worn by the Margaia men: a large round green stone, "about

---

prendre et laissant semblablement au mesme lieu ce qu'il avoit monstré, en s'esloignant fera aussi place, et permettra que le *Margajat*, ou autre, tel qu'il sera, la vienne querir." Léry, *HVTB*, 154.

<sup>187</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 149-50. According to Léry, the elder Indians did their best to convince the French to come ashore, promising to help them cut and load the wood onto the ship, as Indian allies usually did in exchange for European goods. However, because the Margaia were traditional allies to the Portuguese, the French feared for their lives if they went ashore, and chose to wait until they could reach friendly tribes to collect brazilwood. Alliances therefore seemed to have been more rigidly followed by Europeans than by natives, although not as much for moral reasons than because of trust issues. Alliances and lasting relations with a specific group of Indians guaranteed safety, while rogue trade with unfamiliar tribes bore the threat of cannibalism.

<sup>188</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 148-49. "Et parce que ce furent les premiers sauvages que je vis de près, vous laissant à penser si je les regarday et contemplay attentivement, encore que je réserve à les décrire et depeindre au long en autre lieu plus propre." English translation in Léry, *HTLB*, 26-27. Léry's style is particularly unique because he directly calls upon the reader and makes made him/her a participant in the action. This is very unusual for the sixteenth-century and produces an extremely vibrant and intimate colonial account.

<sup>189</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 149. "tant les hommes que la femme estoient aussi entierement nuds, que quand ils sortirent du ventre de leurs meres."

the size and roundness of a testoon [silver coin]” inserted below their mouths, which they could “take out and put back in place whenever they pleased.”<sup>190</sup> His descriptions at times vacillated between beauty and monstrosity, fascination and disgust: “sometimes when these stones are removed, our Tupinamba amuse themselves by sticking their tongues through that slit in the lip, giving the impression to the onlooker that they have two mouths.” “I leave you to judge whether it is pleasant to see them do that, and whether that deforms them or not.”<sup>191</sup> While the woman did not have such a “disfiguring” hole below the mouth, her ears were pierced so widely that “you could have put a finger through the holes, and she wore large pendants of white bones in them, which swung almost to her shoulders.”<sup>192</sup> At this stage, Léry’s observations were undeniably picturesque, but he lacked the expertise to give them further meaning.

After this encounter, the French ship made its way to the French colony on Guanabara Bay. Léry and his fellow Calvinists lived in Fort Coligny for ten months, frequenting the Indians who often came to trade with the French outside the fortifications, and making regular trips inland to native villages. During this time, the small French colony was stirred by increasing tensions between the Protestants and Commander Villegagnon, particularly over important theological debates of the time such as the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>193</sup> Villegagnon, a highly educated man, a knight of Malta,

---

<sup>190</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 149. I follow Whatley’s translation of “téton” as “testoon,” a sixteenth-century silver coin. Léry, *HVLB*, 27.

<sup>191</sup> Léry *HVLB*, 58.

<sup>192</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 149. My translation.

<sup>193</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 175-78. Léry explained the traditional Calvinist view of the Eucharist as metaphorical, the bread and wine representing the flesh and blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but not actually being transformed during Mass as actual pieces of the Messiah’s body. The Catholics who believed they were eating the actual body of their Savior were negatively compared by Léry to Ouetacas (Waitakas), an hostile cannibalistic tribe, who did not cook their enemies’ flesh before consuming it, as the French Tupi allies did. In other words, in Léry’s view, not only Catholics were like cannibals, but they were cannibals of the worst sort. “sans savoir comment cela se faisoit, [les Catholiques] vouloyent néantmoins non

who was famed in France for his military achievements, proved to be an implacable ruler in the Brazilian colony. He showed little sympathy for the natives and enslaved many of the prisoners of war he bought from his Tupi allies. He sentenced to death any French colonist who had sexual intercourse with native women, and maintained a strict policy that tried to prevent any non-commercial exchanges with the natives. Léry reported several instances of gruesome punishments and painful deaths inflicted upon French convicts and Indian slaves alike.<sup>194</sup> Raised as a Catholic, Villegagnon initially supported the presence of Calvinists in the French post, but seemed to have had a change of heart towards the Reformed religion as months went by. Finally, although his motives and personal convictions remain largely unclear, he drove the Huguenots out of the colony in November 1557, sending them into exile on the mainland until a commercial ship came along that would accept to take them back to France, which only occurred the following January (1558). As one of the banished Calvinists, Léry thus had the opportunity to spend two full months among the natives, in addition to the numerous visits he made to them over the course of the preceding ten months, and often used the observations he gathered to support his arguments against Catholics, depicted as the “true savages.”<sup>195</sup>

---

seulement grossièrement, plutost que spirituellement, manger la chair de Jesus Christ, mais qui pis estoit, à la manière des sauvages nommez Ou-ëtacas, dont j’ay parlé ci-devant, ils la vouloyent mascher et avaler toute crue.” Léry, *HVTB*, 176-77.

<sup>194</sup> Among these punishments were the breaking of limbs, water and food deprivation, and torture. Léry, *HVTB*, 189-90. “je luy vis une fois faire embrasser une piece d’artillerie à l’un d’entre eux [a Margajas Indian slave] nommé Mingant, auquel pour une chose qui ne méritoit presque pas qu’il fut tancé, il fit néanmoins degoutter et fondre du lard chaud sur les fesses : tellement que ces pauvres gens disoyent souvent en leur langage : Si nous eussions pensé que Paycolas (ainsi appeloient-ils Villegagnon) nous eust traité de ceste façon, nous nous fussions plutost faits manger à nos ennemis que de venir vers luy.”

<sup>195</sup> Between his return from Brazil and the time he published his account, Léry experienced the worst of the Wars of Religion, taking a direct part in the fighting and finally taking refuge in Geneva. In the light of the horrors he witnessed, of what Christians could do to each other, Brazil appeared to him as a kind of ‘lost paradise’. The kind of cannibalism practiced by the Tupis seemed to him more benign, or at least more socially justifiable, than the violence between Protestants and Catholics. Janet Whatley suggests Brazil served Léry as a kind of “sustaining memory.” Léry, *HVLB*, xxxvi. Léry’s remarkably tolerant and



Besides the miniature war of religion that marked Léry's colonial experience, his year in Brazil represented a total disruption of his sensory and cultural environments. Léry recalled, not without a good dose of self-derision, his very first visit to an Indian town on the mainland three weeks after settling in Fort Coligny. Entering the territory and the daily lives of the natives was much more hazardous than trading a few shirts and knives for food supplies on the common ground of the fort's margins. When he reached the town of *Yabouraci*, the peculiar welcome he received from the locals left him disoriented and baffled. While running around him and asking incessant questions in a language he could not understand, the Indians swiftly took his hat, his sword, his belt, and his jacket.<sup>196</sup> He was not prepared to experience this type of sudden physical contact with the bare bodies of the natives, and soon the rest of his senses were steeped in the same confusion: "deafening me with their yells," Léry recalled, "they ran through the village with my clothing. Not only did I think that I had lost everything, but I was at a total loss."<sup>197</sup> Thanks to the Norman interpreter accompanying him, Léry soon learned that the repeated Indian phrase "*Marapé-dereré, marapé-dereré*" that had made his head spin was a common greeting and that the Indians were in fact simply asking for his

---

culturally relative descriptions of Tupi practices, including anthropophagy, should be read with this in mind.

<sup>196</sup> Léry seemed to have been shocked to see the Indians put on his clothes on their bare skins: "l'un ayant prins mon chapeau qu'il mit sur sa teste, l'autre mon espée et ma ceinture qu'il ceignit sur son corps tout nud, l'autre ma casaque qu'il vestit." Léry, *HVTB*, 449-50.

<sup>197</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 450. My translation. The first part of the sentence is "m'étourdissant de leurs crieries," which implies a feeling of dizziness, a whirl of noise surrounding Léry and making his head spin. However, there is no English equivalent for the French verb "étourdir," so I follow Janet Whatley and current French-English dictionaries in translating this sentence as "deafening me with their yells." In the second section Léry wrote "mais aussi je ne savois où j'en estois," a phrase still commonly used in modern French, which clearly suggests disorientation and confusion of the senses. Janet Whatley's translation has: "I didn't know what would become of me," which I think is an over-translation of the original and fails to render the physicality and intensity of the experience (to which I prefer "I was at a total loss.") Léry, *HVLB*, 162.

name.<sup>198</sup> During the following months, Léry experienced similar welcomes and observed how other foreigners were received in Indian villages, and realized that his initial reaction and conclusions had been unjustified. Reflecting on his early fright he noted that it “was only from ignorance of their way of doing things; for they do the same thing to everyone who visits them, especially those they haven’t seen before. After they have played around a little with one’s belongings, they carry them all back and return them to their owners.”<sup>199</sup> Through multiple experiences of Tupí welcoming rituals, Léry came to view them as composed of three symbolic elements or phases: first, a silent introduction into the house of the *Moussacat*, whom Léry identified as the “head of a household, who offers food to people passing through the village,<sup>200</sup>” second, the “weeping greeting” of women, which gender-prejudiced Léry interpreted as crocodile tears solely destined to obtain gifts from the newcomers<sup>201</sup>; and, finally, a long (incomprehensible) harangue by the head of the household.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> Here, Léry offers a great example of active accommodation. Because the truchement explained to him that the Indians could not remember or pronounce traditional French names such as “Pierre, Guillaume ou Jean,” and that his own patronym sounded like the Tupi word for oyster, Léry proudly introduced himself as “*Lery-oussou*,” the ‘big oyster,’ which caused much laughter among the Indians. Léry, *HVTB*, 450.

<sup>199</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 162. “Mais comme l’expérience m’a montré plusieurs fois depuis, ce n’estoit que faute de savoir leur maniere de faire : car faisant le mesme à tous ceux qui les visitent, et principalement à ceux qu’ils n’ont point encore veus : apres qu’ils se sont un peu ainsi jouez des besongnes d’autrui, ils rapportent et rendent le tout à ceux à qui elles appartiennent.” Léry, *HVTB*, 450.

<sup>200</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 164. Whatley over-translated Léry’s phrase giving an explanation where the author seemed to have used a coded phrase: “Moussacat, c’est à dire bon père de famille qui donne à manger aux passans.” (Léry, *HVTB*, 454.) This could have been the translation he received from the interpreter of the word *Moussacat*. It seems to me that this phrase was meant as a title, rather than as the literal description of his social function, although they were clearly connected.

<sup>201</sup> Some ethnologists explain this unusual practice of ritual weeping as a reminiscence of the cult of the dead. The visitor, coming from “outside,” would symbolically be seen as coming back from the other world. A classic study of this practice is: Charles Wagley, *The Welcome of Tears* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Léry took pride in keeping a safe emotional distance from the women’s crying and condemned the Frenchmen who “upon hearing the bleating of these women next to them, were such babies as to be reduced to tears themselves.” Léry, *HVLB*, 164. Léry uses the word “veaux” (translated by Whatley as

The same day, Léry and the *truchement* pursued their tour of native villages, and stopped for the night in the town of *Euramiri*, also known by the French as *Goset*, after the name of the interpreter who used to live there. That night, Léry's nerves were further put to the test, for he suddenly came face to face with one of the greatest fears and taboos of Europe: cannibalism. When the two Frenchmen reached the village at sundown, a celebration or "feast" known as *caouin* was taking place, and the body parts of a defeated enemy were roasting on the fire. It was well-known among the colonists and even the general population in France at the time that Brazilian Indians performed cannibalistic rituals related to the central importance of honor, vengeance, and warfare in indigenous societies.<sup>203</sup> But the physical experience that Léry had through what he saw, smelled, but refused to taste, gave a new dimension to the moral debate surrounding cannibalism. In his narrative, Léry tried to communicate to the reader the tension, as well as the sensory and cultural puzzlement, he experienced during his sleepless first night in a Tupí town. Urging the reader to imagine what he felt, but providing knowledge he acquired later to defuse the suspense, he wrote: "not only was I kept awake by the noise that the savages made, dancing and whistling all night while eating the prisoner; but what is more, one of them approached me with the victim's foot in hand cooked and *boucané*, asking me (as I

---

"babies"), which literally means "calves." This is still a common insult in France, most famously used by Charles de Gaulle to describe French citizens as simple-minded and credulous.

<sup>202</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 455. Léry notes the contrast between the "warmth" of French greetings, which involves physical contact and special attention to a guest ("nos embrassades, accolades, baisemens et touchemens à la main à l'arrivée de nos amis") and the intentional indifference of Indian hosts while the women perform their ritual crying: "le *Moussacat*, (...) s'occupant à faire une flesche ou autre chose, aura esté un quart d'heure sans faire semblant de vous voir." This native practice of ignoring someone and avoiding eye contact is also repeatedly noted by French visitors to the Caribbean as will be discussed later in this chapter. See Moreau, *Un flibustier*, op.cit.

<sup>203</sup> John M. Monteiro, "The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: Coastal Brazil in the Sixteenth Century" in Bruce Trigger, gen. ed., *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, 3 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3: 987. "In defining traditional enemies and in reaffirming social role within the local groups, vengeance, in particular, and warfare, more generally, played important parts in situating Tupi peoples within a spatial and temporal dimension."

learned later, for I didn't understand at the time) if I wanted to eat some of it. His countenance filled me with such terror that you need hardly ask if I lost all desire to sleep.”<sup>204</sup>

This anecdote was typical of cultural misunderstandings taking place during such encounters, and of the myths and fears that emerged from the intruders' ignorance. At the time, 'abandoned' by his *truchement* who had gone to partake in the festivities, a terrified Léry interpreted a friendly gesture (offering to participate in an important celebration and share the valued flesh), as a threat: "I thought that by brandishing the human flesh he was eating, he was threatening me and wanted me to understand that I was about to be similarly dealt with.”<sup>205</sup> Self-deprecation and humor ultimately alleviated the horror of cannibalism, when Léry's mistake became clear the next morning through the culturally informed explanations of the Norman *truchement*. "My one consolation," Léry wrote as he recalled his first steps toward peaceful and confident accommodation with the Tupí people, "was the hoot of laughter they sent up—for they are great jokers – at having (without meaning to) given me such a scare.”<sup>206</sup> Experience, observation, and gradual understanding of the meaning and purpose of Indian behaviors quickly appeared to Léry as the keys to avoid similar traumatizing adventures. Acquiring familiarity with Tupí culture was necessary to move from the status of ignorant, frightened visitor to that of a specialist of French colonial Brazil, learned enough in Indian ways to write one of the

---

<sup>204</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 163. "Mais outre qu'à cause du bruit que les sauvages, dansans et sifflants toute la nuit, en mangeant ce prisonnier, firent à mes oreilles, je fus bien resveillé : encores l'un d'eux avec un pied d'iceluy cuict et boucané qu'il tenoit en main, s'approchant de moy me demandant (comme je sceu depuis, car je ne l'entendois pas lors) si j'en voulois manger, par ceste contenance me fit une telle frayeur, qu'il ne faut pas demander si j'en perdis toute envie de dormir." Léry *HVTB*, 452.

<sup>205</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 163. "pensant véritablement par tel signal et monstre de ceste chair humaine qu'il mangeoit, qu'en me menaçant il me dist et voulust faire entendre que je serois tantost ainsi accoustré." Léry, *HVTB*, 452.

<sup>206</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 164.

most respected books on the subject. The strong homogeneity and codification of social behaviors and rituals among the Tupinambás in the Rio region, provided frequent opportunities for the French observers to witness similar ceremonies, words, and attitudes, thus gaining a better understanding of Tupí culture through repeated exposure.

Like that of many early visitors to the new world, Léry's exposure to Brazilian landscapes and Indian cultures was primarily sensory. Léry seemed to have resented his dependence on the untrustworthy *truchement* to understand Tupí language and useful cultural facts about Indian societies and customs. To counter this humiliating dependence, he chose to trust his own nonverbal observations as accurate sources of knowledge. It was through his senses that Léry gradually discovered Tupí culture and physically experienced it. It was through his senses that Brazil imprinted his memory in such a strong fashion, and it was through the reconstruction of his past sensations that his narrative took shape.<sup>207</sup> From his first contact with the unknown flora, fauna, and human inhabitants of Brazil, Léry found himself bombarded with unfamiliar and often fascinating sights. Léry was unusual among early chroniclers in his earnest appreciation of native art, bodily ornaments (especially tattoos), and crafts, and therefore particularly meticulous in his descriptions.<sup>208</sup> He noted a growing taste for European goods among the Tupis, which he described as greater among the women who seemed to particularly covet colored glass beads.<sup>209</sup> What never ceased to puzzle him was the women's stubborn

---

<sup>207</sup> "We need to expose the senses for what they are: historically and culturally generated ways of knowing and understanding." Mark M. Smith, *Sensing History*, op.cit., 3.

For instance, regarding feather ornaments: "Ils font de mesme artifice, les garnitures de leurs espées et massues de bois, lesquelles aussi ainsi décorées et enrichies de ces plumes si bien appropriées et appliquées à cest usage, il fait merueilleusement bon voir." Léry, *HVTB*, 222-23.

<sup>209</sup> "they make big bracelets, composed of several pieces of white bone, cut and notched like big fish-scales, which they know how so closely to match and so nicely to join – with wax and a kind of gum mixed together into a glue – that it could not better be done ... That is why, for the same use, they find so pretty

refusal to wear European clothing, unlike Indian men: “although we tried several times to give them dresses and shifts (as I have said we did for the men, who sometimes put them on), it has never been in our power to make them wear clothes.”<sup>210</sup> Visible signs of cultural exchanges had their limits and could not be imposed.

Léry approached even such serious matters as mourning rituals or warfare from a distance, as if he had been witnessing a theatrical performance rather than the everyday life of a People. When, “out of curiosity,” Léry and another Frenchman decided to accompany a Tupí war party and witnessed from their safe shelter a three-hour battle between their allies and the enemy Margaia Indians, Léry perceived the artistry of the battle from an essentially sensory, rather than intellectual, perspective. Saluting the esthetical beauty of the native ‘drama’ unfolding before his eyes, he enthusiastically wrote that “there was not only the entertainment of seeing them leap, whistle, and wield their [clubs] so dexterously in circles and passades; it was also a marvel to see so many arrows fly in the air and sparkle in the sunbeams with their grand feathering of red, blue, green, scarlet, and other colors, and so many robes, headdresses, bracelets, and other adornments of these natural feathers with which the savages were arrayed.”<sup>211</sup> Shapes,

---

the little beads of glass that they call *mauroubi*, in yellow, blue, green, and other colors, strung like a rosary, which we brought over there in great number for *bartér*.” Léry, *HVLB*, 65.

<sup>210</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 66. “tant y a néanmoins que quoy que nous leur ayons plusieurs fois voulu bailler des robbes de frise et des chemises (comme j’ay dit que nous faisons aux hommes qui s’en habilloient quelque fois), il n’a jamais été en notre puissance de les faire vestir.” Léry, *HVTB*, 231-2. Léry said that the women justified their refusal to wear European clothing by referring to their custom of ritually bathing in the river several times a day. Léry thought it was a “fine and pertinent excuse” to claim it would be too difficult to undress so often. Women’s nudity bore other important symbolic meaning and social importance among the Tupí, which clearly eluded Léry as a Christian and man.

<sup>211</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 120. “Je n’ai jamais eu tant de contentement en mon esprit, de voir les compagnons de gens de pieds avec leurs morions dorez et armes luisantes, que j’eus lors de plaisir à voir combattre ces sauvages. Car outre le passe-temps qu’il y avoit de les voir sauter, siffler, et si dextrement et diligemment manier en rond et en passade, encor faisoit-il merveilleusement bon voir non seulement tant de flesches, avec leurs grands empennons de plumes rouges, bleues, vertes et incarnates, et d’autres couleurs, voler en l’air parmi les rayons de soleil qui les faisoit estinceler : mais aussi tant de robbes, bonnets, bracelets et

colors, movements, and visible attitudes, however, were more than mere esthetic details. Visual elements were all profoundly meaningful, even within the more familiar French cultural enclave. Léry thus claimed that one could speculate on the mood of the feared Commander Villegagnon by simply looking at his chosen outfit for the day: “when we saw green and yellow, we could tell that there would be foul weather.”<sup>212</sup> Tupí Indian allies, on their end, seemed to have been more impressed by the sight of fully dressed white women than by the ostentatious ceremonies of the Christian cult.<sup>213</sup>

For a Frenchman, being deprived of wine and bread was no small matter.<sup>214</sup> However, Léry seemed to have found much comfort in the new tastes to which native Brazilian women introduced him. Shared meals were also crucial opportunities to notice cultural differences between French and Tupí cultures.<sup>215</sup> Léry had his first taste of Brazil on the boat that took him to Fort Coligny, thanks to the food bartered from the Margaias. Implicitly expressing the idea that tastes are cultural constructs that can change when one gets accustomed to a new environment, Léry wrote: “although at this early stage the meat

---

autres bagages faits aussi de ces plumes naturelles et naisves, dont les Sauvages estoyent vestus.” Léry, *HVTB*, 351.

<sup>212</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 47. “aussi cognoissions nous à peu près à la couleur de l’habit qu’il voit vestu de quelle humeur il seroit meü ceste journée-là : de façon que quand nous voyons le vert et le jaune en pays, nous pouvions bien dire qu’il n’y faisoit pas beau.” Léry, *HVTB*, 190.

<sup>213</sup> “Beaucoup de Sauvages, qui nous estoyent venus voir, furent plus estonnez de voir des femmes vestues (car auparavant ils n’en avoyent jamais veu) qu’ils ne furent ébahis des cérémonies Ecclesiastiques, lesquelles cependant leur estoyent aussi du tout incognues.” Léry, *HVTB*, 179.

<sup>214</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 69. “They dine and feast without bread or wine.” Also on the problem of the lack of wine and bread for celebrating the Mass and the subsequent idea of the contingency of the material elements of the cult, see Léry, *HVLB*, 49.

<sup>215</sup> For instance, Léry noted that Tupis usually remained silent while they ate while Frenchmen were constantly chatting and laughing. “quand ils mangent ils font un merveilleux silence, tellement que s’ils ont quelque chose à dire, ils le reservent jusques à ce qu’ils ayent achevé, quand, suyvant la coustume des François, ils nous oyoyent jaser et caqueter en prenant nos repas, ils s’en savoyent bien moquer.” Léry *HVTB*, 250-51. The times dedicated to eating, contrary to the fixed French schedule, on the other hand, appeared disordered among the Indians: “while they do not observe particular hours for dinner, supper, or light repasts, as we do over here, and do not hesitate if they are hungry to eat as readily at midnight as at noon, on the other hand, since they never eat when they are not hungry, you could say that they are as sober in their eating as they are excessive in their drinking.” Léry, *HVLB*, 75.

that they had brought us seemed strange, nonetheless out of necessity we ate heartily of it.”<sup>216</sup> It is very likely that Léry spent a noticeable amount of time observing Tupi women cook. He knew their cultivation techniques, the utensils they used, and the various names and savors of the dishes they prepared, many of which he described as having “a very good flavor.”<sup>217</sup> He described native recipes based on manioc roots, and assured his readers that *Ouy-Pou*, the less cooked of two kinds of manioc flour made by Indian women, was very tasty, explaining “when you eat of fresh you would say that it is the center of a loaf of warm white bread.”<sup>218</sup>

Léry’s interest in native food may have derived from an unconscious attempt to find familiar smells and tastes from home in a strange and remote land, but it greatly contributed to his acculturation to Tupi culture. Léry and his fellow French colonists even experimented with their own cooking, attempting to make French bread from the manioc flour. He warned any potential amateur baker against the disappointment awaiting him: “it is true that one can make with [these flours] a kind of dough, which, rising, like that made of wheat flour with leavening, is as fine and white as if it were, indeed, wheat bread; but as it cooks, the crust and all the top dries out and burns, and when it comes to cutting or breaking the bread, you find that the inside is all dry and has turned back to flour.”<sup>219</sup> There were also physical limits to acculturation. While the French tried to emulate native ways of eating dry manioc flour, their skills fell short of the mark:

---

<sup>216</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 28. “Quoy qu’à ce commencement les viandes qu’ils nous avoyent apportées nous semblaient étranges, nous ne laissons pas neantmoins à cause de la nécessité, d’en bien manger.” Léry, *HVTB*, 151.

<sup>217</sup> “principalement quand on la detrempe avec quelque bouillon gras, car devenant alors grumeleuse comme du riz, ainsi apprestée elle est de fort bonne saveur.” Léry, *HVTB*, 239.

<sup>218</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 70. “Quand elle est fraîche vous diriez en la mettant en la bouche et en la mangeant que c’est du molet de pain blanc tout chaud.” Léry, *HVTB*, 238.

<sup>219</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 70.



our Tupinamba—men, women, and children – are ...so adept in their style of eating it that when they take it with four fingers from their earthen pot or some other vessel, they can toss it from a considerable distance, and it lands so neatly in their mouths that they don't spill a bit of it. We Frenchmen, wanting to imitate them, tried to eat it that way; but not being adept at the method, instead of throwing it into our mouths, we spread it all over our cheeks and covered our entire faces with flour. So unless we wanted to be got up like jesters – especially those of us who wore beards – we were compelled to eat it with spoons.<sup>220</sup>

Léry repeatedly emphasized the overall joyfulness of the Tupi People, who spent most of their time “frolicking and enjoying the good times that they know so well how to have,” drinking, dancing, and singing.<sup>221</sup> Inseparable from this almost constant “rejoicing” were native music and voices. Unlike many early colonists, Léry did not express complete dislike for Indian tunes and voices, although he did find loud screaming and mourning moans unpleasant.<sup>222</sup> More than any other sensation, Indian sounds and songs remained vividly imprinted in Léry's memory. Evoking a beautiful tune sang in

---

<sup>220</sup> “Que si entre nous François, les voulans imiter la pensions manger de ceste façon, n'estans pas comme eux stillez à cela, au lieu de la jeter dans la bouche nous l'espanchions sur les joues et enfarinions tout le visage : partant, sinon que ceux particulièrement qui portoyent barbe eussent voulu estre accoustrez en joueurs de farces, nous estions contraints de la prendre avec des cuilliers.” Léry, *HVTB*, 240. My translation. This is an example of a kind of cultural exchange that has been relatively little explored by scholars of early America. I believe that much cultural change and adaptation took place through the body, through physical contacts and proximity, emulation of gestures and behaviors of the Other. These exchanges made the “otherness” more tangible, but also tied both parties in a shared sense of humanity. Through new habits, new bodily behaviors and gestures, meaning and culture were transmitted and integrated by the newcomers. Only if they adjusted physically to their new environment could the French be accepted and respected among the natives, and in turn hope to influence the Indians. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique* (Paris : Editions Du Seuil, 2001).

<sup>221</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 64.

<sup>222</sup> Léry seemed to have been prejudiced against women's singing, against which he addressed his harshest criticism. The ritual crying that greeted the newcomers when they arrived in an Indian village was for instance described as “brayeries” (bawling). While visiting the town of *Cotiva*, Léry and a group of Frenchmen witnessed a large, day-long ceremony. As outsiders, however, they were not admitted within the main building and had to remain among the women. They could hear the voices of the men singing next door, and said the women answered their interjections (“*He, he, he, he*”) “with a trembling voice.” Suddenly, the women started to sing very loudly while performing a dance that strongly impressed and frightened the French observers: “they let out such cries, for more than a quarter of an hour, that as we watched them we were utterly disconcerted. Not only did they howl, but also, leaping violently into the air, they made their breasts shake and they foamed at the mouth ...I can only believe that the devil entered their body and that they fell into a fit of madness.” Léry, *HVLB*, 141. This witch-like description (he later refers to the ceremony as a ‘Sabbath’) strikingly contrasted with Léry's admiration for the men's harmonious song. For the original French version, see Léry, *HVTB*, 396-98.

harmony by five hundred men at the conclusion of a long ceremony, he said: “whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears.”<sup>223</sup> Léry conjectured that the instruments made of dried fruits and squashes served “as something to arouse their spirits,” “besides their voices and the chants they usually use in their dances.” He described the method for making musical instruments, such as the *Maraca*, of which he also sensed the ritual and magical usage.<sup>224</sup> He observed that leggings of dried fruits filled with small stones were gradually replaced by European-made bells, “which they greatly covet.”<sup>225</sup> His observations also suggest that the Tupís had become accustomed to the sound of European firearms, expressing critical judgment rather than fear and awe towards the weapons. Not unlike Léry’s own sensory learning process, “once they had come to understand how it was done, they said that they would have loosed five or six arrows with their bows sooner than you could have loaded and fired one shot with a harquebus.”<sup>226</sup> Finally, prefiguring the methods used by missionaries in later decades, Léry used his own singing as a tool for accommodation. While making his way through the jungle to a nearby Indian village in the company of three natives, the

---

<sup>223</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 144. “Et de fait, au lieu que du commencement de ce sabat (estant comme j’ay dit en la maison des femmes), j’avois eu quelque crainte, j’eu lors en recompense une telle joye, que non seulement oyant les accords si bien mesurez d’une telle multitude, et sur tout pour la cadence et le refrain de la balade, à chacun couplet tous en traissant leurs voix, dians : *Heu, heuaüre, heüra, heüraüre, heüra, heüra, oueh*, j’en demeuray tout ravi : mais aussi toutes les fois qu’il m’en ressouvient, le coeur m’en tressaillant, il me semble que je les aye encore aux oreilles.” Léry, *HVTB*, 403.

<sup>224</sup> “they have a strange belief concerning these maracas (which they almost always have in hand): attributing a certain sanctity to them once this bewitchment has been accomplished, they say that whenever they make them sound, a spirit speaks.” Léry, *HVLB*, 145.

<sup>225</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 233. “les sonnettes de par deçà, desquelles aussi ils sont fort convoiteux quand on leur en porte.”

<sup>226</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 115. Léry made very clear the learning process at the heart of this example of sensory acculturation : “du commencement, qu’ils oyoyent les sons de nostre artillerie, et les coups d’harquebuses que nous tirions, ils s’en estonnassent aucunement : mesmes voyans souvent, qu’aucuns de nous, en leur presence, abbatoyent un oyseau de dessus un arbre, ou une beste sauvage au milieu des champs : par ce principalement qu’ils ne voyoyent pas sortir ny en aller la balle, cela les esbahit bien fort, tant y a neantmoins, qu’ayant cogneu l’artifice, et disans (comme il est vray) qu’avec leurs arcs ils auront plustost delasché cinq ou six flesches qu’on aura chargé et tiré un coup d’harquebuse, ils commençoient de s’asseurer à l’encontre.” Léry, *HVTB*, 342.

beauty of the landscape and of the sounds of birds surrounding him inspired Léry to sing out loud a Christian psalm (Psalm 104). His native companions enjoyed the tune so much that they offered him an agouti (large rodent), and inquired about the meaning of the song, which Léry interpreted as encouraging signs of the Indians' predisposition to Christianity and its teachings. Although his interpretation was clearly a stretch, we must nevertheless recognize the importance of sonorous accommodation in the colonial cultural process.

Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage* projects the reader into an amazingly colorful, boisterous, odoriferous, tasty, and sometimes highly sensual world.<sup>227</sup> Through this sensory learning process, Léry found himself transformed. Thanks to the collection of innumerable sensory experiences and their meanings, Léry not only felt more familiar with his environment and hosts, avoiding dangerous cultural mishaps, but he gained self-confidence. The expertise he acquired through his own body emboldened him to challenge the authority of the ultimate cultural mediator in early Brazil: the *truchement*. *Truchements* were central figures of colonial Brazil for anyone who expected to become acculturated to the Indians, or more simply to avoid dying at their hands. They typically came from Normandy, lived for years with the Brazilian natives, often marrying into a prominent clan or family, and were essential to maintain peace and commercial

---

<sup>227</sup> Expressions of touch are sparse in the narratives, probably because of the prescribed Christian modesty, but one can well imagine what effect the constant contact and company of naked Indian women could have had on men who were otherwise largely lacking the presence of even fully-dressed European women. Léry claimed that "this crude nakedness in such a woman is much less alluring than one might expect," but also, quite boldly for the time, confessed that the "natural beauty" of native women was far more superior to that of European women, but that decency prevented him from developing why. Léry, *HVLB*, 67. In addition, friendly welcomes in native towns are frequently described as "caresses" in early colonial accounts. It remains unclear whether this word referred to literal caresses (such as those provided by native women to Cartier and his crew in Canada – see Chapter One), or if it was a phrase to express the friendliness of the welcome. Lastly, Léry does mention recurrently "touching" Indian-made objects and ceramics, as a way of knowing them and understand how they were made. In this sense, Touch was also a sensory means of learning.

cooperation between the Indians and the French merchants who regularly landed on the coast to fill their ships with precious brazilwood and other resources.<sup>228</sup> Léry certainly relied on the informed knowledge of these mediators to fill in the blanks of his experience and his account, and to refresh his memory about certain details, particularly linguistic. These Frenchmen often appeared even more exotic to newly arrived colonists than the strange native peoples and animal creatures of Brazil. In most cases, they married Indian women in complete negation of the Church sacraments, had illegitimate children, and even went as far as transgressing the strongest taboos of Christian Western morality in participating in cannibalistic rituals.<sup>229</sup> In other words, they had gone too far along the path to acculturation and were judged more savage than the Indians for having chosen this heathen life rather than being born into it.

For all the distrust and moral contempt that Léry felt toward the *truchements*, they still represented superior achievement in cultural knowledge and adaptation. Implicit in Léry's attempts to demonstrate his observatory skills and the accuracy of his remarks may have been a desire to challenge the interpreters' prominence. Serendipity gave him a chance to do so shortly before he was forced to leave Brazil, when together with a Frenchman named Jacques Rousseau, and a *truchement*, Léry happened to arrive in the Indian town of Cotiva as a major ceremony involving several shamans and inhabitants

---

<sup>228</sup> Alida Metcalf, *Go-Betweens*, op.cit., 62-74. Metcalf identifies the Norman *truchements* as "transactional go-betweens" who played a crucial role as translators, negotiators, and cultural brokers in early colonial Brazil. She points to the fact that "to make possible this trading relationship, which carried such high stakes on both the Indian and the French sides, Norman interpreters had to establish a place for themselves within Tupinamba society. To accomplish this, they had to obtain social status, and they had to be recognized by local chiefs." Ibid, 71. Marriage into the tribe, or even the chief's extended family, was one of the ways French *truchements* earned the trust and protection of Indian chiefs.

<sup>229</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 128. "To my regret I am compelled to recount here that some Norman interpreters, who had lived eight or nine years in that country, accommodating themselves to the natives and leading the lives of atheists, not only polluted themselves by all sorts of lewd and base behavior among the women and girls (by whom one of them had a boy about three years old when I was there), but some of them, surpassing the savages in inhumanity, even boasted in my hearing of having killed and eaten prisoners."

from multiple Indian villages was about to take place. The men, women, and children stood in three separate rows. The natives did not seem to mind the French presence during what was likely a significant religious event in preparation for war, but nevertheless confined the intruders to the women's building, while the men gathered in the main 'longhouse' with three or four *caraiibes* [shamans].

Unable to see what was happening in the main building, Léry's curiosity was at a climax, until fear overtook him when the Indian women fell into a trance upon hearing the voices coming out of the men's cabin.<sup>230</sup> Léry, who failed to describe the attitudes and reactions of his two fellow Frenchmen, seemed to have been completely under the influence of the voices he heard. The sudden change from the "chaotic noises and howls" to a more melodious song coming from the three cabins suddenly awoke his intrepid curiosity.<sup>231</sup> "Since I was now somewhat easier in my mind at hearing such sweet and

---

<sup>230</sup> His acquired experience and expertise did not make him impervious to doubt and fear. He wrote with much honesty about his feelings during this female performance: "combien, dis-je, qu'il y eust déjà plus de demi an que je frequentois les sauvages, et que je fusse desjà autrement accoustumé parmi eux, tant y a pour n'en rien déguiser, qu'ayant eu alors quelque frayeur, ne sçachant mesme quelle seroit l'issue du jeu, j'eusse bien voulu estre en nostre fort." Léry, *HVTB*, 399. Here, Léry implied that fear should go away with time as he acquired culturally-informed knowledge about Indian ways.

<sup>231</sup> Stephen Greenblatt comments on this same episode, arguing that "Léry presents his appreciation of the beauty of the savage music as a triumph over his own panic fear in the presence of the demonic. Perhaps we should interpret his response then as a version of the aesthetic recoding by means of which medieval Christians neutralized the images of the ancient pagan deities. (...) It is certainly true that Léry's ravishment takes the ceremony –which he has identified as a witches' Sabbath – out of context, but his response does not seem to be the same as distancing: on the contrary, he takes it out of context –any context, including his own beliefs – in order to approach more closely, to draw it into himself, to remember it in the very beating of his heart. The experience of wonder seems to resist recuperation, containment, ideological incorporation; it sits strangely apart from everything that gives coherence to Léry's universe, apart and yet utterly compelling." Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, op.cit., 17. This sophisticated argument, while rightly using knowledge of Léry cultural background to analyze his judgment, minimizes the reality of the sensory impact Indian voices could produce on European bodies, privileging instead the intellectual processing of the physical experience. This strikes me as a rather cynical perspective. Despite their prejudices, traditions, and beliefs, Europeans and Indians were both able to appreciate beauty in each other's cultures. I believe the sudden shift in Léry's assessment of the Indian singing is less a literary device than an honest rendering of the shift in tone and style by the Indian singers, which produced a concordant shift in sensations in Léry's body. If we accept the principle that Frenchmen sought to decipher nonverbal elements as clues of the content of Indian discourses and song

gracious sounds,” he explained, “I wished to watch them from nearby.”<sup>232</sup> The *truchement* warned him against angering their hosts, urging him not to exit the women’s cabin, which ironically made Léry more determined to do so. “Our interpreter,” he bragged, “said that in the six or seven years that he had been in that country, he had never dared be present among the savages at such a ceremony: so that, he added, if I went over there I would be behaving imprudently and exposing myself to danger.”<sup>233</sup> Symbolically emancipating himself from his dependence to the *truchements* throughout his journey, Léry carefully exited the women’s cabin and went to spy on the ceremonies that were taking place in the main building. He subsequently observed the elaborate dances that the men were performing around the shamans, “richly decked in robes, headdresses, and bracelets made of beautiful natural feathers of various colors, holding in each hand a *maraca* or rattle.”<sup>234</sup> For the first time, he also observed the shamans use a long wooden stick, “four or five feet long, at the end of which there was some of the *Petun* grass, dried and lit up,” to blow smoke over all the participants to give them “the spirit of strength” in the face of their enemies.<sup>235</sup>

The ultimate result of this complex process of acculturation was a subtle but profound change in identity. A new Brazilian self developed in Léry’s consciousness.

---

lyrics, it becomes less surprising that a loud, menacing tune associated with unruly dances would scare Léry, making him think of the devil, while a more gentle, peaceful tune would let him know danger had passed. Moreover, there seems to be a clear gender bias here, the women’s dances and voices being more often equated to a “witches’ Sabbath” than male vocal productions.

<sup>232</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 141.

<sup>233</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 141. Léry said he pondered the interpreter’s advice for a minute but “as I sounded out the case further, it seemed to me that he gave me no good reason for what he said.” Léry also claimed to have solid relations with some of the tribe’s elders, which he thought would keep him out of trouble.

<sup>234</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 142. “Et au surplus, parce qu’à cause de la multitude il y avoit trois rondeaux, y ayant au milieu d’un chacun trois ou quatre de ces Caraïbes, richement parez de robes, bonnets et bracelets, faits de belles plumes naturelles, naisves et de diverses couleurs : tenans au reste en chacune de leurs mains un Maraca, ... à fin, disoyent-ils que l’esprit parlast puis apres dans icelles pour les dedier à cest usage, ils les faisoient sonner à toute reste.” Léry, *HVTB*, 401-2.

<sup>235</sup> Léry, *HVTB*, 402-3.

Léry's memories and experiences were divided between what he constantly referred to as “*par-deçà*” [over here] and “*par-delà*” [over there]; between France, his mother land, and Brazil, his adoptive and adopted land. His book was constructed around a dense network of analogies between the two countries. Making precise comparisons between Tupi and French cultures, peoples, and objects was first intended to facilitate the reader's task of imagining and understanding persons and things that were in essence completely alien to them.<sup>236</sup> Léry also heavily relied on analogies to communicate sensory elements of his experience such as sounds, tastes, or smells. Native instruments sounded like “snail shells,” and the *maraca* “rattle[d] louder than a pig bladder full of peas.”<sup>237</sup> The techniques used by the Tupís to pierce the dried fruits to make such instruments were similar to how “children in France pierce big walnuts to make rattles.”<sup>238</sup> Manioc flour, he affirmed, “has the fragrance of starch made of pure wheat soaked a long time in water, when it is still fresh and liquid.”<sup>239</sup> And “you can eat [*aypi* root] like a chestnut roasted on hot coals,” Léry suggested, but it is also very good cooked in earthen pots “as we do omelets.”<sup>240</sup> When witnessing Indian dances and feasts, Léry could not help but think of “those over here whom we call ‘morris dancers,’ who, during the festivals of the patron

---

<sup>236</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 62-64. In one particular passage, Léry urged his readers (using the imperative mood) to try to build the image of a Tupi Indian in their imagination by putting together the bare bodies, adornments, and behaviors as he described them, like “layers” to be added or removed at will: “for the second contemplation of the savage, remove all the flourishes described above, and after rubbing him with a glutinous gum, cover his whole torso, arms, and legs, with little feathers minced fine...you can imagine what a fine fellow he is.” *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>237</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 61.

<sup>238</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 61.

<sup>239</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 69.

<sup>240</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 71.

saints of each parish, go about in fool's garb, scepter in hand and bells on their legs, dallying and dancing the morris in among the houses and town squares.”<sup>241</sup>

However, some of the analogies Léry used in his account occurred to him after his return to France, as the all-to-familiar French culture and society suddenly gained a new layer of meaning and emotions through remembrances of Brazil.<sup>242</sup> For instance, the feathered head ornaments that Tupís sometimes wore during ceremonies resembled, according to Léry, “the real or false hair, called ‘rackets’ or ‘batwings,’ with which the ladies and young girls of France and of other countries over here have been decorating their heads.” He added with irony that “you would say that they have acquired this invention from our savages.”<sup>243</sup> Similarly, French scents could summon powerful memories and sensations of Brazil. As an earlier and exotic version of Marcel Proust's *madeleine*, Léry wrote: “after I came back over here, whenever I happened to be in a place where starch was being made, the scent of it made me remember the odor one

---

<sup>241</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 76. In French the reference is unfortunately obscure as well, but the men to whom he refers must have looked like court jesters: “il me resouvenoit de ceux qu'en certains lieux par-deçà on appelle valets de la feste, lesquels ès temps de leurs vogues et festes qu'ils font des saints et patrons de chacune paroisse, s'en vont aussi en habits de fols, avec des marottes au poing, et des sonnettes aux jambes, bagnenaudans et dansant la Morisque parmi les maisons et les places.” Léry, *HVTB*, 253. He shared this last analogy between native dancers in full regalia and French court jesters or ‘jugglers’ with a large number of French chronicler throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, who also seemed to perceive Indian rituals as theatrical performances.

<sup>242</sup> Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage* was as much about sixteenth-century France as it was about Brazil. It often seems, partly thanks to Léry's omnipresent analogies, that the two were closer to each other than early modern France is familiar to twenty-first century Frenchmen and women. For instance, the ephemeral hair styles mentioned by Léry, or the way French children used to make “*molinet*” (rattles), are analogies directed to Léry's contemporaries, which have lost their evocative power today.

<sup>243</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 60. “Quant à l'ornement de teste de nos *Tououpinamkuins*...ils lient et arrengeant des plumes d'aisles d'oiseaux incarnates, rouges, et d'autres couleurs, desquelles ils font des fronteaux, assez ressemblans quant à la façon, aux cheveux vrais ou faux, qu'on appelle raquettes ou ratepenades : dont les dames et damoiselles de France, et d'autres pays de deçà depuis quelques temps se sont si bien accommodées : et diroit-on qu'elles ont eu ceste invention de nos sauvages, lesquels appellent cest engin *Yempenambi*.” Léry, *HVTB*, 221.



usually picks up in the savages' houses when they are making root flour.”<sup>244</sup> Léry brought Brazil back with him to France, because his experiences had transformed him beyond his stay in the New World. Only many years later, while chatting with a Flemish stranger who shared his nostalgia, could Léry finally but temporarily overcome the incommunicability of his sensory journey to cultural *métissage*.

\* \* \*

### ***Samuel de Champlain's Multisensory Exploration of Native America***

At first glance, few colonial narratives appear as dissimilar as Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* and Samuel de Champlain's *Voyages*. While the former is highly emotional, personal, and infused with Christian rhetoric, the latter rather belongs to the genre of geographical exploration and strives for scientific accuracy, official tone, and emotional detachment. The first author was a religious observer at odds with the local government of the colony, while the other was a military man and a seasoned mariner on a royal mission, who eventually came to be in charge of the newborn French settlement at Quebec. However, a closer look reveals that Champlain's journey through Acadia and Canada also transformed him and his outlook on the New World, making it impossible for him to remember or write about his experiences with the stern exactitude he strove for.

---

<sup>244</sup> Léry, *HVLB*, 69. “Et lors ceste farine ainsi crue, comme aussi le suc blanc qui en sort,... a la vraye senteur de l'amidon, fait de pur froment long temps trempé en l'eau quand il est encore frais et liquide, tellement que depuis mon retour par-deça m'estant trouvé en un lieu où on en faisoit, ce flair me fit ressouvenir de l'odeur qu'on sent ordinairement ès maisons des sauvages, quand on y fait de la farine de racine.” Léry, *HVTB*, 238.

Champlain first sailed to the New World in 1599 as a simple crewman aboard a Spanish ship engaged in war and commerce throughout the West Indies and the eastern coast of Mexico. In his account of this adventure, on which he embarked for fear of idleness and, he later claimed, in hope of gathering useful information for the king of France, New World Indians are only secondary characters. Similarly, his descriptions of the natives he met during his first journey to Acadia in 1603 in *Des Sauvages*, are, despite the title of the narrative, uncommonly few and vague compared to similar early colonial literature. Nevertheless, whether because of his growing dependence on and cooperation with Indians in Canada or because of the thirst of European readership for such information, Native American peoples and ways occupied an increasing amount of space in Champlain's accounts after 1604. Champlain's journey was not one from ignorance and indifference to fondness and informed appreciation for native cultures. Yet, through sensory contacts and nonverbal communications, Champlain's perception of Indians did change, along with his sense of self and of his role among them.

Champlain's first sighting of Caribbean Indians was unremarkable. While gathering fresh water on the island of Guadeloupe, Champlain and his companions saw "more than three hundred savages, who fled away into the mountains without it being in our power to catch a single one of them."<sup>245</sup> No details about their appearance, no attempts at deciphering native attitudes or motives for flight were included. For

---

<sup>245</sup> "Brief narrative of the most remarkable things that Samuel de Champlain of Brouage observed in the West Indies, 1599-1601," in H.P. Biggar, ed., *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, 6 Vols. (Toronto: The Publication of the Champlain Society, 1922), 1: 11-12 (hereafter cited as Biggar, *WSC*.) "à la Gardaloupe, qui est fort montaigneue, habitée de sauvages, en laquelle il y a quantité de bons ports, à l'un desquels, nommé Nacou, nous feusmes prendre de l'eau, et comme nous mettions pied à terre, nous veismes plus de trois centz sauvaiges qui s'en fuirent dedans les montaignes sans qu'il fust à notre puissance d'en attraper un seul, estans plus dispostz à la course que tous ceux des nostres qui les voulurent suivre." My translation.

Champlain, Indians were as memorable as parrots the French would have failed to capture, and clearly less significant than the existence of “quantity of good ports” and high mountains on Guadeloupe. After visiting the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, St. Domingue, Cuba, and stopping off the coast of Venezuela and in Mexico, all Champlain saw fit to report about “*Indiens*” were rumors about the natives’ particular affection for the French “with whom they traffic as often as they can, but without the Spaniards knowing it,” and a fuzzy description of native Mexican fertility rites, which he interpreted as moon worshipping.<sup>246</sup>

Four years later, Champlain found himself in a higher position as cartographer and main explorer in the expedition led by François Gravé, sieur du Pont, in Acadia. Even though his new status implied more intensive and strategic intercourse with Indians, Champlain’s narrative is surprisingly detached, suggesting a lack of personal interest in Indian peoples and cultures other than for practical, diplomatic, and geographic purposes. Of the *tabagie*, or feast, in which he and du Pont participated near Tadoussac in 1603, Champlain spoke as an accomplished traveler whom nothing could surprise. The few elements of the ceremony that he chose to emphasize were the ones that, in his view, suggested valuable qualities and presaged well for future potential civilizing and Christianizing endeavors.<sup>247</sup> The Indians’ orderly – supposedly hierarchical— seating

---

<sup>246</sup> “Brief narrative of the most remarkable things... in the West Indies,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 32 and 1: 61-63. It is not clear whether Champlain witnessed these ceremonies first-hand or was speaking about them from hearsay. “Le reste du peuple sont Indiens, gens de bonne nature qui ayment fort la nation françoise, avec laquelle ils trafficquent le plus souvent qu’ilz peuvent en fere, toutesfois c’est à desçu des Espaignols.” My translation. And “la plupart desdictz Indiens, qui ne sont point soubz la domination des Espaignols, adorent la lune comme leur dieu.”Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> “Trade was necessary to the voyage, but its primary purpose was to study the possibility of settlement in New France. The object was not to plant a colony, but to prepare for colonization in the near future.” David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream: the European Founding of North America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 126. I agree with Fischer that Champlain was “very mindful of the Indians” in view of past failures of French attempts at settling in the New World. He dealt with the Indians as with nations that

arrangements along both sides of the cabin, the silence with which they listened to their leader pronounce a harangue, and the poised tone of the orator, were thus mentioned as saplings of policy.<sup>248</sup>

Throughout his scarce and impassive relations of Native American customs and ceremonies, a number of sensory elements nonetheless made a strong enough impression on Champlain to cause him to describe them in substantive detail: the complete nudity of Indian women performing dances wearing nothing but “beads and strings intertwined,” the harmony and regularity of Indian singing voices and unison of shouts of approval, the heavy breathing of men dancing in celebration of an armed victory while displaying the scalps of fallen enemies, the variety of meats served during feasts, and the “dirty” habit of wiping one’s hands on the coat of dogs while eating.<sup>249</sup> Besides women’s nearly complete nudity, Champlain particularly noted their intricate and adorned hairstyles. One Almouchiquois girl in modern-day Massachusetts left a particularly vivid mark in his memory because her “hair was done quite neatly, covered with a skin dyed red, embroidered on top with small porcelain beads: a section of her hair was lying long in the back, and the rest was braided in various fashions.”<sup>250</sup> Refinement in hairdos, like art,

---

needed to be handled carefully to avoid jeopardizing one’s chances to settle and control the area in the future. In other instances, however, Fischer seems to exaggerate Champlain’s benevolence towards the Indians. I believe his claim that “Champlain regarded American Indians as fully equal to Europeans in intelligence and judgment” derives from an overly romantic reading of the sources. Ibid., 143-44.

<sup>248</sup> “Des Sauvages ou Voyage de Samuel de Champlain de Brouage fait en la France nouvelle, l’an mil six cens trois,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 99-101 and 110. “ayans bien petunné, il commença à faire sa harangue à tous, parlant pozement, s’arrestant quelque fois un peu, & puis reprenoit sa parolle.” “ils parlent fort pozément, comme se voullans bien faire entendre, & s’arrestent aussi tost en songeant une grand espace de temps, puis reprennent leur parolle : ils usent bien souvent de ceste façon de faire parmy leurs harangues au conseil.”

<sup>249</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 101-3, 107-9.

<sup>250</sup> “Les Voyages du Sieur de Champlain,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 356. “Je vey entre autres choses une fille coiffée assez proprement, d’une peau tente de couleur rouge, brodée par-dessus de petites patenostres de porcelaine : une partie de ses cheveux estoient pendans par derrière, & le reste entrelacé de diverses façons.” My translation

may have been synonymous to him of refinement in society and culture, since, on the other hand, he negatively commented elsewhere on the sewing skills of Indian women as a symbol of their lack of craftsmanship.<sup>251</sup> Compared to Léry, Champlain had only a small taste of the New World; he mentioned only eating Indian gourds “in salad like we do cucumbers,” and dried fish and eels and rarely commented upon Indian cuisine. On the other hand, his writings celebrated French alimentary abundance, in contrast to the scarcity and periods of fasting among the natives. A remarkable exception among French explorers and colonists, Champlain and the gentlemen who commanded these expeditions constantly offered food to the Indians during encounters along with the usual *bagatelles* (trifles).<sup>252</sup> It is left to us to imagine what the Indians thought of hard, weevily ship’s biscuits. In a related note, Champlain expressed utter disgust at the sight of the starving natives eating carrion, which smell alone was enough to make Frenchmen change path.<sup>253</sup> This example of the Indians’ lack of taste suggested for Champlain their ‘bestiality,’ in contrast to the French who had been using this same carrion to attract preys for hunting – a proper, civilized way to procure food.

---

<sup>251</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 308. “Les femmes font tous les habits, mais non pas si proprement qu’on ne leur voye la chair au dessous des aisselles, pour n’avoir pas l’industrie de mieux les accommoder.”

<sup>252</sup> In Book Two (1608-1612), Champlain told of a famine among the Indians around Quebec and blamed it on their inability to keep reserves and to practice agriculture like Iroquoian tribes. “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 56. During shore encounters, Champlain and the leaders of the expedition (whether de Mons or Du Pont Gravé) constantly offer bread, beans and peas, *galettes*, and *biscuits* (probably sea biscuits) to the Indians, sometimes even to the exclusion of all other gifts. See, for instance, *Ibid.*, 1: 283, 1: 316, 1:337, 1: 341, 1:398, 2: 54, 2: 140. This is only a small sample of some of Champlain’s sensory experiences in the New World. It must be noted, however, that sounds are relatively few in his account, with the exception of women’s mourning cries, and men’s war shouts.

<sup>253</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 54-5. “Cest charogne estoit une truie and un chien qui avoient enduré toutes les rigueurs du temps chaut & froit. Que le temps s’adoucissoit, elle pouoit si fort que l’on ne pouvoir durer auprès : neantmoins ils ne laisserent de la prendre et emporter en leur cabanne, où aussitost ils la devorerent à demy cuite, & jamais viande ne leur sembla de meilleur goust.” Champlain had no evidence that the Indians actually liked the taste of the decaying carcass, but the cultural difference was such in this case that he used it, and narratively amplified it, to support his conception of the Indians as living like “brute beasts” (*bestes bruttes*). *Ibid.*, 2: 47.

Although Champlain, unlike Léry, did not conceive every sensory detail as meaningful and rarely bothered to describe and decipher what he saw, smelled, heard, tasted, and touched, he did share the belief that observable behavior conveyed profound meaning about the Indians' 'true' nature and society. Just as hairstyles, tastes, and silences could suggest important elements about the natives' present condition and potential for improvement, so did Indian leaders bear on themselves visible indications of their peoples' possible future. One Indian captain the French met in the spring of 1605 was "good-looking, young and spry."<sup>254</sup> In 1608, it was the entirety of the Algonquian tribes dwelling along the St.Lawrence who were said to be "people well-proportioned in their bodies, without deformity, and are spry."<sup>255</sup> Marchim, an Almouchiquois war leader with whom the French at Ste.Croix were well-acquainted, "had the reputation of being one of the most valiant men in his country," reported Champlain. His appearance and countenance matched his fame and suggested it was well-deserved, for "he had nice manners, with all his gestures seeming solemn, all savage that he was."<sup>256</sup>

Enemies could also be gauged by the nobility of their behavior. About to engage in battle against Mohawk Indians with his Huron, Algonquin, and Montagnais allies near the location of the thereafter- named Lake Champlain in 1609, the French soldier judged his "strong and robust" opponents worthy, seeing them "coming towards us, with a

---

<sup>254</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 325-26. "Ces peuples demonstroient estre fort contens, leur chef estoit de bonne façon, jeune et bien dispos." (Biggar gives "active" for "dispos")

<sup>255</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 47-48. "Tous ces peuples sont gens bien proportionnez de leurs corps, sans difformité, & sont dispos. Les femmes sont aussi bien formees, potelees et de couleur bazannee, à cause de certaines peintures dont elles se frottent, qui les fait demeurer olivastres." My translation (Biggar has "agile" instead of "spry").

<sup>256</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 363-64. "nous vismes le Capitaine sauvage Marchim, que nous avions esperé voir au lac de Quinibequy, lequel avoit la reputation d'estre l'un des vaillans hommes de son pays : aussi avoit-il la façon belle, où tous ses gestes paroisoient graves, quelque sauvage qu'il fut." My translation.

gravity and assurance which delighted me.”<sup>257</sup> As a military man, Champlain could not help but make an analogy between the dances performed by the Montagnais before departing to war against the Iroquois and European-style military maneuvers. In 1604 (five years before Champlain got a chance to directly participate in Indian wars), the Indians assembled in full regalia on the “large public square” at the center of their town, “marched one behind the other, with their bows and arrows, clubs and round shields, with which they equip themselves for fighting; and they went leaping one after the other, striking attitudes with their bodies, and executed many turns and twists like soldiers spiraling in formation.”<sup>258</sup>

Samuel de Champlain was a man on a mission. His interest in Indians was limited to aspects that could be directly useful to his goals, both short- and long-term. Signs that the Indians were not totally deprived of policy and knew how to submit to strong able leaders were important to Champlain because he thought they would all be one day under

---

<sup>257</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 98. “Je vey sortir les ennemis de leur barricade, qui estoit pres de 200. hommes forts et robustes à les voir, qui venoient au petit pas audevant de nous, avec une gravité et asseurance qui me contenta fort.” My translation. Historian David Hackett Fischer rightly noted that “Champlain admired the Indians for their astonishing control of sound. They paddled ‘without making any noise,’ not the smallest splash or the slightest touch of a paddle against a canoe. Sixty Indians and three Frenchmen glided like spirits across the still waters of the silent lake.” David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain's Dream*, op.cit., 265.

<sup>258</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 179-80. “Premier que lesdits Montaignez partissent pour aller à la guerre, ils s’assemblerent tous, avec leurs plus riches habits de fourreures, castors, & autres peaux, parez de Patesnostes & cordons de diverses couleurs, & s’assemblerent devant une grand’place publicque, où il y avoit au devant d’eux un Sagamo qui s’appeloit Begourat, qui les menoit à la guerre, & estoient les uns derriere les autres, avec leurs arcs et flesches, massües, & rondelles dequoy ils se parent pour se battre : & alloient sautant les uns apres les autres, en faisant plusieurs gestes de leurs corps ils faisoient maints tours de limaçon.” My translation. The *limaçon* to which Champlain refers here was a military formation in the shape of a snail, that is, a spiraling circle. One may note that, where a man of the sword saw a military maneuver, a man of the cloth may have seen a “ballet.”

Champlain did not systematically make explicit attempts at interpreting or deciphering the Indians’ behaviors. He repeatedly described incomprehensible actions without explicit emotion or deduction: “one of them rose up, and took a dog, and went leaping about the said kettles from one end of the lodge to the other. When he came in front of the grand Sagamore, he threw his dog violently upon the ground, and then all with one voice cried, *Ho, ho, ho*; having done this, he went and sat down in his place.” *Ibid.*, 1: 102.

the control of the king of France. Strong healthy bodies may have evoked to him the image of able farmers and workers. He unambiguously stated from the early days of his explorations in Canada that the French hoped to “pacify [the neighboring Indians], and put an end to the wars they wage against one another, so as to extract in the future some service [from them], and to reduce them to Christian faith.”<sup>259</sup> It was also important to Champlain that Indians displayed certain intelligence, and he repeatedly insisted on the fact that many had “*l’esprit vif*” (a sharp mind). “I assure you,” he wrote, “that many among them have good judgment, and answer very properly any question put to them.”<sup>260</sup> Indeed, what mattered to Champlain above all, perhaps more than the ultimate success of French ambitions for fortune and power in the New World, was to explore and discover. In order to do that, he needed smart, sharp Indians who could understand his questions without understanding his language, and answer him as clearly as possible using clever sign-language and other nonverbal devices.

Champlain’s tendency to condense long, elaborate and lasting encounters or ceremonies into a few lines, and his constant use of ellipses, overlooking elements that most other chroniclers described in great details, could thus be attributed to the specificity of his needs and concerns. In other words, little did it matter to him how the Indians danced and sang as long as they danced and sang. On September 6, 1604, while exploring the Penobscot River a few days after leaving the French settlement at St. Croix,

---

<sup>259</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 272. “lesquels avec le temps on esperoit pacifier, & amortir les guerres qu’ils ont les uns contre les autres, pour en tirer à l’advenir du service ; & les reduire à la foy Chrestienne.” This passage follows a justification of the choice to settle at Port Royal after the first settlement in Sainte-Croix was abandoned (1604).

<sup>260</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 110. “Je vous assure qu’il s’en trouve assez qui ont bon jugement, & repondent assez bien à propos sur ce qu’on leur pouvoit demander.” And variation in a later narrative : “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 46 “ Il s’en trouve assez qui ont bon jugement & respondent à propos sur ce qu’on leur demande.”



Champlain, his twelve fellow sailors and two Indian interpreters, came across two loaded Indian canoes. Champlain described the scene as a formal diplomatic exchange, omitting specific details about the length of the dealings, the appearance and attitudes of the protagonists, and the content of the Indians' conversation with his *truchements*, which he did not attempt to decipher or mediate in any ways. The scene is described as follows:

we saw two canoes paddled by Indians, who came to observe us at a distance of a musket-shot. I sent our two Indians in a canoe to assure them of our friendship, but the fear they had of us made them turn back. The next morning they returned, and came alongside our pinnace, and conferred with our Indians. I had some biscuit, tobacco, and a few other trifles given to them. These Indians had come to hunt beaver, and to catch fish, some of which they gave us. Having made alliance with them, they guided us into their river Peimtegouet, as they call it, where they told us lived their chief named Bessabez, headman of that river.<sup>261</sup>

Since the Indians returned the next morning to barter with the visitors, it is doubtful that they initially turned back out of fear. They may simply have followed protocol, were expecting the French to follow them on shore where most bartering was usually conducted, or went back to tell their fellow countrymen about the presence of the strangers (a few days later, thirty Indians and the chief Bessabez came to meet Champlain's boat). But for Champlain, the key words were "friendship," and "alliance," which guaranteed him new informed guides to an unknown waterway.

Even when Champlain did give more details about Indian ceremonies—summarizing Indian and French harangues, mentioning dances and feasting—he usually concentrated on the general purpose and result of the proceedings. In June 1605, he and

---

<sup>261</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 283-84. "vismes deux canaux conduits par des sauvages, qui nous vindrent reconnoistre à la portee du mousquet. J'envoyé les deux nostres dans un canau pour les assurer de nostre amitié. La crainte qu'ils eurent de nous les fit retourner. Le lendemain matin ils revindrent au bord de nostre barque, & parlementerent avec nos sauvages. Je leur fis donner du biscuit, petum, & quelques autres bagatelles. Ces sauveges [sic] estoient venus à la chasse des Castors & à la pesches du poisson, duquel il nous donnerent. Ayant fait alliance avec eux, ils nous guiderent en leur riviere de Peimtegoüet ainsi d'eux appelee, où ils nous dirent qu'estoit leur Capitaine nommé Bessabez chef d'icelle." My translation.

Sieur de Mons reached Massachusetts Bay for the first time, where they followed distant smoke signals until meeting a welcoming group of “fifteen or sixteen canoes.” What was probably an important ceremony to befriend the newcomers was perceived by the Frenchman as only one more bartering session in view of “pacifying” the Indians and continue his exploration without hindrance. The Massachusetts natives “showed great signs of rejoicing, and made several sorts of harangues, which [the French] did not understand at all.” De Mons sent a few of his men on shore to offer presents of knives and other small goods as well as to gather fresh water, but the local chief, named Honabetha, seemed to have wanted to meet the leaders of this strange group of men in person. He thus came on board the ship “with a number of his companions.” Champlain summed up the exchange, which must have included much mutual observation, attempts at communicating, more gift-giving and perhaps a harangue from the chief, with the ellipsis: “we received the chief very humanely, and gave him good cheer.”<sup>262</sup>

Champlain’s perception of native physical expressions of joy is particularly revealing of his tendency to blur multiple and complex cultural manifestations under one general label. Like his predecessors in the “discovery” of the New World, such as Jacques Cartier, Champlain most of the time thought of the word “joy” and its derivatives as a basic synonym for “peace.” Friendly, joyful attitudes by the Indians visible at a

---

<sup>262</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 340-41. “il vint quinze ou seize canaux de sauvages, & en tel y en avoit 15 ou 16 qui commencerent à monstrier grands signes de resiouissance [sic], & faisoient plusieurs sortes de harangues, que nous n’entendions nullement. Le sieur de Mons envoya trois ou quatre hommes à terre dans notre canau, tant pour avoir de l’eau, que pour voir leur chef nommé Honabetha, qui eut quelques cousteaux & autres jolivetés, que le sieur de Mons luy dona, lequel nous vint voir iusues en nostre bort, avec nombre de ses compagnons, qui estoient tant le long de la rive, que dans leurs canaux. L’on receut le chef fort humainement, & luy fit-on bonne chere : & ayant esté quelque espace de temps, il s’en retourna.” My translation.

distance (on canoes or on shore) were a good omen for the upcoming contact.<sup>263</sup> But “joy,” in Champlain’s accounts, had multiple functions and degrees of intensity. It was an expression of wonder among Indians who had never seen white men before.<sup>264</sup> It was an expression of agreement and alliance in diplomatic setting.<sup>265</sup> The Algonquins and Montagnais were said to have been “very content and satisfied” when they saw the French find their way without needing an Indian guide on board, solely based on their descriptions and maps of the land.<sup>266</sup> “Joy” often marked the Indians’ satisfaction with the quality and quantity of gifts offered to them by the French.<sup>267</sup> In this sense, it could also suggest their “simplicity” and child-like absence of greed. More surprisingly, Champlain interpreted the friendly scenes as the Indians’ own naïve kind of currency in exchange for the gifts they received. Anticipating possible enmity from a New England tribe, the Sieur de Poutrincourt, leader of the Ste.Croix colony, endeavored to tour several Indian settlements and to display his liberality by distributing to women “bracelets, rings” and to men “axes, knives, and other things of which they stood in need.” Being satisfied with these European gifts despite their unfamiliar gendered distribution, the Indians

---

<sup>263</sup>“Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 406. “ce que voyant les sauvages, ils mirent un canot à la mer, & vindrent à nous 8 ou 9 en chantans, dansant, & faisant signes de la joye qu’ils avoient de nous voir.” There is a crucial ambiguity to this interpretation of “joy.” European chroniclers did insist on friendly signs and the Indians’ display of “affection,” suggesting that this childish “joy” implied submission and inferiority. However, they also constantly doubted the truth and reliability of these expressions of joy. Champlain was particularly distrustful of displays of joy and peaceful intentions. He knew the Indians usually laid down their bows and arrows as a sign of peace, but, on the basis of suspicions only, refused to trust the sign in several instances. *Ibid.*, 1: 431. “voyant que leur intention ne tendoit qu’à nous decevoir par caresses, en quoy ils se trompoient : car nous recognoissons bien qu’elle estoit leur volonté, qui ne tendoit qu’à mauvaise fin.” Also *Ibid.*, 1: 417 and 1: 295.

<sup>264</sup>“Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 294. “ils se rejouirent fort de nous veoir : d’autant que c’estoit la premiere fois qu’ils avoient veu des Chrestiens.”

<sup>265</sup>“Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 296. “ce que nos sauvages leur firent entendre, dont ils se demonstrentent estre fort contens, disans qu’il ne pouvait arriver plus grand bien que d’avoir nostre amitié.”

<sup>266</sup>“Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 79. “ Nous les trouvasmes fort contans et satisfaits de ce que nous allions de la façon sans guide, sinon que par le raport de ce que plusieurs fois ils nous avoient fait.”

<sup>267</sup>“Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 316. “Le sieur de Mons leur fit donner des galettes et des poix, dont ils furent fort contens.”

“repaid the whole with dances and *gambades* [gambols], with harangues that we did not understand.”<sup>268</sup>

Joy was also the only interpretation Champlain offered for the dancing, singing, and other incomprehensible gesticulations he and his men witnessed almost every time they approached a group of Indians on water or land. The words “*gambades*” or “*pantalonnades*” (sometimes “*gesticulations*” or “*signes de resiouissance*”) were used to describe Indian attitudes that did not clearly qualify as “dancing” in the eyes of Europeans.<sup>269</sup> What distinguished these bodily movements from instances in which the newcomers clearly identified dancing practices? Dances may have been characterized by the performance of several Indian individuals (such as a group of women standing apart from the rest), or by the unison and rhythm of the movements, whereas the *gambols* – likely meaningful and codified physical behaviors as well – may have appeared as

---

<sup>268</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 417. “Or sur ce que le Sieur de Poutrincourt avoit veu, & l’ordre qu’on luy dit qu’ils tenoient quand ils avoient envie de jouer quelques mauvais tour, nous passames par des cabannes, où il y avoit quantité de femmes, à qui on avoit donné des bracelets, & bagues pour les tenir en paix, & sans crainte ; & à la plupart des hommes apparens & antiens des haches, couteaux, & autres choses, dont ils avoient besoing : ce qui les contentoit fort, payans le tout en danses et gambades, avec des harangues que nous n’entendions point. Nous passasmes partout sans qu’ils eussent assurance de nous rien dire : ce qui nous resiouist fort, les voyans si simple en apparence, comme ils monstroient. “ In this instance, the French were also “rejoicing” at seeing the Indians’ peaceful disposition towards them. This “joy” is here an expression of relief and satisfaction (no doubt with themselves and their clever maneuver too). Champlain mentions “joy” as payment in several other instances in his narratives, particularly between 1604 and 1607. *Ibid.*, 1: 337. “Le sieur de Mons envoya deux ou trois hommes vers eux dans un canau, ausquels il bailla des cousteaux & patesnostres pour leur presenter, dont ils furent fort aises, & danserent plusieurs fois en payement.” In 1607, the Indians danced to welcome the French, then danced some more out of happiness and gratitude: *Ibid.*, 1: 334-35. “Nous nommasmes ce lieu le cap aux isles, proche duquel nous apperçeusmes un cana, où il y a avoit 5 ou 6 sauvages, qui vindrent à nous, lesquels estans près de notre barque s’en allerent danser sur le rivage. Le sieur de Mons m’envoya à terre pour les veoir, & leur donner à chacun un cousteau & du biscuit, ce qui fut la cause qu’ils redanserent mieux qu’auparavant.”

<sup>269</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 108. In his 1603 account, Champlain described an Indian performer during a ceremony celebrating a military victory as making “few gestures and movements of the body, lifting one foot, then the other, stomping the ground.” “[ils] font quelques gestes et mouvements du corps, levans un pied, & puis l’autre, en frappant contre terre.”

individual, chaotic, and spontaneous bursts of enthusiasm. Clearly, what Champlain labeled as manifestations of joy were much more complex nonverbal productions.

The French themselves could perform friendly, “joyful” acts in various ways. In the spring of 1609, Champlain reported that the Algonquins and Hurons settled around Quebec asked him, after obtaining the French promise to assist them in their war against the Iroquois, that “as a sign of great friendship and rejoicing, [he] ordered muskets and arquebuses fired, and that they would be satisfied: which [he] did.”<sup>270</sup> Thunder-like loud noise emitted by strange and powerful weapons soon to be used in war against sworn enemies probably meant more to the Indians than a mere celebration of happiness and contentment with the recent alliance. But, to Champlain, what mattered in all these various nonverbal signs was that they confirmed things were going well, and allowed him to dedicate the rest of his time to his true passion: exploration.

The core of Champlain’s sensory interactions with natives occurred during his multiple “discoveries,” away from the French successive settlements (Sainte Croix, Port Royal, and Québec). Throughout his early voyages to Canada (up to 1612), he primarily interacted with the Indians as guides and informants about local and more distant geography. Although he was a reputed cartographer and explorer, his discovery of the St. Lawrence, the Hudson, and New England required him to master new tools. He had to learn Indian signs, and in the process to become acclimatized to Indian conceptions of the land, capturing and even to a certain extent appropriating its symbolic as well as geopolitical dimensions.

---

<sup>270</sup>“Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 70. “...que maintenant ils me prioient de retourner en nostre habitation, pour voir nos maisons, & que trois jours après nous retournerions `a la guerre tous ensemble ; & que pour signe de grand amitié & resiouissance je feisse tirer des mousquets et arquebuses, & qu’ils seroient fort satisfaits : ce que je fis.”

The first sign that he and his men learned to recognize was smoke. Smoke was an unmistakable indication of human presence, one that could be detected from a great distance.<sup>271</sup> It did not necessarily manifest an intent to communicate, as Champlain discovered when, upon reaching the place where smoke was coming from, he only found hot coals, the Indians having already left.<sup>272</sup> More often, however, not only were smoke signals a reliable way to locate and make contact with Indian groups, but Champlain even suggested in numerous instances that the Indians made fires as beacons to guide him towards their location. Following a chance encounter with five Indians near Massachusetts Bay, the French proceeded to follow their instructions to reach the Bay. “Having gone half a league,” recalled Champlain, “we perceived upon a rocky point several Indians who ran dancing along the shore towards their companions to inform them of our coming.” In this instance, joyful dancing was interpreted as a message directed to other Indians. The Indians on shore also made signs in the direction of the Frenchmen, as the explorer recalled: “having indicated to us the direction of their home, they made signal-smokes to show us the site of their settlement.”<sup>273</sup> Through smoke,

---

<sup>271</sup> In Brazil, one chronicler reported that smoke was used by the Indians and their Portuguese allies to warn other settlements when a foreign ship was in sight and probably in search of plunder. This use is not mentioned in early sources about Canada, although smoke signals could probably be used for a variety of purposes. Jean-Pierre Moreau, ed. *Un Flibustier français, op.cit.*, 77, 83-4. “Mais le malheur fut, qu’ayant été découverts par les Portugais et sauvages qui allumaient des feux le long des côtes pour avertir les habitants quis ont le long d’icelles et les navires qui étaient dans les havres de n’en sortir point, fut la cause que nous nous retirâmes sans rien faire.”

Champlain reported that, when on the war path, Indians avoided at all price making fires, and kept as still and silent as possible, sometimes for weeks while approaching the enemy they hoped to surprise. “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 86. “Le jour se retirent dans le fort des bois, où ils reposent, sans s’esgarer ny mener bruit, ny faire aucun feu, afin de n’estre apperceuz, si par fortune les ennemis passoient.”

<sup>272</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 332. “Costoyant la coste nous apperçusmes une fumees sur le rivage de la mer, dont nous approchâmes le plus qu’il nous fut possible, & ne vîmes aucun sauvage, ce qui nous fit croire qu’ils s’en estoient fuys.”

<sup>273</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 336. “Ayant fait demie lieue nous apperçusmes plusieurs sauvages sur la pointe d’un rocher, qui couroient le long de la coste, en dansant, vers leurs compagnons, pour les advertir de nostre venue. Nous ayans monstré le quartier de leur demeure, ils firent signal de fumees pour nous monstrier l’endroit de leur habitation.” Also, when Champlain encountered a small party of

signs, mapping, and sometimes escort by canoes, the Indians were able to manipulate the French into following a path they had designed with the interest of their own people in mind.

Champlain usually had one or more Indian guides on board with him during his journeys of exploration, who could also serve as interpreters.<sup>274</sup> But these native *truchements*' geographical knowledge, like their language proficiency, often did not go beyond the boundaries of their usual living, fishing, and hunting regions. Once the Frenchmen had traveled too far from their point of departure, they had to secure information from locals, most of the time without any mutual linguistic understanding. Champlain thus had to trust Indians he barely knew, for instance letting one of them serve as pilot of his rowboat through a difficult passage into a natural harbor.<sup>275</sup> As a rule, Indians seemed willing to show the way to their settlement or describe their nearby region of origin to the French, less so to embark with them without guaranties that they would not be dropped off in the land of their enemies.<sup>276</sup> Natives who answered

---

Almouchiquois, he said they returned to their settlement to warn the rest of their people, who made smoke signals to guide the French ship: Ibid., 1: 344. "Ledit canau s'en retourna à terre advertir ceux de son habitation, qui nous firent des fumees, & apperçusmes 18 ou 20 sauvages, qui vindrent sur le bord de la coste, & se mirent à danser." and Ibid., 1: 322 "nous apperçusmes deux fumées que nous faisoient des sauvages, vers lesquelles nous fusmes mouiller l'ancre derriere un petit islet..."

<sup>274</sup> Nothing was better than an insider's point of view on native land and society. "Certainly the vast majority of colonists and officials had no aptitude for or interest in learning to think and speak like Indians. So they searched for reliable surrogates – interpreters whose closeness to native culture gave them an intimate knowledge not only of native tongues but of the mental and moral codes for deciphering native acts, hopes, and fears." James Axtell, "Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians," in *Natives and Newcomers: the Cultural Origins of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 66.

<sup>275</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 408-9. "Nostre chaloupe y estant, nos gens mirent pied à terre & considererent le lieu, puis revinrent avec un sauvage qu'ils amenerent, & nous dirent que de plaine mer nous y pourrions entrer, ce qui fut resolu ; & aussitost levastes l'ancre et fusmes par la conduite du sauvage, qui nous pillota, mouiller l'ancre à une rade qui est devant le port, à six brasses d'eau."

<sup>276</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 299. " Nos sauvages nous quitterent, d'autant qu'ils ne voullurent venir a Quinibequy : parce que les sauvages du lieu sont leurs grands ennemis. "; Ibid., 1: 415 "Ayant fait cinq ou six lieues & abordant la terre, le sauvage s'en fuit, qui avoit eu crainte qu'on ne l'emmenast à d'autres sauvages plus au midy, qui sont leurs ennemis, à ce qu'il donna à entendre à ceux qui estoient

Champlain's signed questions about the shape and direction of rivers and guided him to the safest harbors where the newcomers could then trade and engage in ceremonies with local groups clearly had an agenda of their own. Serving as guide and interpreter for the French was likely a strategic choice on the part of some Indians to fulfill specific ends, as in the case of Messamouët, who accompanied Champlain during most of his travels through Acadia and New England between 1604 and 1607. Having become an expert at interacting with the newcomers, the Souriquois man probably enjoyed special prestige among his people. He also used the French, their visible power, and their travels to extend his own authority over a larger network of tribes. In 1606, he and another Indian captain named Secondon caught a ride with the French to pay a visit to their distant neighbors. After a ten-day journey, Messamouët reached the town of Chouacoet (Saco), where he offered lavish gifts of copper kettles of various sizes, axes, knives, red cloth, and other European goods to the local leader, Onemechin, with whom he wished to conclude an alliance. Onemechin in turn gave him corn, squashes, and beans, "which did not satisfy Messamouët very much, who departed much displeased because he had not been suitably repaid for what he had given them, and with the intention of making war upon them before long."<sup>277</sup> An empowered Messamouët, after symbolically displaying

---

dans la chaloupe. "Indians may also have feared kidnapping, a common practice of European explorers. See Frances Karttunen, "Interpreters Snatched from the Shore: the Successful and the Others," in Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering, eds. *the Language Encounter in the Americas*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 215-29; and James Axtell, "At the Water's Edge: Trading in Sixteenth Century," in *Natives and Newcomers*, op.cit., 81-5.; On Indian interpreters in general: Axtell, "Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians," *Ibid.*, 66-75.

<sup>277</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 396. "en ce lieu le sieur de Poutrincourt retira un prisonnier qu'avoit Onemechin, auquel Messamouët fit des presens de chaudières, haches, cousteaux & autres choses. Onemechin luy en fit au reciproque, de bled d'Inde, cytrouilles, febves du Bresil : ce qui ne contenta pas beaucoup ledit messamouët, qui partit d'avec eux fort mal content, pour ne l'avoir pas bien recogneu, de qu'il leur avoit donné, en dessein de leur faire la guerre en peu de temps : car ces nations ne donnent qu'en donnant, si ce n'est à personnes qui les ayent bien obligez, comme de les avoir assiste en leurs guerres."



his new position through objects he had obtained from his white friends, could claim control over less well-connected groups.<sup>278</sup> The following spring (1607), Messamouet and his allies waged war on Onemechin, who was killed along with his ally Marchim.<sup>279</sup>

The kind of nonverbal geographical information Champlain received from the Indians was multidimensional, hinged on key landmarks, and was communicated with surprising success. Native knowledge was solicited to either prefigure the hydrology and topography of the regions Champlain was about to enter, or to describe lands that remained frustratingly out of the reach of the Frenchmen's crafts but not of the more maneuverable Indian canoes.<sup>280</sup> When even their shallow, flat-bottomed skiff proved unable to pass rapids near the present location of Montreal, Champlain turned to his native guides to complement the data he had been able to gather from his own observations. Asking about "the end of the river" and "whence was its source" (in this case the Ottawa River of which he had seen the mouth), Champlain said he made the

---

<sup>278</sup> Historian David Hackett Fischer uses this same anecdote to demonstrate Poutrincourt's weakness as a leader through his failure to mediate this exchange between Indian leaders that he said he initiated: "Tone and gesture were of high importance in that world. The chiefs were now angrier than ever, and they parted with a determination to make war. Champlain watched it go wrong, but Poutrincourt insisted that he alone could speak for the French. Perhaps Champlain could have done no better, but an opportunity was lost." Fischer, *Champlain's Dream*, op.cit., 194. I believe he is mistaken in suggesting that Poutrincourt had initiated the meeting and that he, or any other Frenchman, had been at one point in control of the encounter between Messamouet, Onemechin, and Marchin. Messamouet and Onemechin were long-time foes, and I think Messamouet intentionally came with his French allies and an impressive amount of European goods to which his opponent did not have access to try to force him to submit to his newly-gained power.

<sup>279</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 295.

<sup>280</sup> Champlain was an admirer of the swiftness and portability of Indian canoes. He considered early on (1603) adopting this mode of transportation over the French barque in order to fully explore the region. "Des Sauvages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 152. "mais avec les canots des sauvages l'on peut aller librement & promptement en toutes les terres, tant aux petites rivieres comme aux grandes. Si bien qu'en se gouvernant par le moyen desdits Sauvages & de leurs canots, l'on pourra voir tout ce qui se peut, bon & mauvais, dans un an ou deux."

Indians “represent [it] with their hand.”<sup>281</sup> The Indians explained through a mix of gestures, words, and numbers that

beyond the first rapid [the French] had seen, they go up the river in their canoes some ten or fifteen leagues to a river which extends to the dwelling-place of the Algonquins, who dwell some sixty leagues distant from the great river; and then they pass five rapids, which from the first to the last may extend eight leagues, and at two of them they carry their canoes to get past them. Each rapid may extend an eighth of a league or a quarter at the most. Then they come to a lake, which may be fifteen or sixteen leagues long. Beyond it they again enter a river, which may be a league broad, and travel some two leagues up it; and then enter another lake some four or five leagues in length; at the end of which they pass five other rapids, the distance from the first to the last being some twenty-five or thirty-leagues; past three of these they carry their canoes, and at the other two they do but track them in the water, because the current is not so strong there nor so difficult as in the others.<sup>282</sup>

The description continued like this for another page, finishing with one of the first mentions of what was to become known as Lake Erie and Lake Huron:

From here they enter another lake, which may be some sixty leagues long, and its water is very brackish. Having reached the end of it they come to a strait two leagues broad, which leads far into the interior. They told us that they themselves had passed no farther, and had not seen the extremity of a lake, which is some fifteen or sixteen leagues where they themselves has been, nor had they who told them of it known of any man that had seen it, because it is so vast that they will not venture to put out into the same.<sup>283</sup>

A twenty-first-century observer could easily match the Indians’ itinerary to a modern-day map. While distances, being only approximate, often fell short of the mark, the succession of landmarks such as rapids, lakes, and river tributaries are astonishingly

---

<sup>281</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 153. “nous interrogeasmes les Sauvages que nous avions, de la fin de la rivière, que je leur fis figurer de leur main, & de quelle partie procedoit sa source.” The translation in Biggar’s edition gives: “we questioned the savages we had with us about the end of the river, which I made them draw by hand, and [show] whence was its source.” My understanding of the French text is that Champlain used the Indians’ hand as a sort of map, with maybe the fingers and orientation of the palm indicating the direction and shape of the river. It would be indeed easier to point or mime obstacles and directions on a support, especially for the French who were used to one-dimensional maps.

<sup>282</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 153-55.

<sup>283</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 155-56.

accurate.<sup>284</sup> These exchanges only necessitated a rather small number of shared codes: a specific sign or word for rapids (sault), which could also be pointed to since one was near the site of the exchange; numbers expressed with fingers, with the Indians probably expressing distances in length of traveling time, and Champlain converting these days and “moons” (months) into leagues; the miming of portage; a representation, maybe through drawing in the sand, of a lake.<sup>285</sup> Native information was consistently confirmed by Champlain’s own explorations. Near Plymouth, Champlain declared: “I recognized in this bay everything the Indians at Island Cape had depicted for me.”<sup>286</sup> Across ten years of recollections, there were only two instances when the declarations of the Indians did not prove true, and even then the misunderstanding seemed to have surfaced from the French side.<sup>287</sup>

The imagined landscapes of northeastern America that Champlain constructed from Indian nonverbal accounts were not culturally neutral. While the French

---

<sup>284</sup> In this instance, the Indians thus described the Ottawa River, the Cascades, Split Rock, Cedar and Coteau-du-Lac rapids; Lake St. Francis, the Long Sault, the rapide Plat, the Galoups; Lake Ontario, Niagara Falls, Lake Erie, Detroit River (the strait connecting Lake Erie and lake St. Clair), and Lake Huron. See notes in “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 153-55.

<sup>285</sup> Although he often assumes that efficient mutual language understanding was used during such exchanges, Fischer is right to point out that “from two weeks of exploration, and much conversation with the Indians, [Champlain] had formed an accurate image of North America from Hudson Bay to the Hudson River, and from the St. Lawrence to the Great Lakes.” Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream*, op.cit., 141.

<sup>286</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1 : 340. “je reconnus en la baye tout ce que m’avoient depeint les sauvages au cap des isles.” My translation. Champlain also compared accounts from various Indian informers to check their accuracy. *Ibid*, 1: 158.

<sup>287</sup> The first instance occurred when Champlain and Sieur de Mons waited for a chief named Sasinou, who had apparently told them he would meet them at a given location to give them two captives. The French waited a few days for him, trading for some pelts with another local chief, then continued their journey back to Sainte-Croix when the chief failed to arrive. They may have misunderstood the time, location, or even existence of the rendez-vous. “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 363. The second example occurred when Champlain had been told he could easily pass through rapids with his skiff by the Indians, and was not able to do so. In this case, the problem may have been that the Indians could indeed pass easily with their own canoes and did not anticipate that the French would not be able to do the same. “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 78. “je me resolus avec le conseil d’un chacun, de faire autre chose que ce que nous nous estions promis, d’autant que les sauvages m’avoient assuré que les chemins estoient aisez : mais nous trouvasmes le contraire.”

cartographer imposed on the land his own conceptions based upon European models, the information he received was also infused with native meaning and socio-cultural constructs. More than purely geographic, these accounts offered tips about the nature of the travel, dangerous passages, and native peoples living along the way.<sup>288</sup> The Indians' landscape was not only made of fixed capes, bays, and rapids. It was also made of hunting and fishing grounds, of spiritually charged places, of war paths, and of paths leading to trading partners and allied nations. When Champlain inquired about the New England coast from a handful of local Indians he happened to meet on his way, he first showed them what he knew and asked them "as well as [he] could" to show him the shape of the littoral laying beyond his sight. "After having drawn for them with a charcoal the bay and the Island Cape, where we then were," recalled Champlain, "they pictured for me with the same tool, another bay that they represented as very large. Here they placed six pebbles at equal intervals, giving me thereby to understand that each of these marks stood for as many chiefs and tribes. Next they represented within the said bay a river which we had passed, which reaches very far, and has shoals."<sup>289</sup> The bay pictured on this day was Massachusetts Bay, around which a confederacy of allied tribes did reside. Ultimately, Champlain adopted the practice of mapping the inhabitants while mapping the land. Geographical markers, such as mountains and peninsulas, were described and situated in reference to people, whom the French had often never met: "we

---

<sup>288</sup> For instance this description of the Norembeque river by Cabahis: "il me dit qu'elle passé le sault don't j'ay fait cy dessus mention, & que faisant quelque chemin en icelle on entroit dans un lac par où ils vont à la rivière de Sainte-Croix, d'où ils vont quelque peu par terre, puis entrent dans la riviere des Etechemins." "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 297-98.

<sup>289</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 334-35. "Après leur avoir depeint avec un charbon la baye et le cape aux isles, où nous estions, ils me figurerent avec le mesme creon, une autre baye qu'ils representoient fort grande, où ils mirent six caillous d'esgalle distance, me donnant par là à entendre que chacune des marques estoit autant de chefs & peuplades : puis figurerent dedans ladite baye une riviere que nous avions passee, qui s'estent fort loing, & est batturiere."

see [from this bay] large mountains to the west, where is the residence of an Indian captain named Aneda.”<sup>290</sup> Imagined landscapes thus gave way to imagined communities.

Northeastern North America as the Indians knew it was also inhabited by malignant spirits, monstrous peoples, and ancestors’ souls and strewn with powerful spiritual landmarks linked to their mythological origins. This was the land that the French cartographer discovered along with far-reaching waterways and fertile landscapes. Champlain constantly oscillated between paternalistic incredulity and genuine belief in evil forces. In 1605, the Sieur de Mons, accompanied by a few gentlemen, twenty sailors, and an Indian couple serving as his interpreters, sought to explore *Quinibequy* (Kennebec) River.<sup>291</sup> The local Almouchiquois guided the French to their settlement through a chosen path, one that was likely to bear special spiritual meaning.<sup>292</sup> When passing near a certain cluster of small islands, the Indians all deposited a propitiatory arrow. Champlain scornfully dismissed the Indians’ ‘superstitious’ belief that this gift would ensure their safe passage through the nearby, imposing rocky cape. The serious

---

<sup>290</sup> “Les Voyages,” Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 322. Inquiring about the Saguenay river from Montagnais Indians, Champlain thus collected information about the geography and hydrology of the area, distances, peoples living along the water, their activities and relations to each other, and even fathomed the existence of the Hudson Bay: “Au bout dudict lac [St.John], il y a des peuples qui sont cabannez, puis on entre dans trois rivieres, il y a deux ou trois manieres de lacs, d’où prend la source du Saguenay, de laquelle source iusques au port de Tadousac, il y a dix journees dans leurs canos [sic]...Au bord desdites rivieres, il y a quantité de cabannes, où il vient d’autres nations du costé du Nort, troquer avec lesdits Montagnez des peaux de castors & martre, avec d’autres marchandises que donnent les vaisseaux Français aux Montaignez. Lesdicts sauvages du Nort disent, qu’ils voyent une mer qui est salee. Je tiens que si cela est, que c’est quelque gouffre de ceste mer qui desgorge par la partie du Nort dans les terres, & de vérité il ne peut estre autre chose.” *Ibid.*, 1: 122-24.

<sup>291</sup> This is an exceptional instance of a married couple partnering as interpreters for the French. The man was probably Algonquin or Montagnais, while his wife was Almouchiquois. They both helped establishing contact with the natives on Kennebec River, but no more mention was made of the woman in the rest of the narrative. She may have died along the way or stayed with her original tribe, since there is evidence that later during this exploration, only the man (Panounias) remained on board with the French. Champlain clearly thought of native interpreters, especially women, as disposable. “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 311-12 and 325.

<sup>292</sup> Champlain noted that the Indians made them take a waterway to reach the place different from the one they had previously taken. “Le lendemain ils nous guiderent en descendant la riviere par un autre chemin que n’estions venus, pour aller à un lac.” “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 316.

dangers and difficulties they encountered when passing the narrow rapids at the said cape did not make him reconsider his position.<sup>293</sup> The Frenchmen's own beliefs in the devil, and the absence of unambiguous linguistic understanding, sometimes contributed to blur the boundary between reality and myth. A couple of years earlier, one Sieur de Prevert of Saint-Malo, who had been dispatched to find and explore copper mines around Sainte-Croix, reported to Champlain tales from his Indian guides about a certain group of their enemies, "who are savage men of quite monstrous shape." From mimes and gestures, the French gathered about these frightening neighbors that "their head is small and their body short, their arms as thin as skeletons, and thighs alike: their legs thick and long, and of the same size all the way down; and when they sit upon their heels, their knees are higher by half a foot than their head." Despite this unusual physique, the Indians were said to be "very agile and resolute, and are settled in the best land of all the coast of Acadia." The French, while thinking that such a people was a "very strange thing," did not seem to doubt the accuracy of the description, nor their understanding of the same, at least supposedly until they finally met this wondrous tribe, which was none other than the 'superstitious' Almouchiquois Indians of 1605.<sup>294</sup>

Prevert may have mistaken the description of dangerous deformed spirits living in the land of the Almouchiquois for the description of the Almouchiquois themselves. Sign-language provided many such opportunities for letting one's imagination and fears run free. Material elements and individual signs that were clearly understood contributed

---

<sup>293</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 317. "passant par des isles, ils laisserent chacun une flesche proche d'un cap par où tous les sauvages passent, & croient que s'ils ne le faisoient il leur arriveroit du malheur, à ce que leur persuade le Diable ; & vivent en ces superstitions, comme ils font en beaucoup d'autres. Par de là ce cap nous passames par un saut d'eau fort estroit, mais ce ne fut pas sans grande difficulté..."

<sup>294</sup> This was a southern Algonquian-speaking people living along the Saco River, off the coast of the Gulf of Maine.

to reinforce the French confidence in their overall interpretations. Champlain thus strongly believed in the existence of a female-shaped devil that terrified his Indian friends around Chaleur Bay.<sup>295</sup> The “Gougou” – whose name was also the name of the island on which it lived — was characterized by its exceptional size, the Indians showing to Champlain that “the tops of the masts of [the French] vessel would not reach his waist,” and explained that the monster took the lives of many savages by putting them into its pocket, one so large that, he said, “he could have put our vessel into it.” The existence of the *Gougou* was corroborated by the “horrible noises” it made, which both Frenchmen and Indians had heard around its supposed insular residence. But what made Champlain give credit to these tales was that “all the savages in general fear it, and speak about it so strangely.”<sup>296</sup>

Through nonverbal and semi-verbal exchanges with Indian informers, Champlain not only derived superbly accurate maps of the areas he explored, but also learned about the land in native terms, thus exceeding his European geographical frameworks. In the process of capturing sensory signals from the Indians through his own senses, he appropriated parts of their cultures and beliefs, all the while becoming one of the most successful Frenchman to decipher Indian sign-language and certainly contributing to the

---

<sup>295</sup> Champlain was later ridiculed by fellow chronicler Marc Lescarbot for believing in the *Gougou*, which contributed to his grudge against him.

<sup>296</sup> “Des Sauvages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 186-88. “C’est que proche de la baye des Chaleurs tirant au Su, est une isle, où fait residence un monstre espouventable, que les Sauvages appellent *Gougou*, & m’ont dit qu’il avoit la forme d’une femme : mais fort effroyable, & d’une telle grandeur, qu’ils me disoient que le bout des mats de nostre vaisseau ne luy fust pas venu iusques à la ceinture, tant ils le peignent grand : & que souvent il a devoré & devore, beaucoup de Sauvages, lesquels il met dedans une grande poche quant il les peut attraper, & puis les mange : & disoient ceux qui avoient esvité le peril de ceste malheureuse beste, que sa poche estoit si grande, qu’il y eust peu mettre notre vaisseau : Ce monstre fait des bruits horribles dedans ceste isle, que les Sauvages appellent le Gougou : Et quand ils en parlent ce n’est qu’avec une peur si estrange, qu’il ne peut se dire de plus, & m’ont asseuré plusieurs l’avoir veu (...) C’est que tous les Sauvages en general la craignent & en parlent si estrangement, que si je mettoit tout ce qu’ils en disent, l’on le tiendroit pour fables : mais je tiens que ce soit la residence de quelque Diable qui les tourmente de la façon.”

creation of new syncretic codes of communication.<sup>297</sup> Place and meaning being indissociable, Champlain would simply not have been able to achieve such a degree of understanding of Canadian and New England geography from his Indian informants had he not been able to grasp at the same time some of its cultural and spiritual dimensions.<sup>298</sup> Only if he attributed some validity to native beliefs and concepts could he understand their signs and fulfill his thirst for “discovery.” This understanding did not necessarily imply full acceptance or appreciation, but it did necessitate a profound mental transformation on his part.

Samuel de Champlain’s second extended stay in Canada, between 1608 and 1612, revealed the transformations that affected him. This time, “as mission commander, Champlain received the title of ‘lieutenant for the country of New France.’ His orders were to negotiate a “treaty of amity” with the Indian nations, to plant a permanent settlement, and “to lay the foundation of a permanent edifice for the glory of God and the renown of the French people.”<sup>299</sup> His narrative has a different tone, which expresses more confidence in his relations with Indians as well as a sense of new status among them. It was only after 1608 that he provided instances of dealing with natives individually, rather than as part of a group of Frenchmen. In 1610, he and the Sieur du Pont-Gravé formed the project of placing a young French boy among their Algonquin

---

<sup>297</sup> Samuel de Champlain achieved astounding successes in the realm of signed communication. See Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 352; 1: 360; and 1: 364-65.

<sup>298</sup> “Locked within the mental horizons of those who give it life, sense of place issues in a stream of symbolically drawn particulars – the visible particulars of local topographies, the personal particulars of socially given systems of thought... You can no more imagine an Apache sense of place without some notion of Old Man Owl, smooth minds, and what occurred at Grasshoppers Piled Up Across than you can fancy a native New Yorker’s sense of place without comparable ideas of Woody Allen, subway rush hours, and strolling in Central Park on the first warm day of spring. Everything, or almost everything, hinges on the particulars, and because it does, ethnography is essential.” Keith H. Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape” in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds. *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 84.

<sup>299</sup> Fischer, *Champlain’s Dream*, 238.



allies for the winter, so that he could learn the language and gather additional geographical and cultural information.<sup>300</sup> Champlain said he negotiated directly and individually with his friend and ally Yroquet, an Algonquin chief. When the elders and other chiefs of the tribe then opposed Yroquet's decision to accept the Frenchman's request, Champlain made it a personal matter to go talk to the Algonquin council and make them change their mind, engaging in elaborate back-and-forth harangues, and promising in return to take an Ottawa boy with him to France.<sup>301</sup> Champlain was certainly accompanied by an Indian interpreter and a French escort, and could not have taken this initiative without consulting Du Pont Gravé or other leaders in Québec. But the fact that he chose to put himself at the center stage, which he rarely did in earlier accounts, and to thus emphasize his unique relationship with the Indians, is significant. Far from being disposable, nameless, and secondary characters in his narrative, Indians after 1608 positively reflected on his own achievements. For the first time, Champlain spoke of special ties he had with the natives: he said of Yroquet, the Algonquin leader from the Petite Nation, that he "had much affection for me" and that he, in turn

---

<sup>300</sup>"Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 138-39. "J'avois un jeune garçon, qui avoit desia yverné deux ans à Québecq, lequel avoit desir d'aller avec les Algoumequins pour apprendre la langue. Pont-Gravé et moy advisasmes que s'il en avoit envie que ce seroit mieux fait de l'envoyer là qu'ailleurs, pour sçavoir quel estoit leur pays, voir le grand lac, remarquer les rivières, quels peuples y habitent ; ensemble descouvrir les mines & choses les plus rares de ces lieux, & peuples, afin qu'à son retour nous peussions estre informez de la vérité." This boy may have been Etienne Bruslé (Brûlé), who was to become one of the most renowned and gifted French *truchements* in Canada.

<sup>301</sup>"Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 140-42. "Je fus donc à terre & demanday à parler au Capitaines, lesquels vindrent à moy, & nous assismes avec beaucoup d'autres sauvages anciens de leurs troupes ; puis je leur demanday pourquoy le Capitaine Yroquet que je tenois pour mon amy, avoit refusé d'emmener mon garçon avec luy. Que ce n'estoit pas comme frere ou amy, de me desnier une chose qu'il m'avoit promis, laquelle ne leur pouvoit apporter que du bien ; & que en emmenant ce garçon, c'estoit pour contracter plus d'amitié avec eux, & leurs voisins, que n'avions encore fait ; & que leur difficulté me faisoit avoir mauvaise opinion d'eux...Nous nous separasmes avec force promesses d'amitié." The use of the rhetoric of friendship is striking, particularly in contrast to previous accounts of diplomatic exchanges in which the details of harangues were usually left out.

“considered [him] to be [his] friend.”<sup>302</sup> Another Algonquin leader traveling with his Montagnais and Huron allies to seek French assistance against the Iroquois, offered Champlain a large flat piece of copper, as they were informally chatting in a canoe. The usually private Frenchman, touched by this token of friendship, wrote “I was very pleased with this gift, although it was of small value.”<sup>303</sup>

Champlain prided himself on being granted the Indians’ special trust and friendship and derived a new sense of leadership from his relationship with his native allies. He tended to describe himself as a benevolent and powerful lord in Québec, who increasingly served as provider and protector of the neighboring Indians. An exceptional famine in the winter of 1608 that particularly affected semi-nomadic tribes around the French settlement contributed to this sentiment. Champlain depicted desperate scenes of starvation, blaming the Indians’ state on their own inability to conserve food for such extremities, and suggested that the Indians did not turn so much to the French for help than to him personally. “Hunger pressed these poor wretches so badly, he explained, that being at their wits’ end, they, men, women and children, resolved to die or to cross the river, in the hope that I would succor them in their dire need.”<sup>304</sup> Like a generous but critical father, Champlain gave them food once they reached the French fort after almost drowning in the icy river, but limited amounts to preserve supplies for his own men

---

<sup>302</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 139 “Je fus trouver le Capitaine Yroquet qui m’estoit fort affectionné” My translation ; and *Ibid.*, 2: 140.

<sup>303</sup> Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 123. “Je fus fort ayse de ce present, encores qu’il fut de peu de valeur.” My translation.

<sup>304</sup> Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 53. “la faim pressoit si fort ces pauvres miserables, que ne sçachans que faire, ils se resolurent de mourir, hommes, femmes, & enfans, où de passer la rivière, pour l’esperance qu’ils avoient que je je les assisterois en leur extresme necessité.” I modified the first part of the translation ; the rest is from Biggar’s edition. Champlain also remembered opening the fort to Indian women, elders, and children when the native feared an upcoming attack from their enemies, and sending French soldiers to “give them courage.” *Ibid.*, 2: 50.

saying that “in a month they would have eaten up all our provisions, so gluttonous are they.”<sup>305</sup>

While a plot to assassinate him was diffused in Quebec among his fellow countrymen, Champlain found a new role as a war leader among a coalition of Montagnais, Hurons, and Algonquins waging war on Mohawks in Ticonderoga at the intersection of present-day Québec, New York State, and Vermont in the summer of 1609. Champlain was extremely concerned about fulfilling his promise towards his native allies, insisting on accompanying them even after his row boat failed him, declaring: “that I would go to war with them in their canoes; for I wished to show them that for myself I would not fail to keep my word to them, even if I went alone.”<sup>306</sup> Presenting himself as a model of loyalty and courage, he also took on the role of an educator and military strategist, urging Indian warriors to adopt the European practice of having guards on shifts at night to watch for potential threats instead of spending collective sleepless nights out of fear of being surprised by their enemies.<sup>307</sup> As a military man, Champlain perceived Indian warfare in terms of European martial techniques and strategies, drawing analogies between the warriors’ attitudes and order and traditional western battle ranks, between Indian war leaders and “*sergent major*” (chief master sergeant), and between the

---

<sup>305</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 56. “dans un mois ils eussent bien mangé tous nos vivres, s’ils les eussent eu en leur pouvoir, tant ils sont gloutons : Car quand ils en ont, ils ne mettent rien en réserve, & en font chère entière jour & nuit, puis après ils meurent de faim.” My translation.

<sup>306</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 80-81. “je leur dis & les sollicitay, qu’ils eussent à continuer leur(s) premier dessin, & que moy troisième, je m’en irois à la guerre avec eux dans leurs canots pour leur montrer que quant à moy je ne voulois manquer de parole en leur endroit, bien que fusse seul.”

<sup>307</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 50-51. “Ils sont fort craintifs & apprehendent infiniment leurs ennemis, & ne dorment presque point en repos en quelque lieu qu’ils soient, bien que je les assurasse tous les jours de ce qu’il m’estoit possible, en leur remonstrant de faire comme nous, sçavoir veiller une partie, tandis que les autres dormiront, & chacun avoir ses armes prestes comme celuy qui fait le guet, & ne tenir songes pour vérité, sur quoy ils se reposent.” And *Ibid.*, 2: 84. “Reconnoissant cela je leur remonstrois la faut qu’ils faisoient, & qu’ils devoient veiller, comme ils nous avoient veu faire toutes les nuits, & avoir des hommes aux aguets, pour escouter et voir s’ils n’apperçevroient rien ; & ne point vivre de la façon comme bestes.”

Iroquois defensive wooden construction and a fort under siege. He criticized the Indians' faith in their shamans' prophecies, and disliked the loud war screams that both parties uttered before and during battle, but he nevertheless found some kind of reassuring familiarity in this violent context. The initial charge against two-hundred Iroquois enemies confirmed Champlain's status as a military leader adored by his troops, feared by his enemies, more than his experience among his own people in Canada had ever done:

Our Indians began to call to me with loud cries; and to make way for me they divided into two groups, and put me ahead some twenty yards, and I marched on until I was within some thirty yards of the enemy, who as soon as they caught sight of me halted and gazed at me and I at them. When I saw them make a move to draw their bows upon us, I took aim with my harquebus and shot straight at one of the three chiefs, and with this shot two fell to the ground and one of their companions was wounded who died thereof a little later.<sup>308</sup>

Indian warfare not only struck a familiar string in Champlain's personality, it affected and influenced him in ways that would have been difficult for him to admit. Despite his recurring critique of the trust Indians put in their dreams and visions, he himself experienced a prophetic dream in which he and his allies defeated the Iroquois, only a few days before the actual battle.<sup>309</sup>

"In appearance they seem to be of good disposition ... but the whole of them, to tell the truth, are not worth much. The slightest intercourse with them discloses their

---

<sup>308</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 99. "Les nostres commencerent à m'appeller [sic] à grands cris : & pour me donner passage ils s'ouvrirent en deux, & me mis à la teste, marchant quelque 20 pas devant, jusqu'à ce que je fusse à quelques 30 pas des ennemis, où aussitost ils m'aperceurent, & firent alte en me contemplant, & moy eux. Comme je les veis esbranler pour tirer sur nous, je couchay mon arquebuse en joue, & visay droit à un des trois chefs, & de ce coup il en tomba deux par terre, & un de leurs compagnons qui fut blessé, qui quelque temps apres en mourut."

<sup>309</sup> "Les Voyages," in Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 95. " & en dormant, je songeay que je voyois les Yroquois nos ennemis, dedans le lac, proche d'une montaigne, qui se noyoient à notre veue ; & les voulans secourir, nos sauvages alliez me disoient qu'ils les falloit tous laissez mourir & qu'ils ne valoient rien. Estand esveillé, ils ne faillirent comme à l'accoustumée de me demander si j'avois songé quelque chose ; je leur dis en effect ce que j'avois veu en songe : Cela leur apporta une telle creance qu'ils ne douterent plus de ce qui leur devoit advenir pour leur bien."

character. They are great thieves, and if they cannot lay hold of a thing with their hands, try to do so with their feet, as we have repeatedly learned by experience.”<sup>310</sup> Champlain’s sensory education through contact with a variety of Indian nations did not eradicate his prejudices or his sense of superiority, and in many cases, reinforced them. Distrust undermined exchanges that could have otherwise been successfully mediated through nonverbal means. Champlain did not know what to make of Indian “joy” and ceremonial behaviors and thus suspected their lack of authenticity. No more than words could be fully trusted when dealing with a foreign people, neither could nonverbal signs and appearances.

What differentiated an encounter in which signs were trusted and led to successful and peaceful interaction, from an encounter in which similar signs were labeled as “treacherous” and conflict was latent, is extremely difficult to grasp from seventeenth-century narratives. The chroniclers may have omitted several clues and elements of tension building up to the ultimate facing off, or it was something more insubstantial, like intuition, that shaped these meetings.<sup>311</sup> Champlain’s distrust of Indians was all the more pervasive because it was authoritative, based on his first-hand experience among them.

---

<sup>310</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 357. “Ils semblent à les voir qu’ils soient de bon naturel, ... : mais tous à bien parler ne vallent pas grand-chose. Si peu de frequentation que l’on ait avec eux, les fait incontinent cognoistre. Ils sont grands larrons ; & s’ils ne peuvent attraper avec les mains, ils y tachent avec les pieds, comme nous l’avons esprouvé souventefois.”

<sup>311</sup> An interesting example occurred in New England in 1606 (near modern-day Gloucester harbor). The Sieur de Poutrincourt spotted a group of Indians who “with the intention of doing us some injury were on their way towards a little brook in the straight at the causeway leading to the mainland.” No indication is given about what, in the Indians’ attitudes, seemed suspicious to Poutrincourt. Was it their particular location? The fact that they bore weapons? Immediately afterwards, Champlain, who was himself walking along the causeway, encountered the Indians, who, according to him “saw clearly that I at the same time had discovered them” and, in order to hide their true intent, proceeded to dance and sing. When they stopped, Champlain made signs to them to continue dancing, while Poutrincourt’s men were getting in position in the woods with their loaded weapons aimed at the natives. When the Indians saw the French soldiers, they themselves grew wary and left. The two French accounts of this incident describe the scene as a victory on the part of the French for having diffused the Indians’ hypothetical plot. Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 400.

He advised his fellow Frenchmen: “one must be on one’s guard against these people and mistrust them, yet without allowing them to perceive it.”<sup>312</sup> Although this suspicion was essentially based on a misunderstanding about the nature of private property, the Indians believing they could take goods from the Europeans without retributions, the French built a defensive, and sometimes offensive, strategy upon it. After a few Frenchmen had been murdered by Indians in 1607, Champlain devised a plan to capture a few individuals and turned them into forced laborers in Québec as a punishment.<sup>313</sup> Because open western-style warfare was not an effective option in the New World, Champlain and his men determined “to resort to stratagem.” The plan was carefully established and conducted:

When they should come to make friends with us again, we should coax them, by showing them beads and other trifles, and should reassure them repeatedly; then we should take the shallop well armed, and the stoutest and strongest men we had, each with a chain of beads and a fathom of match on his arm, and should set these men on shore, where, pretending to smoke with them (each with one end of his match alight, in order not to arouse suspicion, it being customary to carry light at the end of a cord for lighting the tobacco), we were to coax them with soft words in order to draw them into the shallop; and should they be unwilling to enter, each of our men as he approached was to choose his man, and throwing the beads about his neck should at the same moment put a cord around the man to drag him on board by force; but should they raise too great a commotion, and our men be unable to master them, then, tightening the cord well, our men were to stab them; and if by chance any should escape, there were to be men on shore to charge against them with swords.... This was well carried out, as arranged.<sup>314</sup>

---

<sup>312</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 357. “Il faut se donner garde de ces peuples, & vivre en mesfiance avec eux, toutefois sans leur faire appercevoir.”

<sup>313</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 427. “nous resolumes cependant d’avoir quelques sauvages de ce lieu pour les emmener en nostre habitation & leur faire moudre du bled à un Moulin à bras, pour punition de l’assacinat [sic] qu’ils avoient commis en la personne de cinq ou six de nos gens.”

<sup>314</sup> “Les Voyages,” in Biggar, *WSC*, 1: 427-28. “Il fallut donc avoir recours aux finesses : & voicy comme nous advisames, Qu’il falloit lors qu’ils viendroient pour rechercher amitié avec nous les amadouer en leur montrant des patinostres & autres bagatelles, & les asseurer plusieurs fois : puis prendre la chaloupe bien armee, & des plus robistes & forts hommes qu’eussions, avec chacun une chaine de patinostres & une brasse de meche au bras, & les mener à terre, où estans, & en faisant semblant de petuner avec eux (chacun [428] ayant un bout de sa meche allumé, pour ne leur donner soupçon, estant l’ordinaire de porter du feu au bout d’une corde pour allumer le petum) les amadoueroient par douces paroles pour les attirer dans la chaloupe ; & que s’ils n’y vouloient entrer, que s’en approchant chacun choisiroit son homme & en luy mettant les patinostres au col, luy mettroit aussi en mesme temps la corde pour les y tirer par force : Que s’ils tempestoient trop, & qu’on n’en peust venir à bout ; tenant bien la corde on les

Known friendly signs and shared practices, such as the showing of beads and the sharing of tobacco, were transformed into strategic assets to exert violence upon the Indians. Believing that the Indian world was one of illusions and fake performances, the French created a system of dissimulation, deceit, and treason, which profoundly affected the course of French-Indian relations over the next century.<sup>315</sup>

\* \* \*

### ***“You will become Carib”: A Frenchman’s Sensory Tale of Caribbean Others***

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Mgr d’Inguibert, an erudite bishop in the Carpentras diocese (a small town in Provence once part of the Comté Venaissin), who at one time considered answering the missionary call, assembled throughout his life an exceptional collection of manuscripts, including documents of the French presence in the Americas. Among his papers, which today constitute the “bibliothèque Inguibertine de Carpentras,” a French researcher stumbled upon a rare colonial travel narrative dating from the 1620s, which he transcribed and published in 1990 under the title *Un flibustier français dans la mer des Antilles 1618-1620*.<sup>316</sup> This anonymous relation tells of a

---

poignarderoit : Et que si d’avanture il en eschappoit quelques uns, il y auroit des hommes à terre pour charger à coups d’espee sur ceux.”

<sup>315</sup> This was an ambiguous process since, as Champlain’s example demonstrates the French could not learn these nonverbal codes and become familiar with Indian culture, customs, and individuals, without themselves being irremediably transformed, despite their most intense resistance.

<sup>316</sup> Jean-Pierre Moreau, ed. *Un flibustier français dans la mer des Antilles 1618-1620 : Relations d’un voyage infortuné fait aux Indes occidentales par le capitaine Fleury avec la description de quelques îles qu’on y rencontre, recueillie par l’un de ceux de la compagnie qui fit le voyage* (Paris : Editions Seghers, 1990) (hereafter cited as Moreau, *Un flibustier*.)

The authenticity of the document was established in several ways, including paleographic analyses of the manuscript that confirmed the document was written by one hand in the early seventeenth century. The expedition at the center of the relation also appears in Spanish official minutes from the Audiencia de

French privateering expedition under the command of capitaine Charles Fleury, which departed from the Breton port of Dieppe on June 20, 1618 with three hundred men, and, after a long arduous journey and several stops in the Canaries, Cape Verde, Brazil, and Guyana, finally reached the Lesser Antilles. Because of serious damage to their ships by the elements as well as skirmishes with concurrent European vessels, the crew were forced to reside among the Carib inhabitants on the islands of Martinique and Dominica for over ten months, while awaiting another commercial ship (French, Dutch or English) to either help them continue their adventure towards “*Pérou*” (Spanish Mexico) in search of more plunder, or to make their way back to France.<sup>317</sup> In September 1620, after spending the summer months raiding Spanish colonies and ships around Mexico, and a brief stopover in Florida, part of the original crew finally found its way back to Dieppe.

Based on a number of clues present in the text, the editor of the document hypothesizes that the anonymous author was a lay educated Parisian, possibly an apothecary student, given his knowledge of plants and remedies. Despite his scientific knowledge and literacy, he does not seem to have belonged to the elite since he participated in this expedition as a simple soldier and often criticized the idle gentlemen present on board in his memoirs.<sup>318</sup> This is a remarkably rich and little exploited

---

Santo Domingo in September 1619, in which two Spanish corsairs testified that the Captain Fleury from Le Havre (“*El Capitan Florin del Avre de Gracia*”), the leader of the French expedition, was present in the West Indies with five ships and 350 men (Archivo general de Indias in Seville) around the same time indicated in the relation. Captain Fleury also appears in a number of French judicial and official documents from the early decades of the seventeenth century, which provide certain details about him that are concordant with this relation (such as the existence of his cousin, a famed fisherman and pilot). See Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 29-30.

<sup>317</sup> The crew seems to have been divided on what course to take. Many chose to remain on the island and to try to buy their way on another ship headed for Europe. The author of the relation chose to follow Captain Fleury in his ultimate attempt at making profits by raiding Spanish ships and Mexican coastal towns (stealing cattle and salt for instance, and violently capturing a shipment of molasses and cochineal). Moreau, *un Flibustier*, 261-63.

<sup>318</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 14-15.



narrative, which provides a unique look at a type of colonial ‘encounter’ rarely documented in official sources, from the point of view not of one of the leaders of the expedition or of a member of the clergy, but of a commoner.

Particularly significant are the detailed descriptions of the daily interactions between the French mariners and soldiers and their Carib Indian hosts during a lengthy period.<sup>319</sup> The situation in this Caribbean setting differed markedly from the established system in Brazil, where *truchements* lived among local Indians and adopted an Indian lifestyle to facilitate trade and peace with the French ships that periodically landed on the coast. In this instance, it was not one but a large number of Frenchmen (supposedly hundreds) who shared the lives, food, and shelters of the natives of Dominica and Martinique for nearly a year. These men did not make a career out of accommodation. They simply tried to survive until another European ship could take them away. This did not mean, however, that they lacked genuine curiosity about and even appreciation of Carib society and ways, but their goals significantly differed from the Brazilian *truchements* and the Canadian *coureurs de bois* in that they did not have any commercial long-term interests at stake. The narrative informs us that it was not uncommon at the time for French, English, and Dutch crews to *dégrader*, that is to come on shore in search of food and fresh water, but most European visitors spent only a brief time with the natives, either trading for food or sharing a meal in the Indian village, before returning to their ship every night. The author of the relation himself thus realized that his and his

---

<sup>319</sup> Generally, the only accounts we possess of extended cohabitation between Frenchmen and Indians in an Indian village are from Catholic missionaries who chose to live close to their potential converts. Other interactions between lay Frenchmen, especially commoners, and Indians were usually brief (shore-side trade, short-term stays in Indian villages, exchanges around French forts/habitations) and were rarely the object of detailed narratives.

fellow mariners' situation was unique and that it gave them unprecedented insight into the Carib world.<sup>320</sup>

As to why the Indians welcomed the French and fed them for over ten months, even allowing them to break some important social taboos without retaliation, the answer is complex.<sup>321</sup> The French did not dispose of a large quantity of goods to trade with the Caribs, although the demand for European "trinkets" certainly explains in part the positive attitude of the Indians.<sup>322</sup> The author suggests that there was a certain prestige

---

<sup>320</sup> "Every year lands there quantity of ships full of Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Englishmen and Spaniards, who come to these islands to gather water and some fruits, and principally cassava root, which is the bread of the Indians. (...) they said that they never had such French hosts like us before, who stayed there so long and in such great number, who ate, drank and slept there like us, who did not have a ship to retire to.(...) And thus, they were not able to learn their way of life like us, who did not abandon them during ten entire months, following them and accompanying them everywhere, not having anything else to do, and them showing themselves very content to see us and to let us live this way." Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 118. All translations from this source are mine since no published English translation is available.

"Il arrive là, toutes les années, quantité de navires chargés de Français, de Flamands, Anglais et Espagnols, qui s'en vont en ces îles pour y recueillir de l'eau et quelques fruits, et principalement de la cassave, qui est le pain des Indiens. (...) ils disaient que jamais ils n'avaient reçu de tels hôtes français comme nous, qui y furent si longtemps demeurés et en si grand nombre, qui y eurent mangé, bu et dormi comme nous, qui n'avions point de navire pour retraite (...) et par ainsi, ils n'ont su apprendre leur manière de vivre, comme nous qui ne les avons point abandonnés durant dix mois entiers, les suivant et accompagnant partout, n'ayant autre chose à faire, et eux se témoignaient très aises de nous voir et de nous laisser vivre de la sorte."

<sup>321</sup> The French, for instance, were allowed to gather vegetables from the unattended gardens of dead members of the tribe, while the custom was to never harvest the deceased's products, to avoid angering spirits.

<sup>322</sup> More than a purely practical desire for European goods, the new objects may also have carried a symbolic meaning, as visible signs of privileged bonds with their French guests. "There were some too who, having some clothes we gave them like shirt, doublet, stockings, breeches, and other nice things, and thinking to make themselves look very beautiful, taking off all their previous attire, would one wear the doublet without shirt or breeches, the other breeches alone, the other only one stocking-leg, the other would wear a sword on his side, which was so cumbersome that he barely dared to move, and thus considered themselves to be more beautiful than the rest, also letting know by this means that they had French hosts, of which they were extremely proud." Moreau, *un Flibustier*, 167. "Il y en avait qui, ayant quelques hardes que nous leur avons donné comme chemise, pourpoint, bas, haut-de-chausse et autres belles choses, estimant se faire bien brave, quittant tout ce qui dessus, prenait l'un un pourpoint sans chemise ni haut-de-chausses, l'autre les hauts-de-chausses sans rien plus, l'autre un bas seul d'une jambe et rien à l'autre, l'autre se mettait l'épée au côté, qui l'empêchait tellement qu'il n'osait presque remuer, et ainsi s'estimaient être beaucoup plus braves que les autres, donnant aussi à connaître par là qu'ils avaient des hôtes français, de quoi ils étaient grandement glorieux."

Indian women were also said to be fond of metal thimbles they tied to their breaded hair, because of the cliquey sound they made when they danced. *Ibid*, 167.

among the Caribs at having multiple French hosts staying in one's household, one "chief" named Pilotte reportedly even welcoming and feeding thirty-five Frenchmen over the course of two months before heading out to war.<sup>323</sup> In the words of the author: "It should be noted that (as we said above) these Caribs were in some sort of argument with each other about who would have the most hosts, and called them their *compères* as a mark of great friendship, and they [the French] on the other hand gave them rags, like shirts and other things they did not wear, and then they [the Caribs] took them in their houses where they furnished them with all kinds of food supplies, without demanding of them any service in return."<sup>324</sup> Internal politics and public prestige may have been at play, even though the purpose of this friendship does not seem to have been to secure allies in battle against enemy tribes. The fact that the French seemed impervious to the powerful spirits that ruled every aspects of Carib life may have conferred them a certain prestige or even power of their own in the eyes of their Indian hosts.<sup>325</sup> While it seems

---

<sup>323</sup> Moreau, *un Flibustier*, 109. "Il y eut entre autre un capitaine de l'île nommé Pilotte, qui en nourrit 35 en l'espace de deux mois, au bout desquels il s'en alla à la guerre. Et parce qu'on y pâtitait en quelque façon, les uns pour les autres, non pour faute de vivres, mais parce qu'on n'en pouvait assez apprêter pour tant de personnes, la plupart prirent parti ailleurs."

<sup>324</sup> Moreau, *un Flibustier*, 120. "il est à noter que (comme nous avons dit ci-devant) ces Caraïbes étaient entre eux comme en dispute, à qui plus aurait d'hôtes, ils les nommaient leurs compères en signe de grande amitié et eux leur baillaient en revanche des hardes, comme chemises et autres choses qu'ils ne portaient point, et ensuite ils les emmenaient en leurs habitations où ils leur fournissaient de toutes sortes de vivres, sans exiger d'eux aucun service."

<sup>325</sup> The author and his companions did not seem to doubt the existence of this "devil" called *Chemin* or *Mabouya* in Carib dialect. Nevertheless, they infringed upon several taboos without fear of punishment from *Chemin* and even insulted "him" when they could: The author reports "we often went to listen to him at the doorstep and we each told him insults in a low voice, feeling sorry for the misery of these poor people, and the next day our savages would repeat to us the insults we said against *Chemin*, which did not make them smile, and asked us why we did not fear him like they did, which we tried to explain as well as we could, which they seemed to like and have more disdain for the devil, but this was short-lived and to insist upon them would be useless." Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 175-76. "Nous l'allions écouter assez souvent à l'entrée de la porte et lui disions chacun des injures entre nous assez bas, en déplorant la misère de ces pauvres gens, et le lendemain nos sauvages nous rapportaient les injures que nous avons dites contre *Chemin* de quoi ils ne souriaient guère, et nous demandaient pourquoi nous ne le craignons comme eux, ce que nous tâchions de leur faire entendre le mieux qu'il nous était possible, à quoi ils prenaient quelque

that both practical and symbolic elements contributed to the Caribs' good disposition towards the visitors, the real key to French-Carib cooperation may lie in the everyday experiences they shared and through which they intimately learned about each other.

In his study of early French and English possessions in the Caribbean, historian Philip Boucher briefly mentions this narrative, as a compelling example of the "amicable relations," "often civil and even cordial," that early French visitors to the region enjoyed with local Island Carib Indians.<sup>326</sup> The experiences described in *Un flibustier* are summed-up as a symbol of "France's generally more benign relations with [these] aboriginal peoples."<sup>327</sup> The Caribs' enmity with the Spaniards may have provided further incentive to preserve peaceful relations with competing European powers, especially when goods could be obtained from the latter more safely than from Iberian neighbors.<sup>328</sup> Boucher partly explains the apparent tolerance and openness of mind of the French, exemplified by the tone and attitude of the author of the relation, based on their social upbringing, arguing that "without much formal education, they were probably unaware of literate Europe's highly negative image of these aborigines."<sup>329</sup> Pointing to the

---

goût et avaient comme plus de dédain du diable, mais cela était de peu de durée et de les presser on n'y gagnerait rien."

<sup>326</sup> Philip Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>327</sup> Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 10-11.

<sup>328</sup> The author of the "*Un flibustier*" relation indicated that the Spaniards who came to trade on Carib-controlled islands never stayed longer than one day and one night, and that both parties kept their weapons in one hand while trading with the other. In contrast, according to him "the French, the Flemish [Dutch] and the English can stay as long as they wish and freely go on shore." Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 118. "pour les Français, Flamands et Anglais ils y demeurent tant qu'ils veulent et vont librement à terre."

<sup>329</sup> Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 8. I tend to disagree with this statement, which seems to presuppose that prejudices emerge at the elite and intellectual level before "trickling down" to the masses through literature. There is much evidence throughout this document that the author and his fellow mariners and soldiers carried their own folklore, fears, superstitions and prejudices regarding the Indians, especially cannibals. I think Boucher greatly glosses over the negative biases and often harsh judgments of the author towards the Caribs for the sake of his argument contrasting French and English attitudes. For instance, the anonymous author wrote about native ceremonies: "it looks like being in hell, when one sees people so painted and disguised as they are, looking like and imitating the actions of a devil rather

exceptional opportunity the Frenchmen had to live among the Caribs and closely observe them for nearly a year, and to the precious information the author of the relation was thus able to gather, Boucher concludes that “at the end of ten months, although some tension had arisen, Europeans and Caribs parted as close friends (*compères*).”<sup>330</sup>

Boucher is correct in suggesting that the willingness of the French to enter personal, often close, relationships with natives was an important factor in their successful dealings with Caribs, in contrast with the more distant and sometimes violent Englishmen and the aggressive Spaniards in the region. The “tension” that arose towards the end of the French stay partly derived from the fact that the French leader, Captain Fleury, stubbornly refused to live as a guest in an Indian household, preferring to have “an habitation for himself alone without being bothered by the savages.”<sup>331</sup> This standoffish attitude seems to have earned the French captain the hostility and scorn of the local Indians. The author explained that Fleury “did not know as well as us how to accommodate the savages, principally for food, and even was rather disliked among them.”<sup>332</sup> The fact that most Frenchmen under the command of Fleury, on the other hand, did live closely with Caribs as special guests and became proficient in Carib

---

than of a man.” “On dirait être dans l’enfer à voir ainsi des gens barbouillés et contrefaits comme ils sont, ressemblant et contrefaisant plutôt les actions d’un diable que d’un homme.” Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 171.

<sup>330</sup> Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 37.

<sup>331</sup> Boucher does not note this important fact, which also provides nuance to an overly positive description of French-Carib relations during this period. Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 232. Fleury had obtained of the Indians that they let him and his close entourage (about twenty mariners and soldiers) live in a deserted Indian village near the coast: “Le capitaine Fleury ayant donc une habitation pour lui seul sans être empêché des sauvages.” This fact seems to contradict the claim, made by the author in several places, that Carib Indians kept grudges against an entire nation when one member of this nation had offended them. Despite previous “offenses” by French sailors in Dominica and Martinique, and the repeated lack of proper reverence displayed by Fleury, relations between the rest of the crew and their hosts remained essentially unaltered.

<sup>332</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 240.

cultural and social habits (and even to some extent in their language) seems to have greatly contributed to preserving the peace between the two groups.

Boucher also misuses the word *compère* as a synonym for “good friend.” This is doubly problematic. The notion of “friendship” used in this narrative should be carefully considered and defined as a specific historical, cross-cultural product, without its modern connotations, and as a process rather than as an end result. The term *compère* itself, *banari* in Carib dialect, designated a special form of personal, symbolic, and material bond uniting Frenchmen with various Indian heads of households in the early seventeenth century. In some respect, the term and the type of relationship to which it referred can be equated with the *atourassave*, or Brazilian hosts, mentioned by Léry and with the Canadian Indian *compère* as evoked, for instance, in Father Gabriel Sagard’s memoirs.<sup>333</sup>

In order to understand the specific implications of the word, it is useful to observe the way the terms “friends” and “friendship” were used in colonial travel narratives during this period. In this particular relation, there is multiple evidence that “friendship” was often used to mean “peace,” and was known to be extremely fragile, untrusting, and temporary. For instance, after building a makeshift boat and endeavoring to sail around Cuba, Fleury and a few of his men crossed paths with a friendly English ship that invited them to anchor to their side and come on board. Having not heard or misunderstood the English directions, the French instead anchored behind the English ship, which caused

---

<sup>333</sup> Gabriel Sagard Theodat, *Histoire du Canada et Voyages que les frères mineurs recollects y ont faits pour la conversion des Infidèles* [1636], 4 Volumes (Paris : Imprimé par H. Schoutheer, à Arras pour la Librairie Tross, 1865), 1: 62. “quand on veut aller demeurer ou hyverner avec les Sauvages errants, on se met sous la conduite d’un de leur chef de facile, lequel a soing de vous nourrir et heberger comme son domestique, ou comme son enfant, car de se mettre au commun on ne seroit pas bien, et si on n’y pourroit subsister longuement, pour ce qu’ils se séparent souvent pour la chasse, les uns d’un costé et les autres d’un autre, et par ainsi ne pouvant faire vostre cas à part, faudroit que mourussiez de faim ou que vous retourmassiez avec les François.”

their hosts to remain highly suspicious of them and keep their weapons at arm's reach. However, this tension did not prevent Fleury from getting acquainted with the English captain by whom "he was received with many caresses and signs of friendship while feasting and rejoicing in the mariners' way, so that in a short time they were made such intimate friends that it seemed that their acquaintance was not from this sole meeting."<sup>334</sup> Despite the warm and visible expressions of friendship, the inebriated English captain suddenly pulled out his pistol and threatened to kill Fleury when the latter made an unrecorded offensive joke. Similarly, the difference between war and friendship could lay in the few pirouettes of a hat: later that month, as the French ship approached an unidentified English pirate ship they suspected to be Spanish, both crews got on deck ready to fire their cannons and guns. Upon recognizing a few of their former fellow crewmen who had been hired by the English privateer, the French instead of putting their hands on the triggers, lifted them up to their hats and respectfully saluted the English, "and afterwards [they] were good friends and associates during two months, each having given two men as hostages to the other."<sup>335</sup> For men engaged in the highly dangerous and unpredictable business of Caribbean piracy, "friendship" meant a temporary and mutually beneficial truce that often necessitated guarantees such as an exchange of hostages.<sup>336</sup>

---

<sup>334</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 253. "le capitaine Fleury étant allé voir dans son bord y fut reçu avec beaucoup de caresses et signes d'amitié le tout en festoyant et réjouissant à la mode de la mer, de sorte qu'en peu de temps furent faits si intimes amis qu'on eût dit que leur connaissance n'était pas faite de cette seule vue." The phrase "*reçu avec beaucoup de caresses*" is very common (in various forms) in early French colonial narratives. Cartier, notably, often spoke of "caresses" and the "very humanely" ("très humainement") welcome he received from Indians when he visited their villages. Rather than referring to actual physical caresses or specific Indian gestures, it thus seems that the phrase was a common reference to a friendly, peaceful, warm welcome offered by a foreign nation to the French.

<sup>335</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 262.

<sup>336</sup> This type of "friendship" did not necessarily imply exclusive trade, since trade was commonly conducted with official enemies as well. Therefore we must be careful to not systematically equate

The type of “friendship” shared with an Indian *compère* or *banari*, albeit also somewhat fragile and distrustful, was of another kind. The word itself, by which the French referred to their Indian hosts, and their Indian hosts to them, was honorific. The author reported that Indians often adopted the names of their French guests, while the French made “name alliances” with their hosts, calling them “like father, brother, son.”<sup>337</sup> These changes in name implied an important change in status, a symbolic adoption by the Indian host’s family. But, the author emphasized, it was the Carib Indian word *banari* that was the most honorific title of all and was valued by the Indians above that of “father” or “son.”<sup>338</sup> This relationship was one of mutual benefit, each Frenchman being fed and protected by his host family while providing them with European goods throughout his stay. Despite trade of this sort, the author emphasized the care and generous hospitality of the Indians rather than their greed for novelties. Carib host families seemed to have gone out of their way to feed the Frenchmen the best meals, even waking up at night to feel their stomachs to make sure they were not going hungry, and were particularly helpful and attentive to their guests.<sup>339</sup> This tight association with a

---

“friendship” with “alliance” or “commercial partnership.” The key to understanding the specific type of “friendship” developed between French and Indians in various regions of the New World probably lays in the Indian cultures themselves. The custom of welcoming strangers in one’s household likely pre-dated the arrival of Europeans in the Caribbean. The nature and purpose of the practice may have evolved with the presence of European nations in the area and their more frequent stops in the islands.

<sup>337</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 116.

<sup>338</sup> Although a number of works have considered names within Native American kinship, no specific study seems to have been conducted on the other titles received by European visitors when they lived among Indian groups for an extended period of time. The name “*banari*” clearly referred to a special status centered around the relationship between the Indian host and his European guest, which applied to both of them but was distinct from other titles linked to traditional kinship or clan structures. For a North American Indian example: Buck W. Woodard, “Degrees of Relatedness: the Social Politics of Algonquian Kinship in the Contact Era Chesapeake” (M.A. Thesis, The College of William & Mary, 2008).

<sup>339</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 119. The author also reports that, when the French accompanied them on long difficult hikes in rough terrain, the Indians always gave a hand, making sure the French did not fall. The author also nostalgically remembered when he first came ashore, so exhausted and starving that he collapsed on the beach, and how the Indians took genuine care of him at that moment and thereafter. “mais en cet état je fus secouru par un grand nombre de sauvages, l’un m’ayant relevé, l’autre m’ayant



number of Indians, the *banari* in particular, offered the French a more unrestrained and easier access to the rest of the community, which may have increased proportionally to the status of their Indian hosts.

This relationship was also the crux of intense sensory and linguistic learning about each other's culture. One can suspect that much of the information the author gathered about the Dominican Caribs, their language and their ways, was obtained while talking to his *compère* and members of his household during long hours through a mixture of French, Spanish, Carib, and sign language.<sup>340</sup> The author confirmed the Caribs' interest in the strangers and suggested the intensity of these cross-cultural learning sessions: "They are very curious to learn the languages and ways of foreigners," he wrote. "They inquire at every hour about our ways of doing things, and asked us if we practiced the same thing, (...) inquiring from us how we named each thing, and told us as well how they were called in Carib, insisting that we learn their language."<sup>341</sup> This information, combined with the Frenchmen's own sensory observations and experiences, contributed to the discovery of important aspects of Carib culture and society, while transforming all participants in the process.

---

déchargé de mon petit sac, l'autre de mon épée, l'un m'apportant à manger et l'autre à boire, et en même temps m'emmenant à leurs habitations, usant de même hospitalité envers tous mes compagnons." Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 123.

<sup>340</sup> "At the beginning when we arrived in their place, they made us understand what they wanted to say through two ways. The first was through some words of Spanish or French, and the other through signs, and often we had to guess, and we could not understand anything until having stayed a long time with them." Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 116. "Au commencement de notre arrive chez eux, ils nous faisaient entendre ce qu'ils voulaient dire de deux façons. La première par quelque mot espagnol ou français, et l'autre par signes, et souvent il fallait deviner, et ne pûmes rien comprendre qu'après être demeurés longtemps avec eux."

<sup>341</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 116. "Ils sont fort curieux d'apprendre les langues et les mœurs des étrangers. Il s'enquière à toute heure de nos façons de faire, et nous demandaient si nous pratiquions la même chose, (...) s'informant de nous comment nous nommions chaque chose, et ils nous disaient aussi comment ils les nommaient en caraïbe, nous exhortant d'apprendre leur langue."

Close, daily interactions quickly revealed physical and cultural differences between Frenchmen and Caribs. In this unknown and sometimes hostile natural environment, the French soon took the full measure of their inadequacy. While Carib children, young girls and women climbed steep mountain sides to perform the difficult task of harvesting cassava, one had to hold the unbalanced Frenchmen's hands to cross a mangrove.<sup>342</sup> Carib bodies were described as extremely strong and agile, almost 'animal-like,' perceptible in the sounds the Indians made during an intense effort, such as dragging a pirogue from the forest to the beach: "when our Indians work, they breathe heavily like bulls, and in the woods they shout, yell, and whistle so loud that they make the entire forest echo."<sup>343</sup> For Frenchmen out of their element, even sitting down with their new friends appeared as a major culture shock. "The men take a posture almost as if they wanted to sit on their bottom, and then bring their knees against each other, likewise their feet, and thus lean their buttocks on their heels, which they do not pick up at all,(...) and then when they want to eat lean their two elbows on their two knees" explained the author. Efforts to accommodate to Indian customs proved unsuccessful, because such position was "impossible for us to do as them," confessed the French observer.<sup>344</sup> Not

---

<sup>342</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 211. "toujours les rivages sont bordés de certaines grosses racines, et comme coupantes au-dessus, lesquelles on est contraint de passer, que si par hasard le pied venait à manquer, on courrait fortune de se rompre les jambes. Et lorsque nous y avons passé, ils nous tenaient par la main ou nous tendaient le bout de leur arc pour être plus assurés ; Lorsque nous allions avec eux en ces lieux-là, nous étions quasi plus empêchés à nous trouver un passage assuré, qu'eux à leur pirogue."

<sup>343</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 211. "Lorsque nos Indiens travaillent, ils soufflent comme taureaux, et dans les bois ils crient, hurlent et sifflent si fort, qu'ils en font résonner toute la forêt."

<sup>344</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 159. "Les hommes se mettent en posture comme presque s'ils se voulaient asseoir sur leur cul, et puis joignent les deux genoux l'un contre l'autre, comme aussi leurs deux pieds, et ainsi appuient leurs fesses sur leurs talons, lesquels ils ne haussent nullement, chose qui nous était impossible à faire ainsi qu'eux. » This position, still observable among many tribes (notably in the Amazon), requires some flexibility, but is not physically out of reach of Europeans. To Samuel de Champlain, the same posture (witnessed among Canadian natives) evoked monkeys he had seen on his past travels: Biggar, *WSC*, 2: 87. "Tout le peuple est autour de la cabanne assis sur leur cul comme des singes."

only could the Europeans not sit properly and wore strange attire, they also sounded extremely rambunctious to the Caribs, who customarily kept silent and still while eating. The Indians jokingly mocked their jittery and talkative guests telling them: “eat, and when you will have a big belly you will talk and go run up the mountain.”<sup>345</sup> Meals were also an opportunity to discover each other’s differences in taste and sense of disgust. Indians were said to detest salt.<sup>346</sup> The French, on the other hand, found disgusting the way Indians put their entire face in their drinking vessels and spilled the alcoholic liquid all over their faces, even openly flatulating and belching after noisily gulping their drinks.<sup>347</sup> In spite of all this, bodily and sensory perceptions of the other may also reinforced a sense of shared humanity and similarity between the groups.<sup>348</sup>

Shared sensations and bodily observations were not restricted to quaint or gross details. Through their senses, and careful attention to sensory manifestations from the other, members of both groups were also able to understand some more profound aspects of each other’s culture and society. These essentially nonverbal and physical elements were then used to produce assessments, judgments, and hypotheses concerning the type of society and people to which the Other belonged. To the French, at least, it seemed

---

<sup>345</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 160-61. “Et en mangeant ne parlent que fort rarement, comme aussi ils se tiennent fort posés, ne remuant presque point, et se moquent de nous parce que nous parlions toujours et nous mouvions tantôt d’un côté tantôt de l’autre de quoi ils nous tançaient et nous disaient ‘mange, et quand tu auras un gros ventre tu parleras et iras courir à la montagne.’”

<sup>346</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 136-37. Probably as a way to tease the French, Caribs supposedly told them that they did not eat Christians anymore on account of their flesh being too salty. “Car pour manger du sel ils mourraient plutôt, tant ils l’ont en horreur, et sur ce sujet, ils nous disaient bien souvent qu’ils ne mangeaient point de la chair de chrétien, parce qu’ils mangeaient du sel.”

<sup>347</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 161. “Et d’autant qu’ils mangent posément et honnêtement, d’autant plus boivent-ils incivilement, car il semble à les voir qu’ils veulent tout avaler d’un seul coup, car ils plongent si fort la tête dans le coy qu’ils se barbouillent dans le vin jusqu’aux yeux et ne boivent pas tout de suite comme nous, mais par gorgées qu’ils avalent comme quand on hume du bouillon, et à la fin de chaque gorgée ils font un gros rot, et le plus souvent un pet et pis soufflent comme si n’en pouvant plus.”

<sup>348</sup> The French experimented with Indian medicinal and ritual scarification and bleeding, concluding that it was less painful than the French therapeutic bleeding. Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 185. “plusieurs de mes compagnons et moi-même l’avons expérimenté de près.”

clear that one's 'true' nature and beliefs were observable in many simple behaviors, unconscious gestures, and particularly in elaborate ceremonies, which constituted the climax of such multisensory observations.<sup>349</sup> Sharing meals thus drove the French to understand that a strong alimentary taboo surrounded the consumption of chicken, and particularly of eggs among the Island Caribs.<sup>350</sup> Indians of Guadeloupe were said to consider the "soul" or life spirit of a person as a triple force that could be felt through touch: "one in the head that one feels beating on the temple, the other in the arm that is manifested by pulse, and the last in the heart that makes its movement felt enough."<sup>351</sup> Smell offered insights into Indian religious beliefs. The fearful devotion that the Caribs displayed towards their main deities or spirits, *Chemin* and *Mabouya*, which the French considered to be two manifestations of the same devil, was epitomized by a host of

---

<sup>349</sup> This is tied to some of the issues discussed in the first chapter. Frenchmen regularly assumed that deductions based on behaviors (even unintentional attitudes) were a reliable source of information and knowledge about the Indians. This source of information was even considered more reliable than what the Indians said and consciously showed of themselves since the French often systematically assumed that Indians would try to deceive them and lie. French narratives clearly manifest this faith in personal, and generally suspicious, guesses about the Indian Other.

<sup>350</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 138-40. Interestingly, the Caribs did allow the French to eat chicken and eggs while they seem never to have done so themselves. The special status of birds was also confirmed by rites of passage from childhood to manhood, particularly for Caribs destined to become "chiefs," during which the elected young man had to capture and feed a bird of prey for months. On the day of the final ceremony, the bird was sacrificed on his back, and he ate the heart of the animal "believing by this means to be rendered courageous, and to not be able to die from the fasting he must do." The bird was then dried and preserved as an important trophy and sign of status. Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 201. "après qu'il est mort on lui tire le cœur du ventre, et on le baille à manger cru au garçon, croyant par ce moyen être rendu courageux, et de ne pouvoir mourir au jeûne qu'il lui convient faire. Et pour le reste du corps, il le fait bien sécher au feu pendant sa prison, qu'il n'en perd pas une plume, de sorte qu'on dirait qu'il est en vie. Et étant hors, le porte au caouynage par grand trophée, et marque de privilège et degré qui lui est un de ses plus riches trésors."

<sup>351</sup> *Les Caraïbes, la Guadeloupe (1635-1656), Histoire des vingt premières années de la Colonisation de la Guadeloupe d'après les Relations du R.P. Breton* (Paris : Librairie Générale et Internationale, 1929), 73 (hereafter cited as Breton, *La Guadeloupe*). "Au reste touchant l'âme après le trépas ils ont cette rêverie que chaque homme a trois âmes. L'une à la tête qu'on sent battre aux tempes, l'autre au bras qui se manifeste par le pouls, et l'autre au cœur qui fait assez sentir son mouvement." According to Father Breton, the indigenous people of Guadeloupe believed that, after their death, the soul in their heart would go to what the missionary equated with a sort of "heaven" in the sky, while the ones in their arms and head would become *mapoya*, that is evil spirits that would torment the living.

“superstitions,” including some regarding smell. No offensive odors, and by association (probably linked to bodily fluids in general), no flatulence, belching, blowing of the nose, and coughing was permitted in a place where *Chemin* was supposed to be.<sup>352</sup>

Because *Chemin* was generally consulted in complete darkness, French perceptions of this Indian ‘devil’ were predominantly auditory. The author and his fellow countrymen did try to peak at these secret ceremonies as Léry had done in Brazil, but the inside of the lodge was kept pitch black after the Caribs had placed a hammock and vessels full of fermented beer in one of its corners. The Indians themselves seem to have attached much importance to audible elements when it came to their deity, since its arrival, presence, and departure were all marked by distinctive sounds. It was the song of a particular owl that announced that the spirit was approaching and signaled to the Caribs who had summoned him that it was time to put out all their fires.<sup>353</sup> “Suddenly after, *Chemin* lets himself fall through the small hole at the top of the lodge like said above, and makes a sound as if it was some sort of big wooden stump that fell, and afterwards salutes the company one after the other naming them by surname in their tongue.”<sup>354</sup> Once *Chemin* had been offered tobacco (*petun*) to smoke, the observers could only see a floating red coal at the spot where the hammock had been installed, which seemed to the author irrefutable proof that the devil was indeed in the place. If the spirit had been convoked to help heal a sick man, explained the author, he blew on him, and “does as a bull who is angry and hit the ground like a horse.” Besides these sounds, the French even claimed to have heard *Chemin* speak, describing his voice like that of “someone who

---

<sup>352</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 173. “et se fait si bien honorer que outre une infinité de superstitions qu’il leur fait accroire, il leur défend de se moucher, cracher, tousser, ou péter au lieu où il est, ni même y faire cuire aucune chose qui ait tant soit peu d’odeur.”

<sup>353</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 175.

<sup>354</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 175.

would speak in a broken pot, or more often like a small child with a hoarse voice.”<sup>355</sup> *Chemin* was also said to imitate the voice of deceased relatives to fool Caribs on certain occasions.<sup>356</sup> When leaving the lodge, the spirit sounded like “a tourbillon of wind that goes out the big square hole at the bottom” of the wall.<sup>357</sup> The audible animal analogies, *Chemin*’s ability to transform his voice and deceive, the power suggested by the sounds he made while entering and exiting – all contributed to shape the already negative conception the Frenchmen had of the “devil” and gave them clues as to why Caribs feared him so.<sup>358</sup>

---

<sup>355</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 175. “Lorsque ledit *Chemin* veut entrer, le susdit oiseau ou hibou commence à chanter et à caqueter comme une cane. Incontinent chacun éteint le feu qui est dessous lui, et soudain après *Chemin* se laisse choir par le susdit petit trou d’en haut et fait un bruit comme si c’était quelque grosse souche de bois qui tombait, et après salut la compagnie l’un après l’autre les nommant nom par surnom en leur langue. Après on lui allume ou baille un charbon pour allumer son pétun, c’est chose que je ne puis dire si on le lui allume ou si c’est lui-même qui l’allume, tant y a que nous le lui avons vu tenir et remuer souvent, le bout ardent se voyait aisément dans une parfaite obscurité et n’y en avait autre que celui-là au lieu où nous savions bien qu’était son lit pendu et où était fait le préparatif, mais je crois qu’il ne hume non plus la fumée du pétun, comme il boit le vin qui lui est présenté et dirons ci-après ce qu’il devient. *Chemin* donc étant entré, s’il a été appelé pour guérir quelque malade il le souffle et fait de même qu’un taureau qui est en colère et puis frappe en terre comme un cheval et puis s’en va. Que s’il n’y a point de malade et qu’il ait été appelé pour leur donner avis de quelque chose, il les entretient sur ce sujet quelquefois deux ou trois heures et souvent les fait rire à pleine gorge et quelquefois les bat bien fort, et sa voix ressemble à un qui parlerait dans un pot cassé, ou le plus souvent à celle d’un petit enfant enrôlé.”

<sup>356</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 179.

<sup>357</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 176. “*Chemin*, ayant assez discouru et s’en voulant aller, dit à chacun ‘*vaicem*’, qui veut dire je m’en vais, nommant chacun par son nom et on lui répond ‘*aque Chemin*’, c’est-à-dire va-t’en. En même instant on entend comme un tourbillon de vent qui passe par le grand trou carré qui est comme avons dit en bas, et après chacun rallume son feu sous son lit.”

<sup>358</sup> A similar ceremony was described by Father Breton, who mentioned the existence of shamans (both male and female) who were called to the lodge where the spirit was needed (to heal the sick or predict the future outcome of a war). Only these “masks” could summon the spirit, reported Breton. Although his description differed from the one in *Un flibustier*, the presence and actions of the devils are also described primarily through audible elements. “Aussitôt le diable arrive et fait autant de bruit comme si un homme sautait au milieu de la place et faisait claqueter ses doigts, en les secouant dès le faite de la case. Alors il parle et rend réponse de ce qu’on lui demande et tout le monde l’entend. (...) Ce beau dieu ayant fait ses réponses, fait semblant de boire et de manger ce qu’on lui a offert, et puis comme s’il avait tout avalé, remue les calebasses et les couis comme s’ils étaient vides, et se retire donnant du pied contre terre et secouant ses doigts.” *Les Caraïbes*, op.cit., 50.

Sensory perceptions also provided clues about social hierarchy and gender roles. Silence in particular seemed to bear much significance for the Caribs.<sup>359</sup> Like many of their fellow countrymen in Canada, the French in the Caribbean marveled at the respectful silence kept by the audience during public harangues: “all of a sudden one of them stands up in front of the most ancient of the guests with a very stern and serious action and makes a long discourse, and sometimes addresses the entire audience, making signs with his finger showing the sun often, but nobody answers him except by signs as if they wanted to agree with what he said.”<sup>360</sup> Some silences were more puzzling. During the three daily meals, taken by the whole village assembled in the central communal building (*halle*), women brought the food, using pieces of cassava bread as “plates,” but never spoke to the man to whom they handed the food, “who in turn does not look at her at all.”<sup>361</sup> Stranger even to the French chronicler, the men seemingly spoke for the women, a husband telling the one who received the food from the hand of his wife “‘*quiribali*,’ that is eat, and the other replies ‘*yau*,’ that is thank you.”<sup>362</sup> Intense silences were particularly noticeable in contrast with the loudness of ceremonies or

---

<sup>359</sup> Dominican father Raymond Breton, who ran the mission in Guadeloupe in the 1660s, interpreted the quietness and sternness of attitudes of the Indians as a sign of their “melancholy” and sadness. See *Les Caraïbes*, op.cit., 47.

<sup>360</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 168. “tout d’un coup l’un d’iceux se dresse devant le plus ancien des conviés avec une action grave et fort posée fait un long discours et parfois il s’adresse à tous les assistants, leur faisant des signes du doigt en montrant bien souvent le soleil mais personne ne lui répond quasi que par signes comme s’ils se voulaient accorder à ce qu’il dit.” The author said the French guessed from the gestures and attitudes of the speaker that this section of the harangue was to announce the subject of the gathering. “nous estimons qu’il disait alors le sujet pour lequel ils sont invités à boire.” Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 160. “Et étant tous assemblés, comme avons dit, auparavant qu’ils commencent à manger, ils se font des présents les uns aux autres de ce qui sont portés par leurs femmes sur un morceau de cassave, lequel elle rend sans dire mot à celui qui la reçoit, qui aussi ne la regarde quasi point.”

<sup>362</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 160.

*caouynages*.<sup>363</sup> The author spoke respectfully of married Carib women, whose modesty and industriousness were manifested in their quiet behaviors: “They don’t see each other as much as the men, and in all their actions are very composed, and do not speak nearly a word, I mean as soon as they are married, no matter their age. For the girls are a little more free, nevertheless since the age of five or six, they are accustomed to go fetch the manioc in the mountain, which is a very hard thing.”<sup>364</sup>

This stern and silent women’s world strongly contrasted with the loud, “enraged” spectacle of elderly women during ceremonies. Sounds, colors, and goose-bumps told the French these women were “rather like She-devils and Proserpines than like women.” In other words, the sensations and emotions experienced by the French shaped their conclusions and judgments about the individuals causing them, which were assimilated to their audible, visible, odorous, and sensuous productions: “For you imagine seeing in the obscurity women whose faces are smeared as I have said, black, scrawny and wrinkled all over the body, whose breasts fall down onto their knees (because they are sitting); a painter could not make a better representation of a shrew than the portrait of these

---

<sup>363</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 161. “*caouyner*, c’est boire nuit et jour sans manger jusqu’à ce qu’il n’y ait plus de vin, et ne se fait que pour quelque sujet, et quelquefois bien petit comme par exemple sur la simple délibération de vouloir faire un petit bateau.”

The author here misunderstood and minimized the real significance of the making of a “small boat,” likely a pirogue, which he nevertheless describes in great details, observing the complex and diverse ceremonies surrounding the making and launching of such an embarkation.

<sup>364</sup> It is likely that the French had very few direct conversations with Indian women, especially because the author claims that Carib men and women spoke two different dialects, a claim still controversial among anthropologists and historians. Father Breton also wrote that indigenous men and women in Guadeloupe spoke two different dialects, adding that still another language was used for “harangues and important treaties, which even young [Indian] people do not understand well.” *Les Caraïbes*, op.cit., 49. It remains that if the French primarily learned Indian words from their male *Banari*, they probably did not have much exchanges with the women who clearly belonged to a different sphere within Carib society. Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 187. “Elles ne se fréquentent point tant que les hommes, et en toutes leurs actions elles sont fort posées, et ne disent quasi mot, j’entends dès qu’elles sont mariées, quel âge qu’elles aient. Pour les filles elles sont un peu plus libres, néanmoins dès l’âge de cinq ou six ans, on les accoutume à aller quérir le manioc à la montagne, qui est chose fort pénible.”



women, and yet this ugliness is nothing compared to the horror produced by their hoarse singing.”<sup>365</sup>

Some behaviors, lacking emotions and words, appeared unnatural to the French, who understood nonetheless that they were witnessing social codes rather than spontaneous actions. When a Carib chief, taking advantage of a trip made by Fleury to the island of St. Vincent, brought back his son who had been in exile there for eight or nine years, the young man “entering in the cabin where his mother, brothers and sisters were, did not say a word to anyone, nor anyone to him, and left all his possessions in a corner and went right back out like he came in, and went under the big hall where his sister brought him food and drink without speaking to him, and all remained in this silence for two days, after which the father made a big *caouynage* before which the mother, brothers and sisters came to cry around the newcomer.”<sup>366</sup> Despite his uneasiness at such emotional self-control, the author suspected it did not reflect the true feelings of the Carib family, stating that when he saw the son and his father later that day

---

<sup>365</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 188. “Et ainsi est fait un accord de musique enragée, accompagné du chant des trois vieilles, qui est le plus triste et le plus mélancolique qu’on puisse jamais entendre, et prononcé avec une voix sourde et cassée, accompagnée de la beauté et de la grâce des musiciennes qui ressemblent plutôt à des diabesses et proserpines qu’à des femmes. Car on s’imagine de voir dans une obscurité des femmes barbouillées au visage comme ais dit, noires, maigres et ridées tout du long du corps, à qui leurs tétasses pendent jusque sur les genoux (parce qu’elles sont assises), un peintre ne pourrait avoir un meilleur dessin pour se représenter une mégère que le portrait de ces femmes mais encore cette laideur n’est rien au prix de l’horreur que fait leur chant enroué.” “Proserpine” is the Roman name for Persephone, who, in the Greek mythology, was carried off by Hades and made queen of the underworld.

<sup>366</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 182. “Etant de retour et entrant dans la cabane où étaient sa mère, frères et sœurs, il ne dit mot à personne, ni personne à lui, et i quitta toutes ses hardes en un coin et incontinent ressortit comme il était entré, et s’en vint sous la grande halle où sa sœur lui apporta à boire et à manger sans lui dire mot et demeurèrent les uns les autres dans ce silence deux jours, au bout desquels le père fit un grand *caouynage* où avant que commence à boire, la mère, frères et sœurs vinrent pleurer, à la façon que diront ci-après, à l’entour du nouveau venu.”

in a more informal, private setting he “did not recognize anything but that they both were very pleased to see each other again.”<sup>367</sup>

The French quickly realized that some important but mysterious conventions drove Indian comportment. While the meaning of these codes often eluded the foreigners, they nevertheless suspected they held an important key to understanding Carib society. One of these meaningful physical conventions was the avoidance of direct eye contact between Carib individuals in certain contexts. In numerous instances throughout his narrative, the anonymous author emphasized that behavior that strongly intrigued him. During meals, Caribs passed the drinking vessel to their neighbor “without even looking at him,” just as they had received food from the women.<sup>368</sup> When planning a *caouynage*, the organizer went to each lodge in the village to invite the participants and to let the women know they needed to prepare food and drink for the feast. According to the author, he did so “standing only at the doorstep without coming in, saying in a low voice and very sternly without looking at the one who he is addressing what he has to say to her. The women answer him with few words and very low, without also even pretending to look at him.”<sup>369</sup> This widespread attitude, like the emotional restraint witnessed in the son back from exile and his family, struck the French observer as unnatural.

---

<sup>367</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 182. “D’abord qu’ils se virent, je crois qu’ils n’observent guère ce silence et cérémonie, car environ deux heures après le père m’emmena son fils pour me le faire voir car il m’aimait fort, et je n’y reconnus autre chose sinon que tous deux étaient bien aises de se revoir.”

<sup>368</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 161. “Que s’ils ont du vin, leurs femmes en apportent un grand plein coy, duquel ayant bu leur saoul donnent le reste à leur proche voisin en lui disant *couraba*, c’est-à-dire, ‘bois’, et celui-là ayant bu donne le reste à un autre sans même le regarder en continuant ainsi jusqu’à ce que tout soit bu.”

<sup>369</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 162. “il s’en va par toutes les cabanes où, se tenant seulement à l’entrée de la porte sans entrer, dit tout bas et fort posément sans regarder celle à qui il parle ce qu’il veut dire. Et les femmes lui répondent en peu de mots et fort bas, sans faire aussi semblant de le regarder.” Also, in case of larger feast, the messenger who went to neighboring villages to spread the word about the *caouynage* was addressed by the elder without looking at him. *Ibid.*, 163-4.

Through such personal and sensory observations, the author (and most likely some of his French companions as well) built a new conception of Carib society and endeavored to collect evidence to validate his conclusions. While describing the third stage of a rite of passage for young Carib men, he did not fail to note that, although the individual had been fasting for months and lived in near-complete isolation in a cabin outside the village, once he was brought up to the main hall “without saying a single word not saluting anyone,” and offered a variety of food, “no matter how much he fasted, he pretend[ed] not to be concerned with eating and [ate] very little to show that he ha[d] good courage.”<sup>370</sup>

This was one element that contributed to the perception of Island Carib culture as highly performative. In the eyes of the French, Caribs performed codified social behaviors rather than acting spontaneously. When Carib men hurt or cut their foot while working, for instance, they “[got] very angry and will be more than a quarter of an hour at shouting insults. And, extending the right arm as much as possible to the left, they move forward and give a hard blow with their left hand under the right armpit, repeating this insult, ‘*ollibation ou, ou*’ very often.”<sup>371</sup> The French failed to see that their own behaviors, as natural and uncalculated as they may have seemed to themselves, were also contingent cultural products. Instead, they found their conceptions about Carib society corroborated by the numerous and diverse collective ceremonies they got a chance to

---

<sup>370</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 203-4 “Étant arrive sans dire un seul mot ni saluer en effet aucune personne, se tenant tout debout, met ses deux mains sur sa tête (...) », « Et incontinent on lui apporte une cassave chaude, un crabe et du piment, et combien qu’il ait bien jeûné néanmoins, il feint de ne se soucier point de manger et mange fort peu pour montrer encore qu’il a bon courage.”

<sup>371</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 115-16. “comme il arrive bien souvent, qu’ils se heurtent contre quelque pierre qui les aura blessés, ou contre quelque couteau ou ferrement qui les aura coupés, après l’avoir jeté à terre ils se mettent en grande colère et seront plus d’un quart d’heure à crier des injures. Et, étendant le bras droit tant qu’ils peuvent vers la gauche, ils s’avancent et donnent un grand coup de la main gauche sous l’aisselle droite, en répétant cette injure, ‘*ollibation ou, ou*’, fort souvent.”

witness during their extended stay. The wealth of details and subtlety of observation in the author's descriptions of the Carib ceremonies suggest not only his curiosity and "wonder" towards strange rites, but also a conscious effort to decipher the meaning behind elements such as the tone and volume of Indian voices, the postures and hand gestures of orators, the accessories and ornaments worn by participants, and the various emotions and expressions passing upon their faces.<sup>372</sup> More than exotic details, the observer considered these multisensory clues as bearers of essential meaning. The passage from a low voice to a loud voice, from laughter to tears, could mean a change in subject.<sup>373</sup> The French noted a number of words, pronounced like code words at key moments of the *caouynage*.<sup>374</sup> Once again, emotions expressed in a way unfamiliar to the French seemed unauthentic and fake: "and having spoken like this for a quarter hour

---

<sup>372</sup> The order in which the participants came in and where they sat was seen as revealing of social hierarchy and precedence. This was also the case in Cartier's and Champlain's writings. Stephen Greenblatt hints at this process of "sensory deduction" but concludes that the information obtained was a product of the Europeans' imaginations, and that no effective communication was possible. Taking the example of Christopher Columbus, he writes: "he represents the move toward sovereign possession as the result of an act of interpretation, a deciphering of the native's words and gestures: 'I gathered that he told me...'. Columbus imagines – and invites his readers, above all the king and queen, to imagine – a scene of legitimate appropriation, an appropriation enabled, through a mechanism at once institutional and psychic, by the giving of gifts and the display of what must have been to the natives utterly incomprehensible representations: the portrait of the king stamped on a gold coin, the royal banners, the cross." Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, op.cit., 13.

<sup>373</sup> For long and detailed descriptions of *caouynages*, see Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 168-73, 187-91, 221-3. In particular, the description of the variations in tone and volume of the voices, *ibid*, 170-71: "Ils se tiennent par moments non comme nous, mais tournant le dedans de la main, l'une vis-à-vis de l'autre, entrelacent leur doigts l'un dans l'autre et baissent en après le visage en pliant fort le corps, courant et fermant par intervalles les genoux, le mouvement desquels il semble qu'ils regardent toujours, et en cette posture chantent toujours en haussant leur voix petit à petit, et étant bien haussée l'abaissent aussi de même petit à petit disant ainsi comme s'ensuit: '*bayimann, bayemaan, bahimaan, nirabee, nirabee, immourouou ou ou immourouou, immorouou ou, ommoïrouou ou, cayenounan an an, cybouril, cybouri, cybouri*' et comme aussi ils disent tout ce qui leur vient à la fantaisie et nomment ce qui se présente à eux en le mettant tour sur un même chant. "

<sup>374</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 169. "Everyone being served in this manner, they start to drink to each other saying, '*anvici banari*', that is, 'I drink to you', and the other answers '*yau*', 'I thank you,' and after drinking, he says again '*toto banari*', that is, 'I drank to you', and the other must give him reason." "Tous étans servis de cette façon, ils commencent à boire l'un à l'autre en disant, '*anvici banari*', c'est-à-dire, 'je bois à toi', et l'autre répond '*yau*', 'je te remercie', et après avoir bu, il dit encore '*toto banari*', c'est-à-dire, 'j'ai bu à toi', et faut que l'autre lui fasse raison."

rather calmly, all of the sudden raises his voice so loud that it seems he is getting angry, and immediately after returns to his previous discourse and the other who is listening to him continues to say between his teeth '*hom, hom*', and then both start to shed big tears, and then dance while still crying, and suddenly laugh, so that they sing, dance, laugh and cry almost at the same time."<sup>375</sup>

The already theatrical Indian ceremonies reached a climax as full entertaining spectacle with the launching of a new pirogue, a ritual that was likely linked to a forthcoming departure to war. Over the course of "two or three hours," the Caribs staged a fake but highly realistic battle, which gave the French a preview of authentic "Caribbean-style" warfare. Splitting into two groups, the thirty or forty Caribs sitting with their weapons in the new pirogue faced "others pretending to be their enemies" who stood "in front of the said pirogue at a distance of eighteenth or twenty steps, each armed with their bows and arrows, which however are not tipped, and shoot at the ones who are in it and principally one who is standing at the front of the pirogue, and holds a small wooden shield in his hand, and is mocking them, doing a hundred sorts of comedic gestures and faces, all the while blocking the arrows fired at him."<sup>376</sup> Some Indians jumped off the pirogue to pursue their opponents, who "pretend to run away," causing the

---

<sup>375</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 170. "Et ayant parlé environ un quart d'heure assez posément, tout d'un coup hausse si fort la voix qu'on dirait qu'il veut se fâcher, et incontinent après il se remet en son premier discours et l'autre qui l'écoute dit toujours entre ses dents '*hom, hom*', et puis se prennent à pleurer tous deux à chaudes larmes, et puis à danser en pleurant toujours et puis tout à coup à rire, de sorte qu'ils chantent, dansent, rient et pleurent presque en même temps (...)"

<sup>376</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 213. "Ayant ôté toutes les feuilles qui la couvrent, ils se jettent trente ou quarante dedans, armés de même que s'ils voulaient combattre leurs ennemis. D'autres feignant d'être leurs ennemis, se mettent au-devant de ladite pirogue à dix-huit ou vingt pas, armés chacun de leurs arcs et flèches, qui toutefois ne sont armés par le bout, et tirent à ceux qui sont dedans et principalement à un qui est tout debout sur le devant de la pirogue, qui tient une petite rondache de bois à la main qui se moque d'eux et fait cent sortes de pantalonnades et grimaces, et toujours pare les flèches qui lui sont tirées." The word "pantalonnade" refers to a specific sort of entertainment provided in early modern Europe by street comedians and jesters. It was characterized by physical or "slapstick" comedy. The Indian described here was thus probably teasing his opponents with funny gestures and pantomime.

French to say of the violent but harmless one-on-one wrestling that followed that “it is a pleasure to see them roll on top of each other, where they make postures of all sorts.”<sup>377</sup> In the meanwhile, women on board the pirogue “start to shout and yell as if it was real.”<sup>378</sup> As much as the French enjoyed the entertainment of this ceremony, the idea that the Indians were outstanding performers, actors, and masters at disguising their true feelings reinforced the widespread European sentiment that they could not be trusted. From acting to deception there was but a small step in French minds. It thus became even more necessary for the newcomers to use all their senses and every potential nonverbal clue at their disposal to decipher the “true” intentions or feelings of the Indians beyond the signs and words they gave.

All these shared experiences transformed both the French and the Caribs, although change over time may not always be easily identifiable or clearly stated in the sources. Some changes were immediate and visible: when the French first landed in Martinique after months of starvation and diseases, their appearance scared the natives, who even doubted they were French at all.<sup>379</sup> After only three weeks, they were,

---

<sup>377</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 215. “de sorte que c’est un plaisir de les voir rouler les uns dessus les autres, où ils font des postures de toutes façons.” The realism of the scene seem to be what impressed the French observers: “they wrestle with such a tension and strength, that, throwing each other on the ground, one on top of the other, hit the ground with such a harsh blow that it seems they broke some bones. And with that, they breathe so heavily that they resemble very clearly some bulls fighting. ” “s’étant attrapés l’un l’autre, se luttent d’une telle raideur et force que se jetant tous deux par terre, l’un dessus l’autre, donnent un coup si rude contre terre qu’on dirait qu’ils se sont tous brisés. Et avec ça, ils soufflent si fort qu’on dirait nettement que ce sont quelques taureaux qui combattent.”

<sup>378</sup> The author explains that women accompanied men to war to provide food and to comb the men’s hair and paint their bodies in preparation for battle. Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 213-14. “Et en même temps, quatre ou cinq femmes qui sont dans la pirogue (car il en va en guerre expressément pour peigner et peindre les hommes), se mettent à crier et hurler comme si c’était tout de bon.”

<sup>379</sup> The Indians seem to have been able to identify the nationality of the European visitors based on appearance and probably the sonority of their language. Here, they seem to have said that this emaciated and filthy crew did not look like the Frenchmen they were used to see: Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 101. “D’ailleurs on ressemblait à de vrais squelettes, ou corps qui eussent été enterrés quelques jours, car depuis la plante des pieds jusqu’à la tête, étions couverts d’une crasse si noire et tenante et gluante, que nous ressemblions plutôt à des fantômes qu’à des hommes, qui fut la cause que quand nous arrivâmes

according to the author “so fat and swollen (I do not know what term to use), that we were round as bowls, even though we were not in good health.”<sup>380</sup> The French also learned to accommodate Indian customs and lifestyles, through missteps and misunderstandings.<sup>381</sup> The use of new objects was not limited to the Indians’ adoption of European iron tools and glass beads: Europeans not only learned to appreciate the Indian hammock but even started fabricating them themselves.<sup>382</sup> Although the Carib Indians belonged to the ‘host culture’ and essentially remained in their familiar element, there is evidence that the encounter induced changes in their everyday practices and beliefs. Father Breton, a missionary in Guadeloupe from 1635 to 1656, suggested that some Indians overlooked their traditional alimentary taboos and tastes when they ate among the French.<sup>383</sup> Some Indians seemed to have consciously tried to resemble the French and imitate their gestures and practices in an effort of accommodation.<sup>384</sup> They may have

---

aux Indes, les sauvages croyaient que nous fussions des diables, disant que les Français, n’étaient faits comme nous.”

<sup>380</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 108-9. “Et puis dans environ trois semaines ou un mois, nous devînmes si gras et bouffis (je ne sais comment l’appeler), que nous étions ronds comme des boules, même si nous ne nous portions guère bien.” What he describes is likely the effect of malnutrition.

<sup>381</sup> For instance, the French realized they offended their hosts when they did not eat all their food. By observing what other Carib visitors to the village did, like wrapping their leftovers in a piece of cassava bread and taking it with them, they learned how to properly act. Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 164. “Que s’il n’a voulu ou pu manger la *cassave* qu’on lui apporte entière, il faut qu’il l’emporte (car ils disent, qu’ils ne donnent pas une chose pour la revoir, de quoi ils se fâchaient au commencement contre nous, qui ne sachant leur coutume leur laissions nos restes de cassave et du vin et autres choses).”

<sup>382</sup> Breton, *La Guadeloupe*, 62. “The French use them commonly. ... Some are brought to us (besides the ones we trade from the savages) from the mainland; The English and the Portuguese make some too. The Indians paint theirs on the outside with Moorish-like motives with black [dye] that never fades.” “Les français s’en servent communément... On nous en apporte (outre ceux que nous traitons des sauvages) de terre ferme ; Les Anglais et les Portugais en font aussi. Les sauvages peignent les leurs par dehors en moresque avec du noir qui ne se déteint jamais.”

<sup>383</sup> Breton, *La Guadeloupe*, 57. Breton contrasted the aliments the Indians ate and did not eat “among themselves,” confirming their dislike for salt and their avoidance of chicken and eggs, and the Indians’ practice around the French: “when they are among us they eat almost of everything.” (“quand ils se trouvent parmi nous ils mangent presque de tout.”)

<sup>384</sup> Breton, *La Guadeloupe*, 81. Father Breton gave as what he saw as an encouraging sign for the future conversion of the natives the example of a Carib Indian, who had once sojourned in Spain, who put on

done so to attract the Europeans' favors and gifts, to appropriate some of the powers they saw in the newcomers, or simply out of personal taste for this different culture.

A striking earlier example of such performative accommodation is given in the account of Father Yves d'Evreux, the leader (Père Supérieur) of four Capuchin missionaries who lived in the French colony of Maragnan in Northern Brazil in 1613 and 1614. Hopeful that Indian emulations of French actions were an encouraging sign for future conversion, Father d'Evreux reported that

the Tupinambas, who, for the past two years that the French have taught them to take off their hats and salute people, to do hand kissing, to bow, to say hello and goodbye, to come to church, to receive holy water, to kneel, to join their hands in prayer, to sign themselves on the forehead and the chest, to hit their stomach in front of God, to attend Mass, to listen to the sermon even if they do not understand any of it, to wear *Agnus Dei*, to assist the priest in saying Mass, to sit at the table, to put the napkin in front of oneself, wash their hands, take the meat with three fingers, cut it in the plate, toast the company when drinking, in short, to do all the honest and civil things that are among us, are so good at it that you would think they have been fed [raised] all their life among the French.<sup>385</sup>

There was more to nonverbal communication than practical benefits and pitfalls. Through the observation, analysis, and emulation of various signs and behaviors, colonial protagonists not only obtained some answers to specific questions and immediate needs, they also developed a new sense of the Other and of Self. Early colonial exchanges, intensely physical and multisensory, especially when they occurred over an extended

---

French clothes when he came to see the missionaries and kneeled during Mass, imitating the Catholics' ritual gestures.

<sup>385</sup> Yves d'Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil*, op.cit., 79. My translation. "Les Tapinambos, depuis deux ans maintenant que les Français leur apprennent à ôter leurs chapeaux et saluer le monde, à baiser les mains, faire la révérence, donner le bonjour, dire adieu, venir à l'église, prendre de l'eau bénite, se mettre à genoux, joindre les mains, faire le signe de croix sur leur front et poitrine, frapper leur estomac devant Dieu, écouter la Messe, entendre le sermon même s'ils n'y comprennent rien, porter des *Agnus Dei*, aider le prêtre à dire la messe, s'asseoir à table, mettre la serviette devant soi, laver leurs mains, prendre la viande avec trois doigts, la couper dans l'assiette, boire à la compagnie, bref, faire toutes les autres honnêtetés et civilités qui sont entre nous, s'y sont si bien avancés que vous diriez qu'ils ont été nourris toute leur vie entre les Français. Qui me voudra nier que ces marques ne soient suffisantes pour convaincre nos esprits à espérer, et pour croire, qu'avec le temps cette nation se rendra domestique, bien apprise et honnête."



period of time, did not leave the participants unscathed. Through perception and practice, Europeans learned about deep layers of native culture, regardless of whether their education, religion, and prejudices led them to accept or reject what they saw. At the same time, the New World and its peoples profoundly affected them, giving new meanings to their familiar environment upon their return. Through their presence, their physical engagement in the native communities, and their own bodily expressions of European culture, the newcomers also left a mark on the places and the peoples they visited. Because it implied multisensory perceptions and actions, nonverbal communication was thus more significant than a simple pragmatic exchange of information. It was a process of cultural learning, acceptance, rejection, and transformation affecting both the French and the Indians.<sup>386</sup>

Léry knew this well. He constructed his narrative based on the constant dichotomy between the person he was before his experience in Brazil and the person he became there. Although he may have resisted the idea, Samuel de Champlain had to allow native thought and culture to influence his view of northeastern North American landscapes and even discovered a new dimension of his leadership among his Indian allies and enemies. The Caribs of Dominica and Martinique also realized that no cultural

---

<sup>386</sup> According to Phenomenology, reality and perception are one. "Le monde est cela que nous percevons," ("the world is what we perceive") writes Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* [1945](Paris : Gallimard, 2005), 17. Phenomenology therefore emphasizes human experience and perception as sources of meaning, arguing that "il n'y a pas une parole, pas de gestes humains, même habituels ou distraits, qui n'aient une signification." Ibid, 19. It results from this that "c'est par mon corps que je comprends autrui, comme c'est par mon corps que je perçois des 'choses'." Ibid., 223, 226. In other words, I am never simply *in* a place, I *make* the place, and I *become* the place at the same time through my body. Because bodies carry culture, and culture is always emplaced, visitors to a "new world" could not fail to affect and be affect by their experience. Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *symbolic capital* are also very valuable to understand the acculturation process. In order to be respected and be able to exert some form of power or influence upon a group to which one does not belong, one must adopt the accepted "codes" of the group to gain *reconnaissance*. Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2001).

contact was innocuous. Their words and attitudes implied the consciousness that accommodation meant absorbing a piece of the other while leaving a piece of oneself. Urging the French to learn their language, they told them “learn it well and when you will know it, you will go about naked like me, you will be painted red, you will wear your hair long like me, you will become Carib and you will not want to return to France. And I, speaking like you, I will take your clothes and will go to France to the house of your father and I will be called by your name, and you by mine.”<sup>387</sup>

---

<sup>387</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 116. “‘apprends la bien et lorsque tu la sauras, tu iras nu comme moi, tu te feras peindre en rouge, tu porteras des cheveux longs comme moi, tu deviendras caraïbe et tu ne voudras plus retourner en France. Et moi parlant comme toi, je prendrai tes habits et m’en irai en France à la maison de ton père et je m’appellerai comme toi, et toi comme moi.’”

## CHAPTER THREE

### Nonverbal Perspectives on Language Learning and Use

“ la forme (...) donne l'estre et l'âme à la chose. Dites merveilles, mais ne les dites pas bien, ce n'est rien; dites peu et dites bien, c'est beaucoup.” Saint François de Sales

“Form (...) gives body and soul to the thing. Say marvels, but do not say them well, it is nothing; say little but say well, it is much.” Saint Francis de Sales

To the Carib Indians of early seventeenth-century Dominica, languages, customs, and bodies were inseparable. If we trust early European accounts, the Caribs seem to have thought of the acquisition of a foreign language as a holistic, bodily exchange that implied the simultaneous transmission of elements from one's culture and identity. A French observer recalled in 1619-1620 that his native Dominican hosts “[were] very curious to learn the tongues and ways of the foreigners. They inquired at every hour about our ways of doing things, and asked us if we did the same [as they did], and so as to better understand, they made us spit in their mouth and ears, believing by this means to learn sooner to speak French, asking us how we named each thing, and telling us how they named them in Carib, exhorting us to learn their language.”<sup>388</sup> Once the French learned the Carib language, the Indians further explained, they would become “like them,” undergoing physical as well as linguistic transformation, while the French-

---

<sup>388</sup> Jean-Pierre Moreau, ed., *Un flibustier Français dans la Mer des Antilles 1618-1620* (Paris : Editions Seghers, 1990), 116 (hereafter cited as Moreau, *Un flibustier*). “Ils sont fort curieux d'apprendre les langues et les mœurs des étrangers. Ils s'enquièreent à toute heure de nos façons de faire, et nous demandaient si nous pratiquions la même chose, et pour le mieux comprendre, ils nous faisaient cracher dans leur bouche et dans leurs oreilles, croyant par ce moyen apprendre plus tôt à parler français, s'informant de nous comment nous nommions chaque chose, et ils nous disaient aussi comment ils les nommaient en caraïbe, nous exhortant d'apprendre leur langue.” All translations from this source are mine. Although the French observer failed to understand or explain the full symbolic and ritual meaning of the “spitting,” the description still suggests a connection between the body, identity, and language in Carib culture.

speaking Indians would go to France, wear French clothing, and adopt French names and houses.<sup>389</sup>

In our modern consumerist world, it is tempting to conceive of language learning as a purely intellectual process. Memorizing foreign words and phrases, mastering the subtleties of grammatical rules and exceptions, learning to decipher and trace a new script, becoming adept at the conjugation of regular and irregular verbs or declensions, ought to make us able to speak a tongue regardless of how much it differs from our own. Anyone who has attempted to do so, however, knows that theory and practice differ immensely. Non-linguistic and para-linguistic elements of speech (prosodic features) — such as culturally-contingent gestures, accents, and rhythm— often separate the native speaker from the most assiduous student. Language and the way one speaks also carry elusive parcels of culture that are as necessary to master as grammar and vocabulary to efficiently speak a foreign tongue. Mentalist concepts of language and the idea that words carry a fixed meaning only fully developed in Europe in the seventeenth century.<sup>390</sup> By this time, ritualized patterns of colonial interaction and communication had already been established across the Americas. During this more “mature” phase of colonial exchanges, more flexible conceptions and methods of language learning seemed to have coexisted, some of which attributed particular importance to nonverbal elements.

---

<sup>389</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 116. “‘apprends la bien et lorsque tu la sauras, tu iras nu comme moi, tu te feras peindre en rouge, tu porteras des cheveux longs comme moi, tu deviendras caraïbe et tu ne voudras plus retourner en France. Et moi parlant comme toi, je prendrai tes habits et m’en irai en France à la maison de ton père et je m’appellerai comme toi, et toi comme moi.’”

<sup>390</sup> This was also a time when European intellectuals and linguists started working on “universal language schemes,” aimed at the production of artificial languages that would provide the means for universal communication. The gradual decline of Latin as a lingua franca also played an important part in the changes affecting European conceptions of language and communication during this period. Sylvain Auroux, et al., ed., *History of the Language Sciences: An International Handbook on the Evolution of the Study of Language from the Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000): 1, 1030. On related topics, see: Nicholas Ostler, *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005).

As French colonists, soldiers, mariners, officials, and the first generation of Catholic missionaries entered more consistent, daily social relations with native groups in Brazil, the Caribbean, and Canada before 1660, communication and language-learning became one of the crucial locations where power was negotiated and new “codes” or standards for interaction experimented. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the continuous importance of non-speech communicative strategies during and after the acquisition of mutual linguistic understanding by the French and Indians in the New World. Sign-language, pantomime, and ritualized gestures remained essential components of cross-cultural communication once both groups were passed the “first contact” phase and entered more complex social interactions on a regular basis. Similar contexts for French-Indian interaction developed at different times in various regions of the Americas, with crucial variations due to the local native cultures and larger geopolitical situations.

In Brazil, where intermittent commercial contact had taken place between Europeans and Indians since the early sixteenth century, French colonists and interpreters adopted the habit of “touring” native villages and of residing with native Tupí families as early as the 1550s in a large radius around the French post of Fort Coligny (modern-day Bay of Rio de Janeiro). After 1594, the French also founded an outpost in northern Brazil (in Maragnan or Maranhão), establishing similar relations with the indigenous population, and exploiting dyewood, medicinal plants, and other exotic resources, while competing with the English and Iberians for a foothold in Guiana and access to the riches of Peru. A few Capuchin fathers joined the colonial effort in Maragnan in 1613, and endeavored to evangelize the local Tupinambás who had taken refuge from Portuguese

attacks by relocating further south, closer to their French allies and trading partners.<sup>391</sup> In the meanwhile, Fort Coligny and the dreams of a “*France Antarctique*” had been destroyed by the Portuguese in 1560. While the French considered growing sugar and tobacco to develop a viable colony in northern Brazil, they remained during the early decades of the seventeenth century essentially dependent on native food supplies, a situation that encouraged the maintenance of the pattern of relationships that had first emerged in Rio (Fort Coligny): Frenchmen and women were spread out in multiple native villages and shared the daily lives of their Tupí hosts. This unique context fostered specific forms of cross-cultural exchange, likely favorable to hybrid nonverbal productions.

In the Caribbean, failure of non-Hispanic European powers to assert firm control over the Lesser Antilles led to a complex international pattern of trade and competition between French, English, and Dutch sailing crews and local native groups. Europeans routinely resided among the Caribs for extended periods (several months) while awaiting supplies or transport back to the Old World, or while raiding the Spanish Antilles from these convenient Indian ports of call. Only after 1625 did the French and English divide the island of St. Christopher and each settled half of it permanently. The pattern of residing among natives would become compromised in the following decades with the multiplication of permanent European settlements in the Lesser Antilles, and the defensive withdrawal of Caribs to a few islands, such as St. Vincent. The small number

---

<sup>391</sup> “Though far lesser known than the various explorations and settlements that led to a French presence in Acadia and the Saint Lawrence, the 1612-1616 project to colonize Maragnan was the French monarchy’s most significant effort in the Americas before the ministry of Richelieu (1624-1642).” Philip Boucher, “Revisiting the ‘French Atlantic’ or, How to Think About the French Presence in the Atlantic, 1550-1625,” in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 299.

of French Catholic missionaries who attempted to evangelize the islanders beginning in the 1630s soon found themselves over-extended and unable to maintain a regular presence among the Indians for more than a few months at a time. Despite the obstacles and their time-consuming duties towards the growing French population in the Caribbean (over 15,000 according to contemporary accounts), missionaries did dedicate a significant amount of time to learning native languages and teaching crucial, and often nonverbal, aspects of the Christian faith (such as the sign of the cross) to the Caribs.<sup>392</sup>

In Canada, following the foundation of Port Royal (1605-1607) and Québec in 1608, French settlements and trading posts emerged farther up the St. Lawrence River, in Trois-Rivières and then Montréal. During the early years of the seventeenth century, fur traders and fishermen reinforced their commercial ties with the natives following social patterns probably very similar to those in the Caribbean and Brazil, while the first missionaries (Recollets and Jesuits) arrived in 1611, succeeding to the single secular priest who had officiated the previous year in the colony. The Recollets, including Brother Gabriel Sagard, collaborated with the few Jesuits present in Canada throughout the 1620s. A permanent mission among the Hurons was founded in 1632, and by the mid-seventeenth century, it was common practice for missionaries to “winter” with the Hurons or Algonquins while perfecting their linguistic skills and preaching the Gospel. During this phase of colonial interaction, with the “novelty” element out of the equation, both groups tried to gain further knowledge about and influence upon the other. Nonverbal elements not only held the key to the acquisition of language, but more importantly were central to its proper and efficient usage. Contests for the power to

---

<sup>392</sup> Pierre Pelleprat, *Relations des Missions des PP. de la Compagnie de Jesus dans les Isles et dans la terre ferme de l’Amérique méridionale, divisée en deux parties* (Paris, 1655).

communicate and the power to impose one's standards for communication were mirrored by conflicting conceptions of the role and nature of the nonverbal.<sup>393</sup>

Early lay visitors to the New World attempted to learn Indian languages “on the ground,” for the most part without recourse to dictionaries and grammars, which Catholic missionaries started producing and using in the early decades of the seventeenth century. The language learning experiences of these men (and to some extent women) — colonists, explorers, and mariners — were in many ways less abstract and much more physical (multi-sensory) than our modern ones, perhaps influenced by native ideas about language learning such as those of early Dominican Indians. In order to learn elements of each other's tongues, French and Indians first had to decipher each other's bodies and learn the nonverbal codes at the core of often impromptu language-learning experiences. For the lay Frenchmen and Indians who wished to break the language barrier, a sensory journey into cultural oddities was in order. This journey may not have completely transformed them and made them shed their former identities as “French” or “Tupí” or “Huron,” but it did imply subtle cultural transformations to allow mutual understanding at the verbal and the nonverbal levels.

The complex dimensions and cultural meanings that native languages bore may have been exacerbated by the colonial encounter as the need to assert authority and cultural predominance increased. Linguistic singularity often marked kin group identity, cultural particularisms, history, and even political power. Language distinguished a group from its neighbors, and resistance to learn the other's tongue could serve as a sign of

---

<sup>393</sup> “it is clear that even in the early stages of the encounter there were native people who were quite capable of using language as an effective weapon in the power struggle with Europeans, and they did not hesitate to do so.” Margaret J. Leahey, “*Comment peut un muet prêcher l'évangile?: Jesuit Missionaries and the Native Languages of New France*,” *French Historical Studies*, Vol.19, No.1 (Spring 1995), 111.



cultural supremacy.<sup>394</sup> “Although the evidence is scarce,” writes historian Edward Gray, “it does suggest that American Indians used linguistic difference to retain some control over local knowledge, cultural inheritance, and political discourse, employing language much as one might employ a secret code.”<sup>395</sup> In this logic, learning a foreign language may have been conceived by Indians as more than the mere acquisition of practical skills to facilitate exchanges with strangers. The relatively small number of natives who learned French during the colonial period not only spoke new words, but most of the time also looked and acted differently, selectively adopting the dress and manners of the French, at least in specific cross-cultural contexts.<sup>396</sup>

In early-seventeenth century Brazil, a Tupinamba chief expressed to Capuchin father Yves d’Evreux his desire to “become Christian,” which implied “to learn to read and write, to speak French and make the reverences, gestures, and ceremonies of the French.”<sup>397</sup> Rather than a true declaration of faith, this was probably the Indian chief’s

---

<sup>394</sup> For instance, the small Algonquin tribes who dealt with the powerful Huron confederacy in the 1620s knew how to speak the Huron language as well as their own, while the Hurons only spoke their own tongue. The Huron language manifested the overall strength of the nation by serving as a *lingua franca* across central Canada. Forcing the newcomers to learn their idiom was a way to display their power and ascendancy. F. Gabriel Sagard Theodat, *Histoire du Canada et Voyages que les Freres mineurs Recollects y ont faits pour la conversion des infidelles*, 4 Vols. (Paris : Librairie Tross, 1866), 1: 226. The Ebicerinys could communicate with the French missionary in Huron, “car il sçavent les deux langues, la huronne et la leur, quoy que tres differentes, ce que n’ont pas les Hurons, lesquels ne sçavent ordinairement que la leur maternelle, sans se mettre en peine d’en apprendre une autre, ou par negligence, ou pour le peu de necessité qu’ils ont des autres Nations, ayans dans leur pays presque tout ce qui leur fait besoin.”

<sup>395</sup> Edward Gray, *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 18. Gray makes the following comparison: “We might even say that a tongue was to tribal groups what a crest was to European aristocratic families or clans: a sign of shared ancestry, shared traditions, and common memories.” *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>396</sup> It has often been assumed that Indians rarely learned to speak the colonists’ tongues because of their superior position (numerically and geopolitically) during the period, as well as because of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that the absence of labials in native tongues posed to the acquisition of European languages. The fact that language learning may have been seen by Indians as bearing profound and irreversible consequences on identity and culture may also explain the reluctance of many to acquire the invaders’ tongues and may shed further light on the motives of the native individuals who did.

<sup>397</sup> Yves d’Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil fait en 1613 et 1614*. Ed. by Hélène Castres. (Paris : Payot, 1985), 52 “Ce Capiton s’était ingéré finement auprès de nous, nous faisant dire par le truchement qu’il

attempt to appropriate the French spiritual powers, which in native traditions were acquired and maintained through ritual actions rather than doctrine. The same Tupi chief also requested that the Capuchins give him a chasuble similar to the one they wore to celebrate Mass. Gaining some of the power attributed to the newcomers thus implied speaking their tongue (probably in order to more properly address their God), as well as imitating their gestures, attitudes, and clothing (also invested with particular power due to its color and function).<sup>398</sup> Speaking a new language, at least among some Caribbean and Brazilian natives, thus implied a more profound transformation than a simple change of lexicon.

The conception of language learning as implying the adoption of non-linguistic cultural elements and maybe even a partial change in identity, sharply contrasted with the systematic, abstract, and ethnocentric approach to language learning that characterized French Catholic missionaries. Unlike other Frenchmen, missionaries – the Jesuits in particular—not only attempted to learn Indian tongues so as to communicate with the natives, but also endeavored to understand the inner grammatical and philological principles of the Indian languages, and to produce tools that would ease the learning experience of future generations of missionaries. In seventeenth-century Canada, the

---

désirait fort se faire chrétien, apprendre à lire et à écrire, parler français et faire les révérences, gestes et cérémonies des Français. (...) Ayant passé quelques mois en notre voisinage, il fut désireux d'avoir des habits semblables aux chasubles avec lesquelles nous disions la messe, et de fait il nous fit demander par sa femme, qui en fut tout aussitôt éconduite." My translation. Evreux also emphasized in several occasions the efforts made by the local Indian allies to imitate the French and their manners : "ils s'efforçent par tous les moyens de contrefaire nos Français." Ibid., 79.

<sup>398</sup> A similar motivation may be attributed to Membertou, an Algonquin Indian who told Jesuit father Biard that he wished to learn French to become a Christian preacher. Given the enormous significance of oratory in northeastern Indian cultures, this probably manifested a search for new power through eloquence and new rituals. Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vols. (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company Publishers, 1896-1901), 2: 22 (hereafter cited as *JR*). Father Breton in Guadeloupe also mentions an Indian who learned some French, who used to wear French-style clothing when he visited his French allies. This reinforces the idea that learning a strange tongue was equated as a partial shift in identity by natives. Breton, *la Guadeloupe*, 81.

Récollets and Jesuits produced dictionaries, lexicons, grammars, and translations of core Christian texts and prayers into various Indian languages, of both the Algonquian and Iroquoian linguistic families.<sup>399</sup> Tested scholarly techniques based on a refined knowledge of Latin and Greek (and sometimes Hebrew) were expected to solve the language problem in northeastern America, making the use of sign-language and the recourse to interpreters ultimately obsolete. In the Jesuits' minds, Indian tongues constituted tools of colonization and of cultural/religious domination. Unlike Indians who sought to learn French and asked Frenchmen to learn native tongues so that their cultures could merge (admittedly often to achieve commercial or political self-benefit), Jesuit fathers thought they could learn Indian languages without giving in to Indian cultures and ways, and without being affected in their core identities. They would transform the Indians without being transformed. In other words, for the Jesuits, Indian languages were an additional intellectual skill and conversion tool, a means to an end. Learning aspects of the various native cultures may be necessary to acquire Indian languages, but speaking and understanding the native tongues was less aimed at learning about the cultures than at altering them.<sup>400</sup>

The missionaries' obsession with linguistic communication and their prolixity on the subject drove modern scholars to see the period of the 'Jesuit language acquisition project' as marking the end of the reign of nonverbal exchanges. Sign-language and pantomime were likely still mobilized from time to time because of the difficulty

---

<sup>399</sup> Tracy Neal Leavelle, "'Bad Things' and 'Good Hearts': Mediation, Meaning, and the Language of Illinois Christianity," *Church History* 76: 2 (June 2007), 363-94.

<sup>400</sup> "L'adaptation si souvent célébrée dont font preuve les Jésuites et leurs émules (...) n'est qu'un moyen pour acquérir cette confiance, qu'une enveloppe pour 'saisir les âmes' hors des mains du démon et leur offrir le Paradis." Dominique Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire: les Missions Françaises au XVIIe siècle, 1600-1650* (Fayard: Paris, 2003), 101.

encountered by the French to learn Indian tongues, the multitude of native languages, and the unavailability or uncooperativeness of the *truchements* (French interpreters and middlemen). But according to the traditional scholarly interpretation, once a certain dose of mutual linguistic understanding had been achieved, nonverbal means of communication were marginal rather than central to the later period of colonial interactions, starting in the first decades of the seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century.<sup>401</sup> As a result, nonverbal communication is thus often overlooked as little more than a temporary and inadequate solution to the absence of mutual linguistic understanding, responsible for increased misunderstandings and conflicts. Once trade jargons and pidgins, interpreters, and expert linguists (the missionaries) were in place, the use of sign-language and non-speech communicative strategies supposedly waned, along with misunderstanding-induced conflicts.

Upon closer analysis, however, it appears that sign-language, pantomime, prosodic features of speech (tone, gestures, accentuation, etc), and ritual gestures remained critical to cross-cultural communication. First, nonverbal communication strategies were crucial to the language acquisition project itself. Words, phrases, and even “grammatical” rules were acquired through a mixture of signs, pictographs, and pantomime that depended on close collaboration between Indian individuals and their French ‘pupils.’<sup>402</sup> In addition, the nature of native speech and oratory rendered the importance of nonverbal communication undeniable and non-negligible for anyone

---

<sup>401</sup> Lois M. Feister, “Linguistic Communication between the Dutch and Indians in New Netherlands, 1609-1664.” *Ethnohistory* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 25-38. Ives Goddard, “The Use of Pidgins and Jargons on the East Coast of North America.” In *The Language Encounter in the Americas*, edited by Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 61-75.

<sup>402</sup> Historian Tracy Neil Leavelle emphasized the importance of native instructors and close cross-cultural cooperation in the elaboration of hybrid religious texts destined to native Christian converts. Tracy Neil Leavelle, “‘Bad Things’ and ‘Good Hearts’.”

attempting to understand and learn to address the Indians in their own tongues. Catholic missionaries themselves, as several historians have established, placed much emphasis on the visible and material aspects of conversion, relying on images, music, edifying theatre, and a variety of religious objects to “impress” the minds of their potential novices.<sup>403</sup> In turn, Indians who adopted and adapted Catholicism or tried to identify themselves more closely to the French tended to emulate nonverbal elements of French identity as much as linguistic ones. Finally, despite the best efforts on the part of both missionaries and Indians to learn and teach each other’s languages, the multiple weaknesses of linguistic understanding made non-speech communication devices enormously relevant, even in later periods of French-Indian relations. When Cavalier de La Salle embarked on his journey of exploration down the Mississippi Valley in the last decades of the seventeenth century (1687), he thus hoped to be able to rely on nonverbal “codes” and a few key accessories (calumet, wampum and gifts) to make contact with “new” tribes.

The significance of nonverbal communication went beyond that of a temporary and flawed solution to the inadequacies of language. Nonverbal elements were by no means subordinate to language. They made speech understandable and gave it power. In other words, the elaboration of effective mutual understanding between the French and Indians rested as much on the mastering of non-speech codes than on the acquisition of theoretical linguistic skills, forcing us to broaden our conception of what constitutes ‘language.’ Where did the importance of nonverbal elements reside in the perception and learning of a foreign language? How did the nonverbal mediate aspects of power, identity, religion, and even gender during this phase of French-Indian colonial relations?

---

<sup>403</sup> Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire*.

\*

\*

\*

French and Indians first formed opinions about each other's language based on essentially non-linguistic elements.<sup>404</sup> The sonority of the incomprehensible tongue, its main pronunciation traits, but also the various attitudes, facial expressions, and gestures of the speakers – the “way” it was spoken – all contributed to create a “first impression,” whether positive or negative, that sometimes endured after mutual understanding was achieved. One of the earliest European descriptions of North American Indians, dated from 1509, focused on the tattoos, skin color, eating habits and dress of the seven Newfoundland Indians who had been brought to the French port of Rouen by a fishing party. In addition to the coarse texture of their hair, the author noted that “they form their words with their lips.”<sup>405</sup> Whether this remark was aimed at confirming the “humanity” of the natives or, with more nuance, to distinguish their speech from the more guttural European tongues, it provided a physical evaluation of speech. There is evidence that, on the other side of the Atlantic, the natives of Brazil (and certainly in other parts of the New World as well) rapidly learned to identify and differentiate the various European nations with which they were in contact based solely on the diverging sonority of their speech. Hans Städen, a German soldier who traveled twice to South America and was held captive by the Tupinamba Indians in 1550, recalled that his cannibal captors branded him

---

<sup>404</sup> “non-linguistic” elements include elements of speech that do not relate to the meaning of the words and content of speech. Tone, volume, accents, pronunciation, etc, belong to the realm of language and speech but are not “linguistic” per se. They can also be termed “para-linguistic.”

<sup>405</sup> From Eusebius of Caesarea, *Chronicon. Nova additio* (Paris, 1512), fol. 172; reproduced and translated into English in David B. Quinn, *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 1: 157.

as an enemy because they did not recognize the tongue of their French allies when he spoke, and concluded he must be part of the enemy Portuguese nation.<sup>406</sup>

Accents and variations in dialects also served as cultural markers between native communities. “From one end [of the island] to the other,” reported a French observer in early-seventeenth century Martinique, “they barely understand each other, and have different accents, which is cause that they make fun of each other either for this or for the language itself, which is entirely pronounced from the throat, and is thus very difficult to write [down].”<sup>407</sup> Perception of language, especially between culturally-foreign groups, thus hinged upon perception of non-linguistic components of speech. From the earliest contacts, nonverbal and linguistic expressions were tightly linked and would remain as such as the colonial relationships evolved (in the mid-sixteenth century in Brazil, the early decades of the seventeenth century in the Caribbean, and in the mid-seventeenth century in Canada).

Reliance on nonverbal cues endured after Europeans and Indians became better acquainted. Although still unversed in native languages and therefore ignorant of the content of the speeches to which he listened, Récollet friar Gabriel Sagard, like many other French observers, developed a favorable image of Canadian Indian speakers as stern, thoughtful, and eloquent. The Hurons, described Sagard while on a mission in 1623, “speak very thoughtfully, as if wanting to make themselves well understood, and they pause suddenly to think for a long moment, for fear of making a mistake, or to

---

<sup>406</sup> Neil L. Whitehead and Michael Harbsmeier, ed., *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 60.

<sup>407</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 124. “leur langue ne s’étend pas plus loin que leurs îles, et même d’un bout à l’autre ils ne s’entendent presque point, et ont différents accents qui est cause qu’ils se moquent les uns des autres soit pour cela ou pour le langage, qui se prononce presque tout du gosier, ce qui le rend difficile à écrire.” My translation.

ensure their words were well grasped, then start speaking again.”<sup>408</sup> Many Frenchmen also appreciated the careful attention and silence of Indian audiences when someone, including a newcomer, addressed them in both private and in public ceremonial settings. In Canada as in the Caribbean, however, this positive judgment was not reciprocated by the Indians, who were taken aback by the rambunctious Frenchmen and their disorderly ways of speaking.<sup>409</sup> “[The Hurons] call our Frenchmen ‘women,’” reported Sagard, “and the Montagnais [call them] ‘talkative geese,’ when, rushing too much and boiling in their actions, they all speak at the same time and interrupt one another like women, which is but too common.”<sup>410</sup>

Even when an interpreter was present to translate the content of an Indian speech, French observers generally noted the way the words had been spoken, to convey the tone, atmosphere, and overall quality of the communication to their readers. In many ways, nonverbal aspects of speech continued to shape the impressions that the French constructed of Indian orators and oratory even as mutual linguistic understanding was achieved. Nonverbal details were also used as a literary device in official correspondence and travel narratives to “authenticate” the experience of the writer. Ability to describe the gestures and accessories that accompanied an Indian oration served as proof that the chronicler had been a first-hand witness of the scene.<sup>411</sup> Capuchin father Yves d’Evreux

---

<sup>408</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 369. “Ils parlent fort posement, comme se voulans bien faire entendre, et s’arrestent aussitost en songeans une grande espace de temps, peur de se méprendre, ou qu’on aye bien conceu leur dire, puis reprennent leur parole.” My translation.

<sup>409</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 160-61. “Et en mangeant ne parlent que fort rarement, comme aussi ils se tiennent fort posés, ne remuant presque point, et se moquent de nous parce que nous parlions toujours et nous mouvions tantôt d’un côté tantôt de l’autre de quoi ils nous tançaient et nous disaient ‘mange, et quand tu auras un gros ventre tu parleras et iras courir à la montagne.”

<sup>410</sup> Sagard, 2: 369. “Cette modestie est cause qu’ils appellent nos François femmes et les Montagnais oyes babillardes, lorsque trop precipitez et bouillans en leurs actions, ils parlent tous à la fois et s’interrompent l’un l’autre comme femmes, ce qui n’est que trop ordinaire.”

<sup>411</sup> This difference is particularly emphasized by Jean de Léry (see Chapter 2).



described the qualities of a Brazilian Indian orator in 1613 in terms similar to those used by Sagard in Huronia a decade or two later, but neglected to include the literal meaning of the speech that the local interpreter had translated to him: “he speaks with measure and solemnly, without hastening his words, which he accompanies with naïve gestures, and explains clearly what he wants to say and the spirit in which he pronounces his words. [The audience] answers him softly and respectfully, and the young watch and listen attentively when he speaks.”<sup>412</sup> Because native oratorical traditions gave a crucial place to vocal variations of tone and volume, gestures, precedence and ritualized actions, these nonverbal elements constituted a key to deciphering and judging the harangue as, if not more, important as the interpreter’s translation or the auditor’s own linguistic understanding.<sup>413</sup>

Nonverbal elements of speech could even participate in the formation of gendered opinions about Indians. While Father Sagard admitted his inability to understand Nipissing women (members of an Algonquian-speaking tribe referred to as “Ebiceriny” by the French in the early seventeenth century), he associated the softness of their words with the general softness and modesty of their manners and dispositions.<sup>414</sup> “Among all the nations,” he claimed, “it seems to me that Ebiceriny women speak the most delicately and sweetly; they have a small sharp beak that makes it look as though their words leave

---

<sup>412</sup> Evreux, 94. “Il parle avec mesure et gravement, sans précipiter ses paroles qu’il accompagne de gestes naïfs, et il explique nettement ce qu’il veut dire et l’esprit dans lequel il prononce ces paroles. On lui répond doucement et respectueusement, et les jeunes le regardent et écoutent attentivement quand il parle. S’il se trouve à la fête des *caouinages*, il est le premier assis et servi le premier.” My translation.

<sup>413</sup> This point will be fully developed in Chapter Four.

<sup>414</sup> The native group that was known as Ebiceriny by the early French visitors to the Great Lake region were in fact the Nipissings, who may have derived their name from Lake Nipissing around which they lived (modern-day Ontario, northeast of Georgian Bay). While Champlain had met them in the early decades of the seventeenth century, the Récollets spent much time near them between 1615 and 1629, although they focused most of their attention on the nearby Hurons. Bruce C. Trigger, vol. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, 20 Vols, ed. by William C. Sturtevant (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 15: 787-91.

from the tip of their lips, and, what is even more admirable, [their words] flow readily without hesitation and without taking a breath, and so softly that you can hardly see them open their mouths during their little chats and distractions.”<sup>415</sup> Ebiceriny (Nipissing) women “charmed” the missionary by their bird-like way of speaking. Far from the disorderly cackling of boisterous Frenchmen, the Nipissing women spoke so delicately that Sagard even wondered how they could hear each other. Possibly, these women used this style of speech to preserve the privacy of their conversations, from the missionary and maybe from other Indian men as well, a thought that eluded Sagard. In French minds, these peripheral elements of speech also set the Nipissing women apart from women and men of other Indian nations. This interpretation may not have been far off from the truth, as this specific form of speech may have had a distinct, symbolic, and local purpose within the Nipissing culture, marking specific socio-cultural and/or gender roles.

The first Indian words acquired by the French in various regions of the Americas were attached to easily-decipherable social contexts, and were often accompanied by sign-language. The first Micmac phrase that Jacques Cartier transcribed (phonetically) in the relation of his 1534 travel to Canada was *Napou tou daman asurtat*, which he loosely translated as “*nous voulons avoir votre amitié*” (“We want to have your friendship”). This sentence was repeatedly pronounced by the Micmacs as they pursued the newcomers in their canoes, “showing many signs of joy and of their desire to be friends.” Cartier

---

<sup>415</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 336. “mais entre toutes [nations] il me semble que les femmes Ebicerinyennes parlent le plus delicatement et mignardement; elles ont un petit bec affilé dont vous diriez que les paroles leur partent du bout des lèvres, et ce qui est plus admirable est, qu’elles coulent de suite sans hesiter ny reprendre haleine, et si doucement qu’à peine leur voyez-vous ouvrir les levres en leurs petits entretiens et esbats. Je m’estonnois mesme comme elles se pouvaient entendre et le Truchemens Richer comprendre ce qu’elles disoient, car pour moy, il faut que j’advouë qu’il m’eust esté bien difficile de my rendre sçavant.” My translation.

confessed that other words were pronounced by the Micmacs, which he and his men were unable to understand, probably for the lack of such an obvious context.<sup>416</sup>

Frenchmen were able to understand a few words and phrases based on social similitude and sometimes through the gestures that accompanied them. In Martinique, where Indian men and women spoke distinct dialects, a French soldier noted that, upon seeing the newcomers' emaciated bodies after months of food deprivation at sea, the Caribs "showed by their gestures to be very surprised, repeating these words again and again, which are signs of surprise, '*Cai, Cai, Cai,*' and the women said, '*bibi, bibi, bibi.*'"<sup>417</sup> In the early phase of language learning, words were thus understood as "signs," through the same inferential process used to decipher gestures and other nonspeech signals. Although translations were often approximate, they enabled the French to identify behavioral and linguistic codes that facilitated interaction with the natives, even allowing for gendered nuances.<sup>418</sup> Father Sagard similarly reported the way in which the Hurons expressed disapproval and a sense of negative awe in "[striking] gently their hand

---

<sup>416</sup> David B. Quinn, ed., *New American World*, 1: 299.

<sup>417</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 119. "Ils montraient à leurs gestes d'en être fort étonnés, répétant toujours ces mots, qui sont signes d'étonnement, '*Cai, Cai, Cai,*' et les femmes disaient, '*bibi, bibi, bibi.*'" My translation. This also provided the French with an opportunity to learn subtle aspects of the local Indian culture through nonverbal elements. The author for instance reported that the Caribs, expressing their awe at the French emaciated bodies, pulled down the skin under the newcomers' eyes with their fingers. The Frenchman noted that this made much sense since a starving man rarely has healthy and sparkling eyes and that "hunger pushes the eyes out the skull." Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Translations of individual Indian words and phrases were probably often inaccurate and certain non-literal. However, this does not mean that the two groups did not achieve a certain success in communicating during this early phase of interaction. The French soldier who resided among the Carib Indians of Dominica and Martinique for eleven months in 1618-1620, thus mistook the word *Houragano* (a Carib word for hurricane that would be adopted by several European languages: *huracán* in Spanish, *ouragan* in French) for the name of a nearby island. His misunderstanding was not complete, however, probably thanks to explicit signs and gestures accompanying the Indians' dialogue. He wrote, indeed, that the inhabitants of this "island" of *Houragano* experienced such strong winds that they "often are forced to leave their cabins because the sea goes over them," demonstrating that he did understand that the conversation was about a large storm. Moreau, *Un flibustier*, op.cit., 114.

against their mouth, and saying *ho, ho, ho, ho, ho*. *Danstan téonguiandé*, this is not good, this is worthless.”<sup>419</sup>

Ritual greetings were also among the first linguistic signals learned on both sides of the encounter. The word *Chay*, which Father François du Peron heard when he first entered the cabin of a Huron family in the winter of 1639, was the only word he obtained from his hosts that day.<sup>420</sup> “The lack of language made me speechless,” he recalled, “and their way of doing things, which is to not say a word, except *chay* to the one who arrives also rendered them mute.”<sup>421</sup> Social practice taught Brother Sagard and his fellow missionaries in Saint-Gabriel mission how to recognize and emulate Huron greetings, not only through words but with attention to tone, inflection, and overall attitude or mood: “when some individual *Sauvage* friend of ours came to visit us, upon entering our place, the salutation was *ho, ho, ho*, which is a joyful salutation, and the voice alone *ho, ho, ho* can only be made as if half laughing, especially when lifting the last syllable, which thus expresses the joy and contentment they had to see us.” The meaning of the onomatopoeia was less literal than carried through an ensemble of paralinguistic signals. “Because their other salutation,” further explained the Récollet father, “[is] *Quoye*, which was as one would say, ‘what,’ ‘what are you saying,’ and can be understood in various ways. It is therefore common towards friends and enemies alike, who similarly answer *Quoye*, or more gracefully, *Yatoro*, that is: my friend, my companion, my comrade.”<sup>422</sup>

---

<sup>419</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 480. “[Ils] frappoient de la main doucement contre leur bouche & disoient ho, ho, ho, ho, ho. *Danstan téonguiandé*, voilà qui n’est pas bien, voilà qui ne vaut rien, & ils avoient raison.”

<sup>420</sup> *JR*, 15: 160.

<sup>421</sup> *JR*, 15: 162. “Le defaut de la langue me rendoit muet, et leur façon de faire, qui est de ne dire mot, sinon un *chay* à celuy qui arrive les rendoient aussi muets.” My Translation.

<sup>422</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 1: 222. “Quand quelque particulier Sauvage de nos amys nous venoient visiter, entrans chez nous, la salutation estoit ho, ho, ho, qui est une salutation de joye, et la seule voix ho, ho, ho, ne se peut faire que ce ne soit quasi en riant, principalement quand on leve la dernière syllabe,

Approximate translation obtained through nonspeech elements, however, was sufficient to give the French a sense of the various registers of language and social conventions that presided in Indian life situations. The exchange of ritual vocabulary was reciprocal. Some Indians (including some children) adopted particular French greetings based on their audience, despite significant pronunciation difficulties due to the absence of labial letters in native tongues. “When my *Sauvages* from saint-Gabriel came to visit us,” recalled Sagard, “when entering our place, or when we met them around town, their usual salutation was Jesus Maria, or rather *Iesous Mana*, or *Ana*, not being able to say [it] better.”<sup>423</sup> Ritual words, that is, words pronounced less for their literal meaning than to mark specific symbolic actions, moments, or feelings, favored mutual understanding and the beginnings of language learning. Like specific signs, however, these words were associated with specific actions or emotions and did not allow the French to build a more flexible lexicon of Indian words to construct other sentences and express more sophisticated ideas.

Verbal and paralinguistic codes offered a few precious doors into the meaning of Indian ceremonies and councils to the nescient Frenchmen. Sagard could bolster evidence of his linguistic and cultural expertise by including in his account the specific terms used respectively by the Montagnais and the Hurons to mark the official opening of a collective ceremonial feast. These words seem to have been the same at every feast, were

---

tesmoignant par là, la joye et le contentement qu’ils avoient de nous voir; Car leur autre salutation *Quoye*, qui est comme on disoit, qu’est-ce, que dites-vous, se peut prendre en divers sens, aussi est-elle commune envers les amis et ennemis, qui repondent de mesme *Quoye*, ou plus gracieusement, *Yatoro*, qui est à dire : mon amy, mon compagnon, mon camarade...” My translation.

<sup>423</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 1: 222. “ Lorsque mes sauvages de saint Gabriel nous venoient voir, entrans chez nous, ou les rencontrans par la ville, leur salutation ordinaire estoit Jesus Maria, ou plustost *Iesous Mana* ou *Ana* ne pouvans dire mieux on me dira que la lettre M est labiale, il est vray, mais les enfans à force de s’y estre exercé la prononçoient assez bien.” My translation.

pronounced at the same moment during the precise sequence of events, and were also characterized by a particular tone and attitude on the part of the one who spoke them. “When everything is cooked and ready to serve, they right away make the second announcement, through the same Montagnais word than the first time, *kinatomigaouin*, I invite you to feast, and if they are more than one [guest], *kinatomigaouinaou*, I invite you all to feast, and [the guests] reply *ho, ho, ho* and among them say *ninatomigaouinauo*, we are invited to feast.”<sup>424</sup> The difference between the meaning of this “*ho, ho, ho*,” which expressed enthusiastic agreement, and the “*ho, ho, ho*” used as a greeting, or the “*ho, ho, ho*” used by the audience during Indian councils to manifest their attention and concurrence with the orator, probably lay in subtle variation in tone, inflection, and volume of the voices, which could only be rendered in writing with great difficulty. A difference just as elusive – and yet seemingly more important than the difference in language itself – also separated the Hurons’ call to feast from that of the Montagnais. “The Hurons,” explained Sagard, “to invite to the feast, say with a more solemn and powerful tone: *Saconcheta, Saconcheta* (which is a word however that does not derive from the word for feast, since *Agochin* among them means feast), upon which [the guests] all walk there at the same time with their bowl and the spoon inside, which they carry gravely in front of them.”<sup>425</sup>

---

<sup>424</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 275.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 : 275. “tout estant cuit et prest à dresser, on va de rechef faire la seconde semonce, par ce mots Montagnais, comme à la première fois *kinatomigaouin*, je te prie de festin, et s’ils sont plusieurs *kinatomigaouinaou*, je vous prie de festin, lesquels répondent *ho, ho, ho* et entr’eux *ninatomigaouinauo*, nous somme priés de festin. Mais les Hurons disent d’un ton plus grave et puissant en invitant au festin : *Saconcheta Saconcheta* (qui est un mot qui ne derive point neantmoins du nom de festin, car *Agochin* entr’eux veut dire festin) lesquels s’y en vont en mesme temps avec leur ecuelle et la cuiller dedans, qu’ils porteny gravement devant eux avec les deux mains.” My translation.

These types of ritual words and phrases were common among native groups, especially during ritual celebrations. They may even have represented the only words pronounced during a feast since Indians traditionally kept silent while eating, especially in the Caribbean. They were often the only words understood by the Frenchmen during complex and overwhelming native ceremonial proceedings. Stunned by culture shock, still wondering at the Carib practice of avoiding eye contact in certain ritual settings, the French corsair who spent eleven months in Dominica and Martinique in 1619-1620 nevertheless managed to cling to two ritual words that he was able to decipher from context: “the husband stands up as he sees his wife handing out the present [of food] and shouts to the one she is serving ‘*quiribali*,’ that is, ‘eat’ and the other answers ‘*yau*,’ that is, ‘I thank you’.”<sup>426</sup> At the end of a shared feast, Carib Indians also used ritual parting words that were made clear by accompanying paralinguistic elements : “when this one wants to leave, having drunk all his wine and rolled up his leftover *cassava* under his arm, he stands straight up, and tells everyone one after the other in a very posed fashion, ‘*vuicem banari*,’ which means, ‘I’m leaving,’ and then everyone answers him ‘*aqui banari*,’ that is ‘go then,’ and he leaves.”<sup>427</sup> The French quickly put the frequency of such ritual speech to their advantage and adopted early on the enduring habit of using nonverbal and paralinguistic clues to decipher Indian speech and ceremonies. In this sense, nonverbal elements of speech and early language-learning circumstances profoundly shaped later perception of native rituals and oratory.

---

<sup>426</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 160. “Mais le mari d’icelle se dresse en même temps qu’il voit que sa femme tend le présent et cris à celui à qui elle l’envoie ‘*quiribali*,’ c’est-à-dire, ‘mange’ et l’autre répond ‘*yau*,’ c’est-à-dire ‘je te remercie’.” My translation.

<sup>427</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 164. “Et lorsque celui-là s’en veut aller, ayant bu tout son vin et roulé sa *cassave* qu’il n’a pu manger la met sous le bras et se tenant tout debout, dit à tous l’un après l’autre fort posément, ‘*vuicem banari*,’ qui signifie, ‘je m’en vais’, et puis on lui répond ‘*aqui banari*,’ c’est-à-dire ‘et bien va-t’en’, et puis s’en va.” My translation.

Lay Frenchmen (and women) probably relied on nonverbal and paralinguistic cues to learn elements of native tongues throughout the seventeenth century, even as interpreters and Catholic missionaries started to provide more systematic translations of Indian languages. Unfortunately, there is only sparse record of the casual, mutual learning that took place between anonymous and often illiterate French individuals and American Indians, during bartering sessions, shared games and distractions, while hunting, flirting, and fighting, or in the smoky darkness of a wigwam. The various contexts in which knowledge (cultural and linguistic) was exchanged as well as the unique traits of the local native cultures among which the French resided, are important aspects to speculate about these verbal and paralinguistic learning experiences. Gender and social position of the persons involved in the exchange also significantly determined the mode of transmission and content of the information. For instance, most of the Algonquin and Iroquois vocabulary acquired by Samuel de Champlain during his early explorations in Canada and New England had to do with geography and warfare, his two principal occupations and concerns. In contrast, Frenchmen who were not on official missions and entertained more casual exchanges with local populations tended to gather vocabulary about everyday life, with food occupying a predominant position.

Lay Frenchmen also had opportunities to interact with both native men and women, often residing among Indian households for the duration of their stay or at least temporarily, and learning words in a variety of domains (from hunting to cooking, cutting trees to weaving).<sup>428</sup> In contrast, most Jesuit missionaries chose to reside in their own

---

<sup>428</sup> Historian James Axtell refers to Indian women who entered casual or long-term intimate relationships with French traders and *truchements* and greatly contributed to their learning of Indian languages as “sleeping dictionaries” (a slightly offensive term but which has the merit of being explicit). “Unlike the traders and trappers who also pursued their callings in Indian country, the missionaries were denied the



quarters (sometimes with other missionaries) once permanent missions were established, and, even during the winter hunting season when they were forced to live, sleep, and eat with the Indians, generally had far more limited exchanges with Indian women.<sup>429</sup> The type of words learned and the means of learning were thus determined by the particular context and socio-demographic factors of the exchange. “When we first arrived among them, they made us understand what they wanted to say in two ways” recalled the anonymous French soldier about his Carib hosts. “The first was through a few Spanish and French words, and the other by signs, and often we had to guess, and we were not able to understand anything until after residing a long time among them.”<sup>430</sup> Nevertheless, the Frenchman managed to gather daily words and phrases in both the male and the female Carib dialects: “the men name the moon *nouna*, and the women *cati*; to say ‘hello my son,’ men say *maboiqua immourou* and women *mabiorgnora ho*; to say ‘come here,’ men say *accabou ou ou*, and women *acquietos*.”<sup>431</sup> As a rule, the Indian words recorded by Frenchmen who were neither government officials nor missionaries

---

company of those female ‘sleeping dictionaries’ who so quickly formed the strangers’ tongues to native vocabularies, syntax, and accents.” James Axtell, “The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures,” *Natives and Newcomers: the Cultural Origins of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 167.

<sup>429</sup> This may have resulted from a conscious choice on the part of Indian women themselves, rather than being a result of the Jesuits’ celibacy vow and moral habits only. If the Jesuits were perceived as womenless, powerful shamans of some sort, it was probably traditional for women to keep their distances. Evidence suggests that in Northeastern North America, powerful shamans who did not bear other important social functions within their community (such as war chief as was the case of some shamans) were often celibate.

<sup>430</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 116. “Au commencement de notre arrivée chez eux, ils nous faisaient entendre ce qu’ils voulaient dire de deux façons. La première par quelque mots espagnol ou français, et l’autre par signes, et souvent il fallait deviner, et ne pûmes rien comprendre qu’après être demeurés longtemps avec eux.” My translation.

<sup>431</sup> Moreau, *Un flibustier*, 117. “Et ainsi les hommes nomment la lune *nouna*, et les femmes *cati* ; pour dire ‘bonjour mon fils’, les hommes disent *maboiqua immourou* et les femmes *mabiorgnora ho* ; pour dire ‘viens là’, les hommes disent *accabou ou ou*, et les femmes *acquietos*, et ainsi des autres.” My translation.

tended to reflect spontaneous, daily interactions rather than a well thought out effort to collect vocabulary systematically.

Indian phrases linked to trade and gift-exchange were probably among the first to be understood and perhaps used in turn by the French. The signs and gestures accompanying the exchange of goods were among the most easily decipherable, most frequent, and perhaps most enduring Indian nonverbal codes learned by the newcomers. “Whether we went into their villages or they came into our fort,” explained Jean de Léry about trading sessions with Tupí women around the French colony on Guanabara Bay (Rio de Janeiro) in mid-sixteenth century Brazil, “they would offer us fruits or some other commodity from their country in exchange for [glass beads], and with their way of speaking full of flattery of which they customarily used, they would be after us incessantly, pestering us and saying, ‘*Mair, deagatorem, amabé mauroubi*’: that is, ‘Frenchman, you are good; give me some of your bracelets of glass beads.’ They would do the same thing to get combs from us, which they call *Guap* or *Kuap*, mirrors, which they call *Aroua*, and all the other goods and merchandise we had that they desired.”<sup>432</sup> The “flattering speech” to which Léry referred was probably manifested as much through tone (pleading voice), and physical attitudes (perhaps caresses, knowing looks) than through the phrase he recorded. The goal was to please the strangers to obtain desirable goods from them. Using the newcomers’ own words, particularly if they seemed to bear

---

<sup>432</sup> Jean de Léry, *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* [1578] (Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 2004), 231. “soit que nous allissions en leurs villages, ou qu’elles vissent en nostre fort, à fin de les avoir de nous, en nous présentant des fruicts, ou quelque autre chose de leur pays, avec la façon de parler pleine de flaterie dont elles usent ordinairement, nous rompant la teste, elles estoient incessamment apres nous, disant : *Mair, deagatorem, amabé mauroubi* : c’est-à-dire, François tu es bon, donne moy de tes bracelets de boutons de verre. Elles faisoient le semblable pour tirer de nous des peignes qu’elles nomment *Guap* ou *Kuap*, des miroirs qu’elles appellent *Aroua*, et toutes autres merceries et marchandises que nous avons dont elles avoyent envie.” Note the two different spellings provided for the Tupi word “*Guap* or *Kuap*”, probably based on various pronunciations/sonorities of the first letter.

particular value in their eyes, could also be a way to obtain what one's heart desired. While at the trading post of Tadoussac in the Spring of 1623, Gabriel Sagard was bothered by the insistence of a *Canadien* (Algonquin) Indian chief who wanted the missionary to give him his "rosary and the Cross which he called *Jesus*, and made signs to me that he would wear it around his neck, but not having any other, I had to refuse, much to my regret because this good man was showing me much friendship, and displayed some sort of devotion for this cross."<sup>433</sup>

It was also during such casual, daily exchanges that Indians reciprocally learned French popular sayings and common phrases. In both Canada and the Caribbean, missionaries deplored the tendency of natives to learn and repeat obscenities and curse words from the sailors and traders, as well as, on occasion, mariners' songs that the men of the cloth found offensive. "The first thing that these poor savages learn are swearwords, dirty words and insults," denounced Father Biard after settling in the Acadian colony in Port-Royal in the spring of 1612. "you can often hear the *sauvagesses* [Indian women] (who otherwise are very timid and modest) calling our people 'big rotten' and shameful opprobrium in the French language," he continued, putting the blame on the lay Frenchmen he ironically called "Evangelists," who undermined the native "field" missionaries came to cultivate. Biard believed, perhaps naively, that the native women who spoke these words ignored their meaning and only sought to induce a predictable response from their French audiences: "they see that in such words is their

---

<sup>433</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 1 : 152. "Ce Capitaine Sauvage m'importuna fort pour avoir nostre Chapelet et la Croix qu'il appelloit Iesus, et me faisoit signe qu'il la porteroit à son col, mais n'en ayant point d'autre, il me fallut refuser à mon grand regret, car ce bon homme me tesmoigna assez d'amitié, et semble quelque devotion à ceste Croix, de laquelle ie ne me pouvois deffaire qu'en me privant d'un objet qui me consolait fort parmy mes autres croix." My translation.

common laughter and ordinary pastime.”<sup>434</sup> Certain words or songs may have been memorized by both groups less for their literal meaning than for their symbolic and social functions, as a means to accommodate and partake in joint amusements. In the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, Father Breton, a Dominican priest who led local missions for twenty years beginning in 1635, also noted that “a few savages have learned good words and although they do not know the meaning of the dirty words and blasphemes they say, it is nevertheless a very pernicious example.”<sup>435</sup>

From the Catholic missionaries’ point of view, this way of learning languages lacked method and structure. But for most lay French and Indian individuals who needed basic mutual understanding to trade, hunt, fight, live together, and engage in amorous or sexual relationships, it fulfilled multiple functions and may have been more than satisfactory. Although both groups were certainly not free of prejudices against each other, their lack of pre-conceived knowledge about language and grammar may have facilitated the acquisition of a new tongue. By learning language “in context,” the words and phrases became inseparable from the culture from which they came, including physical behaviors and prosodic features attached to speech. According to a Jesuit father, the result of such an experience was “neither French nor Savage; and nevertheless when the French use it, they think they are speaking the savage tongue.”<sup>436</sup> The measure of

---

<sup>434</sup> *JR*, 2: 8. “La première chose que ces pauvres Sauvages apprennent, ce sont les juremens, parolles sales, et injures ; et orriés souvent les sauvagesses (lesquelles autrement sont fort craintives et pudiques) mais vous les orriés souvent charger nos gens de grosses pourries et eshontées opprobres, en langage françois ; non qu’elles en sachent la signification, ains seulement parce qu’elle voyent qu’en telles parolles est leur commun rire et ordinaire passetemps. Et quel moyen de remedier à cecy en des hommes qui mesprennent (malparlent) avec (d’autant) plus d’abandon qu’ils méprisent avec audace.” My translation.

<sup>435</sup> Breton, *la Guadeloupe*, 80. “Quelques sauvages en ont appris de bons mots et quoiqu’ils ne sachent pas la signification des paroles sales et blasphèmes qu’ils disent, c’est néanmoins un très pernicious exemple.” My translation.

<sup>436</sup> *JR*, 5 : 113-15 . “qui n’est ni du Français ni du Sauvage ; et cependant quand les Français l’utilisent, ils pensent qu’ils utilisent la langue sauvage.” My translation.

success in terms of intercultural and multilingual communication in seventeenth-century America should be less the ability of the protagonists to translate literally and without mistake their thoughts in the foreign language than the more general and no less important goal of making oneself understood enough to obtain certain things (food, glass beads, or an alliance) and to preserve one's life in the process. The most successful French interpreters, such as the famed Etienne Brûlé or Nicolas Marsolet in Canada, and the many anonymous Normand interpreters in Brazil, were perhaps less adept at 'perfectly-spoken' native languages than experts at cross-cultural communication.<sup>437</sup> This cross-cultural communication, owing much to the very particular conditions and socio-cultural aspects of "casual" language learning, likely involved as much fluency in nonverbal signs and codes than in standard Indian syntax.

\*

\*

\*

"It is a strange thing to find oneself in a country where it is necessary to learn without a teacher, without books, without rules, at an age already mature, a language which has no likeness to ours," commented Jesuit father Francesco Gioseppe Bressani in 1653.<sup>438</sup> Many difficulties awaited the missionaries who attempted to acquire Indian languages in the New World, not the least of which was to adjust to new learning methods. In Europe, languages were usually studied through books, dictionaries, and

---

<sup>437</sup> Philippe Jacquin, *Les Indiens Blancs: Français et Indiens en Amérique du Nord (XVI-XVIII siècle)* (Paris: Payot, Bibliothèque historique, 1987), 10. Jacquin emphasized that "a culture is a system of signs and symbols, the relationship to the other takes place in several dimensions, and acculturation does not imply complete identification ; it leads to the interpretation of certain signs, to the adoption of mixed practices." ("une culture est un système de signes et de symboles, le rapport à l'autre se situe sur plusieurs dimensions, et l'acculturation n'induit pas une identification totale, elle conduit à l'interprétation de certains signes, à l'adoption de pratiques mixtes." My translation.) On cultural go-betweens and, in particular, Normand interpreters in sixteenth-century Brazil, see Alida Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

<sup>438</sup> *JR*, 39: 103. Original in Latin.

grammars, and from teachers who already mastered the said tongues and rules. Pronunciation was sometimes perfected with the help of multilingual interpreters. In contrast, the hundreds of native languages of North America represented *terra incognita* for the linguist. Seventeenth-century missionaries thus first tried to reproduce familiar learning tools, systematically collecting words and phrases to form dictionaries and lexicons, which would then instruct their reinforcements. They turned to interpreters, both native and French, to provide the bases of Indian language-learning, and later, to correct their pronunciation of words they had learned from the early dictionaries. When several friars lived under the same roof, they served as each other's tutors and pronunciation coaches.

It was hoped that, through these various means, native languages would soon deliver their grammatical and structural secrets, allowing missionaries to express Christian ideas fluently. The initial task of collecting vocabulary and idioms, however, proved much more cumbersome than anticipated. Even when interpreters were available, their mastery of Indian languages was neither firmly attested nor willingly shared. Protecting their own social advantage and the interests of their employers, *truchements* (interpreters) employed by fur trading merchants often refused to cooperate with the invasive missionaries. The only phrase a *truchement* named Nicolas Margolet chose to share with Brother Sagard before he embarked to spend the winter with a band of Montagnais was *Noma Kinisitotatin*, which meant "I do not understand you."<sup>439</sup>

---

<sup>439</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 333-334. "je m'adressay au truchement Marsolet pour en avoir quelque instruction, mais il me dit franchement dedans notre barque à Tadoussac qu'il ne le pouvoit nullement et que je m'adressasse à un autre ; je luy en demanday la raison il me dit qu'il n'en avoit point d'autre que le serment qu'il avoit faict de n'enseigner rien de la langue à qui que ce fut." My translation.

In the early seventeenth century, the friars thus reluctantly turned to non-linguistic means of communication as their sole and ultimate recourse to acquire the foundations of Indian languages.<sup>440</sup> Words had to be collected through painstaking sessions of mixed and often comical pantomime, sound effects, gestures, and drawings. “Because they could not make me understand their conceptions, they demonstrated them to me through figures, similarities, and exterior demonstrations,” recalled Father Sagard who dedicated a significant portion of each day to such exchanges. “Sometimes by discourse, and sometimes with a stick, tracing the thing on the ground as well as they could, or through movements of the body, not being ashamed to make some pretty indecent ones sometimes, so as to make themselves better understood by these comparisons, rather than through long discourses and reasons they could have invoked.”<sup>441</sup> Once he had established a list of words and phrases, Sagard spent his afternoons repeating them to his Indian teachers, who corrected his mistakes: “observing very carefully the words of the tongue I was learning, I established memoirs that I studied and repeated in front of my savages, who enjoyed it and helped me to perfect myself with a rather good method, often saying to me, Aniel pour Gabriel, ...*Assehoüa*, *Agnonra*, et *Seatonqua*: Gabriel, take your quill and write; then they explained to me as well as they could what I wanted

---

<sup>440</sup> The means of acquisition of Indian languages and the nature of indigenous communicative strategies and styles may have significantly influenced the content of the missionaries’ cross-cultural writings. I intend to take a closer look at missionary dictionaries and lexicon with nonverbal means of communication in mind when I will revise my manuscript. For an interesting example from Spanish America, see: Colleen Ebacher, “The Old and the New World: Incorporating American Indian Forms of Discourse and Modes of Communication into Colonial Missionary Texts,” *Anthropological Linguistics*, vol. 33, No.2, (Summer, 1991), pp. 135-165.

<sup>441</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 1: 203-204. “ Et comme ils ne pouvoient parfois me faire entendre leurs conceptions, ils me les demonstroient par figures, similitudes, et demonstrations exterieures, par fois par discours, et quelquefois avec un baston, traçant la chose sur la terre au mieux qu’ils pouvoient, ou par mouvement du corps, n’estans pas honteux d’en faire quelquefois de bien indecents, pour se pouvoir mieux donner à entendre par ces comparaisons, plustost que par de longs discours, et raisons qu’ils eussent pû alleguer.” My translation.

to know from them.”<sup>442</sup> In the process, the Indians certainly gathered a few French terms, although they seemed to have been more eager to see the missionary speak their own tongue.

Deprived of familiar learning tools and of the prestige they enjoyed in France as adept scholars and linguists, reduced instead to the status of marginally successful students of a “savage people,” some missionaries resented the use of nonverbal means to learn Indian languages. “Because they do not know our language, nor us theirs, or very little, touching commerce and daily life, we have to make a thousand gesticulations and play-acting to express our conceptions, and thus obtain from them a few names of things that cannot be shown with the senses” explained Father Biard, a Jesuit missionary residing in Port-Royal around 1612.<sup>443</sup> Sign-language, pictographs, and mime naturally seemed more adequate to express material, physical things than abstract concepts: one could point to “a pot” or “a dog,” or mime the actions of “running,” “crying,” or “hunting.” But, Biard complained, “*to think, to forget, to remember, to doubt*: to know these four words, you will have to entertain these gentlemen at least a whole afternoon, while acting like a thresher. And even then, after all this, you will find yourself deceived and mocked, having had, as the saying goes, the mortar for a level, and the hammer for the trowel.”<sup>444</sup> Surprisingly, French missionaries seldom blamed the inadequacy of

---

<sup>442</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 1: 203. “observant soigneusement les mots de la langue que j’apprenois, j’en dressois des memoires que j’estudois et repetois devant mes Sauvages, lesquels y prenoient plaisir et m’aydoient à m’y perfectionner avec une assez bonne methode, me disant souvent, Aniel pour Gabriel, qu’ils ne pouvoient prononcer à cause de la lettre B, qui ne se trouve point en tout leur langue, non plus que les autres lettres labiales, *Assehoüa*, *Agnonra*, et *Seatonqua* : Gabriel, prends ta plume et écris, puis ils m’expliquoient au mieux qu’ils pouvoient ce que je desirois sçavoir d’eux.” My translation.

<sup>443</sup> *JR*, 2: 10. “Car, comme ny eux ne sçavent nostre langue, ny nous la leur, sinon fort peu, touchant le commerce et vie commune, il nous faut faire mille gesticulations et chimagrées [sic] pour leur exprimer nos conceptions, et ainsi tirer d’eux quelques noms de choses qui ne se peuvent montrer avec le sens.”

<sup>444</sup> *JR*, 2: 10. “*penser, oublier, se ressouvenir, doubter* : pour sçavoir ces quatre mots, il vous faudra donner beau rire à nos messieurs au moins toute une après-d ?, en faisant le bastelleur ; et encore, après tout



nonverbal means of language learning to explain their failures in acquiring and understanding Indian tongues. Instead, they chose to blame the essential nature of native languages, coming to the conclusion that the concepts that could not be expressed through nonverbal means probably did not have any verbal translation at all.<sup>445</sup>

The nature and extreme complexity of Indian languages forced missionaries to rely on nonverbal means of communication even as they spent decades compiling, studying, and memorizing lexicons and dictionaries. One of the key paradoxes at the heart of the missionary language acquisition project in the seventeenth century was that these nonlinguistic strategies constituted at the same time a prime source of frustration among the fathers, and perhaps, the key to their success. To some degree, the reluctance of some missionaries to use nonspeech and paralinguistic means to acquire Indian languages and their preference for systematic, traditional methods mimicking Latin and Greek grammars, may well have delayed their success.<sup>446</sup> This could be one explanation for the comparative fluency that lay interpreters seemed to achieve over the course of a few years, since, as other Frenchmen and women, they learned the meaning of Indian phrases and words from context and gestures rather than from codified dictionaries. Why exactly did nonverbal means of language learning (such as pantomime, drawing, and

---

cela, vous trouverez-vous trompé et mocqué de nouveau, ayant eu, comme l'on dit, le mortier pour un niveau, et le marteau pour la truelle." My translation.

<sup>445</sup> *JR*, 2: 221 "Of those things, indeed, which fall under sight, touch, and the other senses, the names were obtained from the answers of the savages in one way or another; but for those things which eluded the senses, there is the greatest scarcity of names among that race, and also a profound ignorance of the things themselves." This apparently counter-intuitive conclusion probably derived from the notion that all human languages derived from the original universal language given by God in the Tower of Babel. The weaknesses and shortcomings of Indian languages, their utter incongruity with classical languages (Latin and Greek), were proofs of how far down the Indians had fallen from the divine language. On this topic, see Edward G. Gray, *New World Babel*. Despite the missionaries' frustration with the nonconformist methods they were forced to adopt, this interpretation may also have been a testimony to the relative confidence they had in the efficiency of non-verbal means of language learning.

<sup>446</sup> Victor Egon Hanzeli, *Missionary Linguistics in New France*, 32-40.

sign-language) prove so frustrating to the missionaries and appeared so inadequate to the task at hand? First, as we have seen, because of the missionaries' classical training and of the difficulties, both conceived and real, they encountered when forced to adjust to new methods and conditions. Secondly, because of the structure of Indian languages, which included compound words—a fact that eluded the missionaries for many years.<sup>447</sup>

A discouraged father Le Jeune once admitted that he thought he would “never be able to speak the languages of the *Sauvages* with enough freedom that would be necessary to preach to them and answer right away without hesitation to their questions and their objections.”<sup>448</sup> This feeling of helplessness partly derived from the fact that the endless and painstaking collection of Indian words and phrases (most likely acquired through nonverbal and paralinguistic strategies) appeared futile in view of the complex functioning of Indian tongues: “stock your memory with all the words that mean each thing in particular, learned the nod or syntax that tie them together, you are still only an ignorant,” explained Le Jeune. “You may well make yourself understood by the *Sauvages*, although not always, but you do not understand them.”<sup>449</sup> Le Jeune went on to illustrate this major difficulty with a parallel with French language and grammar:

If I want to say in French, “the wind pushes the snow,” I only need to know these three words, for wind, for the verb to push, and for snow, and to know how to put them together. It is not the same here. I know how to say wind, *routin*; I know how to say to push something noble such as

---

<sup>447</sup> Leahey, “Comment peut un muet...?,” 127. Even after Father Brébeuf had illuminated the “polysynthetic” structure of Native language, it continued to elude many missionaries, such as Father Le Jeune.

<sup>448</sup> *JR*, 7: 32. “Je ne croy quasi pas pouvoir jamais parler les langues des Sauvages avec autant de liberté qu’il seroit nécessaire pour leur prescher, & repondre sur le champ sans broncher, à leurs demandes & à leurs objections, estant notamment occupé comme j’ay esté jusques à présent.”

<sup>449</sup> *JR*, 7: 26. “peuplez vostre memoire de tous les mots qui signifient chaque chose en particulier, apprenez le nœud ou la Syntaxe qui les allie, vous n’êtes encor qu’un ignorant, vous pourrez bien avec cela vous faire entendre des Sauvages, quoy que non pas tousiours, mais vous ne les entendez pas : la raison est, qu’oultre les noms de chaque chose en particulier ils ont une infinité de mots qui signifient plusieurs choses ensemble.” My translation.

snow is regarded among the *Sauvages*, it's *rakhineou*; I know how to say snow, it's *couné*. But if I want to put these three words together *Routin rakhineou couné*, the *Sauvages* will not understand me, or if they do, they will start laughing because they do not speak like that, and only use this one word *piouan* to say "the wind makes the snow blow."<sup>450</sup>

Le Jeune believed his memory was simply not sufficient to remember not only the specific words for each thing (such as *nissitai*, or "feet" in Huron), but also the particular phrases and constructions to mean this thing in each particular circumstances, belonging to different people, etc (like *Nitatagouasisin* to mean 'my feet are cold'). "This is why," Le Jeune concluded, "I often cause them to laugh when I speak, trying to follow the economy of the Latin or French language, not knowing these words that mean several things together."<sup>451</sup>

The inner logic and difficulty of native languages was not the sole obstacle to the missionaries' linguistic success. The friars, like other Frenchmen, soon realized that there was much more to Indian languages than grammatical rules and vocabulary lists. Récollet brother Gabriel Sagard considered himself a reasonably gifted linguist. "Back when I was in France," he recalled, "I already had a strong inclination for Indian tongues, so that by benefiting from them I could benefit the souls [of the heathens], and I had already assembled a great quantity of words." Learning from books written by preceding missionaries, before having ever been to the New World or met a single Indian himself,

---

<sup>450</sup> JR, 7: 28. "si je veux dire en François le vent pousse la neige, suffit que j'aye cognoissance de ces trois mots, du vent, du verbe je pousse, & de la neige, & que je sçache conjoindre, il n'en est pas de mesme icy. Je sçay comment on dit le vent *routin*, [28] comme on dit il pousse une chose noble comme est la neige en l'estime des Sauvage, c'est *rakhineou*, je sais comment on dit la neige, c'est *couné*, que si je veux conjoindre ces trois mots *Routin rakhineou couné*, les Sauvages ne m'entendront pas, que s'ils m'entendent ils se mettront à rire, pource qu'ils ne parlent pas comme cela, se servans de ce seul mot *piouan*, pour dire le vent pousse ou fait voler la neige." My translation.

<sup>451</sup> JR, 7: 28. "d'où provient que je les fais souvent rire en parlant, en voulant suivre l'oeconomie de la langue Latine, ou Française, ne sçachant point ces mots qui signifient plusieurs choses ensemble." My translation. Linguist Victor Hanzeli has pointed to the fact that their excellent knowledge of Latin and Greek may have impaired the missionaries' ability to understand and accept the grammatical organization of Indian tongues.

and thus without having ever heard the sound of native words other than from his own mouth, Sagard thought he was adequately preparing himself for his great mission. The illusion was to be short-lived on the new continent. He admitted: “for not knowing how to pronounce [the words] in the cadence of the country, at the first encounter I had with Montagnais, thinking I would be able to jargon, I remained speechless, and them likewise.”<sup>452</sup> Language without its spoken paralinguistic elements was of no effect. Intonation, rhythm, pronunciation, and accentuation proved as important and as difficult to master as the grammar and words of the Indian languages.

In 1639, Jesuit father François Du Peron remarked that, in the Huron language, “an accent changes the meaning of a word.”<sup>453</sup> Brother Sagard concurred, explaining that even interpreters who possessed years of expertise, such as the famous *truchement* Etienne Brûlé, still experienced difficulties with the complex accentuations and tempo of Indian speech. If you mispronounced even a single syllable in a word, Sagard insisted, “you miss it all, or if you make yourself understood it will be in a completely different way than you wish, like this word of the Ebiceriny language: *Kidauskinne*, which pronounced a certain way means ‘you don’t have any sense’ and in another tone, ‘you told a lie.’”<sup>454</sup> Only hard practice and regular communication with the Indians, Sagard believed, could help add the “cadence” to the “*lettre*.”

---

<sup>452</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 333. “Dès la France, j’avois une grande inclination pour les langues sauvages, afin qu’en y profitant je puisse après profiter aux âmes, et en avois desjà assemble une quantité de mots, mais pour ne les sçavoir prononcer à la cadence du país, à la première rencontre que je fis des Montagnais, pensans baragouiner, je demeuray muet, et eux avec moy.” My translation.

<sup>453</sup> *JR*, 15: 154. “un accent change la signification d’un mot.”

<sup>454</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 337. “Il se trouve une autre grande difficulté en ces langues, en la prononciation de quelque syllabes, à laquelle consistent les diverses significations d’un mesme mot, qui est une difficulté plus grande que l’on ne pense, car manquez seulement en une, vous manquez en tout, ou si vous vous faites entendre, ce sera tout autrement que vous ne desirez, comme en ce mot Ebicerinyen : *Kidauskinne*, lequel avec une certaine façon de prononcer veut dire, tu n’as point d’esprit, et par un autre ton signifie : tu as menty.” My translation.

Sagard went further and claimed that, in order to learn the necessary linguistic and cultural elements from the Indians and to properly speak their languages, one also needed to adopt specific outward behavior. He noted that Native Americans appreciated being addressed in the same stern, thoughtful, and respectful manner that they themselves used. The Indians were generally eager “to learn and to hear about things they ignore[d],” as long as the speaker expressed himself in a serious fashion, “and not mockingly, or inanely, like our [lay] Frenchmen used to do.”<sup>455</sup> Success in Indian language-learning thus came to those who not only knew Indian words and syntax and used the proper pronunciation and rhythm, but who also performed the part of an acceptable Indian speaker. Sagard conducted an experiment in the art of pleasing his audience, changing his mood and tone on various occasions (from melancholic to harsh, from angry to joking), and closely observing the reactions of his Indian hosts. He concluded that the attitude that “carried sweetness in the mouth, and contentment in the heart, and [with] a deportment humbly stern and modest, was the one [the Indians] valued the most.”<sup>456</sup>

---

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 2: 393. “car ils sont bien ayse d’apprendre, & d’ouyr choses qu’ils ignorent, pourveu qu’on leur parle serieusement, & en vérité, & non point en gaussant, ou niaisant, comme faisoient nos François.” My translation.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 2: 368. “Ne sachant pas encore au commencement que je m’associay avec eux, qu’elle estoit l’humeur qui leur agreoit davantage, car comme dit l’Apostre, il se faut faire tut à tous pour les gaigner tous, la prudence m’obligea à leur faire veoir plusieurs faces et divers changements d’humeurs, et trouvoy que celle qui portoit la douceur en la bouche, le contentement au cœur, et un maintien humblement grave et modeste estoit celle de laquelle ils faisoient principalement estat.” My translation.

It was no coincidence that this behavior and the values it conveyed were also prized by Catholic missionaries and such influential Catholic leaders as Francis de Sales and Ignatius de Loyola themselves. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, on the subject of speech, De Sales wrote: “Que votre langage soit doux, franc, sincère, rond, naïf et fidèle. Gardez-vous des duplicités, artifices et feintises.” (“May your language be soft, sincere, round, naïve and loyal. Keep away from duplicity, artifices, and falsities.”) Humility, “sweetness,” sincerity needed to be practiced outwardly as well as inwardly. “L’humilité nous perfectionne envers Dieu, et la douceur envers le prochain.” (“Humility perfects us towards God, and sweetness towards each other”). Respect, devotion, charity, and humility were particularly important when speaking about God and trying to win people to Christianity: “Mais parlez toujours de Dieu comme de Dieu, c’est-à-dire **révéremment et dévotement**, non point faisant la suffisante ni la prêchouse, mais avec **l’esprit de douceur, de charité et d’humilité**, distillant autant que vous savez...le miel délicieux de la dévotion et des choses divines, goutte à goutte, tantôt dedans l’oreille de l’un, tantôt dedans l’oreille de

A successful student of Indian languages thus had to be a good actor as well as a good linguist.<sup>457</sup> This would have come as no surprise to the Jesuits, who believed that excellence in a Christian proselytizer came from his ability to impress and even “charm” his audience, adapting to the local culture as much as proper behavior permitted, to achieve emotion and conversion.<sup>458</sup> More surprisingly, outward appearance could sometimes also become an obstacle to language-learning. Because natives seemed to conceive language-learning as one of the ingredients of a more profound cultural transformation, *truchements* were sometimes criticized for not “looking the part.” Jean Richer, an interpreter who had spent two years among the Nipissings (called Ebicerinys by early French visitors) northeast of Lake Huron and seemed to have achieved an acceptable degree of fluency in their language, was constantly teased by his hosts who told him: “now that you are beginning to speak our language well, if you did not have a beard you would almost have as much sense as that one nation, naming to him one that they considered inferior to them in intelligence.” Language proficiency thus implied

---

l'autre, priant Dieu au secret de votre âme qu'il lui plaise de faire passer cette sainte rosée jusques dans le Cœur de ceux qui vous écoutent. Surtout il faut faire cet office angélique doucement et suavement, non point par manière de correction, mais par manière d'**inspiration**, car c'est merveille combien la suavité et amiable proposition de quelque bonne chose est une puissante amorce pour attirer les coeurs.” (“Always speak of God as of God, that is to say reverently and devoutly, not by acting smug or preachy, but with a spirit of softness, of charity and humility, distilling as much as you can...the delicious honey of devotion and divine things, drop by drop, once in this ear, once in this other ear, praying God in the secret of your soul that it may please him to convey this holy dew upon the Heart of those who listen to you. Especially, you must do this angelic task sweetly and suavely, not by means of correction, but by means of inspiration, because it is marvel how suavity and amicable propositions of a good thing is a powerful bait to attract the hearts.”) François de Sales, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de La Pléiade, 1969), 218, 152, 205. My translations. Emphases are mine.

<sup>457</sup> Throughout his book Sagard insisted on the importance of “dissimulating” one’s true feelings, particularly anger and frustration, which seemed to have been frowned upon by the Indians. Sagard, *Histoire*, 1: 102, 108, 173, 174. “Surtout si on a quelquefois de l’impatience, il la faut estouffer au-dedans de soi-même sans la faire paroître au dehors, et n’estre point songear [songeur], chagrin, turbulent, non plus qu’esventé, pour ce qu’ils méprisent fort ces mauvaises qualitez, en un bon esprit, comme nous en un homme qui s’estime sage.”

<sup>458</sup> Dominique Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire*, 101, 103. “Le parfait agent convertisseur est un charmeur.” “l’agent convertisseur doit d’adapter aux capacités de son auditoire, et prenant exemple sur les apôtres, s’adresser à lui dans sa langue ‘tout bonnement, familièrement, et simplement.’”

multi-dimensional, and sometimes surprising, nonverbal and paralinguistic elements. At stake for the Frenchmen who studied Indian languages was not only the achievement of their own goals, whether spiritual or commercial, but also recognition and respect from the Indians, no less essential to success. “In their opinion, the *truchement* should have studied their language another two or three years and be wearing no beard at all, to be esteemed a man of good sense and judgment.”<sup>459</sup>

Some missionaries may have resented the use of “degrading” nonverbal strategies to learn native languages, but ironically, Catholic conversion techniques, in both Europe and the Americas, heavily relied on another set of nonverbal devices.<sup>460</sup> In recent years, a number of historians have analyzed the use of music and singing, ritual gestures, objects, and religious images by Catholic missionaries in early North and South America (as well as in other parts of the world) in their effort to convert Indian “heathens.”<sup>461</sup> Unable to fully explain the Christian dogma without mastering Indian tongues, missionaries did not remain inactive on the conversion front while trying to perfect their spoken talents.

---

<sup>459</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 350-351. “Or, ces Sauvages, apres luy avoir fait quelques reproches d’avoir quitté le mauvais país de la France, pour venir habiter le leur beaucoup plus beau et meilleur, luy dirent : et bien, iusques à present tu as presque vescu en beste sans cognoissance et sans esprit, mais maintenant que tu commence à bien parler nostre langue, si tu n’avois point de barbe, tu aurois presque autant d’esprit qu’une telle nation, luy en nommant une qu’ils estimaient avoir beaucoup moins d’esprit qu’eux, et les François avoir encor moins d’esprit que cette nation-là, tellement qu’il eut fallut à leur compte que ce truchement eut encor étudié pour le moins deux ou trois ans leur langue et n’avoir point du tout de barbe, pour y estre estimé homme d’esprit et de iugement.” My translation.

<sup>460</sup> John W. O’Malley, et al. *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*. 2 vols. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999) ; Réal Ouellet, *Rhétorique et conquête missionnaire: le jésuite Paul Le Jeune* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1993).

<sup>461</sup> Pauline Moffit-Watts, “Languages of Gestures in Sixteenth-century Mexico: Antecedents and Transmutations” in Claire Farago, ed., *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 140-52; Moffitt Watts, “Pictures, Gestures, Hieroglyphs: ‘Mute Eloquence’ in Sixteenth-Century Mexico,” in Fiering and Gray, eds., *The Language Encounter*, 81-101; Margaret J. Leahey, “Iconic Discourse: The Language of Images in Seventeenth-Century New France,” In Fiering and Gray, eds., the *Language Encounter*, 102-118; François M. Gagnon, *La Conversion par l’image: Un aspect de la mission jésuite auprès des Indiens canadiens au XVIIe siècle* (Montréal : Bellarmin, 1975); Dominique Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire*; James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Instead, they were convinced that their mission could be conveyed by both “live voice and by example.”<sup>462</sup> They used visual, tactile, and audible means to express the essential aspects and values of their faith and to attract the Indians. Their demeanor itself was a means of conversion, as were objects of the cult, chants, and even writing. In the early years of the mission in Huronia Father Pierre Biard toured the Indians’ dwellings and “prayed God in their presence and showed them some pictures and token of our faith.”<sup>463</sup> Absence of hostility or attentiveness of the audience were taken as significant successes and encouraging signs of the Indians’ predisposition to Christianity.<sup>464</sup> The sound of the prayers alone, noted the Jesuits, with or without understanding their content, seemed to please the Indians.<sup>465</sup> Although limited, these visible and audible successes carried much personal meaning and gratification for the laboring fathers.<sup>466</sup> In Martinique in June 1635, the Dominican fathers similarly saw their modest aspirations fulfilled: “The Father Superior disembarked with his companion and they displayed the Cross and tied [to a tree

---

<sup>462</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 1: 32. from official letter patente of the King. “tous les Ordres religieux, qui avec une pureté de vie se mettoient à enseigner les peuples et les endoctriner, tant de vive voix que par exemple.”

<sup>463</sup> *JR*, 3: 225.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.* “they listened with great attention and respect to what was told them.”

*JR*, 4: 92 “il y avoit bonne compagnie de Sauvages, qui escoutoyent, & à leur contenance monstroyent grand contentement en ce qui se disoit.”

<sup>465</sup> *JR*, 6: 86. “Je dressay quelques prieres en leur langue, avec l’ayde de l’Apostat : or comme le Sorcier n’estoit pas encore venu, ie les recitois le matin & avant nos repas, eux-mesmes m’en faisans souvenir, & prenans [88] plaisir à les ouïr prononcer.” My translation.

<sup>466</sup> Father Biard recalled that, during a visit to the Almouchiquois Indians around Port-Royal in 1612, he received the “greatest part of the caresses” from the locals who invited him into one of their wigwams where at least 80 persons were disposed to listened to the missionary: “once they took their seats, I got down on my knees, and making the sign of the cross, I recited my *Pater, Ave, Credo*, and a few orations; then, as I was taking a pause, my hosts, as if they understood me well, applauded me in their fashion by the exclamation *Ho! Ho! Ho!*” *JR*, 2 : 40. “Pour moy, je receus, ce jour-là, la plus grande part des caresses ; car, comme j’estois sans armes, les plus honorables, laissans les soldats, se prindrent à moy avec mille significations d’amitié. Ils me conduysirent en la plus grande cabane de toutes ; elle contenoit bien 80 ames. Les places prises, je me jettay à genoux, et ayant fait le signe de la croix, je recitais mon *Pater, Ave, Credo*, et quelques oraisons ; puis, ayant fait une pause, mes hostes, comme s’ils m’eussent bien entendu, m’applaudirent en leur façon s’escriant *Ho ! ho ! Ho !*” My translation.



or to the cross ?] the King's coat of arms, and sang the *Te Deum*, in the presence of the Caribs who did not take offense from it.”<sup>467</sup>

Early explorers used similar techniques. In 1535 Jacques Cartier read from a *Livre d'Heures* (Prayer Book) in Hochelaga and made his men sing the *Te Deum*. Jean Ribault, a Huguenot, caused his companions to pray in front of a band of Florida Indians in 1563, voluntarily accentuating the gestures of the Christian rituals to excite curiosity and even possibly emulation from the “savages.” Neither Cartier nor Ribault believed that the Indians would fully understand the Christian message or would spontaneously convert upon seeing the rituals. But they nevertheless sought to visually, audibly, and symbolically express their beliefs—maybe also as a reaction to the Indians' performance of their own rituals—to provide the right “example” and assert their presence and authority. In this sense, a mute duel of symbolic behaviors took place during early encounters which continued throughout the period in the nonverbal vocabulary of religious conversion, diplomacy, and trade.

A musical duel took place in 1612, near the French post of Port-Royal. The French, including Father Biard who reported these events to his Superior in France, were spending the night on their ship, anchored off the shore where a large group of Almouchiquois Indians engaged in nocturnal ceremonies. Biard and his fellow Frenchmen assumed, he said, that the songs and harangues they could hear coming from this pagan worship were directed to the Devil. Biard immediately launched a spiritual counter-attack: “I caused our people to sing some ecclesiastic hymns, like the *Salve*, the *Ave Maria Stella*, and others.” Soon, however, the French ran out of spiritual songs, and

---

<sup>467</sup> Breton, *La Guadeloupe*, 79. “Le Père Supérieur descendit aussi avec son compagnon et ils arborèrent la Croix et attachèrent les armes du Roy et chantèrent le Te Deum, en présence même des Caraïbes qui ne s'en offensèrent point.” My translation.

“turned to the other songs they knew,” that is, secular French folk songs. The situation soon completely escaped Biard’s control and words came to mean very little in the remarkable exchange that followed

Having reached the end of these [songs] as well, as it is in the Frenchman’s nature to emulate everything, they began to imitate the singing and dance of the Armouchiquois, who were on shore, counterfeiting them so well, that in order to listen to them, the Armouchiquois kept silent; then, our people being quiet, reciprocally they [the Indians] started again. Really, there was motive to laugh: you would have said it was two choirs that accorded with each other very well, and you could have barely distinguished the true Armouchiquois from the counterfeit.<sup>468</sup>

Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century did not simply turn to nonverbal strategies out of necessity, because of the absence of language. Instead, they strongly believed that words alone were not sufficient to touch the minds of the faithless. In early Mexico, for instance, Franciscan “brothers relied heavily upon ‘languages’ built primarily out of mixtures of images and gestures, languages in which written, and often spoken, words were ancillary to the ‘mute eloquence’ of these other media.”<sup>469</sup> One of the keys to conversion, the Jesuit believed, was to generate emotions in their audience, whether through outstanding oration, material means, or a subtle combination of both oral and nonverbal devices. Fear, admiration, joy, awe – any sentiment was a breach into the minds of potential converts. The adoption and adaptation of local beliefs and social practices was aimed in part at better targeting the said audiences. In the words of

---

<sup>468</sup> JR, 2: 36. “Toute la nuit ce ne fust que haranguer, chanter, danser, car telle est la vie de toutes ces gens lorsque ils sont en troupe. Or comme nous presumions probablement que leurs chants et dansent estoient invocations du diable, pour contrecarrer l’empire de ce maudit tyran, je fis que nos gens chantassent quelques hymnes eclesiastiques, comme le *Salve*, l’*Ave Maria Stella*, et autres. Mais comme ils furent une fois en train de chanter, les chansons spirituelles leur manquant, ils se jetterent aux autres qu’ils savoyent. Estant encores à la fin de celles cy, comme c’est le naturel du François de tout imiter, ils se prindrent à contefaire le chant et danse des Armouchiquois, qui estoient à la rive, les contrefaisant si bien en tout, que, pour les escouter, les Armouchiquois se taysaient ; et puis nos gens se taysans, reciproquement eux recommençoyent. Vrayment il y avoit beau rire : car vous eussiez dict que c’estoyent deux chœurs qui s’entendoient fort bien, et à peine eussiez vous pû distinguer le vray Armouchiquois d’avec le feinct.”

<sup>469</sup> Moffit-Watts, “Pictures, Gestures, Hieroglyphs,” 84.

historian Dominique Deslandres, missionary techniques on the home front and in the colonies implied “learning vernacular languages, taking into account the pace of local activities when organizing the mission on the ground, informing oneself of local customs to refer to them or stigmatize them during predications and various missionary teachings.” In many ways these acts of accommodation comprised both verbal and nonlinguistic, even sensory elements: “to place oneself at the level of understanding of the crowds to which you teach, by touching their senses through sight (images), or hearing (canticles), or even touch (rosaries, medals, blessed grains, or Agnus Dei...), constituted many adaptations or “machines” (as they were then called), efficacious means to bring men back into Christ’s camp.”<sup>470</sup>

Early Christianization efforts were thus sensory rather than verbal, even as mutual linguistic understanding slowly improved. Early missionaries were said to do “what they could,” attempting to catechize the Indians “through the eyes and through the ears.” “Through the eyes,” explained the author of the 1616 official relation to the Jesuit Superiors in France, “by showing them our ways and ceremonies, and getting them accustomed to them. During our processions we made the small children walk ahead of the cross, and perform small services, such as carry the luminaries, or other things. They and their fathers alike enjoyed it, as if they had been true Christians.” Along with these important “examples” and nonverbal “rehearsals” of Christian faith, Christianity was also conveyed through words: “we also composed our catechism in the savage language, and

---

<sup>470</sup> Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire*, 154. “Apprendre les langues vernaculaires, tenir compte du rythme des activités des habitants lors de l’organisation de la mission sur le terrain, s’informer des mœurs locales pour y faire référence ou les stigmatiser lors des prédications et des divers enseignements missionnaires, se mettre au niveau de l’entendement des foules auxquelles on enseigne, en touchant leurs sens par la vue (les images), ou l’ouïe (les cantiques), ou encore le toucher (chapelets, médailles, grains bénits, ou Agnus Dei...) Voilà autant d’adaptations, de ‘machines’ comme on dit alors, de moyens efficaces pour ramener les hommes dans le camp du Christ.”

we were starting to be able to jargon a little with our catechumens.”<sup>471</sup> As the Indians observed and participated in these strange rituals, they asked questions and challenged the newcomers. Father Le Jeune was once asked by his Huron host why the “Black Robes” did not fear the *Manitou*, or powerful spirit who could bring illness and disaster upon those who did not show proper respect. Le Jeune answered that if he believed in the “true” God (that of the Christians) he would have nothing to fear from the *Manitou*, which he equated to the devil, because the spirit feared them more than they feared him. Even these types of doctrinal debates and theological exchanges took place through a mixture of nonverbal and verbal means. Avid to know more, the Huron “showed surprise, and told [Le Jeune] that he wished [he] knew his language: because [...] we were making ourselves understood to each other more through the eyes, and the hands, than through the mouth.”<sup>472</sup>

Soon, French missionaries could report positive results, manifested through subtle changes in outward behavior on the part of the Indians rather than through elaborate verbal testimonies (*professions de foi*), although the latter were not absent from the Jesuits’ reports. Just as the doctrine and faith could be transmitted through the senses as

---

<sup>471</sup> JR, 4: 86. “si les ont-ils catechisé tant qu’ils ont peu, & par les yeux, & par les oreilles. Par les yeux, dy-ie, leur faisant voir nos us & ceremonies, & les y accoustumant. En nos Processions nous faisons aller les petits enfans au devant de la Croix, & faire quelque service, comme de porter les luminaires, ou autres choses ; & tant eux que leurs peres y prenoyent du plaisir, comme s’ils eussent esté vrayment Chrestiens. Dieu mercy cela est ja communément gagné, qu’ils ne veulent point mourir sans baptesme, se croyans estre miserable à jamais, s’ils trespasent sans iceluy, ou du moins, sans une forte volonté d’iceluy, & sans douleur de leurs pechez. (...) Nous avons aussi composé nostre Catechisme en Sauvageois, & commencions aucunement à pouvoir jargonner avec nos Catechumenes.”

<sup>472</sup> JR, 6: 86. “il s’estonna, & me dit qu’il eust bien voulu que i’eusse eu cognoissance de sa langue : car figurez vous que nous nous faisons entendre l’un de l’autre plus par les yeux, & par les mains, que par la bouche.” This is an instance in which the “dialogue” between the Indian and the missionary is reported as if both men communicated verbally without any problem, with the words of both parties being transcribed in flawless French. Only the final note by the missionary gives us clues about the paralinguistic means that were used during the exchange. A large number of transcribed discussions with Indians as they appear in the *Jesuit Relations* probably resulted from similar context and hybrid communication strategies, although rarely openly signaled by the authors.

well as the mind, conversion could be expressed and measured nonverbally. In 1611, Father Biard reported with satisfaction the reactions and mimetism he had observed among Indians who witnessed the Mass in the Acadian mission of Port Royal:

The Savages have often been present, always profoundly silent and reverent. Afterwards I would visit their huts to pray and to lay hands on the sick; I gave them little crosses of brass, or images, which I hung about their necks and as far as possible I infused some religious notions into their minds. They received all these things very gladly, they made the sign of the Cross under my guidance, and nearly all the boys followed me a long distance in order to repeat it oftener.<sup>473</sup>

Simon Piskaret was an Abenaki Indian who used to be “Christian only in appearance and out of calculation.” According to the Jesuits who knew him, after the local shaman who had consistently challenged the presence of the missionaries died suddenly while performing a ceremony (a just punishment from God, noted the black robes), Simon and other “luke-warm” converts fully accepted the Christian faith. Following his truthful and heartfelt conversion, the Jesuits gave as proof of his sincerity the fact that he “remained on his knees for long periods of time, which is a very uncomfortable posture for the Savages; and he harangued incessantly in favor of the Faith, demonstrating through his words that he was touched into the depth of his heart.”<sup>474</sup>

Devotion to objects linked to the Catholic faith also represented similar encouragements for the missionaries: “They honor in their homes our Lord, in their manner, in the way they put the image that I gave them in the most considerable

---

<sup>473</sup> *JR*, 2: 99. Original in Latin, English translation in Thwaites.

<sup>474</sup> *JR*, 31 : 266. “Simon Pieskaret qui n’estoit Chrestien qu’en apparence & par police, le devint tout de bon, il se confesse trois fois en vingt-quatre heures, tant la crainte des jugements de Dieu le pressoit, quoy qu’il fut malade, il se tenoit for longtemps à genous, posture fort incommode aux Sauvages : il haranguoit incessamment en faveur de la Foy, témoignant par ses paroles qu’il estoit touché iusques au fond du coeur.” My translation.

place.”<sup>475</sup> In Trois-Rivières, Indian women transformed their traditional mourning rituals, using rosaries and imitating the gestures of the Christian faith when visiting the tomb of the deceased.<sup>476</sup> Soon, visible signs distinguished Christian Indians from the rest of the community: “They are starting to give a completely Christian dress [fashion] to the various ways they have inherited from their infidel parents,” commented Father Jérôme Lalemant.<sup>477</sup> Christian rituals and material culture functioned as symbolic “signs,” new codes that could be used to communicate as well as to set apart the initiated natives from the others. The tolling of the bell on the Tadoussac chapel thus became a familiar call for the Indian converts, but “terrified” their heathen relatives.<sup>478</sup> This was a new kind of language that implied a manifest change in identity.

Nonverbal expressions of faith, like paralinguistic and prosodic elements of speech, were in no way subordinate to language in the context of cross-cultural communication in seventeenth-century America. It seems that, even when a reasonable degree of mutual linguistic understanding existed, essential matters were still preferably expressed through nonlinguistic means. This was true as well of natives who knew how to speak French. In 1622, a Montagnais Indian whose name is lost to us, was journeying home after spending a year in France. Being seriously ill and feeling that his time had come, he turned to the two Recollect fathers traveling with him – Father Guillaume Galleran and Father Irénée Piat—and asked them in the broken *patois* he had acquired

---

<sup>475</sup> JR, 51 : 50. “ils honorent chez eux notre seigneur, en leur façon, dont ils mettent l’image que je leur ai donné, au lieu le plus considérable.” My translation.

<sup>476</sup> JR, 31 : 272. “La plus-part des Sauvages Chrestiens & Cathecumes, passerent une grande partie de la nuit quelle mourut, aupres de son corps faisans oraison, reïterans leurs chappelets, & les autres prieres qu’on leur enseigne, les François aussi bien que les Sauvages honorerent avec affection sa sepulture.” My translation.

<sup>477</sup> JR, 32: 208. “Ils commencent de donner un habit tout Chrétien aux façons de faire indifférentes qu’ils ont tirées de leurs parens infidelles.” My translation.

<sup>478</sup> JR, 31 : 246. “On a aussi apporté une cloche pour appeller les Sauvages au service de nostre Seigneur. Cet ornement a ravi de jolye les Chrestiens, & donné de la terreur aux Payens.”

during his stay in Dieppe: “*Moy pourquoy point Chrestien, moy pourquoy point Baptisé,*” that is “Me why not Christian, me why not baptized.”<sup>479</sup> The anonymous Montagnais had never before accepted the multiple attempts of both French Catholics and Huguenots to baptize him, but supposedly, their discourses had left an imprint in his mind and, about to trespass, he felt anxious to make his peace with the elusive God of the whites. He may also possibly have hoped, as many Indians did, that baptism would restore his health. Father Irénée found himself in a quandary. In order to properly baptize the Montagnais, he needed to explain to him the foundations of the faith and to hear him in confession, but “there was not there a *truchement* who could do it.” The problem was not the absence of interpreters (one is clearly present during the following scene), but the fact that “they [the Indians? The interpreters?] do not possess the proper words to make them understand our mysteries, and the poor sick man only knew little French.” Nevertheless, “the Father made him understand as well as he could, more by signs than through words, for God does not demand the impossible, after which he gave him a picture of the Crucifixion of Our Lord, which [the Indian] took with great reverence, taking off his cap, and kept it close to him, often making the same reverence towards it.”<sup>480</sup>

Language had been a real obstacle to the conversion of the Montagnais man because dogma and confession both emphasized the Word and exact meaning. But it did not seem to matter much in terms of proof of the Indian’s Christian feelings: “what was

---

<sup>479</sup> Sagard, 1 : 96. “et s’écrier en son patois François qu’il escorchoit au moins mal : *Moy pourquoy point Chrestien, moy pourquoy point Baptisé*, et est à noter qu’estant en France il avoit esté assez souvent sollicité des Huguenots d’embrasser leur pretenduë religion, ce qu’il ne voulut jamais faire.” My translation.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid. “Le Père luy fist neantmoins comprendre au mieux qu’il pû, plus par signes que par paroles, car Dieu n’oblige pas à l’impossible, après quoy il luy présenta une Image du crucifiement de Notre Seigneur qu’il prist avec grande reverence en ostant son bonnet, et la mist auprès de luy, et souvent luy faisoit la mesme reverence.” My translation.

truly marvelous,” explained the narrator of this episode, “is that [the newly converted Montagnais] never ate without first joining his hands and moving his lips, like my big Huron savage also used to do, and armed himself with the sign of the Holy Cross, humbly pronouncing these divine words: Jesus have pity on me.”<sup>481</sup> Nonverbal elements and speech were not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, Indians who learned the French language and/or converted to Christianity, adopted codified gestures and attitudes as well as key phrases that they may have perceived as magical incantations, suggesting that they conceived physical and verbal “signs” as having a similar nature and function. When the words were missing, the mute movement of the lips was an adequate alternative that even the missionaries clearly valued. This new repertoire for cross-cultural communication was as much physical as verbal, and Indians who chose to speak a few words of French (religious or not) did so as they would put on a red cloak, imitate a French bow, or wear an Agnus Dei around their necks.<sup>482</sup> Words and nonverbal elements were “detachable” identity markers, which implied new loyalties (genuine or artificial) and sometimes a new sense of self.

Even once Frenchmen —both lay and religious—had achieved a satisfactory degree of fluency in the Indian tongues, nonverbal and paralinguistic elements remained essential to successful communication with the natives. In particular, the importance and omnipresence on nonlinguistic elements at the heart of native oratory practices was one of the reasons why sign-language and other paralinguistic strategies did not disappear

---

<sup>481</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 1: 96. “ce qui estoit de merueilleux, est que jamais il ne mangeoit qu’il ne joignit premierement les mains et remuoit les lèvres, comme faisoit mon grand Sauvage Huron, il s’armoioit du signe de la S. Croix et disoit humblement ces divines paroles : Iesus ayez pitié de moy.” My translation.

<sup>482</sup> Agnus Dei were medals or cloth pouches bearing the symbol of the Lamb of God. They could contain relics. Indians often used them as talisman, keeping valuable materials (copper, beads, bones, ashes) inside the pouch.



after mutual linguistic understanding was achieved in French America. Indian speakers did not use signs and gestures solely in order to make themselves understood by the newcomers despite the communicational issues faced by the groups. Rather, signs, pictographic representations, and pantomime, were crucial components of Native American oratorical techniques and strategies, and often figured prominently in everyday speech as well.<sup>483</sup> A Huron leader who expressed his desire to enter a close friendship with the king of France, for instance, accompanied his statement with a symbolic hand gesture that was perceived by the French observer, Brother Sagard, as arrogant: “this *Garihoua Andionxra* did not have such a small esteem of himself, and called himself brother and cousin of the King of France, and equals, like the two demonstrative fingers of his hands that he showed us joint together, while he made this ridiculous and inept comparison.”<sup>484</sup> Nonverbal elements of native oratory profoundly shaped the perception that the French had of native orators: “it is easy to represent in writing the words and discourses of the *Sauvages*,” remarked Father d’Evreux in the early sixteenth-century Brazilian colony of Maranhão (Maragnan), “but not so [easy to represent] the gestures and the keenness of mind with which they conversed with me.”<sup>485</sup> Overall behavior, appearance, tone, and intonation, as well as gestures and facial expressions, were as important as, if not more, the words themselves, even when the latter were understood.

---

<sup>483</sup> Although there has been few studies of this aspect of native oratory in Northeastern North America, similar nonspeech communicative strategies are evident among Western Plains Indian groups. Allan R. Taylor, “Nonspeech Communication Systems,” in William C. Sturtevant, Gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, 20 Vols (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 17: 275- 89.

<sup>484</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 390-391. “Et ce *Garihoua Andionxra* n’avoit pas si petite estime de luy mesme, qu’il ne voulut dire frere et cousin du Roy de France, et de mesme égalité, comme les deux doigts demonstratifs des mains qu’il nous monstroit joint ensemble, en nous faisant cette ridicule et inepte comparaison.” My translation.

<sup>485</sup> Yves d’Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil fait en 1613 et 1614* (Paris : Payot, 1985), 258. “Le lecteur doit être averti qu’il est aisé de représenter par écrit les paroles et le discours de ce Sauvage, mais non pas les gestes et la vivacité d’esprit avec lesquels ils m’entretenaient. ”

The quantity, quality, and variety of nonverbal devices varied enormously between regions within the Americas, between native groups and cultures, and between Indian orators who possessed various degrees of talent or practiced different oratorical styles. In Brazil, while pantomime does not seem to have been as widespread as among Iroquoian tribes of Northeastern North America, native speakers nevertheless relied on multidimensional nonverbal techniques. Capuchin Father Yves d'Evreux, admiring the Indians' attention to details, explained that native speakers "remember for ever what they have once heard or seen, and they will represent to you every circumstance, either of the place, or the time, or the people, where this or that thing has been said or done, making in the sand with the tip of their finger a geography or natural description of what they are depicting."<sup>486</sup> Even in the face of mutual linguistic understanding, signs continued to form a crucial part of communication. When a delegation from a 'western nation' came to the town of Tapouitapere [a neighboring Indian town to the Maragnan colony] to meet and trade with the French, d'Evreux thus observed the expert local "*truchement* Migan" ask the visiting chief the size and distance of his nation. The chief answered "that his nation was very large and his country very far, indicating approximately the distance in leagues between the island and his land, showing with his fingers the number of moons, that is, months, it would take him to return home."<sup>487</sup> One may rightly wonder how well the *truchement* was able to understand the tongue of such a distant visitor, although the

---

<sup>486</sup> Evreux, *Voyage*, 84. "Quant à la mémoire ils l'ont très bonne, puisqu'ils se souviennent pour toujours de ce qu'ils ont une fois ouï ou vu, et ils vous représenteront toutes les circonstances, soit du lieu, soit du temps, soit des personnes, où telle chose a été dite ou faite, faisant avec le bout de leurs doigts sur le sable, une géographie ou description naturelle de ce qu'ils vous représentent." My translation.

<sup>487</sup> Evreux, *Voyage*, 141. "Le truchement lui demanda si sa nation était grande et s'il y avait loin jusqu'à son pays. Il répondit que sa nation était grande et son pays fort loin, indiquant à peu près la distance en lieues qu'il pouvait y avoir de l'île à sa terre en montrant par ses doigts le nombre des lunes, c'est à dire des mois qu'il lui fallait pour retourner en son pays." My translation.

French witness did not report any difficulties or misunderstanding during the exchange. It remains likely that signs, pictographs, onomatopoeias, and other types of nonverbal communication were part of native speech even in situations where mutual understanding was unquestionable.<sup>488</sup>

The sharpest regional contrast between Native American oratorical (verbal and nonverbal) practices seem to have been between native groups of the Caribbean and indigenous nations in northeastern North America. Silence and carefully codified, concise ritual speech were prominent features of Caribbean cultures.<sup>489</sup> In Canada, on the other hand, public oratory allowed more improvisation and expression of personal talent. In fact, it included so much pantomime, sign-language, and accessories that numerous French observers equated these northern Indian ceremonies with “theatre” or “ballet” and often described Indian orators as expert “actors” and performers.<sup>490</sup> Even when an interpreter was present, or when their own personal linguistic abilities allowed them to grasp the literal meaning of the Indian speeches during ceremonies, French observers continued to pay particular attention to conspicuous and highly symbolic nonverbal elements.

Father Barthelemy Vimont, superior of the Jesuit residence in Québec, attended and described the series of diplomatic ceremonies that accompanied the conclusion of a very important treaty between the French and their former enemies, the Iroquois of the Five Nations, in the summer and early fall of 1645. Hurons and Algonquins, as well as

---

<sup>488</sup> Brazilian Tupi Indians also practiced smoking as a ritual way to “prepare their minds” for the practice of public oratory. *Ibid.*, 114. “Ils croient que cette fumée les rend diserts, de bon jugement et éloquents en paroles, si bien que jamais ils ne commencent une harangue qu’ils n’en aient pris.” “They believe that this smoke makes them well-spoken, of good judgment, and eloquent in words, so well that they never start a harangue without taking some.” My translation.

<sup>489</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>490</sup> This will be fully developed in the next Chapter.

French officials and Iroquois representatives participated in the proceedings. One Iroquois orator left a particularly strong impression in Father Vimont's memory. This Indian rhetorician seemed to command the entire longhouse: "he walked about that great space as if on the stage of a theatre." The theatrical metaphor continued, as Father Vimont described

there is no merry-andrews in France so ingenious as that Barbarian. He took a stick, and placed it on his head like a bundle; then he carried it from one end of the square to the other, representing what the prisoner had done in the rapids and in the current of the water...he went backward and forward, showing the journey, the windings, and the turnings of the prisoner...In a word, I have never seen anything better done than this acting.<sup>491</sup>

Native diplomacy also involved elaborate exchanges of symbolic gifts, and orators had the task of eloquently elucidating the meaning of each gift for their audience. Each wampum belt, in particular, carried a separate meaning, which could sometimes be explained through mime and symbolic "play-acting." The same Iroquois orator continued his verbal and physical depiction of the river that led to the Iroquois country: "after having by his gestures rendered the route easy," explained Vimont, "he tied a collar of porcelain beads on the arms of a Frenchman, and pulled him straight across the square, to show that our canoes could go to their country without any difficulty."<sup>492</sup> Later, the Iroquois spokesman also tied his arm with those of a Frenchman and of an Algonquin with another wampum belt to symbolize their indestructible union and friendship. The

---

<sup>491</sup> *JR*, 27 : 255. "il n'y a tabarin en France si naïf que ce Barbare. Il prenoit un baston, le mettoit sur sa teste comme un paquet, puis le portoit d'un bout de la place à l'autre, representant ce qu'avoit fait ce prisonnier dans les saults & le courant d'eau, ausquels estant arrivé, il avoit transporté son bagage pièce à pièce, il alloit & revenoit representant les voyages, les tours & retours du prisonnier, il cherchoit [sc. s'échouoit] contre une pierre, il reculoit plus qu'il n'avançoit dans son canot, ne le pouvant soutenir seul contre les courans d'eau, il perdoit courage puis reprenoit ses forces, bref, je n'ay rien veu de mieux exprimé que cette action"

<sup>492</sup> *JR*, 27 : 259. "ayans par ses gestes rendu le chemin favorable, il attacha un collier de porcelaine au bras d'un François, & le tira tout droit au travers de la place pour marque que nos canots iroient sans peine en leur pays."

nature of native diplomacy and oratory in itself demanded that the French be as adept at deciphering nonverbal signs as in understanding Indian languages. It also rendered the necessity of understanding Indian tongues less pressing and may have contributed to the excessive confidence the French tended to express when it came to their ability at comprehending native ceremonies and discourses.

Frenchmen, missionaries in particular, also relied on nonverbal clues to test the accuracy of the interpreters' translations. The goals and methods of the missionaries and of the *truchements* frequently conflicted, and even when they collaborated, their relations seem to have been fraught with mutual suspicion and antipathy. Father Biard, shocked to discover that Hurons killed dogs as part of propitiatory healing rituals, tried to express his disapproval "more by gesture than by language, for as far as language, my interpreters did not say the tenth part of what I wanted."<sup>493</sup> Brother Sagard also deplored that interpreters "often do not report accurately things that one tells them" and questioned their actual fluency.<sup>494</sup> The interpreters may have been more successful at making their ideas understood through an elaborate mixture of signs, paralinguistic elements, and words, rather than being able to flawlessly speak native tongues. It was hard for individuals who were having difficulty audibly distinguishing separate native words from the discursive flow of their strange hosts to measure with any exactitude the fluency of a more advanced student of Indian languages. In 1616, Father Biard had to rely on an Indian interpreter to convey some Christian ideas and sense of his mission to the Almouchiquois. Biard did not understand the local dialect, but he nevertheless tried to

---

<sup>493</sup> *JR*, 2 : 16. "J'investivay contre cette façon de faire, plus de geste que de langue, car pour la langue mes interprètes ne disoyent pas la dixieme partie de ce que je voulois."

<sup>494</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 444. "[Les] Truchemens, qui souvent ne rapportent pas fidelement les choses qu'on leur dit, ou par ignorance ou par mespris, qui est une chose fort dangereuse, & laquelle on en a souvent veu arriver de grands accidens."

measure the quality of the interpreter's speech based on other visual clues: "[the savage] acquitted himself with credit in the eyes of the other Savages; and to look at his face and hear his talk, he played the Doctor very grandly; whether successfully or not, I cannot tell." <sup>495</sup> Father Vimont, who in 1645 had paid such close attention to the gestures and movements of the Iroquois orator, felt legitimate in questioning the quality of the translation provided by the interpreter because it did not seem to follow the order of the nonverbal elements he himself had been able to decipher: "I gathered only some disconnected fragments, taken from the mouth of the interpreter who spoke only in a desultory manner [*qui ne parlait qu'à baston rompus*] and did not follow the order observed by the barbarian." <sup>496</sup>

\*

\*

\*

Nonspeech communicative strategies and nonverbal rituals in religious and diplomatic contexts will be fully explored in the following two chapters. These examples were introduced to suggest the permanence and continuous importance of nonverbal communication after the advent of mutual linguistic understanding. Past historiography has often assumed that reliance on sign-language and other nonverbal devices decreased, either gradually or suddenly, once jargons, pidgins, interpreters, and gifted missionary-linguists made their appearance on the colonial stage. A correlation between the decrease

---

<sup>495</sup> *JR*, 3: 225. "Le mal estoit, qu'ils ont une langue toute diverse, & falloit qu'un Sauvage servit de truchement, lequel sachant bien peu de la Religion Chrestienne, se bailloit neantmoins du credit envers les autres Sauvages : & à voir sa contenance, & ouyr son long parler, il faisoit grandement du Docteur : si bien ou mal, je m'en rapporte."

<sup>496</sup> *JR*, 27: 264. "Voilà ce qui se passa en cette assemblée, chacun avoüa que cét home estoit pathetique et eloquent, je n'ay recueilly que quelques pieces comme decousues tirées [de la] bouche de l'interprete, qui ne parloit qu'à bastons rompus, & non dans la suite que gardoit ce Barbare."

of sign-language and the improvement in overall mutual understanding (or decrease in misunderstanding) has also been implied. Evidence suggests on the contrary that linguistic communication between the groups involved multiple, and crucial, nonverbal dimensions. In fact, it even suggests that the nonverbal means used during early encounters were, rather than spontaneous creations motivated by the shortage of common words, part of a larger set of codes that could be used independently from or in close association with language. Nonverbal clues were essential to the acquisition, understanding, and use of language. This forces us to reconsider our definition of “language” and our criteria for measuring efficient cross-cultural communication.

Nonverbal elements were not “solutions” to the absence of language, they **were** language as well. Mime, tone, onomatopoeias, accessories, facial expressions, and the extreme variety of nonverbal means of communication (taken in a large sense), gave power and credibility to speech.<sup>497</sup> The best French student of Indian languages or Indian student of French was not the one who mastered grammar and syntax to perfection, but the one who could **perform** the speech in adequate nonverbal cultural ways. At least during most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the flaws of linguistic understanding between the groups may have often been compensated by the continuous use of another, mute, lexicon. These sensory means of communication had a quality that dictionaries and grammar books did not: they conveyed crucial aspects of daily life and

---

<sup>497</sup> According to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in order to reach his audience, a speaker must be given what he calls “symbolic capital.” Words alone, even perfectly uttered, cannot have any impact on others unless the orator is recognized as a credible, valid source of information by his audience. The French generally attributed such a “capital” to Indian orators, regardless of whether or not they understood their words, based on their charisma and the nonverbal components of their oratorical skills. The French attempted to acquire such a “symbolic capital” and thus some degree of power and influence upon the Indians through the simultaneous acquisition of Indian language and nonverbal elements of native oratorical styles. Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et Pouvoir Symbolique* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2001), 107-110.

culture, and one could not acquire one without acquiring the other. As the French reached new areas of colonial America, they certainly took this repertoire of behaviors, signs, and ritual codes with them. This nonlinguistic lexicon continued to play an important part in cross-cultural exchanges, both with well-acquainted native groups with whom linguistic understanding was also available, and with new nations with whom signs were the only resource.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Eloquence, Power, and the Theatrics of Oratory in New France (1630-1680)**

Nonverbal elements were not only essential to daily speech, they were indispensable to verbal art and its ceremonial performance in the New World. A complex repertoire for cross-cultural communication, composed of standardized formulas, evocative metaphors, objects that could “speak,” mesmerizing garments and accessories, music and calculated exclamations, contorted postures and other kinesic performances, held the key to alliances, salvation, trade, war, and peace. Nowhere was nonverbal communication more pivotal to issues of identity, power, and trust than in the context of public and cross-cultural oratory in seventeenth-century New France.

Although French observers noted the importance of oratory for native social and political systems in other parts of the Americas between 1500 and 1700, New France constitutes the most compelling and best documented example of the role that verbal art played in French-Indian relations. Early colonial North America was the site of a unique encounter between rich native oral traditions peculiar to the region, and the masters of rhetoric of Europe, the Jesuits, who recorded both Indian and French orations with particular attention to all their performative elements. This exceptional and fortuitous encounter between oratorical cultures and the hybrid productions that emerged from it, as well as the unusual wealth of records that we possess for this region and period, make a particularly compelling case for studying “nonverbal eloquence” and its implications for

power and acculturation during the seventeenth century. While the Jesuits were also active in the Caribbean during the same period, the relations between the French and the Carib natives had turned sour by mid-century, significantly limiting the opportunities for ceremonial and oratorical exchanges between the groups.<sup>498</sup> In the first half of the century, Father Raymond Breton thus reported scant information about Carib oratory, arguing that the natives “speak little unless they are spoken to,” and claiming that a particular dialect was in use “for harangues and treaties of consequence that the young people themselves understand poorly.”<sup>499</sup> In Brazil, where Tupi verbal art was highly valued, few missionaries and no Jesuits were present, and their mission was soon interrupted by the expulsion of the French from the region by the Iberian powers.<sup>500</sup> It is thus in New France that our story begins and shall remain through the complex changes that affected oratory and the nonverbal during the seventeenth century.

\* \* \*

In July 1636, a man requested a special audience with the Governor General of New France, Charles de Montmagny, and with the commander of the French fleet in

---

<sup>498</sup> *Les Caraïbes, la Guadeloupe (1635-1656), Histoire des vingt premières années de la Colonisation de la Guadeloupe d'après les Relations du R.P. Breton* (Paris : Librairie Générale et Internationale, 1929) (hereafter cited as Breton, *La Guadeloupe*); *Relation de l'Origine, Mœurs, Coutumes, Religion, guerres et Voyages des Caraïbes Sauvages des Isles des Antilles de l'Amérique Faite par le Sieur de La Borde, employé à la conversion des Caraïbes estans avec le R.P. Simon, Jésuite*.

For secondary literature, see Philip Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Jean-Pierre Moreau, *Les Petites Antilles de Christophe Colomb à Richelieu, 1493-1635* (Paris: Karthala, 1992). More research needs to be done regarding French-Indian relations in the Caribbean during the seventeenth century.

<sup>499</sup> Breton, *La Guadeloupe*, 47-49. “Ils parlent peu si on ne leur parle.” “ils ont diverses sortes de langages. Les hommes ont le leur et les femmes un autre, et encore un autre pour les harangues et traités de conséquence, que les jeunes gens même n’entendent pas bien.... Es autres choses, la langue est copieuse et assez belle. Ils chantent quelquefois des chansons sur un ton tout qui n’est pas agréable et est tout simple.”

<sup>500</sup> Limited information regarding Tupi verbal art was collected by Capuchin missionaries in the region and is available in Claude d’Abbeville, *Histoire de la Mission des Pères Capucins en L’Isle de Maragnan et Terres Circonvoisins* (Graz, Austria : Akademische Druck, 1963) and Yves d’Evreux, *Voyage au Nord du Brésil fait en 1613 et 1614*, ed. Hélène Castres (Paris : Payot, 1985).

Canada, General Charles du Plessis-Bochart. In order to accommodate the numerous attendees, the official meeting took place in Québec in a building belonging to the Compagnie des Cent Associés, which then had the fur trade monopoly in the colony, and of which Plessis-Bochart happened to be one of the head clerks. The purpose of this gathering, however, extended beyond the trade of beaver pelts. When the man stepped in between two orderly rows of people, his dress and posture indicated to onlookers that he was someone of importance. “[I]n the French fashion,” he wore “a very handsome coat under a scarlet cloak” and, before speaking, saluted the governor and the general by taking off his hat and making a “rather pretty reverence in the French manner.”<sup>501</sup> Addressing the military officer in particular, whom he called his “younger brother,” his voice filled the room as he powerfully declared: “You see (...) that I am French.” This charismatic speaker was identified by the Jesuit missionary who attended as the “Captain of the savages of Tadoussac,” without further indication of his name. He had been selected as a spokesperson by his people, not only by virtue of his eloquence, but because of the special bonds of friendship that he shared with the French leaders to whom he came to speak.<sup>502</sup> That summer, the Tadoussac Algonquians were marching to war against the Iroquois and this stop in Québec was intended to obtain the alliance and military support of the French in this perilous expedition. Around the same time, we are told, other bands of Algonquians had been negotiating an alliance with the Hurons to coordinate an attack upon their common Iroquois enemies.

---

<sup>501</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vols., (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company Publishers, 1896-1901), 9: 226 (hereafter cited as *JR*). “Chacun estant assis, les François d’un costé, les Sauvages de l’autre, le Capitaine de Tadoussac commença à haranguer ; il estoit vestu à la Françoisise, d’un fort bel habit, souz une casaque d’écarlate. Voulant parler, il osta son chapeau, & fit une reverence assez gentiment à la Françoisise....”

<sup>502</sup> The chief mentioned in his speech: “tu sçais, mon frere, que ma Nation me tient pour [Français] ; on croit que j’ay le bon-heur d’estre aimé des Capitaines, & que je suis leur parent;” *Ibid*, 228.

The choice that the “Captain of Tadoussac” made to present himself as a Frenchman, rather than a “*sauvage*,” friend of the French, was thus strategic. In fact, his dress, gestures, and opening statement, as well as perhaps the setting of the speech itself in the French colonial capital, represented intrinsic components of the rhetoric he had devised to convince the French to join his people in battle. Presenting oneself in culturally appropriate terms – both verbally and nonverbally – was essential in the context of public oratory in seventeenth-century New France, which mediated the closely entwined and sometimes indistinguishable domains of religion, commerce, politics, and external diplomacy. His French ‘act’ should not be seen as a dispensable accessory or artificial embellishment to his speech. Rather, it constituted part of his speech, no less important than his words, offering a strong visual and physical argument to obtain from the French the reaffirmation of their love and friendship at the beginning of the oration, as a prelude to his central request.<sup>503</sup> The orator’s logic was flawless. Once the French had been successfully pressured into publicly expressing their love, he continued: “You know it is the peculiar privilege of friends to succor in time of need those whom they love; the help that you will give us in our wars will be the true proof of your friendship; your refusal will cover my face with confusion.”<sup>504</sup> If the French withheld their help, the effect would be as physical as the friendship that the chief displayed on his person.

---

<sup>503</sup> This, I will argue, is the most relevant way to look at accommodation and the emulation of “foreign” elements in one’s oratorical performance because it corresponds to the ways in which Native Americans themselves viewed the use of nonverbal devices. The sense of “artificiality” that seems to accompany the use of French dress and gestures to please a French audience is a Western concept and does not reflect the fact that, for Indians, good oratory was efficient oratory, not necessarily “immutable” oratory. In other words, the distinction between “content” and “delivery” of the message is much less valid in an American Indian mode of thinking about public speech than in the Western oratorical tradition.

<sup>504</sup> *JR*, 9: 228. “vous sçavez que c’est le propre des amis de secourir ceux qu’ils aiment au besoin: le secours que vous nous donnerez dans nos guerres sera le tesmoin fidelle de vostre amitié ; votre refus me couvrira le visage de confusion.”

A second orator then took the stage, depicting with vivid images and emotionally charged evocations what the future would hold for both the French and the Algonquians if the former failed to provide assistance:

your friend conjures you to do this; if you do not lend him your hand, you will see him engulfed in the fray of his enemies; you will seek him with your eyes and your lips, asking, ‘where is such a one, who loved us so much and whom we loved?’ Learning of his disaster, you will be sad and your heart will say to you, ‘if we had succored him, our eyes would have taken pleasure in looking at him and out heart in loving him, but here we are in bitterness.’<sup>505</sup>

The physical experience of grief and regret and the visible absence of those fallen in battle would long remind the French of their fateful betrayal of friendship.

The Jesuit father who recorded this scene wrote about another cross-cultural performance twenty years later, in Iroquois country, at Onondaga (an Iroquois settlement known as *Onnontaghé*, on the shores of Lake Onondaga, which gave its name to the local tribe).<sup>506</sup> Like the previous meeting, this one involved multiple nations and took place in the context of a looming war. Members of the five Iroquois nations –Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca– had gathered in a “grand council” in July 1656 to discuss several pressing matters, including the presence of several Jesuit fathers in their midst and the creation of a mission in Iroquois country. An internal crisis also needed to be mediated. A respected Seneca chief, known as Ahiaratouan, had recently been

---

<sup>505</sup> JR, 9: 228-30. “Vostre amy vous en conjure : si vous ne luy prestez la main vous le verrez dispaistre dans la meslée de ses ennemis ; vous le chercherez des yeux & de la bouche, demandans, où est un tel, qui nous aimoit tant et que nous aimions ; apprenant son desastre vous serez triste, & vostre cœur vous dira : Si nous l’eussions secouru nos yeux pendroient plaisir à le voir, & nostre cœur à l’aimer, & nous voilà dans l’amertume : or il ne tient qu’à vous de vous delivrer de cette angoisse, & de vous donner le contentement de le voir retourner du combat plein de vie & de gloire.”

<sup>506</sup> The *Relation* of 1656-57 was compiled by Father Paul Le Jeune (procurator in France for the Canadian missions) from the journals and letters of the missionaries who were present on this journey to the Iroquois country, particularly that of Father Claude Dablon. Le Jeune prefaced this *Relation* with a short letter in which he explained that the ship by which the initial *Relation* written by Father Jean De Quen was being sent to France had been captured by the Spaniards and all the letters on board were lost. This is thus a second account composed by Le Jeune from surviving letters and journals.

murdered by a Mohawk war party near the Trois Rivières (Three Rivers) settlement, prompting the Senecas to prepare to seek violent retribution against the offenders.

On July 24, the nations assembled, along with forty Frenchmen, five Jesuit fathers, and two brethren.<sup>507</sup> A man known as Achiendasé was chosen as the main orator who would arbitrate the dispute between the Senecas and the Mohawks, lead the discussion about the implantation of a Catholic mission in the area, and “invite all those tribes to put something in the war-kettle, – that is, to consult together about the means of attacking and defeating their enemies, and of contributing toward the general expense.”<sup>508</sup> Daunting tasks, therefore, faced the distinguished orator, in this tensed context of internal and external diplomatic relations. Achiendasé began his performance according to native oratorical conventions by laying out the presents through which he would speak to his audience and which were “so well displayed, arranged, and disposed (...), that they made a wonderful show.”<sup>509</sup> Remarkably, this expert orator was none other than Father François Le Mercier, superior of the Jesuit mission in Canada. The author of the account felt compelled to explain the rationale behind Le Mercier’s actions to his continental readers before proceeding with his description of the ceremony: “Now, as these peoples are great orators and frequently make use of allegories and metaphors, our Fathers, to win

---

<sup>507</sup> The Jesuit delegation was composed of Father François le Mercier (Superior of the Mission), Father René Ménard, Father Claude Dablon, Father Jacques Frémin, Father Joseph Chaumonot, Brother Joseph Boursier, and Brother Antoine Breart. *JR*, 43: 132.

<sup>508</sup> *JR*, 43: 168. “Ces peuples avoient convoqué tous les Estats du pais, ou plutost toutes les Nations alliées pour reconcilier les Annieronnonns avec les Sonnotoueronnonns qui estoient sur le point d’entrer en guerre pour la mort du Capitaine dont nous venons de parler : Pour traiter de nostre établissement au centre de leur pays, & pour inviter tous ces peuples à mettre quelquechose dans la chaudière de guerre ; c’est-à-dire pour aviser aux moyens d’attaquer & défaire leurs ennemis, & fournir à quelques frais communs.”

<sup>509</sup> *JR*, 43: 168. “Nous avons si bien estallé, si bien dressé et rangé nos presens qu’ils paroissent à merveille.”

them to God, accommodate to this custom of theirs: of which they are delighted, seeing that we succeed as well as they.”<sup>510</sup>

Jesuit missionaries, these ‘teachers of Europe,’ who were particularly renowned for their sophisticated rhetorical training and practices and their knowledge of the classics, were thus embracing American Indian verbal art to better reach their new audiences. At the same time, they were introducing their own etiquette into the ceremonies in the form of novel nonverbal components, according to their own purpose and message: “Before giving an explanation of [the gifts],” as was customary in native oratory, “all our Fathers and our French knelt down, removed their hats, clasped their hands, and intoned aloud the *Veni Creator* all along. This astonished and delighted the spectators, to whom we gave to understand that we never dealt with any matter of importance without first asking the assistance of the Spirit who governs the whole world.”<sup>511</sup> Since the early days of contact, the French had found, in the public performance of music and hymns and the ostentatious enactment of Christianity, satisfying means to express their faith while accommodating native ceremonial demands.<sup>512</sup> The next stage of the performance, however, was more unexpected. Father Le Mercier then turned to a fellow missionary, Father Joseph Chaumonot, who according

---

<sup>510</sup> Ibid. “Or ces peuples estans grands harangueurs & se servant souvent d’allegories et de metaphores, nos Peres pour les attirer à Dieu, s’accommodent à leur façon de faire : ce qui les ravit, voyant que nous y reüssissons aussi bien qu’eux.”

<sup>511</sup> JR, 43: 170-72. “Devant que d’en donner l’explication, tous nos Pères & nos François se jetterent à genoux, mirent bas leurs chapeaux, & joignirent les mains entonnant à haute voix le *Veni Creator* tout au long : ce qui surprit & ravit toute l’assistance à laquelle nous fismes entendre que nous ne traitions d’aucune affaire d’importance, sans demander auparavant le secours de l’Esprit qui regit tout l’univers.”

<sup>512</sup> This was a common Jesuit method in other colonies outside of America, but the performances did vary with the local cultures and traditions to which the Fathers adapted. Dominique Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire: les missions françaises au XVIIe siècle, 1600-1650* (Paris : Fayard, 2003). William J. Summers, “The Jesuits in Manila, 1581-1621: The Role of Music in Rite, Ritual, and Spectacle,” in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts*, 2 vols., ed. John W. O’Malley et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 1: 659-79.

to the chronicler could “speak Iroquois as well as the natives of the country,” to eloquently decipher the meaning of each of the ten gifts that the French had so artistically displayed.<sup>513</sup>

Chaumonot began with a series of gifts intended to alleviate the grief of the Indians at the recent death of a number of chiefs and of several Christian converts whose souls, he explained, survived in the faith of their children and friends.<sup>514</sup> Later, Chaumonot also provided thanks for the Indians’ “reception of [the French] into their country, which was as courteous as the invitation had been urgent,” and offered gifts to request that a canoe be sent to Québec with news of the current proceedings.<sup>515</sup> These explanations of propitiatory gifts were typical of Indian oratorical practices. Moreover, in his speech, the priest did not solely express his personal thoughts, as a traditional European speaker would do. Rather, he expressed the fact that he was but an agent of a multitude of voices being carried to the Iroquois through his body. First, he “joined the Algonquins and the Hurons in his presents,” despite their absence at the council, “so that they might form but one heart and one people with all these nations,” an idea which reflected the French desire to form a lasting peace between their multiple Indian allies that would facilitate both commerce and conversion in the region.<sup>516</sup> He also explained that Father Le Mercier/Achiendasé spoke the words of Onontio, the French governor, “to

---

<sup>513</sup> Father Chaumonot is sometimes referred to in the Jesuit Relations as Father Chaumont. His full name was Pierre Marie Joseph Chaumonot. The “Iroquois” language that he spoke was in fact very likely Huron. “Chaumonot” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 12 Vols. (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1965), 1: 205-207.

<sup>514</sup> *JR*, 43: 172. “Le Pere Joseph Chaumont se levant en suite expliqua huit ou dix presens faits pour adoucir les regrets de la mort de plusieurs Capitaines, & pour faire revivre dans la Foy de leurs enfans & de leurs amis quelques braves Chrestiens & Chrestiennes passées depuis peu de la terre au ciel.”

<sup>515</sup> *JR*, 43, 172-74. “Il en fit deux autres, l’un en reconnaissance de ce qu’ils nous avoient receus en leur pays avec autant de courtoisie, qu’ils nous avoient invité avec instance ; & l’autre pour leur faire mettre le canot à l’eau, pour faire sçavoir à Quebec de nos nouvelles.”

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 172. “Il joignit les Algonquins & les Hurons dans ses presens pour ne faire qu’un cœur & un peuple avec toutes ces Nations.”



help him in raising up the houses that had been overthrown, in bringing the dead back to life, in maintaining what was in good condition, and in defending the country against the disturbers of the peace.”<sup>517</sup> He spoke for his people, both the Jesuits and the rest of the French. Finally, his voice became more powerful and his tone more impassioned as he became the voice of God in this part of the earth:

For the sake of the Faith, I hold this rich present in my hand [a “very beautiful wampum string very artfully made”], and I open my mouth to remind you of the word that you pledged us when you came down to Quebec to conduct us to your country. You solemnly promised to lend ear to the words of the great God. They are in my mouth; listen to them; I am but his organ.<sup>518</sup>

The gift of wampum was intended to hold the Iroquois to their past promises, as a material record of a previous meeting, and to serve as a testimony of the truth and authority of the message being delivered. Like the Algonquin orator in Québec in 1636, Chaumonot ended his demonstration with a threat, warning the Indians of what failure to comply would bring: “If you reject [these truths] in your heart, be you Onnontagheronnon [Onondaga], Sonnontoueronnon [Seneca], Annieronnon [Mohawk], Oneïogouenronnon, Onneïoutehronnon [Oneida], know that JESUS CHRIST, who animates my heart and my voice, will one day cast you into Hell.”<sup>519</sup>

---

<sup>517</sup> Ibid. “Il dit à haute voix que Onontaghé estant comme le Parlement de tout le pays, & Agochiedagueté le plus considéré dans toutes ces contrées, Achiendasé se venoit joindre à luy comme la bouche d’Onontio, afin de l’aider à relever les maisons renversées, à resusciter les morts, à maintenir ce qui estoit en bon estat, & à deffendre le pays contre les perturbateurs de la paix.”

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 174. “prenant un tres-beau colier de porcelaine artistement fait : c’est pour la Foy que je tiens en main ce riche present, & que j’ouvre la bouche pour vous sommer de la parole que vous nous donastes lors que vous descendites à Quebec pour nous conduire en vostre pays. Vous avés promis solennellement que vous presteriés l’oreille aux parolles du grand Dieu, elles sont en ma bouche, écoutés-les, je ne suis que son organe.”

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 176. “Que si tu les rebutes en ton cœur qui que tu sois Onnontagheronnon, Sonnontoueronnon, Annieronnon, Oneïogouenronnon, Onneïoutehronnon, sçache que IESUS-CHRIST qui anime mon cœur et ma voix te precipitera un jour dans les Enfers. Mais previens ce malheur par ta conversion, ne sois point cause de ta perte, obeïs à la voix du Tout Puissant.” Emphasis is in the original text. The French were referring to the five Iroquois Nations through the names that the Hurons gave them, probably because the Hurons were the first Iroquoian-speaking people with whom the French had had intensive contact.

The evocation of a dreadful alternative to the message or action being advocated by the orators was not the only parallel between the two episodes. In both instances, there were multiple speakers, each of whom displayed his own style and talent while complementing each other towards a common goal. While in the first vignette an Algonquian Indian emulated French norms and behaviors and relied on aspects of French material culture, in the second, French Jesuit fathers carefully crafted a performance that would resonate with Northern Iroquoian oratorical etiquette, notably through the explanation of gifts of wampum. The audiences to which the speeches were directed were thus equally important in shaping the content and the modes and styles of delivery of the discourses. While geopolitics had dramatically changed between 1636 and 1656, in both cases the emulation of culturally specific verbal and nonverbal elements of oratory allowed the speakers to diffuse potentially volatile situations. In seventeenth-century North America, words, when properly performed vocally and nonverbally, were invested with true efficacy and power. They could make things happen, both wonderful and terrible, and they could repair destruction or disorder when it had occurred, or, as Onontio had put it: “[raise] up the houses that had been overthrown” and “[bring] the dead back to life.”<sup>520</sup>

In the case of the Tadoussac Indians’ request for military assistance against the Iroquois, many obstacles lay in the way of a successful agreement. Despite years of acquaintance and manifestly solid mutual knowledge of each other’s societies and practices, cultural misunderstandings still occurred between the French and Algonquians.

---

We can infer that the speech was given in Huron language by Father Chaumonot, which, given the long and complicated relations between the Five Nations and the Hurons, must have significantly shaped the reception of his message, associating the priest with this tribe both symbolically and diplomatically.

<sup>520</sup> *JR*, 43: 172.

When the Indians offered beaver pelts along with their speech, the French perceived the gift as a bribe and were indignant at the thought that one could pretend to “buy” their military support. The French leaders replied that even “if they [the Indians] should fill the house with beavers, [they] would not undertake the war for the sake of their presents; that [the French] helped [their] friends, not in the hope of any reward, but for the sake of their friendship.”<sup>521</sup> When an Indian elder explained the function of the offering, the French understood his words, but failed to fully accept and trust their meaning: “when we visit the Tribes which are our neighbors and allies, we make them presents, which speak while we keep silence. (...) this is a good custom; you ought to observe it as well as we.”<sup>522</sup> While the gifts did carry a propitiatory function, they represented less a material addition to the request in the sense familiar to Europeans, than an active, nonverbal, and symbolic element of the Indians’ rhetoric itself. In other words, gifts did not “accompany” the message, they directly contributed to the message and its reception. This was one of the lessons about native oratory that the French learned during the seventeenth century and eventually enacted themselves.

Heated rhetorical battles between Indians and Frenchmen were commonplace in seventeenth-century New France, becoming increasingly frequent as the French learned to master Indian languages and oratorical patterns. Despite tensions, however, and although the French stubbornly refused to assist the Tadoussac Indians in battle, the two parties went their separate ways without any obvious damage to their mutual friendship.

---

<sup>521</sup> JR, 9: 230. “On prit de là sujet de leur répondre, que quand ils rempliroient la maison de Castors, qu’on n’entreprendroit pas la guerre pour leurs presens ; que nous secourions nos amys, non pour l’espoir d’aucune recompense, mais pour leur amitié.”

<sup>522</sup> Ibid. “Quand nous visitons les Peuples qui nous sont voisins et alliez, nous leur faisons des presens, qui parlent pendant que nous nous taisons : (...) c’est une bonne coustume, vous la devriez garder aussi bien que nous, disoit ce bon vieillard.”

The Algonquians went to war and returned the following August with many scalps and a number of prisoners taken from their Iroquois enemies.<sup>523</sup> Similarly, in 1656 at Onondaga, a series of disputes and strong words seemed to be successfully mediated through the ceremonial context of the oratorical exchanges. When the Mohawks mocked the French for offering presents that could not be easily divided among other Iroquois nations, “the Father Superior [Le Mercier] replied to their impostures in so emphatic a manner that they soon repented of their false accusations.”<sup>524</sup> In the course of his “fiery” discourse, Father Chaumonot also used offensive language, for instance arguing that the finest Indian meals would barely be good enough to feed French animals.<sup>525</sup> Nevertheless, the Jesuit chronicler claimed that the Indian audience’s reaction was positive, even enthusiastic, because “these people [were] delighted to see us so well versed in their ways.”<sup>526</sup> This suggests that misunderstandings and disagreements—even serious ones— could be overlooked as long as the form and context of the discourse were acceptable to the audience, a pattern already observed in the early phase of the colonial encounter.

This chapter seeks to explore the role of the nonverbal in performances of oratory as a unique space for negotiations, debates, and accommodation between nations in New France. It redefines native oratory as a multimedia and multidimensional tool of

---

<sup>523</sup> *JR*, 9: 250.

<sup>524</sup> *JR*, 43: 164. “ils firent une harangue pleine de risées & de railleries contre les François, & se voulant excuser de ce qu’ayant reçu des presens à Québec pour toutes les nations Iroquoises, ils ne les avoient pas distribués, ils dirent que les François estoient assez stupides pour donner des choses qui ne se pouvoient partager, & qu’ainsi ils avoient été contraints de donner tous ces presens à leur nation. Le Père Superieur repliqua à leurs impostures d’une manière si pressante qu’ils se repentirent bientost de leurs fausses accusations.”

<sup>525</sup> *JR*, 43: 174. “C’est pour la Foy que nous privons de nostre nourriture naturelle, & des mets delicieux dont nous pouvions jouir en France ; pour manger de vostre bouïllie & de vos mets, dont à peine les animaux de nostre païs voudroient gouter.”

<sup>526</sup> *JR*, 43: 172. “Pendant que le Père expliquoit toutes ces choses en détail, ce n’estoit qu’admiration & acclamations de tous ces peuples ravis de nous voir si versés dans leur façons de faire.”

communication in order to better understand how and why it became the center of cross-cultural exchanges and productions. At the basic level, nonverbal elements (pantomime, gestures, dress, accessories, etc.) made it easier for newcomers to understand and adapt to native etiquette, and provided enough similarities between the two cultures to serve as common ground for accommodation. The Jesuits, in particular, who were trained in ancient rhetoric and used theatre to spread the message of God to the masses, found in native oratorical practices a familiar and fertile ground for performing Christianity and gaining influence in Indian society. In a world where the line between politics, religion, and commerce was blurry at best, oratory was central to the balance of power between the groups. Native oratory was essential to alliances and peace in part because it was a crucial place to affirm and consolidate trust between speakers and their audiences. This trust was not only grounded in words, but also in the objects, sounds, and bodies that participated in native discourses. An irremediable tension thus arose between the verbal and nonverbal language of truth at the heart of native oratory, and the perception of Indian multi-dimensional eloquence by the French as a theatrical, thus unauthentic, performance that could be “faked” or imitated as a means to one’s ends.

While it is true that the Jesuits imported many of their strategies and methods from the Old World, they also confronted rich and complex Native American oratorical cultures, which significantly differed from what they knew and progressively transformed their understanding and enactment of verbal art in America. Through time, the French understanding of native oratory undoubtedly gained in depth and nuance, and the quality and complexity of their performances of Indian-style oratory increased. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the practice of “speaking through gifts” and letting “gifts

“speak in one’s name,” was mastered by Jesuit orators, and misunderstandings regarding potential “bribery” no longer endured.<sup>527</sup> However, it remains unclear whether missionaries adopted these practices and “Indian-style” nonverbal elements to add an artificial Indian “flavor” to their performance, as one would adopt a figure of speech or local slang to better ‘fit in,’ or if they truly understood the full meaning and implications of their actions and words. How could trust and authenticity—and thereby peace and alliance—be maintained if the French perceived Indian oratory as a “show” and their own adaptation as a strategic “act”? Were there more profound misunderstandings between the groups at the core of this oratorical contest? Did cross-cultural performances of oratory reveal patterns of power and power shifts throughout the period? In other words, was the orator who adapted the local style and medium of delivery of his speech in a subordinate or dominant position?<sup>528</sup> And did nonverbal performances thus reflect socio-political and diplomatic transformations across the period?

---

<sup>527</sup> For instance, when Father Jacques Marquette visited the Illinois Indians in 1673, he wrote: “seeing everyone assembled and silent, I spoke to them through four presents that I made to them; through the first I said that we walked in peace to visit the Nations that were on the River down to the sea.” *JR*, 59: 119. “Voyant tout le monde assemblé et dans le silence, je leur parlay par quatre presents que je leur fis, par le premier je leur disois que nous marchions en paix pour visiter les nations qui estoient sur la Riviere jusqu’à la Mer.”

<sup>528</sup> Accommodation and concession are sometimes perceived as signs of weakness, or as the result of one’s ability to impose his/her own will. However, if we consider the nature and logic of native oratory, and the place it gave to consensus and negotiation, this perspective is transformed. Understanding and adjusting to an opposite point of view could be seen as a sign of wisdom and success rather than weakness and failure. In this sense, it is pointless to attempt to measure “power” based on the degree of mutual adaptation/accommodation between French and Indians. By the late seventeenth century, ceremonies commonly displayed both Indian and French elements, as well as new hybrid productions. But the ratio of French/Indian elements was not steady or unchanging and it varied from one council to the next, based on the issues at stake, the audience, the orator and his unique style, and the purpose of the meeting.



FIGURE 2: Louis-Henri, a Tupinamba Indian from Brazil who visited France and was introduced to Louis XIII in 1613, performing cultural hybridity. In Claude d' Abbeville. *Histoire de la mission des pères Capucins en l'isle de Maragnan et terres circonvoisines*. Paris : Imprimerie L. Perrin, 1876

\*

\*

\*

### **A Multimedia Eloquence**

Across most of the Americas during the colonial period, Europeans were confronted with the paradox of the 'eloquent barbarian.' In northeastern North America particularly, westerners encountered, against all their expectations, native cultures characterized by highly sophisticated verbal art traditions that permeated every aspect of life.<sup>529</sup> "No matter what attributes of Western civilization might be found lacking in

---

<sup>529</sup> Few studies have been dedicated to Indian oratory in the Northeast, and even fewer to oral traditions before the eighteenth century. Studies tend to focus disproportionately on the Iroquois of the League, probably because their practices were better documented and continued into more recent time periods (particularly the American national period), while verbal art of the Algonquian people remains poorly known. See, for instance, Harry Robie, "Kiotsaetson's Three Rivers Address: An Example of 'Effective'

Indian cultures,” writes historian and native verbal art specialist William M. Clements, “excellence in oratory remained a constant in the writings of virtually everyone from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries except for the most extreme Indian haters.”<sup>530</sup> Seventeenth-century French observers noted expressiveness as a sign of intelligence possessed by a “surprisingly” large number of native Americans, a talent perceived to be “natural” and cultivated through their frequent councils. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, Father Joseph Jouvency observed among the natives of Acadia that “no one among them is stupid or sluggish, a fact which is evident in their inborn foresight in deliberation and their fluency in speaking.”<sup>531</sup> A few decades later, Father Paul Le Jeune, who was typically stingy in his appreciation of native culture, reported that the Hurons cultivated their minds through daily amicable discussions and noted that “they are for the most part fairly intelligent.”<sup>532</sup> Eloquence and verbal artistry, he remarked, almost equated to a form of local pastime, one in which a disproportionate section of the population took part compared to France, where oratory was the prerogative of a few and a social marker of the intelligentsia. “There are almost none of them incapable of

---

Iroquois Oratory.” *American Indian Quarterly* 6 (Fall-Winter 1982): 238-53. More largely, this tendency is inscribed within a larger scholarly and popular bias that tends to concentrate its attention on the Western part of the United States and on Plains Indians at the detriment of eastern native cultures. “Thus do the motives and thinking underlying Native oratory remain unrevealed, or worse, distorted beyond recognition.” Ward Churchill, “Reclaiming the Native Voice: Reflections on the Historiography of American Indian Oratory,” in Barbara Alice Mann, ed., *Native American Speakers of the Eastern Woodlands: Selected Speeches and Critical Analyses* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), viii. For an excellent analysis of the nature and role of public oratory in the Iroquois League of Power, see Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), esp. 45-49; Michael K. Foster, “On Who Spoke First at Iroquois-White Councils: An Exercise in the Method of Upstreaming,” in Foster et al., eds., *Extending the Rafters: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Iroquoian Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 183-207.

<sup>530</sup> William M. Clements, *Oratory in Native North America* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2002), x (hereafter cited as Clements, *Oratory*).

<sup>531</sup> *JR*, 1: 277. Original in Latin.

<sup>532</sup> *JR*, 10: 212. “Ils ont pour la plupart l’esprit assez bon.”



conversing or reasoning very well, and in good terms, on matters within their knowledge,” Le Jeune stated. “The councils, too, held almost everyday in the Villages, and on almost all matters, improve their capacity for talking; and, although it is the old men who have the upper hand, and upon whose judgment depend the decisions made, yet everyone who wishes may be present, and has the right to express his opinion.”<sup>533</sup> Native America—generally described as the savage kingdom of barbarity and ignorance—appeared to be in fact a democratic republic of spoken words.

Indian eloquence was particularly impressive to European observers because it seemed to be the product of “nature” rather than intensive education and training, to which the missionaries were subjected in France. On more than one occasion, the Old World masters of rhetoric complimented these “born orators,” arguing for instance that “an eloquence wholly drawn from nature [did] not cause any one to regret the help of art.”<sup>534</sup> The Jesuits struggled so much with this paradox – how could a people whom they considered inferior culturally and intellectually display such a talent in one of the most prized Western art forms?— that they felt compelled to regularly incorporate “disclaimers” in their relations, to confirm to their readers that they were not adding embellishments or style to their transcriptions of Indian speeches and that the words they reported were truly the creation of Indian “savages.”<sup>535</sup>

---

<sup>533</sup> *JR*, 10: 212. “Davantage en cette frequentation ordinaire, comme ils ont la plupart l’esprit assez bon, ils s’éveillent & se façonnent merveilleusement ; de sorte qu’il n’y en a quasi point qui ne soit capable d’entretien et ne raisonne fort bien et en bon termes, sur les choses dont il a la cognoissance : ce qui les forme encor dans le discours sont les conseils qui se tiennent quasi tous les jours dans les Villages en toutes occurrences : & quoy que les anciens y tiennent le haut bout, & que ce soit de leur jugement que dépende la decision des affaires : néantmoins s’y trouve qui veut, & chacun a droit d’y dire son advis.”

<sup>534</sup> *JR*, 70: 99. [anonymous letter] ; also in : *JR*, 15 : 156. “ Ils ont quasi tous plus d’esprit en leurs affaires, discours, gentilleses, rencontres, souplesses et subtilités, que les plus avisés bourgeois et marchands de France. ”

<sup>535</sup> *JR*, 59: 277. “avec une force d’esprit, une piété, et une éloquence incroyable dans un sauvage.” ; *JR*, 9 : 232. “Je n’ajoute rien au discours de ce Sauvage, il toucha toutes ces raisons, & plusieurs autres qu’il

While eloquence and loquacity were widespread among all Native Americans, some individuals particularly distinguished themselves as outstanding public speakers. Father Barthelemy Vimont commented on the lesson in humility that remarkable Indian orators provided to missionaries: “the world may say what it will of them, but I believe that some Savages express themselves better in their own language than I do in ours.”<sup>536</sup> Even before they could understand native languages, and therefore assess the quality of the arguments, logic, persuasiveness, and intelligence of the speeches and speakers, French observers admired Indian oratory. This appreciation and the widely held sense that American Indians were uncommonly eloquent were in some cases entirely derived from the performance rather than content of the speeches. The strength and passion of the tone of an orator, the evocativeness of his gestures, the pitch and variations of his voice, his elaborate costumes and use of accessories, were the first and most memorable signs of Indian verbal artistry.<sup>537</sup> In many ways, this perception of Indian oratory and eloquence as performative and multidimensional rather than purely verbal was more pertinent than many modern commentaries on Indian speeches that pinpoint allegories and metaphors as

---

deduisit fort gravement en son langage.”; *JR*, 10: 237. Speaking of a beautiful oration given by a Huron chief in presence of the French, one chronicler apologized for his own inability to transcribe it with its original quality: “I shall not give it the grace it had in the mouth of this Chief.” “Il me fit ce discours, mais je luy feray tort de le mettre icy, car je ne luy donneray pas la grace qu’il avoit en la bouche de ce Capitaine.”

<sup>536</sup> *JR*, 20:223. “Que l’on en die [*sic*] ce qu’on voudra, mais je crois que quelques Sauvages s’énoncent mieux en leur langue, que je ne fais en la nostre, & leurs sentimens de Dieu, sont par fois si tendres que le cœur les gousté mieux, que le papier ne les exprime.”

<sup>537</sup> See for instance *JR*, 27: 264-66. “Il entonna quelques chansons entre ses presens, il dança par resioüissance [*sic*], bref, il se montra fort bon Acteur, pour un homme qui n’a d’autre estude que ce que la nature luy a appris sans regle & sans preceptes. La conclusion fut que les Iroquois, les François, les Algonquins [*sic*], les Hurons, les Montaignets [*sic*], & les Attikamegues danceroient tous, & se resioüyroient avec beaucoup d’allegresse.”

a sign of linguistic poverty, without regard for the other elements that composed the speech events.<sup>538</sup>

As they learned Indian languages or gained access to interpreters, the French soon realized that the literal content of the discourses were as impressive as the media and style of their delivery. Moreover, they came to understand that the form and content of Indian oratory were inseparable. Jesuit missionaries frequently granted Indian orators the highest praise possible by comparing them to classical rhetoricians such as Titus Livius.<sup>539</sup> It rapidly became apparent that Indian orators were masters in “primary rhetoric”—the art of persuasion—and that their solemn tone and expressive attitudes was matched by the soundness and logic of their arguments. “I do not know what a Roman Senator could have answered that would have been more appropriate to the subject under discussion,” commented the French governor after an Algonquian orator had masterfully debunked the best French arguments during a dispute regarding intermarriage between the groups.<sup>540</sup>

---

<sup>538</sup> Clements, *Oratory*, 80. “Pro-Indianists might cite the use of figurative language to support their belief in the essential humanity of the North American Natives, for artistic manipulation of language could be said to reveal highly developed intellects—a sign of ‘genius,’ as Aristotle has it (quoted in Basso 1976, 93) (...) but a stronger tradition developed that suggested that this apparent penchant for the figurative represented a weakness in intellect, an inability to communicate with precision in the language of abstract concepts, a ‘designative inadequacy’ in Native American vocabularies that exceeded that of European languages (Basso 1976, 107). As David Murray has summarized this view, ‘The perceived lack of abstractions, reflecting a lack of intellectual development on the part of the Indians, means that concepts must be built up from objects and their qualities or associations’ (Murray 1991, 42).”

<sup>539</sup> *JR*, 10: 244. “Voilà la harangue de ce Capitaine, qui passeroit, à mon advis au jugement de plusieurs pour une de celle de Tite Live, si le sujet le portoit : elle me sembla fort persuasive.” Also, in *JR*, 1 : 279: “they have often been heard to make a peroration so well calculated for persuasion, and that off-hand, that they would excite the admiration of the most experience in the arena of eloquence.” (original in Latin).

<sup>540</sup> *JR*, 9: 232. “Monsieur le Gouverneur entendant cette réponse, me dit, Je ne sçay ce qu’un Senateur Romain auroit répondu de plus à propos sur le sujet proposé. Je luy répliquay, qu’on faisoit nos Sauvages en France bien plus massifs qu’ils ne sont.”

The attention given to Indian oratory in French colonial relations was not only prompted by the Jesuits' own interests and training, but more largely reflected the omnipresence of oratorical performances within northeastern native societies.<sup>541</sup> "They are the greatest speech-makers on earth," declared Father Pierre Biard after residing among the Montagnais, "nothing is done without speeches."<sup>542</sup> Indeed, because it was invested with active power, oratory was used in a multitude of contexts and for a variety of purposes, representing an undeniable part of everyday communal life. Although French observers often lacked a full understanding of the social and political meaning of oratory, and failed to perceive crucial differences in styles and forms of discourses, their observations reveal some of the usages of public speech. For instance, during councils, Iroquois leaders were said to "endeavor to display their eloquence, both in relating their fables, their genealogies, and their stories, and in suitably exhorting the elders and warriors, according to the requirements of current affairs."<sup>543</sup>

The distinction suggested above by Father Pierre Millet between fictional forms of oral literature ("fables" and "stories") and authentic or historical ones ("genealogies" and "current affairs") is problematic. Indeed, "myths were regarded by the Northern Iroquoians as being true explanations of the origins of natural phenomena and social

---

<sup>541</sup> On oral cultures, see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 14-15.

<sup>542</sup> *JR*, 2: 44. "Ces gens, croy-je, sont les plus grands harangueurs de toute la terre; ils ne font rien sans cela." This was confirmed in *JR*, 3: 224. "Ils ne sont point larrons comme les Armouchiquoys, & sont les plus grands harangueurs du monde. Ils ne font rien sans cela."

<sup>543</sup> *JR*, 58: 184. "Les nations iroquoises, pour entretenir la paix et l'union entre elles, et pour réparer les fautes que les particuliers pourraient faire, ont institué de certaines ambassades qu'elles s'envoient réciproquement les unes aux autres. C'est là où ils exposent avec le plus de magnificence qu'ils peuvent leurs beaux colliers de porcelaine, et où leurs capitaines s'étudient à faire paraître leur éloquence, tant à raconter leurs fables, leurs généalogies et leurs histoires qu'à exhorter à propos les anciens et les guerriers selon l'exigence des affaires présentes."

institutions. They began with an opening formula such as ‘this happened long ago.’”<sup>544</sup> Among Algonquians, what a westerner would define as “myths” were also “seen as true accounts of events occurring in the earliest times” and were distinguished from a category of speeches considered as fiction, which consisted in “shorter tales recited for amusement or to teach a moral lesson.”<sup>545</sup> Standardized formulas and other stylistic and nonverbal devices (including particular types of song, tone, and dress of the speaker), signaled to the audience the nature of the speech and its degree of veracity. It was therefore through performance that the orator created and preserved the verisimilitude and credibility of his subject. “Verisimilitude can be created performatively by embodying the characters in the narration by means of gestures, manipulation of voice qualities such as timber, volume and pitch, and direct quotation,” explains Native American literature expert Andrew Wiget.<sup>546</sup> This was, in a sense, what Father Barthélémy Vimont expressed when he appreciated an Iroquois orator’s performance: “[Kiotsacton] sang some songs between his gifts; he danced for joy; in a word, he showed himself to be a very good actor.”<sup>547</sup> The efficacy, both symbolic and actual, of the speech thus rested in the overall, multimedia, and multidimensional performance given by the orator, and in its reception by the audience.<sup>548</sup>

---

<sup>544</sup> Gordon M. Day and Michael K. Foster, “Oral Literatures of the Northern Algonquians and the Northern Iroquoians” in Andrew Wiget, ed., *Handbook of Native American Literature* (New York: Garland, 1996 [1994]), 77.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 74. “both these types are distinguished from traditional histories which recount relatively recent events.”

<sup>546</sup> Andrew Wiget, “Native American Oral Literatures: A Critical Orientation,” in Wiget, ed., *Handbook*, 9.

<sup>547</sup> *JR*, 27: 264-66.

<sup>548</sup> Andrew Wiget has tackled the important issue of “truthfulness” in Indian oratory. He noted that in many cases, Western literary theory is inadequate to analyze and appreciate Native American oral literatures. In order to explain how truthfulness was created in Native speech events and the role of performance in this process, he wrote: “an audience’s assent to the claim occurs on two levels, engrossment and reflection. The first is the tacit assent, sometimes called the ‘willing suspension of disbelief,’ that measures the verisimilitude of a representation by its capacity to imaginatively involve the

Persuasion was indeed the central goal of native oratory. Indian politics were characterized by consensual decision-making. An Indian leader did not order or command: he had to convince, to persuade, to gain people to his cause through his artful use of rhetoric.<sup>549</sup> This was a reciprocal process. An individual's social status as respected warrior, or as member of a notable clan or family, for instance, could make him an orator of choice. Reciprocally, his eloquence and qualities as public speaker were instrumental in fostering and reinforcing his personal prestige and position. Seeking to explain the source of leadership and succession process among the Hurons, a Jesuit distinguished between what he perceived to be "two kinds of Captains among the Savages, those by right of birth, and those by election." For both, eloquence was crucial to maintaining authority and position. "These peoples are not so barbarous that they do not show respect to the descendants of their chiefs, so that, if the son of a Captain has some talent for leadership, and above all, if he has natural eloquence, he will hold his

---

audience in the performance. The second is the distanced, critical judgment about the likelihood of such event's ever happening in view of culturally shared assumptions about the structure of reality and human behavior, the 'truthfulness,' if you will. (...) In performative terms, then, the representational aim of verbal art is to create a sense of verisimilitude appropriate to the nature of the communication which engrosses the audience sufficiently to preclude serious questions of credibility that threaten to destroy the frame of communication." Wiget, "Native American Oral Literatures," in Wiget, ed., *Handbook*, 7-8. This sense of verisimilitude could not be created by words alone, although certain formulaic expressions and specialized vocabulary could contribute to the process. Nonverbal elements were therefore essential to the establishment of "truthfulness," necessary in order to obtain the assent or credibility from the audience, which alone could guarantee the efficiency of the speech and the ultimate success of the speaker.

<sup>549</sup> *JR*, 10: 255. "these summons are entreaties, not commands." *JR*, 6: 242 "toute l'autorité de leur chef est au bout de ses levres, il est aussi puissant qu'il est eloquent ; & quand il s'est tué de parler & de haranguer, il se sera pas obey s'il ne plaist au Sauvages." ["All the authority of their chief is in his tongue's end; for he is powerful in so far as he is eloquent; and, even if he kills himself talking and haranguing, he will not be obeyed unless he pleases the Savages."]; See also F. Gabriel Sagard Theodat, *Histoire du Canada et voyages que les frères recollects y ont faits pour la conversion des infidèles*, 4 vols (Arras : H. Schoutheer, 1865), 2 : 387 (hereafter cited as Sagard, *Histoire*) "Mais ces Capitaines n'ont point entr'eux autorité absolue, bien qu'on leur ait quelque respect, et conduisent le peuple plutost par prières, exhortations, et remonstrances, qu'ils sçavent dextrement et rhetoriquement ajancer, que par rigueur de commandement, c'est pourquoy ils s'y exercent, et y apprennent leurs enfans, car qui harangue le mieux est le mieux obey."

father's place without opposition.”<sup>550</sup> In other words, descent alone was not sufficient—talent outweighed descent. The same chronicler thus gave the example of one of these hereditary leaders, who was “a man of good sense, and courageous, but as he [was] not a ready speaker, he [did] not share in the sovereign glory of the Captains.”<sup>551</sup> The connection between leadership and oratory in Indian society aroused the interest of French observers who rapidly understood the potential benefits of becoming powerful speakers among the natives: “one who knew the language perfectly, so that he could crush their reasons, and promptly refute their absurdities, would be very powerful among them,” mused one missionary while struggling to learn native tongues.<sup>552</sup>

Trade agreements, diplomatic negotiations, and military alliances between tribes or with the French were particularly propitious times for newcomers to observe the power of oratory and how, in turn, oratory fostered empowerment. Ceremonies linked to the agricultural calendar and other important events marking the life of the community also included displays of public oratory. Complex performances, combining well-calculated arguments with dances, offerings, and pantomime were designed to obtain consensus of opinion, to undermine potential conflicts and violence, and to reestablish equilibrium in the universe when it had been compromised, for instance after a sudden death. Eulogies thus formed an important category of public speeches. More than an abstract acknowledgement of the accomplishments of the deceased, eulogies actively “dried the

---

<sup>550</sup> *JR*, 16: 134. “Ces peuples ne sont point si barbares qu’ils ne portent du respect aux descendants de leurs Chefs, si bien que si le fils d’un Capitaine a quelque conduite, sur tout s’il a quelque éloquence naturelle, il tiendra la place de son père sans contredit.”

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>552</sup> *JR*, 8: 36. “Je reviens toujours sur mes brisées, qui sçauroit parfaitement la langue pour les accabler de raisons, et pour refuter promptement leurs niaiseries, seroit bien puissant parmy eux.”

tears” of the surviving relatives.<sup>553</sup> When the death of a member of the community was acknowledged, “one of them makes a speech,” explained Father Jouvency, “in which he employs all those arguments that the most eloquent speakers are wont to use for the solace of grief. He rehearses the praises of the dead; he reminds them that the latter was born a man, and therefore liable to death; that those misfortunes which cannot be repaired are made lighter by patience; he sets forth other things of that sort to the same effect.”<sup>554</sup>

In the case of a murder, the stakes of the ceremony were even higher. In order to alleviate the grief of the relatives and to effectively remove from their hearts all desire of revenge and violent retribution against the murderer, which could potentially bring more destruction and disorder to the group, the entire community symbolically came together and made a large number of gifts—beaver pelts, wampum strings, iron tools, foodstuff—to the victim’s family.<sup>555</sup> “The Captain presents them in person, and makes a long harangue at each present that he offers, so that entire days sometimes pass in this ceremony.”<sup>556</sup> The first series of gifts was supported by a careful set of gestures, tone,

---

<sup>553</sup> *JR*, 22: 290-93. “Les presens parmy les peuples sont toutes les affaires du païs: ils essuient les larmes, ils appaisent la colere, ils ouvrent la porte des païs étrangers, ils délivrent les prisonniers, ils resuscitent les morts, on ne parle quasi & on ne respond que par des presens : c’est pour cela que dans les harangues, le present passe pour une parole, on fait des presens pour animer les hommes à la guerre, pour les convier a la Paix : pour attirer une famille ou une nation à venir prendre place & demeurer auprès de vous, pour satisfaire ou payer ceux qui ont reçu quelque injure, ou quelque blessure, notamment s’il y a eu du sang répandu.”

<sup>554</sup> *JR*, 1: 263 [original in Latin]. Also described by Le Jeune in *JR*, 10 : 268: “Il est vray qu’en cette occasion, ils ne manquent point de discours. Je me suis souvent estonné de les voir long temps sur ce propos, & apporter avec tant de discretion, toutes les considerations capables de donner quelque consolation aux parens du defunct.”

<sup>555</sup> “In both internal politics and external diplomacy, gifts symbolized a close relationship between a leader’s role as a speaker of words, a representative of his kin and followers, and a provider and distributor of economic resources. But also in a very practical and concrete sense gifts made words true and legitimized the position of the person who conveyed them.” Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 47.

<sup>556</sup> *JR*, 10: 214-16. “les parens du defunct ne poursuivent pas seulement celui qui a fait le meurtre, mais s’adressent à tout le Village, qui en doit faire raison, & fournir au plustost pour cet effet iusques à soixante presens, dont les moindres doivent estre de la valeur d’une robe neuve de Castor : Le Capitaine



and attitudes, which were all an integral part of the rhetoric, designed to reestablish peace in the minds and hearts of the relatives: “The Captain, speaking, and raising his voice in the name of the guilty person, and holding in his hand the first present as if the hatchet were still in the dead’s wound, *condayee onсахачoutawas*, ‘There,’ says he, ‘is something by which he withdraws the hatchet from the wound, and makes it fall from the hands of him who would wish to avenge this injury.’”<sup>557</sup> The performance symbolically “un-did” the dramatic event and reconciled the members of the community.

The Jesuit chronicler skeptically explained that the Indians “claim by this present to reunite all hearts and wills, and even entire Villages, which have become estranged.”<sup>558</sup> Oratory brought people together physically in a same ‘sacred’ space, and fostered, through speech and collective ceremonial performances, a sort of communion between speaker and various opinion groups within the audience. The same principle guided diplomacy and political decision-making. The ultimate success of a good orator was in obtaining consensual assent and repairing situations of crisis. Assent, and thereby, authority granted to the orator, was manifested by the audience through nonverbal means. Respectful silence and attention during the speech was a good sign of its efficiency, a

---

les presente luy mesme en personne, et fait une longue harangue à chaque present qu’il offre ; de façon que les journées entieres se passent quelquefois dans cette ceremonie.”

<sup>557</sup> Ibid. “Le Capitaine parlant, & haussant sa voix au nom du coupable, & tenant en sa main le premier present, comme si la hasche estoit encor dans la playe du mort, *condayee onсахач8ta8as*, voila dit-il, dequoy il retire la hache de la playe, & la fait tomber des mains de celuy qui voudroit venger cette injure.” The translation in Thwaites is significantly mistaken, since it states “raising his voice at the name of the guilty person,” when in fact the orator was speaking in the name of the murderer, acting his “part,” as if he was symbolically “undoing” his deed by removing the weapon from the mortal wound. Speaking in multiple “voices,” as if enacting multiple characters (present or not, fictional or real) was a very common stylistic device used in Indian ceremonial oratory. Another type of gifts was, among the Hurons, hung on a pole above the head of the dead and was accompanied by a different style of oration. The pole, the gifts, their explanations, the placement of the bodies, both dead and alive, all contributed to the efficacy of the ceremony in ways that speech alone could not.

<sup>558</sup> JR, 10: 218. “Ils prétendent par ce present reünir les cœurs & les volontez, & mesme des Villages entiers, qui avoient esté comme divisez.”

point particularly noted by Jesuit missionaries to celebrate the positive reactions and encouraging predisposition of natives to the Christian message.<sup>559</sup> Calibrated collective manifestations of joy or approval also signified success, for instance, among the Hurons in the form of a “very strong respiration drawn from the pit of the stomach, *Hauu*,” or “*Ho, Ho*.”<sup>560</sup> The audience also sometimes actively participated in the oration itself, with formulaic statements being repeated at certain points in the ceremony, or through dancing, smoking, and singing.

Although often long and passionate, Indian discourses were also characterized as examples of self-control, temperance, and moderation, in part because their purpose was to maintain or reestablish order in times of commotion. Father Joseph Jouvency admired the greatest Indian orators because “they never allow themselves to lose their calm composure of mind.”<sup>561</sup> The tone of the orations thus directly contributed to their function and efficacy. One missionary suggested that this tone markedly differed from everyday speech, while not constituting a separate dialect: “the manner of speaking, which, on account of its diversity has a different name, and is called *ac8entonch*; it is common to all Savages; they raise and quaver the voice, like the tones of an Antique Preacher, but slowly, decidedly, distinctly, even repeating the same reason several times(...) I once heard it said by some Interpreter, that these nations had a particular

---

<sup>559</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 475. Sagard said the Hurons “se resioüissoient de nous ouyr chanter des Hymnes & Pseaumes, à la loüange de Dieu, pendant lesquels (s’ils se trouvoient presens), ils gardoient estroitement le silence, & se rendoient attentifs, pour le mois au son, & à la voix, qui les contentoient fort.”

<sup>560</sup> *JR*, 15: 120; *JR*, 27: 266 “Monsieur le Gouverneur respondit aux presens des Iroquois, par quatorze presens quo avoient tous leurs significations, & qui portoient leurs parolles ; les Iroquois les accepterent tous avec grands tesmoignages de satisfaction qu’ils faisoient paroistre par trois grands cris, poussez à mesme temps du fond de leurs estomach à chaque parolle ou à chaque present qui leur estoit fait.”

<sup>561</sup> *JR*, 1: 277. [original in Latin]

language in their Councils: but I have learned by experience that this is not so.”<sup>562</sup> The tone of the council, however, did vary according to the subject at hand. During a Huron council aimed at dealing with the recent devastation wrought by deadly epidemics, for instance, the Jesuit fathers were struck by how the atmosphere and behaviors of the participants seemed to evoke the subject at hand without the need for words: “I do not know that I have ever seen anything more lugubrious than this assembly. From the start they looked at one another like corpses, or rather like men who already feel the terrors of death; they spoke only in sighs, each one undertaking the enumeration of the dead and sick of his family.”<sup>563</sup>

In native societies, therefore, power resided in communicative competence, drawn from multiple sources and manifested through various modes of expressions. Competence was “based on knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways,” by manipulating in the most eloquent manner the various media and stylistic resources available to public speakers, from metaphors to play-acting and singing.<sup>564</sup> It could also be tied to social status as, the “prerogative to perform correlated with characteristics such as age, gender, membership in the appropriate clan or organization, and so on.”<sup>565</sup> As a rule, elders enjoyed higher status as orators in Indian society, their speeches being

---

<sup>562</sup> JR, 10: 256. “La première [chose digne de remarque] est en la manière de parler, laquelle à cause de sa diversité a un nom different, & s’appelle *ac8entonch* ; elle est commune à tous les Sauvages ; ils haussent et fléchissent la voix comme d’un ton de Predicateur à l’antique, mais lentement, posément, distinctement, mesmes repetant une mesme raison plusieurs fois. (...) J’ay autrefois ouy dire à quelque Truchement, que ces Nations icy avoient un langage particulier en leurs Conseils : mais j’ay expérimenté le contraire.”

<sup>563</sup> JR, 15: 40. “ Je ne sçache avoir rien veu jamais de plus lugubre que cette assemble; du commencement ils se regardoient les uns les autres comme des cadavres, ou bien comme des homes qui ressentent déjà les affres de la mort; ils ne parloient que pas soupirs, chacun se mettant à faire le denombrement des morts et des malades de sa famille.”

<sup>564</sup> Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, MA: Newberry House, 1977), 11.

<sup>565</sup> Wiget, “Native American Oral Literatures”, 14.

considered more “powerful” than that of younger members of the community.<sup>566</sup> While women certainly had significant influence on oratory, especially in matrilineal societies where they could summon councils and entice their people to go to war, almost every recorded Indian oration was delivered by males.<sup>567</sup> Finally, eloquence and power depended on the particular style and talent of each speaker.

European records in many ways mask the flexibility and complexity of Indian verbal art. For instance, in the case of mourning ceremonies and discourses aimed at “covering the death” of a member of the community, inexperienced and linguistically impaired Jesuit observers at first believed that identical phrases and gifts were always used in similar circumstances, giving the false impression that such instances of native oratory were static rather than dynamic.<sup>568</sup> It is easy to see why Westerners would perceive Indian ceremonies and oratory as repetitive and unchanging.<sup>569</sup> Repetition and

---

<sup>566</sup> On elders having more influence: *JR*, 10: 252-54. “un Ancien, afin que la sermone soit plus efficace, d’autant qu’on n’adioute pas tousiours foy aux jeunes gens.”

<sup>567</sup> “too often the fact that male speakers, such as Sagoyewatha, were speaking words sent forward by the women’s councils has been overlooked in the record. Even worse, the words physically presented by female speakers themselves have been shunted aside as superfluous, creating an extraordinary distortion of woodlands history through centuries’ worth of scholarly oblivion of the female half of government in eastern cultures.” Mann, *Native American Speakers*, xvi.

<sup>568</sup> When Father Paul Le Jeune described a mourning ceremony following the murder of a Huron man, he did not use the past tense to give a narrative of the particular oration he had attended, but instead generalized his description with the use of the present tense. He seemed to suggest that the same standardized formulas accompanied the same gift, at the same moment: “he adds the third present, saying, *condayee onshondechari*, ‘This is to restore the Country;’ *condayee onshondwaronto*, *etotonhwentsiai*, ‘This is to put a stone upon the opening and the division of the ground that was made by this murder.” *JR*, 10: 216-8. “il adjoute au troisième present, en disant *condayee onshondechari* ; voila pour remettre le Pais en estat ; *condayee onshond8aronti*, *etotonh8entsiai* ; voila pour mettre une pierre dessus l’ouverture & la division de la terre, qui s’estoit faite par ce meurtre.”

<sup>569</sup> Another example is provided in the *Relation de 1636*, where Father LeJeune dedicates a chapter to “the order the Hurons observe in their councils,” and in which he generalizes about all councils, even numbering the various “phases” or “steps” followed by the participants. “Premièrement le Chef ayant déjà consulté en particulier avec les autres Capitaines et Anciens de son Village, & jugé que l’affaire merite une assemblée publique, il envoie [*sic*] convier au Conseil par chaque village (...) 3. Apres que quelqu’un a opiné, le Chef du Conseil repete, ou fait repeter ce qu’il a dit (...) ; 4. Chacun conclud son avis en ces termes *Condayauendi Ierhayde cha nonh8ic8ahachen* ; c’est-à-dire, voilà ma pensée touchant le

the use of familiar phrases and formulaic expressions for specific contexts were indeed important stylistic devices, which greatly facilitated the Europeans' understanding, identification, and participation in these ceremonies. In the midst of a largely incomprehensible sea of foreign words, key terms and repetitive statements provided the French with something they could grasp, as well as potentially valuable knowledge to be recorded and transmitted to future missionaries. Within the larger theme of restoring order to a disrupted community, a multitude of metaphors, for instance, evoked the "covering" or "healing" of wounds (real or symbolic), the "clearing" of symbolic and actual paths to link allied nations (to facilitate travel and exchange of goods as well as symbolically strengthening the alliance), and the "joining" or "bonding" of hearts and bodies (as allegories of a strong friendship and alliance). Once newcomers were able to speak native languages, these "stock" metaphors or figures of speech could also help them to sound more like native orators, and thus to gain more recognition and power upon their Indian audiences.<sup>570</sup>

Seventeenth-century Indian oratory is largely and irremediably lost to us. Despite the multitude of careful and lengthy descriptions and transcriptions of native discourses in French sources, including those that include records of the nonverbal elements of oratorical events, the performances themselves cannot be recovered in writing. We must keep in mind at all times that what we have to work with are *representations* of Indian

---

sujet de notre Conseil : puis toute l'Assemblée répond par une forte respiration tirée du creux de l'estomach, *Hauu.*" *JR*, 10 : 250-262.

<sup>570</sup> This may explain why French chroniclers often used literal translations of Indian idioms, such as "fire-stick" (*Bâton de feu*) for gun, or the most widespread insult among Indians of someone "having no sense" (*point d'esprit*), even when they were not transcribing Indian speeches. In a sense, they had assimilated the Indian conception of words as carriers of action and power beyond meaning and the idea that one must speak in appropriate cultural terms to touch one's audience.

oratory, not oratory itself.<sup>571</sup> The textualization of oratory, however, while often distorting the message of the discourse, does not always erase the dynamic, dialogic, and polyphonic nature of verbal art in which the audience and its exchanges with the orator are absolutely crucial.<sup>572</sup> Andrew Wiget summed up this process in a comparison with written words: “Like editors and first readers, audiences in performance have a kind of co-creative function. The active participation of the audience in evaluating the performance as it occurs is what distinguishes performance as an *emergent form* from textuality as *fixed form*.”<sup>573</sup> Through greater attention to nonverbal elements and by conceiving oratory as a multimedia and multidimensional event rather than as a verbal feat, we can overcome some of the limitations of textual representations of Indian verbal art.<sup>574</sup>

---

<sup>571</sup> Clements, *Oratory*, 23-24. Clements refers to James Clifford’s definition of “textualization” as “the process ‘through which unwritten behavior, speech, beliefs, oral tradition, an ritual come to be marked as a corpus, a potentially meaningful ensemble separated out from an immediate discursive or performative situation’ [Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 38]” and explains: “In other words, textualization is the transmutation of dynamic action into static text.” Clements notes that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts that described specific Indian speech events hold significant information about the oration and thus should not be disregarded. He believes that in some cases, older records provide a type of information that more recent ethnographers such as Franz Boas and his students failed to capture because they excessively focused on the accurate transcription of the message at the expense of the other nonverbal features of the event. “Many earlier commentators on American Indian oratory (...) have not been very successful at replicating the uttered words, but they may be able to provide descriptions of the performance situation, of audience responses, of cultural contexts, and of kinesic and paralinguistic dimensions of the orator’s performance. (...) Even when those elements have been misunderstood, as was often the case with European and Euro-American attempts to document Native American oratory, thoroughly informed analysis can provide accurate appreciation as long as information to work with has been preserved.” Clements, *Oratory*, 26.

<sup>572</sup> “What the sources present are ‘texts,’ a term critical to Boesian anthropology, anthropological linguistics, folklore studies, and literary criticism(...) textualization.” Clements, *Oratory*, 23. In this sense, even a video recording of a performance that would include images and sounds of both the audience and orator, would still only be a representation. A ceremonial speech event cannot be duplicated or reproduced because it exists only so far as it is happening in its unique space and time. The perception of Indian ceremonies as redundant is thus profoundly mistaken: regardless of how many phrases and expressions, dances and songs, or gestures appear similar to others during a different ceremony, the purpose, setting, and human interactions always result in a unique event.

<sup>573</sup> Wiget, “Native American Oral Literatures,” 15-16.

<sup>574</sup> Elizabeth C. Fine, *The Folklore Text from Performance to Print* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

Contrary to what most missionaries and other French observers believed, Indian oratory was open to innovation and improvisation. Father Pierre Biard struggled to come to terms with the fact that Indians at the same time possessed extraordinary memories while being unable to recite anything verbatim: “They have a very good memory for material things, such as having seen you before, or the peculiarities of a place where they may have been, of what took place in their presence twenty or thirty years before, etc.; but to learn anything by heart- there’s a rock; there is no way of getting a consecutive arrangement of words into their pates.”<sup>575</sup> While strict standards and stylistic norms framed the performance of oratory in the New World, orators displayed their talents in their ability to consciously manipulate the stylistic and nonverbal resources available to them to be as persuasive and evocative as possible. Algonquians and Iroquoians relied on mnemonic devices, such as wampum belts and strings, to organize longer speeches, which could last hours on end. Anthropologists Gordon Day and Michael Foster emphasized that “such recitations must be regarded as extraordinary feats of memory, but study of different versions of myths, tales, and other speeches shows that they were, in general, not recited verbatim, and performers developed their own characteristic styles and enjoyed varying reputations for effectiveness within their communities.”<sup>576</sup> In other words, as formalized as the performances were, they also reserved a significant place for artistic creativity and improvisation, based on multiple media. A mourning speech could sound and look similar to previous speeches, but it was created anew by each orator.<sup>577</sup>

---

<sup>575</sup> *JR*, 3: 73. “il n’y a pas moyen de leur mettre dans la caboche une tirade rangée de paroles.”

<sup>576</sup> Day and Foster, “Oral Literatures,” 74.

<sup>577</sup> The incorporation of Christian rhetoric and allegories thus provided Indian orators with new tools to achieve eloquence. In 1675 at the Mission Saint-François Xavier among the Iroquois, a mourning speech was given that epitomizes at the same time the normative and the dynamic nature of Indian oratory for which I argue: “Celui qui présidait, présentant à l’assemblée un riche collier de porcelaine, fit un long

Various orators may “clear paths” and “dress wounds,” but some did it with more eloquence – both verbal and nonverbal.

This fact had enormous repercussions for cross-cultural relations between French and Indians. It also holds important implications for our understanding of the colonial acculturation process. In May 1675, the Saint-François Xavier mission, situated in La Prairie de la Magdeleine outside of Québec, was in a fever of excitement. The first bishop of New France and founder of the *Séminaire de Québec*, François de Laval, was to visit the Jesuit missionaries and their Huron and Iroquois neophytes for the first time and to perform the Holy Mass for a remarkable crowd composed of Christian Frenchmen and women, Indian converts, and a number of “heathen” natives residing in the area. In order to properly welcome their prestigious guest, the mission Indians designed an elaborate ceremony that highlighted the multivocal and multidimensional nature of oratory. First, they prepared three different “stages” for their upcoming performances, gathering branches, moss, and leaves to form three “cradles” (or grottos) of greenery at strategic points along the path that the bishop was to take.<sup>578</sup> “When Monseigneur’s Canoe was

---

discours. Commençant par les choses que le défunt l’avoit chargé de leur dire de sa part, et, prenant en main ce beau collier : ‘voilà, leur dit-il, mes compagnons, la voix de nostre défunct frère. Considérez la bien, écoutez la bien. Il prétend qu’elle soit éternelle parmi vous, ou comme un reproche continuel de votre perfidie, si vous quittez la Foi, ou comme un gage précieux qu’il vous laisse de la récompense dont nous jouirons tous avec lui dans le paradis, si nous obéissons à la Voix de Dieu et à la sienne.” The use of wampum, the multivocal nature of the speech with the orator speaking in the name of the deceased, the entreaty to always remember the message deliver and the threat of what would occur if the audience failed to comply, all represent “traditional” elements of native oratory. In this sense, the addition of Christian language represents the more creative, stylistic, and artistic element that support the persuasiveness of the discourse.

<sup>578</sup> *JR*, 59: 270-72. “ils allèrent tous au bois et en rapportèrent chacun leur charge de branchages dont ils formèrent une allée agréable dans la grande place, qui est depuis la chapelle jusqu’au fleuve de Saint-Laurent. Au bout de cette allée, sur le bord de la rivière par où Monseigneur devait arriver, ils avaient placé une petite estrade élevée sur l’eau d’environ deux pieds. Au milieu de la même allée, ils avaient dressé un berceau, et ils l’ornèrent de divers feuillages affin que Monseigneur y pust recevoir leur premier compliment. Joignant l’eschafaut ils avoient disposé une longue allée de branchages, par laquelle on pust aller a l’ombre des feuilles depuis le bord de l’eau jusqu’à l’elise ; au milieu de cette allée qui estoit de 2 ou 300 pas estoit préparé un Cabinet de verdure avec des sieges de gazon ou se devoit faire le 2<sup>nd</sup>



within speaking distance, the Captain of the Hurons, who had taken his place with the elders of the same nation on the platform which we have mentioned, called out in a loud voice: ‘Bishop, stop your canoe, and listen to what I have to tell you.’<sup>579</sup> Laval, who had been “warned” to bear with native customs, graciously submitted and listened to the formal greeting speech of two Huron leaders.<sup>580</sup>

Space constituted an essential dimension of oratory, in several ways. First, the locality where a council or ceremony was to take place bore much meaning. Québec or Onontaghé, Tadoussac or Trois-Rivières, all represented places that carried a memory of important events and words and were thus invested with particular meaning. It seems that special gatherings took place in special locations, a point that would deserve further attention from scholars. At the more local level, the choice of holding an oration in the cabin of the Jesuit missionaries or in the longhouse of a local chief opposed to their presence also carried meaning and influenced the performance of the speech and its results. The enclosed space where the oration was given was also infused with a particular aura: generally, orators “prepared” the ground by covering it with finely made vegetal mats, bark, or furs, or in one instance, shields.<sup>581</sup> The seating arrangement of the

---

compliment ; et a la porte de l’église ou l’allée se terminoit estoit encore un autre berceau de feuillages ou Monseigneur devoit estre harangué pour la 3<sup>e</sup> fois.”

<sup>579</sup> *JR*, 59: 274. “Quand le canot de Monseigneur fut a la portée de la voix ; le Capitaine des Hurons avec les anciens de la mesme nation s’estant placés sur l’eschafaut dont nous avons parlé, cria tout haut, ‘Evesque arreste ton Canot, et escoute ce que J’ay a te dire.’”

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, 274. “On avoit prié Monseigneur l’esvesque de souffrir que nos sauvages usassent des leurs ceremonies ordinaires quand ils font des receptions, et s’estans fait expliquer ce compliment il prit plaisir à sa naiveté, et s’arresta volontiers pour escouter ces deux orateurs qui le haranguerent l’un apres l’autre en l’assurant de leurs Joye et de [leur respect] l’esperence qu’ils avoient que sa presence les combleroit des benedictions du Ciel, en le louant de son esprit de sa vertu et de sa dignité qui l’élevoit tant au dessus des autres maistres de la foy, et de la priere, et en l’invitant de prendre terre chès eux.”

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-88. Father Marquette provided an instance in which the French proceeded to add their own ‘touch’ to the meaningful set-up and decor of the stage where the oration was to take place : “ Ce fut une belle prairie proche du Bourg qu’on choisit pour ce grand conseil, et qu’on orna à la façon du país la

members of the audience was determined according to the socio-political state of affairs and the specific issues being discussed.<sup>582</sup> The distance from the orator had both practical and symbolic resonance. During a council where the responsibility of two Jesuit missionaries in the increasing number of deaths in the locality was to be determined and their fate decided, the two fathers were placed at the far end of the Huron longhouse. “Thereupon the Master of the solemn feast of the Dead, who is the chief of council for the whole country, began to speak,” reported Father Le Mercier, but “ he spoke so indistinctly that we lost many of his words ; therefore, after our Father Superior represented that, since the matter concerned us, it was fitting that we should correctly understand all that was said, (...) we went farther up, and took our places next to those who had the most bloody weapons to produce against us.”<sup>583</sup> Ordinarily, however, one was not free to sit where he or she pleased since the position within the room reflected

---

Couvrant de nattes et de peaux d’ours, et le p. ayant fait estendre sur des Cordes diverses pieces de taftas de chine, il y attacha quatre grandes images de la st. Vierge qui estoient veües de tous Costés.” *JR*, 21: 42. The choice of sitting on shields (the source does not specify if they were European-style metal shields, which is unlikely, or native vegetal shields) was clearly intended as bearing meaning about the status and function of the participants: “[The Iroquois] had the two negotiators of the peace [Father Ragueneau and Sieur Nicolet] sit upon a shield, and the two prisoners on the ground(...)” (“ils firent asseoir les deux mediateurs de la paix sur un bouclier, & les deux prisonniers à terre.”)

<sup>582</sup> *JR*, 27: 250. During a large council in Trois-Rivières, in presence of the French governor and of several tribes (Hurons, Montagnais, and Iroquois), the orations and ceremonies were performed in the “courtyard of the Fort, over which large sails had been spread to keep off the heat of the Sun” (“dans la cour du Fort où l’on fit estendre de grandes voiles contre l’ardeur du Soleil”). The Iroquois chose to sit on the same side as the French to demonstrate their close relationship to them. Also note the choice of material to serve as sitting mat: “Les Iroquois estoit assis à ses pieds [the governor’s] sur une grande écorce de pruce, ils avoient tesmoigné devant l’assemblée qu’ils vouloient se mettre de son costé por marque de l’affection qu’ils portoient aux François.” The seating arrangement was thus intended to convey a message to the audience about the status of the Iroquois and their relationship to the newcomers. Intertribal relations were also physically and spatially displayed: “A l’opposite estoient les Algonquins, les Montagnais, & les Attikamegues, les deux costez estoient fermez de quelques François et de quelques Hurons.”

<sup>583</sup> *JR*, 15: 40. “Le Maistre de la feste solemnelle des Morts, qui est le Chef du conseil de tout le païs, prit la parole et exaggera l’estat déplorable de sa nation (...), il parloit si peu distinctement, que nous perdions beaucoup de ses paroles ; c’est pourquoy le Père Superieur ayant représenté puis qu’il s’agissoit de nous, il estoit à propos que nous comprissions bien tout ce qui se diroit(...) nous monstasmes plus haut, & prisms place auprès de ceux qui avoient les pieces les plus sanglantes à produire contre nous.”

specific social, symbolic, or political position. Power and meaning were thus inscribed in multiple aspects of the space where oratory occurred.

Movement and circulation through space also constituted an important kinesic component of oratorical performances and their meaning. The most eloquent orators knew how to possess the space by using it to its fullest through their various gestures, dances, and pacing, or to maintain a stern and still composure when appropriate and to invest the space with respectful reserve instead.<sup>584</sup> In Saint-François-Xavier, each location where ritual orations were to take place had thus been visually and artificially marked with foliage.<sup>585</sup> The short journey of the bishop from the shore of the St. Lawrence River, where he landed, to the mission church was transformed into a rite of passage from without the community to within it, which was not without recalling similar spatial rituals during the early phase of the colonial encounter.<sup>586</sup>

Following the first oration by the two Huron elders, Bishop Laval was allowed to land and was then escorted along a chosen path to the next “cradle.” He marched ahead of a procession, led by Father Frémin, superior of the mission, and of a crowd of Iroquois men and women, who together proceeded to sing the *Veni Creator* in Iroquoian. Behind them followed a group of Frenchmen and women who sang the same tune, but in Latin, “alternately with the savages.” This cross-cultural and bi-lingual choir was an essential part of the greater enactment of oratory. Songs and music, like pantomime, were

---

<sup>584</sup> JR, 27 : 255. “il n’y a tabarin en France si naïf que ce Barbare. Il prenoit un baston, le mettoit sur sa teste comme un paquet, puis le portoit d’un bout de la place à l’autre, representant ce qu’avoit fait ce prisonnier dans les saults & le courant d’eau, ausquels estant arrivé, il avoit transporté son bagage pièce à pièce, il alloit & revenoit representant les voyages, les tours & retours du prisonnier, il cherchoit [sc. s’échouoit] contre une pierre, il reculoit plus qu’il n’avançoit dans son canot, ne le pouvant soutenir seul contre les courans d’eau, il perdoit courage puis reprenoit ses forces, bref, je n’ay rien veu de mieux exprimé que cette action.”

<sup>585</sup> This choice may have been inspired by the Christian story of Palm Sunday.

<sup>586</sup> See Cartier’s journey to Hochelaga in Chapter One. Water’s edge, the edge of a dwelling, and the edge of woods, all represent spiritual spaces, transitional areas.

omnipresent in native orations, often fulfilling the dual function of associating other participants more directly in the performance (through antiphonal singing), and of participating in the persuasiveness of the speech by repeating short key words or phrases in rhythm.

At the second grotto, Laval was made to stop again and the audience became silent. In this décor, two Iroquois leaders, an Onondaga captain and an elderly Oneida, pronounced the next speeches “in the name of all Five Iroquois nations,” which the French chroniclers regrettably failed to transcribe in any detail. It was not unusual to have multiple orators perform as part of the same oratorical event. Not only did orators commonly respond to each other’s arguments and engage into rhetorical jousting, but several speakers also complemented each other’s eloquence, based on their individual status (military chief or religious leader for instance) and personal oratorical styles. Orations were also deeply multivocal because one orator could adopt, through various phases of his speech, the voices of others. Rather than a figure of speech, the phrases “I speak for my people” or “it is not I who speaks but so-and-so” were understood literally as the intervention of individuals physically absent from the council, but whose power and voices invested the space nonetheless. The use of “traditional” metaphors and formulaic expressions that had been used for generations also symbolically associated ancestors and past communities to the speech.<sup>587</sup>

---

<sup>587</sup> “The Iroquois orator who employed these figures invested his speech with the power of the group both synchronically and (since the tropes were traditional) diachronically. His images identified him with the group, and the argument that he used the traditional figures to advance seemed to come from that group and to have the implicit endorsement not only of the speaker’s contemporaries but of previous generations who had employed the same figures as well. The use of traditional metaphors in oratory might carry the same weight as the epigraphs that essayists sometimes use to introduce their written arguments or the supporting quotations from recognized authorities with which academics bolster their scholarly publications.” Clements, *Oratory*, 90.

Because verbal art is by nature performative, the dialogue –sometimes vocal, sometimes silent and implicit—between the audience and the performer is an indispensable and constitutive component of oratory. “It is important to stress that when an orator speaks,” writes historian William Clements, “he or she has an audience that is as much a part of the performance as the orator. The presence of that audience recalls the fact that oratory, like every other kind of discourse, is dialogic, that the orator is always responding to and reacting to other discourse.”<sup>588</sup> In this sense, the mere presence of the French in the audience had a transformative power upon Indian oratory, and any native speeches that were recorded during the colonial period had been affected by culture change, even if the signs of acculturation sometimes seem imperceptible. In Saint-François Xavier in 1675, the discourse pronounced by the two Iroquois leaders was thus no more “traditional” than the one that was to follow. Indeed, the last orator, who spoke from atop a tree stump “which served him as a pulpit,” was a neophyte who had gained much regard and authority in the community by “instructing his brothers” in the Christian Gospel.

This Indian preacher, baptized Paul, “hereby made his compliment with a strength of spirit, a piety, and an eloquence incredible for a *Sauvage*.”<sup>589</sup> Before pronouncing his speech, Paul “took off his hat” (which seems to indicate that his dress may have been at least in part “Franco-Christian” as well), and “made the sign of the Cross, and lifting his eyes with his voice towards the sky, he thanked God for the grace it bequeathed upon

---

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>589</sup> *JR*, 59: 276. “Après quoy on s’advanca jusques au 2<sup>nd</sup> berceau soubz lequel sa grandeur fut haranguée pour la 3eme fois par nostre fervent catechiste nommé Paul qui estant accoutusmé a parler souvent en public pour Instruire ses freres fit icy son compliment avec une force d’esprit, une pieté, et une éloquence incroyable dans un Sauvage.”

them by sending his Lieutenant the Sy. Bishop.”<sup>590</sup> The choice of the orator and the content and style of his speech were appropriate to the occasion and strategically fashioned by and for his primary audience: Bishop Laval, along with the Jesuits fathers and the Indian converts of the Saint-François Xavier mission. When Paul finished his speech, Laval entered the church and performed Holy Sacrament ceremonies, still accompanied by intermittent bi-lingual singing from the audience.<sup>591</sup> What could be interpreted as signs of successful Christianization among mission Indians and thus hastily equated to a “loss” or decrease in “traditional” beliefs and practices among natives may not have appeared as such to the participants themselves. This is suggested by the fact that “some infidel Iroquois, who had recently arrived from their own country,” were said to have equally performed “all the same respects and submissions as our Christians.”<sup>592</sup>

Attention to the multiple nonverbal dimensions of Indian oratory therefore has the power to challenge traditional conceptions of cultural hybridity and the acculturation process. If we consider Indian verbal art as a dialogic and dynamic event rather than a fixed form of linguistic expression, it is possible to conceive that the natives participating in such cross-cultural ceremonies did not perceive “French” or “Catholic” elements as foreign or out-of-place. Instead, the manipulation of Christian rhetoric, kinesic performances (such as genuflection), and other nonverbal elements (such as hymns), was

---

<sup>590</sup> Ibid. “Estant donc monté sur un tronc d’arbre qui lui servoit de Chaire il osta son chapeau fit le signe de Croix et eslevant ses yeaux avec sa voix au ciel il remercia Dieu de la grace qu’il leur faisoit de leur envoyer le Sy. Evesque son lieutenant et demanda encore celle de profiter de sa visite.”

<sup>591</sup> Ibid. “Ce discours fini Monseigneur entra dans l’église où le Père Cholenec en surplis luy presenta l’eau benite, et fit apres le salut du St. Sacrement, ou les françois et les sauvages chanterent encore a deux chœurs le pange lingua l’avé maris stella, et le domine saluum fac regem ; apres quoy les sauvages seuls hommes et femmes alternativement chanterent un second motet du St. Sacrement.”

<sup>592</sup> Ibid, 278. “Des Iroquois infideles, arrivés depuis peu de leur pays, et qui ne respiraient que la guerre et la fierté, la reçurent aussi en rendant à sa Grandeur tous les mêmes devoirs et toutes les mêmes soumissions que nos Chrétiens, comme si la présence d’un si bon pasteur eût changé ces cruels loups en de doux agneaux.”

inscribed within the multimedia form of eloquence commonly practiced by the best Indian orators. Similarly, attempts by the French to emulate Indian oratory, as long as it fulfilled the essential norms of the style (proper context, repetition and vocalization-change in pitch and tone of the voice for instance) and used some familiar devices (figures of speech, wampum, gift-giving), may have been seen by at least some natives as successful (i.e. legitimate and persuasive) performances of oratory, in which innovations and the introduction of new personal styles was not excluded.<sup>593</sup>

\*

\*

\*

### **Trust, Deceit, and the Power of Nonverbal Eloquence**

Native oratory thus seemingly offered an ideal space for cross-cultural accommodation, which is why it had been used for generations to mediate inter- and intra-tribal dealings. Its performative nature, numerous nonverbal features, and repetitiveness facilitated its understanding and emulation by outsiders, such as European observers. Because it comprised music, dancing, and play-acting, oratory was also invested by newcomers with a certain “entertainment value.” Indian orations could seem long and tedious to the French, but they could also represent a true source of enjoyment and multisensory *divertissement*, with or without mutual understanding, particularly if the

---

<sup>593</sup> While we should be critical of emphatic claims of success and of the “admiration” and “awe” expressed by Indians during Jesuit performances, we should also recognize that in the large majority of cases, French performances of Indian-style oratory led to positive results. It is also possible that the Indians, who valued eloquence and intelligence, gave more authority or power to the rare Frenchmen who could speak their language well enough to demonstrate their arguments convincingly.

performer was impassioned and the ceremony colorful and sonorous.<sup>594</sup> To some extent, native ceremonies truly intended to properly “entertain” guests (as well as “spirits” or “Manitou” when considered to be present), through food, pleasant performance, and refined rhetoric. But beyond the mundane aspects of collective feasts lay important psychological implications, more largely tied to the general socio-political function of oratory. Ceremonies and speeches were intended to foster a neutral and comfortable space at a time of disorder or tension (or to consolidate existing peace or harmony), which allowed trust to develop between the participants despite their most solid divergences of opinion or their deepest misunderstandings. Without trust, the orator could not be invested with credibility by his audience and would lose his persuasiveness: no consensus, no peace, no trade agreement, no success could thus prevail without the creation of the proper conditions of oratory.<sup>595</sup>

Trust was therefore, unsurprisingly, one of the most prevalent themes in Indian rhetoric. Several figures of speech were used at the beginning of orations to affirm the truthfulness of the words to come. In Iroquoia, truth was thus rhetorically associated with the sun because of the light it shed upon the speaker’s intentions. An Onondaga chief

---

<sup>594</sup> After comparing many French descriptions of native ceremonies, I came to think that whether the observers enjoyed the performance or disliked it largely depended on personality and individual taste, rather than cultural, religious, or social background.

<sup>595</sup> The connection between trust/truth and power/control has also been emphasized by Sandra Gustafson in her study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century eloquence in the British colonies of North America. Although the meaning and forms of expression of authenticity vary according to specific historical and cultural contexts, the general and complex link between trust/authenticity/consensus/power seems to be culturally overarching and temporally enduring. “Power is related to, and often flows from, claims to authenticity. (...) Cultural authenticity demands clear origins of its practitioners; they must be originals in the sense that they originate in the community that they claim to represent. The ethic of transparency in the late eighteenth century mandated the speaker’s emotional authenticity and created a spectacle of sincerity. As forms of emotional authenticity, sincerity and sensibility helped to redefine power from domination to consent. The orator’s display of emotion staged a wide range of effects that focused on the negotiation of consensual social relations.” Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xxi.



who sought to establish a new peace with the French in 1652 introduced his oration to the French governor through a mixture of words and gestures that metaphorically expressed the honesty of his message before delivering it: “everyone being seated, he rose, and first invoked the sun, as a faithful witness of the sincerity of his thoughts, as a torch which banned the night, and the darkness from his heart, in order to give a truthful light to his words.”<sup>596</sup> An elder Huron orator named Ontitarac similarly opened the proceedings during a council in 1638 by exhorting all participants to speak the truth: “thus speak frankly, he said, and may no one dissimulate what he will know of the truth.”<sup>597</sup> Gifts were also intended as a lasting testimony and guarantee of the sincerity of one’s discourse, or as thanks for one’s honesty.<sup>598</sup> In more than one way, truthfulness was material and physical. Both the French and the Indians shared the concept that “being truthful” meant ‘speaking and/or acting’ according to one’s heart. Reciprocally, deceitfulness was characterized by a disconnection between one’s true intentions and thoughts and one’s bodily actions. This is why among natives and Frenchmen alike,

---

<sup>596</sup> *JR*, 40: 164. “Tout le monde estans assis : il se leva, invoquant premierement le Soleil, comme témoin fidèle, de la sincérité de ses pensées, comme un flambeau, qui bannissoit la nuit, & les ténèbres de son cœur : pour donner un jour véritable à ses paroles.” Also in *JR*, 21 : 43 [Iroquois-1640] : “ Là dessus, l’un des Capitaines, nommé Onagan, se leve, prend le Soleil à témoing de la sincérité de son procedé, puis parle en ces termes.”

<sup>597</sup> *JR*, 15: 40. “parlez donc franchement, disoit-il, & que personne ne dissimule ce qu’il sçaura estre de la vérité.”

<sup>598</sup> *JR*, 43: 108 “par un autre present, je connois, disoit-il, l’esprit d’Onnontio, je sçay que le François est véritable en ces promesses. Si je voy quelqu’un de mes gens tué sur la Rivière, je n’aurai aucun soupçon que ce soit par la trahison des François.”; *JR*, 62: 102. “un autre collier de porcelaine pour remercier les Onnontaguez de leur honnesteté.”

On gifts strenghtening and symbolizing the truthfulness of words, see *JR*, 40: 202. “ On commença par l’exhibition des presens, qu’on estendit sur une corde, qui traversoit toute la sale [sic]. Ce n’estoient que des coliers de porcelaine fort larges, des bracelets, des pendans d’oreilles : et des calumets ou petunoirs. Chacun ayant pris sa place : le plus ancien de ces Ambassadeurs, prit la parole, disant à toute l’assistance, qu’il venoit de déplier l’affection, & l’amitié de ceux de sa nation, figurée sur ces coliers ; que le cœur estoit tout ouvert, qu’il n’y avoit aucun ply, qu’on voyoit dans ses paroles, le fond de leurs ames.” Here the wampum belts that had been unfolded and hung on a rope were testimonies of the lack of dissimulation in the Iroquois’ hearts, hence the reference to the absence of “folds” in the heart.

suspicious actions and behaviors, more than words, were perceived as signs of potential treachery.<sup>599</sup>

Orations thus offered pivotal opportunities to try to distinguish whether the words—or “the mouth” to use a common metonymy—reflected the genuine ideas and intent of the speaker—his “heart.” In 1644, Kiotsaedon, a tall Iroquois “ambassador” in Trois-Rivières, rose, looked at the Sun, then began his speech while holding the first of seventeen wampum belts he was to elucidate and offer to the French governor: “Onontio, lend me ear,” he said in a loud voice. “I am the mouth for the whole of my country; you listen to all the Iroquois, in hearing my words. There is no evil in my heart; I have only good songs in my mouth.”<sup>600</sup> Ten years later, it was another Iroquois chief who pledged to the Hurons, who doubted the authenticity of their desire to make peace: “our heart matches our words.”<sup>601</sup> Despite frequent French comments deprecating the treacherous and unreliable nature of the Indians, lying and deception were clearly stigmatized in

---

<sup>599</sup> When the Jesuit fathers residing in the Huron mission of St. Joseph were being suspected of causing the wave of deaths plaguing the town, all their actions became scrutinized by the Indians who feared that the newcomers were casting evil spells on them. *JR*, 15: 32. “Ils s’ombragent de la moindre de nos actions : qui se plaint de ce que les matins nous tenons nostre porte fermee ; possible, disent-ils pour quelque sort. Qui nous soupçonne de quelque sinistre dessein, lors que sur le soir nous chantons nos Litanies. (...) Ny eust pas iusqu’a la floüette [girouette] que nous avons fait mettre en haut d’un sapin qui ne leur donna matiere de parler.” Brother Gabriel Sagard similarly was suspected of casting spells when he walked around the town murmuring his prayers at regular times of the day. For French suspicion of Indian actions, see Pierre Esprit Radisson, *Voyage of Peter Esprit Radisson, Being an Account of His Travels and Experiences among the North American Indians, from 1652 to 1684; transcribed from original manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and the British Museum*. (New York: Burt Franklin [1885] 1967), 96. “their speech was cleare contrary to their designed, and promises inviolably friendship.”

<sup>600</sup> *JR*, 27: 252. “Kiotsaeton qui estoit d’une haute stature se leva, et regardant le Soleil, & puis tournant ses yeux sur toute la Compagnie, il prit un collier de porcelaine en sa main, commençant sa harangue d’une voix forte : Onontio preste l’oreille, je suis la bouche de tout mon pays, tu escoute tous les Iroquois entendant ma parole, mon cœur n’a rien de mauvais, je n’ay que de bonnes chansons en bouche, nous avons des tas de chansons de guerre en nostre pays, nous les avons jetées par terre, nous n’avons plus que des chants de jouissance, & là-dessus il se mit à chanter, ses compatriotes respondirent (...)”

<sup>601</sup> *JR*, 40: 178. “notre Coeur s’accorde avec nos paroles.”

native society.<sup>602</sup> The theme of truth was also developed in discourses that accused enemy tribes or European visitors of treason and dishonesty. When a delegation of sixty Onondagas came to request an alliance with the French but were met with suspicion and unwillingness to negotiate in view of past tensions with the Iroquois, one of the Indians declared that “one ought to distinguish carefully between Nation and Nation.” He contrasted the truthfulness of his people with the untruthfulness of the Mohawks “who cherish their rancor and bitterness of their Heart, deep in their breast, when their tongue is uttering some fair words.” The Onondaga orator then expressed the full physicality of his people’s honesty, declaring that he “spoke with every part of his body, from his little toes to the top of his head, and that there was nothing in his heart, nor in any of his other members, that denied what had come out of his mouth.”<sup>603</sup>

In some instance, therefore, the French perceived nonverbal elements of Indian performances and the close observation of Indian sensory expressions as undeniable proofs of honesty and “love” for the newcomers. Recalling the warm welcome that a group of Jesuit fathers and lay Frenchmen received from the Five Iroquois nations gathered in Onondaga in 1656, one chronicler reported that the Indians “showed in their

---

<sup>602</sup> *JR*, 43: 126. “nous sçavions bien que le mensonge, les fourbes, les déloiautés estoient presque aussi naturelles à ces peuples que la vie. Nous les cognoissions tres portés, et très accoutumés au sang, au feu, et au carnage.” ;

*JR*, 40 : 156. “oui, mais dira quelqu’un, les Iroquois sont des perfides ? [sic] Ils ne font la paix, que pour la trahir plus avantageusement dans une nouvelle guerre. Nous avons desiá [sic] eu la paix avec eux et ils l’ont violée.” The theme of the “treacherous savage” was particularly targeted in the Iroquois nation. This seems to indicate that the French were profoundly influenced in their judgment of the Iroquois by the rhetoric employed by the Hurons and Algonquins, with whom the French had historically entertained earlier and closer bonds, and who were engaged in violent warfare against the Iroquois during the period.

<sup>603</sup> *JR*, 40: 164. “ Le Capitaine répondit qu’il falloit bien distinguer, entre Nation et Nation, que les Onnontaëronnons n’estoient pas infidèles, comme les Iroquois Annierhronnons, qui recuisent leur fiel et l’amertume de leur Coeur, au milieu de la poitrine, quand leur langue profere quelques bonnes paroles. Que pour luy, à qui toute la Nation avoit fait entendre ses intentions, qu’il parloit de toutes les parties de son corps, depuis ses plus petits orteils iusques au sommet de sa teste ; & qu’il n’avoit rien dans son cœur, ny dans le reste de ses membres, qui dementit ce qui estoit sortit de sa bouche.”

eyes and in their gestures the feelings of a heart filled with tenderness for us.”<sup>604</sup> The Iroquois received the French in the longhouse of the most prominent leader of the country, presenting their best dishes of meat, fish, and platters of fruits to the visitors, and taking many pains to ensure they were comfortable. But, beyond hospitality, it was the eyes of the Iroquois hosts that spoke genuine emotions across cultural barriers: “never were seen so many bright faces; it seemed as if the hearts of the savages were leaping out of their eyes; and I do not think that it is possible, without having seen it, to conceive the manifestations of love and cordiality with which they greeted us.”<sup>605</sup> The emotional connection experienced by the French with their hosts during these ceremonies was so strong that fear and the constant precariousness of their fate seemed to fade for a rare moment from French consciousness. The author was so convinced of the truthfulness of the feelings he had observed that he stated: “if after all this they betray us and massacre us, I will blame them not of dissimulation, but of frivolity and inconstancy, which can change in a short time the love and trust of these barbarians into fear, hatred, and perfidy.”<sup>606</sup>

---

<sup>604</sup> *JR*, 43: 158. “ Si ces pauvres gens nous faisoient tout l’accueil possible, faisant voir dans leurs yeux et dans leurs gestes les sentimens de leur Coeur tout remply de tendresse pour nous ; nos actions correspondoient à leur amour, en sorte que dans tous ces témoignages de joye et d’affection reciproque, nous benissions Dieu de ce qu’il nous avoit conservez parmy tant de peines, de dangers, et de fatigues, & de ce qu’il nous avoit enfin conduit au bout de notre pelerinage.”

<sup>605</sup> *JR*, 43: 162. “Nous fûmes conduits dans la Cabane de l’un des plus notables & des plus fameux Capitaines du païs, où toutes choses estoient bien préparées pour nous recevoir à leur mode : on nous apportoit des fruicts de tous costez, ce n’estoient que festins, & dix jours durant la pesche et la chasse de cette bourgade fut employée pour regaler les François ; chaque famille nous voulant avoir à l’envy. Quelques temps apres une autre escouade de François en bonne conche arrivant tambour battant, on ne vit jamais tant de visages epanouïs, il sembloit que les cœurs des Sauvages sortoient par leurs yeux, & je ne croy pas qu’on puisse concevoir, sans l’avoir veu, les tesmoignages d’amour et de cordialités qu’ils nous donnoient.”

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.* “Si apres tout cela ils nous trahissent & nous massacrent, je les accuserai non pas de dissimulation, mais de legereté et d’inconstance, qui peut changer en peu de temps l’amour & la confiance de ces Barbares en crainte, haine et perfidie.”

\*

\*

\*

However, a profound contradiction lay at the core of French colonial attitudes towards native oratory. The same performative elements that were intended to foster trust and accommodation, and commanded the respect and admiration of many observers, also caused the French to be on their guard because of parallels they perceived between Indian oratory and European performing arts such as theatre, ballet, and opera. The Jesuits, in particular, tended to describe Indian oratory as a theatrical performance, and Indian orators as skilled actors who used a variety of devices to deceive and manipulate their audiences. Here was the most profound paradox about Indian oratory as a multimedia performance in the colonial period: while it played an extraordinarily important role in favoring accommodation and facilitating the Europeans' conformity to native diplomatic standards and the reciprocal adoption of European elements into native practices, it also undermined French-Indian relations by raising a pervasive suspicion of inauthenticity. Nonverbal elements were double-edged: they entertained, favored mutual understanding and mediation, fostered trust, and provided French orators with crucial tools to be heard and to gain influence upon native populations; at the same time, in the Westerners' minds, they seemingly manifested the artificiality of native words and rituals and offered new grounds for criticism and proto-racial prejudices. During most of the seventeenth century, therefore, Jesuit missionaries engaged in a deeply contradictory relationship with oratory, using it to compete against powerful Indian leaders and beliefs that they deemed incompatible to Christianity and even drawing a certain personal satisfaction from their performances, while at the same time attacking its Indian examples as the epitome of native vice and deceitfulness.

Native ceremonies appeared codified and non-spontaneous to the French in part because they were collective and repetitive. To Westerners, genuine sentiments did not seem capable of being expressed through codified and impersonal practices such as ritual weeping or rhythmic dancing. This could seem paradoxical to a people who weekly gathered in lavish places of worship to celebrate their God through thoroughly choreographed combinations of gestures, words, and songs. But French prejudices against the “heathens” of North America made them perceive more similarity between Indian rituals and profane entertainment than with Catholic practices. The fact that newcomers first turned to nonverbal elements of native ceremonies to try to gather knowledge about Indian cultures and beliefs may have given them the impression that Indian life and sometimes emotions were “staged” and disingenuous. Father Pierre Biard, who traveled in the early seventeenth century through Acadia, expressed in a letter to his superiors his frustration with the hours-long Indian ceremonial conventions with which the French had to comply. “Do you know,” he wrote, “how well they know how to make themselves courted? They speak like brothers to the King, and it is not expected that they will withdraw in the least from the whole play. One has to give them presents, and harangue them well before they agree to the trade. And once this is done, one still has to *tabagier* them, that is to say to feast them.”<sup>607</sup> Indians seemed so presumptuous in their demands for compliance that Biard found it ludicrous. By using the word “play,” the father suggested the artificiality, ridicule, and potential duplicity of Indian rituals.

---

<sup>607</sup> JR, 3: 80. “Et sçavez vous s’ils entendent bien à se faire courtiser. Ils tranchent des freres avecques le Roy, & ne leur faut rien rabattre de toute la piece. Il leur fait faire des presents, & bien haranguer avant qu’ils accordent la traicte ; & icelle faicte, faut encore les Tabagier, c’est-à-dire, les banqueter. Alors ils danseront, harangueront, & chanteront *Adequidex*, *Adesquidex*, sçavoir est qu’il sont les bons amys, alliés, associés, confederés, & comperes du Roy et des François.” Thwaites has the word “farce” to translate “play” which conveys the same idea but is guilty of overtranslating.

Similarly, many Frenchmen, although learned in Indian ways for pragmatic reasons, continued to overlook the symbolic meaning of ceremonies and to conceive native oratory as a set of simplistic and unchanging rules with which one had to comply in order to achieve successful accommodation, trade, or diplomatic agreement.

The multidimensional nature of oratory, with its complex concoction of evocative words, pantomime, songs, costumes, accessories, and dances, also contributed to equate Indian ceremonies to public *divertissement* rather than to Western diplomacy or worship. The dialogic and antiphonal components of oratory called to mind Greek dramas and their choruses. Orators spoke in tones that recalled those of public announcers and jesters.<sup>608</sup> It was essentially because Indian oratory was much more than rhetoric that it made a lasting impression on French observers and recalled memories of European amusements. Father Jacques Marquette compared the extremely sophisticated calumet rituals of the Illinois Indians to “the entertainment of the Bal or the Comedy.”<sup>609</sup> Marquette, who was one of the first Europeans to record his travels in the upper Mississippi Valley between 1673 and 1675, noted that the “Calumet Dance” was highly prized by the Illinois and for that reason, was performed only on special occasions, “to

---

<sup>608</sup> *JR*, 15 : 156. “Ils n’ont point de police du tout: ce que les capitaines ont de pouvoir est à peu près comme les crieurs et trompettes ; ils crient à pleine teste par les carrefours. Le ton qu’ils gardent en leur harangue est justement le ton des prisonniers du petit Châtelet de Paris.” This final reference to the prison of the Petit Châtelet has become obscure to us. The Petit Châtelet, which had been destroyed by a flood in 1296, was rebuilt in the late fourteenth century by Charles V “for the purpose of restraining the turbulence of the scholars of the university, who were frequently in a state of insurrection.” It is possible that educated prisoners shouted their ideas through the windows. “By a decree of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 1398, Charles VI ordered that the prisons of the Petit Châtelet should be annexed to those of the Grand Châtelet, which had become insufficient and overcrowded.” William Walton, *Paris from the Earliest Period to the Present Day*, 10 Volumes (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Son, 1902), 7: 59.

<sup>609</sup> *JR*, 59: 132. “La Dance du Calumet, qui est fort celebre parmi ces peuples, ne se fait que pour des sujets considerables ; quelquefois c’est pour affermir la paix, ou se réunir pour quelque grande guerre ; c’est d’autre fois pour une jouissance publique, tantost on en fait l’honneur à une Nation qu’on invite d’y assister, tantost ils s’en servent à la reception de quelque personne considerable, comme s’ils vouloient luy donner le divertissement du Bal ou de la Comedie.”

assert the peace, or to gather for some great war; and other times for public rejoicing, to honor a Nation whom we invite to attend it, or to welcome some person of significance.”<sup>610</sup> For Marquette, therefore, it was first the purpose or celebratory context of the ceremony—to entertain and mark a particular occasion—that resembled the use that the French traditionally made of the performing arts. But it was also the “show,” quite literally, that the Illinois staged and performed with unequaled artistry that suggested the comparison to Marquette.

The center-stage where the ceremony was to be performed was marked by a “large mat of rushes, painted in various colors” upon which had been placed a material representation of the main orator’s “Manitou” (“*Le Dieu de celuy qui fait la Dance*”), surrounded by the calumet on the right and an assortment of various weapons arranged circularly (“*tout à l’entour on fait comme une trophée*”).<sup>611</sup> Once it begun, the ceremony seemed to be composed of clear, choreographed “stages,” which evoked to Marquette the “scenes of a ballet.” The “first scene of the Ballet,” he recounted, consisted in the entrance of the performers—composed of the best male and female singers of the tribe—who saluted the Manitou by blowing smoke in his direction, and by “dancing [the calumet] in cadence” while holding the pipe with both hands: “[each dancer] makes it execute many different figures; sometimes he shows it to the whole assembly, turning himself from one side to the other. After that, he who is to begin the Dance appears in the

---

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

<sup>611</sup> JR, 59: 132. “La place étant choisie, on l’environne tout à l’entour d’arbres pour mettre tout le monde à l’ombre de leur feuillages, pour se defendre des chaleurs du Soleil ; on étend une grande natte de joncs peinte de diverses couleurs au milieu de la place ; elle sert comme de tapis pour mettre dessus avec honneur le Dieu de celuy qui fait la Dance ; car chacun a le sien, qu’ils appellent leur Manitou, c’est un serpent, ou un oyseau ou autre chose semblable, qu’ils ont resvé en dormant et en qui ils mettent toute leur confiance pour le succez de leur guerre, de leur pesche et de leur chasse : près de ce Manitou, et à sa droite, on met le Calumet en l’honneur de qui se fait la feste et tout à l’entour on fait comme une trophée et on étend les armes dont se servent les guerriers de ces Nations, sçavoir la massüe, la hache d’arme, l’arc, le carquois et les flesches.”



middle of the assembly, and leads, and sometimes he presents it to the sun as if he wished the latter to smoke it; sometimes he inclines it toward the earth; other times, he spreads its wings, as so to fly, and at other times he brings it to the mouths of the participants.”<sup>612</sup> Although Marquette had mastered the rudiments of the Illinois language, he omitted the words and lyrics of the songs being sung to describe instead the silent language of the dance he witnessed.

The second “scene” resembled even more a theatrical representation, as it was meant to realistically depict the combat between two men: “This show is very pleasant,” Marquette admitted, “especially the fact that they still do it in cadence: for one attacks, and the other defends himself; one strikes, and the other blocks; one runs, and the other follows him, and then the one who was running away turns his face and the enemy now flees; this is done so well, with slow and measured steps, and to the rhythmic sound of the voices and drums, that it might pass for a very fine opening of a Ballet in France.”<sup>613</sup> It was thus the musicality, rhythm, and order of the performance that reminded Marquette of French ballets. The third and final “stage” or “scene” of the ceremony included

---

<sup>612</sup> *JR*, 59: 134. “Chacun va d’abord avec respect prendre le Calumet et le soutenant des deux mains, il le fait dancer en cadence, s’accordant bien avec l’air des chansons ; il luy fait faire des figures bien differentes, tantost il le fait voir à toute l’assemblée se tournant de côté et d’autre; après cela, celuy qui doit commencer la Danse paroist au milieu de l’assemblée, et va d’abord, et tantost il le presente au soleil comme s’il le voulait faire f’umer, tantost il l’incline vers la terre, d’autre fois il luy étend les aisles comme pour voler, d’autres fois il l’approche de la bouche des assistants (...).”

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-136. “La seconde consiste en un Combat qui se fait au son d’une espece de tambour, qui succede au chansons, ou mesme en s’y joignant, s’accordent fort bien ensemble : le Danseur fait signe à quelque guerrier de venir prendre les armes qui sont sur la natte et l’invite a se battre au son des tambours : celuy-ci s’approche, prend l’arc et la flèche, avec la hache d’armes et commence le d’uel contre l’autre, qui n’a point d’autre défense que le Calumet. Ce spectacle est fort agreable, sur tout le faisant toujourns en cadence ; car l’un attaque, l’autre se deffend ; l’un porte les coups, l’autre les pare ; l’un fuit, l’autre le poursuit et puis celuy qui fuyoit tourne le visage et [136] fait fuir son ennemy ; ce qui se passe si bien par mesure et à pas comptez et au son réglé des voix et des tambours, que cela pourrait passer pour une assez belle entrée de Ballet en France.”

displays of eloquence in the form of a long oration recounting battles and victories, accompanied with the usual gifts and smoking of the calumet.

But Marquette's enthusiasm was rare among his peers. In diplomatic contexts, particularly, the French constructed a perception of native oratorical proceedings as manipulative and ingenuous. In 1641, the French engaged in a long parley with the Iroquois for the liberation of two French prisoners, François Marguerie and Thomas Godefroy, and the potential alliance that could result with the Five Nations. Governor Montmagny attended the negotiations in Trois Rivières, during which many speeches and gifts were exchanged. The Jesuit chronicler remarked that, after the French had made and elucidated the meaning of all their presents, the Iroquois, who were dissatisfied for not having received any firearms, manipulated traditional rhetoric to obtain what they sought. The Iroquois orator thus noted that the French's oration was incomplete, as it had not addressed the "breaking of the bonds" of the prisoners. This led the French to make additional gifts but, still, no weapons. The Indians then proceeded to display more gifts of wampum by which they invited the French to come to their "country," facilitated the voyage by canoe, and pledged to uphold the peace with the French native allies (Algonquians and Hurons). In addition, "they offered a third [gift] in the name of the Hiroquois youth, that their Uncle Onontio, the great Captain of the French, might present to them some arquebuses."<sup>614</sup> Finally, they celebrated the "generosity and liberality" of the French and symbolically "kicked the Dutch, with whom they no longer wished to

---

<sup>614</sup> *JR*, 21: 52. "ils en offrent un troisième au nom de la jeunesse Hiroquoise, à ce que leur oncle Onontio grand capitaine des François, leur fit present de quelques arquebuses"

have any commerce, they said.”<sup>615</sup> In the end, however, despite their best efforts, the French governor refused to seal the peace with the Five Nations.

The Jesuit observer gave clues as to how the notion of “manipulation” and its ties to the performative and ritualized nature of Indian diplomacy may have informed this decision: “Observe, I beseech you by the way, the procedure of these people and no longer tell me that the Savages are brute beasts; certainly they do not lack good training,” he wrote as a prelude. He asked his readers:

Could they have more artfully induced us to give them arms? Could they more ingeniously insinuate themselves into our friendship, than by restoring our prisoners and offering to us gifts, than by indicating their willingness to be on good terms with those whom we protect in their presence, than by inviting us into their country, assuring us that they prefer us to the Dutch, extolling us above the generality of men? Such is their conduct, which lacks indeed the Spirit of the children of God, but not the spirit of the Children of the world.<sup>616</sup>

Eloquence and persuasive nonverbal style could be read, and often was, as a sign of the manipulative nature of the Indians. This predominant distrust towards oratory reflected the Cartesian rationalist doctrine and the philosophical traditions from which it emerged in the seventeenth century. Unlike Aristotle, who praised oratory as the height of human achievement, Descartes believed that eloquence hid the truth and that ‘sophistic’ rhetoric was antirational because it celebrated the orator’s performance above the content of the

---

<sup>615</sup> *JR*, 21: 52-54. “ils produisirent quelques peaux de castor pour asseurer qu’estans de retour en leurs Bourgades, ils feroient une assemblée générale des personnes les plus considérables de toutes les Nation Hiroquoises, pour publier toute la generosité et la liberalité des François : Bref ils font un dernier present pour témoigner qu’ils donnoient un coup de pied aux Hollandois, avec lesquels ils ne vouloient plus avoir de commerce, disoient-ils.”

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, 54. “Remarqués, je vous supplie en passant, le procédé de ces peuples, & ne me dites plus, que les Sauvages sont des bestes brutes ; assurément ils ne manquent pas de bonne education (...) Nous pouvoient-ils plus finement induire à leur donner des armes ? Se pouvoient-ils plus finement insinuer dans nostre amitié qu’en nous rendant nos prisonniers, nous offrant des presens, qu’en témoignant qu’ils vouloient entrer en bonne intelligence avec eux que nous protegions en leur presence, qu’en nous invitans en leur païs, nous assurons qu’ils preferoient aux Hollandois, nous extollant pardessus [sic] le commun des hommes : Voila leur conduite qui manque, à la vérité, du vray Esprit des enfans de Dieu ; mais non pas de l’esprit des enfans du siecle.”

speech.<sup>617</sup> The debates surrounding the reliability of native oratory in the New World were thus the extension of larger questions over the manipulation of one's senses through oratorical performances being discussed in Europe at the time.

As a group, the Jesuits displayed particularly ambiguous attitudes towards Indian oratory that, in fact, reflected a larger set of contradictions in the Society's view and use of theatre. In many ways, few Europeans were in a better position than the Jesuits to understand and appreciate Indian oratory and its multiple dimensions. The *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599, which described the scholastic principles and methods of the Society, made a priority of turning the Jesuit pupils into confirmed, confident, and convincing orators.<sup>618</sup> To this end, the novices assiduously studied classical authors and regularly practiced both public oratory and private sermon. In addition to developing written and spoken eloquence, daily exercises were aimed at strengthening public presence, or charisma, and mastering an "unaffected poise."<sup>619</sup> The stakes were high in training effective public orators. In the missions in particular, the fate of the world and the victory of God on earth were believed to rest on the tip of their silver tongues. The Jesuits' educational system and methods were in many regards innovative, notably including "vivid dramatic performances for the entire citizenry," which, as noted by a number of scholars, had far-reaching social and political effects upon seventeenth-century French

---

<sup>617</sup> For a concise overview of European conflicting opinions of oratory from Antiquity to the Renaissance, see Clements, *Oratory*, esp. 9-13. A more complete study is George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

<sup>618</sup> On Jesuit training, see John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. 90-126, 221-26, 253-60; Victor Egon Hanzeli, *Missionary Linguistics in New France: A Study of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Descriptions of American-Indian Language* (La Hague: Mouton, 1969), 30-44.

<sup>619</sup> Joseph P. Donnelly, S.J., *Jacques Marquette, S.J., 1637-1675* (Chicago : Loyola University Press, 1968), 20-23. "The end product of Jesuit education was the poised, able, fervent Catholic, eminently prepared to influence the social world which he was about to enter."

society.<sup>620</sup> In fact, because of their distinctive use of baroque rhetoric and their reputations as performers, the Jesuits ironically became, after the mid-sixteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, victims of accusations similar to those they themselves made against Indian performers: “*jésuitisme*,” explains literary scholar Marc Fumaroli, “became in vernacular French a synonym for sophistry and hypocrisy and the Jesuits themselves were held to be arch-enemies of common sense as well as of scientific truth.”<sup>621</sup>

Theatre was, next to oratory, a crucial component of Jesuit methods at home and abroad.<sup>622</sup> A number of scholarly works have emphasized the recourse to music, ballet, iconography, and theatre (including musical theatre and opera) by missionaries around the world in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.<sup>623</sup> Drama first emerged

---

<sup>620</sup> “It was here that the Jesuits played a crucial role, through their scholarship and teaching and through a series of initiatives ensuring that education extended beyond secondary education so as to permeate all society. While they authored sermons, writings, and, most strikingly, vivid dramatic performances for the entire citizenry, their most significant contribution here was that delivered through the Marian *congrégations* (in Latin, *sodalitates*), which they ran for adult men, differentiated according to social class.” Judi Loach, “Revolutionary Pedagogues: How Jesuits Used Education to Change Society,” in O’Malley et al., ed., *The Jesuits*, 2: 67.

<sup>621</sup> Marc Fumaroli, “The Fertility and Shortcomings of Renaissance Rhetoric: the Jesuit Case,” in O’Malley et al., ed., *The Jesuits*, 1: 90. Fumaroli efficiently challenges this black legend, arguing that “we can no longer regard the Jesuits of the *ancien régime* solely as teachers of foul rhetoric, as Renan did, or as extravagantly baroque preachers. Neither can we reduce Jesuit rhetoric entirely to routine or to negligible recipes for the classroom and the pulpit. (...) Far from being a trite technique of manipulation or pretence, the rhetoric of the Humanists and, later, the Jesuits was the creative driving force of their ethics, spirituality, exegesis, anthropology, and theology.” *Ibid*, 1: 91.

<sup>622</sup> “In the last several years, scholars of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries have labored mightily to extend our appreciation of the ‘Jesuit style’ of theatre in the early modern world and have underscored the critical role played by Jesuit performance in the construction not only of Catholic but also of local cultures within the ambit of Jesuit colleges.” Michael Zampelli, S.J., “*Lascivi Spettacoli*: Jesuits and Theatre (from the Underside),” *ibid*, 2: 550. Key works on Jesuit theatre include: J.-M. Valentin, *Les Jésuites et le théâtre (1554-1680): Contribution à l’histoire culturelle du monde catholique dans le Saint-Empire romano-germanique* (Paris : Desjonquères, 2001) ; William H. McCabe, *An Introduction to Jesuit Theatre : A Posthumous Work*, ed. Louis J. Oldani (St.Louis: Inst. Of Jesuit Sources, 1983).

<sup>623</sup> Paulo Castagna, “The Use of Music by the Jesuits in the Conversion of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil,” in O’Malley et al., ed., *The Jesuits*, 1: 641-58; William J. Summers, “The Jesuits in Manila, 1581-1621: The Role of Music in Rite, Ritual, and Spectacle,” *ibid*, 1: 659-79; Víctor Rondón, “Sung Catechism and College Opera: Two Musical Genres in the Jesuit Evangelization of Colonial Chile,” *ibid*, 2: 498-511;

as an important part of the Jesuit curriculum in the sixteenth century. The first Jesuit plays, performed in Rome around 1565, were one of many entertainments offered in the city during Carnival time. Thereafter, Jesuit theatrical performances continued to be associated with special occasions or celebrations, presented several times a year to distinguished visitors including royalty. Jacques Marquette, who studied at the Jesuit College in Reims in the 1640s, would indeed have witnessed such use of public performances which he was later to compare to the Illinois dance of the calumet.<sup>624</sup> A Catholic source estimates the existence of about five hundred continental Jesuit colleges between 1650 and 1700, all of which had “playhouses, engaged in a coordinated production of plays.”<sup>625</sup>

The “make-believe” character of theatre and its association with the impious world of actors and itinerant entertainers, however, caused the Jesuits increasingly to distinguish their own style of performances from other forms of profane entertainment. Historian Michael Zampelli emphasized the existence of a significant “antitheatrical anxiety on the part of the Jesuits.”<sup>626</sup> In reaction, the Jesuits soon emphasized the didactic value of theatrical performances in the Jesuit curriculum. Drama was perceived as both a logical continuation of the learning process for the Jesuit students, who got a chance to showcase their abilities as performers/preachers and their mastery of the values

---

René B. Javellana, “The Jesuits and the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines,” *ibid*, 1: 418-38; Jeffrey Muller, “Jesuit Uses of Art in the Provinces of Flanders,” *ibid*, 2: 113-56; Hiromitsu Kobayashi, “Suzhou Prints and Western Perspective: The Painting Techniques of Jesuit Artists at the Qing Court, and Dissemination of the Contemporary Court Style of Painting to Mid-Eighteenth-Century Chinese Society through Woodblock Prints,” *ibid*, 2: 262-86.

<sup>624</sup> In fact, the year Marquette became a Jesuit Father, in 1654, his College in Reims presented an ambitious theatrical project, called *Lys Sacré: Roy des Fleurs ou le sacré de Louys XIV*, which the novices presented in front of the young King Louis XIV himself, then sixteen years old, on the occasion of his official consecration in Reims. Donnelly, *Jacques Marquette*, 30.

<sup>625</sup> W.H. McCabe, S.J. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, 7, p.893) quoted in Joseph F. Mac Donnell S.J., *Companions of Jesuits: A Tradition of Collaboration* (Fairfield, CT: Fairfield Univ. Press, 1995).

<sup>626</sup> Michael Zampelli, S.J., “*Lascivi Spettacoli*,” 2: 551.

they had learned, and as an edifying lesson for the spectators. In the seventeenth century, plays thus developed a life of their own as a means of instruction in rhetoric and religious values.<sup>627</sup> In this sense, Jesuits shared with Indian orators their dedication to persuasion and their desire to “impress” the minds of their audience. At the same time, however, “alongside the elaborate dramas in their colleges, the fathers and brothers of the Society also staged their suspicions about spectacles. In advice manuals, devotional books, moral theology texts, sermons, and letters, Jesuits advanced strong arguments *against* theatrical representation.”<sup>628</sup> To explain this apparent contradiction, Zampelli notes that this critique was

rooted not only in theory but also in praxis. Jesuits ‘do’ theatre with particular ends in view: hence, they are particularly well placed to discern the power inherent in ‘playing.’ Jesuit criticisms of the professional theatre foreground the apparently competing ends of the *comici* and reveal what is ‘at stake’ in professional performance, socially, culturally, and in terms of religion.<sup>629</sup>

It was essentially this same tension that the missionaries brought with them to the New World in their assessment of native oratory, which they perceived primarily as drama-like performances. Their own statuses as performers and experts in oratory provided Jesuit missionaries with unique insights into the power of and threat posed by Indian multimedia eloquence. Nothing epitomized the contradictions of the Jesuit view

---

<sup>627</sup> On Jesuit drama: “Its basic principle was the sound one that an extraordinary power for spiritual reform was to be found in a good theatre where by use of various external means it is possible to work upon the will through the senses and the imagination, presenting virtue as attractive and vice as something horrible. The history of the Jesuit theatre gives testimony of a splendid spiritual influence on both actors and audience.” Donnelly, S.J., *Jacques Marquette*, 20-29. On Jesuit theatre and multisensory performances, see Bruna Filippi, “The Orator’s Performance: Gesture, Word, and Image in Theatre at the Collegio Romano” in O’Malley et al., ed., *The Jesuits*, 2: 512-529. Giovanna Zanlonghi, “The Jesuit Stage and Theatre in Milan during the Eighteenth Century,” *ibid*, 2: 530-549. On the ubiquitous view of theatre by the Jesuits and their critique of it, see Michael Zampelli, S.J., “*Lascivi Spettacoli*,” 2: 550-71.

<sup>628</sup> Zampelli, “*Lascivi Spettacoli*,” 2: 550.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 551.

on theatre more compellingly than the popular figure of the *jongleur*, a term that appears repeatedly in the *Jesuit Relations* to refer to Indian orators, and to shamans in particular.<sup>630</sup> Other frequently used terms, such as *tabarin* or *bateleur* also evoke the same character.<sup>631</sup> When using this comparison, Jesuit chroniclers had in mind both real social beings, the public entertainers ubiquitous in late medieval and Renaissance society, whom they undoubtedly had encountered in the streets, in front of churches, and on public squares in Europe, and the *jongleur* as a predominant literary figure, omnipresent in religious *exempla*, theological works, and moral tales for clerics.<sup>632</sup> According to the *Universal Dictionary of Antoine Furetière*, published in 1690, the *jongleur* in the seventeenth century was defined as “a charlatan who amuses people with subtleties, jumps and hand tricks,” and who sometimes sold “magical” remedies to an unsuspecting populace. The meaning of the verb *jongler* had evolved over time to become by the eighteenth century a synonym for “to tell a lie.”<sup>633</sup>

---

<sup>630</sup> *JR*, 16: 148 “J’ay dit souvent qu’on dônoit icy le nom de sorcier à certains jongleurs ou charlatans, qui se mêlent de chanter, et de souffler les malades, de consulter les diables, et de tuer les hommes par leurs sorts.”

And *Ibid.*, 158 “au mesme temps que nous le rebutions, il fut sollicité de retourner à ses jongleries.” The full meaning and implications of this term has been overlooked by many English-speaking scholars, perhaps partly because of the poor translation offered in Thwaites’ edition of the *Jesuit Relations*, which has “sorcerer” and “merry-andrew” in several instances.

<sup>631</sup> *JR*, 27 : 253 ; *JR*, 16 : 148.

<sup>632</sup> Martine Clouzot, who emphasized in her brilliant essay the role of the medieval *jongleur* as a “cultural intermediary,” stressed that questions about the multiple roles of the character always take place simultaneously at two levels: “That of the social ‘reality’ of the character who acts and circulates, but also at the level of the moral figure conceptualized by the thinkers and moralists of the time.” [“celui de la ‘réalité’ sociale du personnage qui agit et circule, mais aussi au niveau de la figure moral conçue par les penseurs et les moralistes de l’époque.”] Martine Clouzot, “Un intermédiaire culturel au xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle : le jongleur,” *Bulletin du centre d’études médiévales d’Auxerre*, [en ligne], Hors Série n°2, 2009, mis en ligne le 24 janvier 2009. URL:<http://cem.revues.org/index4312.html>

<sup>633</sup> “Jongler”, *Dictionnaire Universel d’Antoine Furetière* (1690), Tome II. *Le Robert Historique de la Langue Française* states that the *jongleur* was “un artiste universel, puisqu’il vendait à l’occasion des onguents et herbes médicinales.” Martine Clouzot also defines the *jongleur* as “the public amuser *par excellence*, the master of Entertainment.” (“En tant que personnage, il est omniprésent dans tous les lieux et les milieux de la société médiévale : du château au village, de la route de pèlerinage au monastère, du parvis des



Like the *jongleur*, Indian shamans were doubly subversive, through their bodies and their words.<sup>634</sup> The body of the Indian orator was reprehensible in that it was, during performances, contorted or deformed, thus perverting God's creation. In 1666, Father Le Mercier described the speech made by "the most prominent and most eloquent" orator of a band of Iroquois with whom the French were dealing, emphasizing the bodily actions of the Indian who, he wrote, "performed all the apish tricks imaginable." "It is impossible to describe all the gesticulations made by this man, who was more than sixty year old."<sup>635</sup> Partial or total nudity as well as the use of accessories and body paints that transformed men into "devil-like figures" in the eyes of Europeans also rendered the performer offensive.<sup>636</sup> As a trope in medieval religious texts, "the description of these scandalous deformations allows [the writers] to oppose the sin of pride (*superbia*) to the virtues of modesty and decency (*modestia* et de *pudicitia*) imposed by the Church on the clergy."<sup>637</sup> In the New World, it fulfilled a similar function, both practical and literary, describing the shamans as lascivious, deceitful, arrogant, and unholy and casting them as the nemeses of the black robes.<sup>638</sup> Humility was associated with truth, while arrogance

---

églises aux étuves. Il est l'amuseur public par excellence, le maître du divertissement. Ce don d'ubiquité favorise a priori son rôle d'intermédiaire culturel.") Clouzot, "un intermédiaire culturel," 3.

<sup>634</sup> "le jongleur est doté d'un corps charnel, vêtu ou non, agile, et toujours en mouvement. Il est également doué de parole, dangereuse car trompeuse et excessive." Clouzot, "un intermédiaire culturel," 9.

<sup>635</sup> *JR*, 51: 206-8. "le premier & le plus éloquent de leurs Orateurs, ayant comme repris ses esprits, se leva, & fit toutes les singeries imaginables autour de cette perche ; pour declarer son estonnement, One ne peut pas descrire toutes les gesticulations que fit cet homme âgé de plus de soixante ans."

<sup>636</sup> H.P. Biggar, ed., *Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Ottawa: Publications of the Public Archives of Canada, 1924), 136. "[They] dressed up three Indians as devils, arraying them in black and white dog-skins, with horns as long as one's arm and their faces coloured black as coal."

<sup>637</sup> "La description de ces scandaleuses déformations permet d'opposer le péché d'orgueil (*superbia*) aux vertus de modestie et de pudeur (*modestia* et de *pudicitia*) imposée par l'Eglise au clergé." Clouzot, "un intermédiaire culturel," 9.

<sup>638</sup> Shamans were not the sole targets of the missionaries' critiques. Orators and "chiefs" were also frequently condemned for their pride and self-aggrandizing arguments. For instance: "the few following words reveal the great vanity and insupportable pride of the Captain of these islanders," wrote Father Jerome Lalemant in 1640. The Indian chief was said to declare that "As soon as I open my mouth, every

became a stigma of lies being told and of the ignorance of the “true faith” in which the natives stood.<sup>639</sup>

In this sense, Indian *jongleurs* were both real “enemies” to be faced in the oratorical ring, and serious moral counter-examples for the European readership of the *Relations*, particularly future missionaries. The words of the shaman/*jongleur* sustained the bulk of Jesuit attacks, although they were often inseparable from their actions and bodies: the dreams that the medicine-men recounted to their communities, their predictions of the future, their “incantations” to cure the sick, and their vehement discourses against the missionaries, were characterized as lies, damaging to the Catholics’ endeavors and more generally to God’s advent. “The majority of them are impostors, practicing the enchantments to obtain presents from the poor sick, to render themselves popular or to make themselves feared,” denounced Father Le Jeune in 1639.<sup>640</sup> Worst of all, the shamans were said to be fully aware of the falsity of their words

---

one listens to me. It is also true that I bear up and maintain the whole country during the life of my grandchildren and my nephews. (...) even the Hurons give ear to me.” Commenting on what was clearly an effort on the part of the Indian to explain to the French how oratorical power equated political power, Lalemant severely wrote: “to see, I say, a skeleton, or rather a ragamuffin, bear himself as a president, and speak like a King, is to see the haughtiness and pride under rags.” *JR*, 20: 154-56. (“ Voir un homme tout nud, qui n’a ny chaussure aux pieds, ny autre ahbit qu’un méchant bout de peau, qui n’abrie [sic] que la moitié de son corps, disgracié de la nautre n’ayant que la moitié de ses yeux, car il est borgne, sec comme un vieil arbre sans feuilles ; Voir, dis-je, un squelette, ou plutost un gueux, marcher en president, & parler en Roy, c’est voir l’orgueil & la superbe sous des haillons.”)

<sup>639</sup> *JR*, 6: 242 “Les Sauvages estant remplis d’erreur le sont aussi de superbe et d’orgueil. L’humilité naist de la vérité, la vanité de l’erreur & du mensonge ; ils sont vuides [sic] de la connoissance [sic] de la verité, & par consequent tres remplis d’eux-mesmes.”

<sup>640</sup> *JR*, 16: 148. “ J’ay dit souvent qu’on donnoit icy le nom de sorcier à certains jongleurs ou charlatans qui se mélent de chanter, & de souffler les malades, de consulter les Diables, et de tuer les hommes par leurs sorts. Je me persuade qu’en effect il y en a qyelqu’un entre eux qui a communication avec les Demons ; mais la plupart ne sont que des trompeurs, exerçant leurs jongleries pour tirer quelques presens des pauvres malades, & pour se rendre recommandables, ou pour se faire craindre. “ Martine Clouzot notes that : “Dans leurs sermons, les théologiens reprochent aux jongleurs d’abuser de la crédulité des gens pour mieux leur soutirer de l’argent. Ce problème de l’argent donné aux jongleurs est soulevé dès les premiers temps du christianisme par les premiers conciles, qui ont été ensuite repris tout au long du Moyen âge.” Clouzot, “un intermédiaire culturel,” 15. In the *Jesuit Relations*, the shamans and other “deceitful” orators were similarly criticized for talking people into giving them gifts. The orators could thus

and to be maintaining themselves as well as others in darkness despite this realization. Laboring at the Oneida mission, Father Bruyas wrote that “[he] had the affliction to see a reputed Juggler die in his infidelity; but his presumption and his pride rendered him unworthy of holy Baptism.” “What I admire everyday among this kind of people,” he pursued, “is that, although convinced by their own experience that all their jugglery is nothing but a fraud, nevertheless they still allow themselves to be deceived until their dying day....”<sup>641</sup> This particular Iroquois shaman was considered so powerful that, after his death, his “spirit” continued to visit the people of his town in dreams, undermining the missionaries’ work from the afterlife.<sup>642</sup>

But there was another side to the *jongleur*. As converted and repentant, the *jongleur* could also become “saint.” Saint Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order, famously described himself and his disciples as *jongleurs de Dieu*.<sup>643</sup> Historian Martine Clouzot explains that this surprising parallel was in fact essentially based upon the physical and performative elements shared by the religious preacher and the public entertainer in their oratorical methods:

---

“abuse” people’s credulity and use their superstitions for their own material benefits and to gain power, a major theme in the *Jesuit Relations*.

<sup>641</sup> JR, 56 : 34. “ J’ay eu l’affliction de voir mourir un fameux Jongleur dans son infidélité. Mais sa presumption, & son orgueil l’ont rendu indigne du saint Baptesme. Ce que j’admire tous les jours en ces sortes de gens, c’est qu’estans convaincus par leur propre experience, que toutes leurs jongleries ne sont que des impostures, ils ne laissent pas neantmoins de se laisser tromper eux-mesmes jusqu’au dernier soupir (...) Ce fameux Jongleur, dont je viens de parler, estoit dans une veneration extraordinaire chez tous les Iroquois, & comme son credit et son exemple avoient empeché le progres de la Foy pendant sa vie ; il semble que son ombre soit encore funeste au Christianisme.”

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 34-36. “Un ancien a tenu depuis peu un Conseil, où il a déclaré que ce Jongleur, luy a apparu en songe, & que le regardant d’un œil terrible, luy a commandé de rapporter aux Anciens, qu’ils estoient perdus sans ressource...que neantmoins si on vouloit eviter ces malheurs, il falloit enlever son corps du lieu où il estoit enterré, et le porter sur le chemin qui mène à Gandastogué.”

<sup>643</sup> The study of reference (and still one of the most readable) on St. Francis, although dated, remains G.K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1924), which has an entire chapter dedicated to “God’s Fool”: “Le Jongleur de Dieu” (96-120).

In defining himself as a '*jongleur de Dieu*', Saint Francis sees in these corporal movements gestures that are useful to prayer and predication...formally, [the *jongleur*] serves as physical support for a gestural pedagogy for the Franciscan brother: to imitate the *jongleur* in his activity, is to preach through examples with efficacy. This identification of the mendicant to the *jongleur* thus truly makes the latter a figure of moral edification primarily intended for the clergy.<sup>644</sup>

The performances of native orators were similarly reprehensible only insofar as the messages they conveyed were untruthful or potentially perverting. Missionaries could thus simultaneously admire the talent and eloquence of Indian speakers while condemning their words. More importantly, they fully realized and understood the roots of the power that the artful use of the nonverbal could provide. If the missionaries won this ongoing rhetorical battle with the shaman, symbol of the "old evil ways" that kept Indians away from salvation, this power would be transferred to them. In 1640, Father Buteux reported the words that a converted shaman allegedly told an assembly of his people after he had been baptized and had symbolically destroyed his drum: "I have resolved to abandon forever our old customs; I no longer have any voice for the superstitious chants, my drum no longer has any sound, and my mouth no longer has any breath the deceive the sick."<sup>645</sup> In this nonverbal battle as imagined by the Jesuits, hymns

---

<sup>644</sup> "Les raisons de ce rapprochement sont fondées sur le corps et les gestes des jongleurs, dont l'usage est pourtant condamné chez les moralistes. Or, en se définissant comme un 'jongleur de Dieu', saint François voit dans ces mouvements corporels les gestes utiles à la prière et à la prédication : 'il ne chante pas seulement en français, mais accompagné avec les gestes et les sons à la manière des jongleurs.' (...) sur la forme, il sert de support corporel à une pédagogie gestuelle destinée au frère franciscain : imiter le jongleur dans son activité, c'est prêcher d'exemples avec efficacité. Cette identification du mendiant au jongleur fait alors véritablement de ce dernier une figure de l'édification morale en priorité à destination du clergé. " Clouzot, "un intermédiaire culturel", 24.

<sup>645</sup> JR, 20: 288. "j'ay resolu de quitter pour jamais nos anciennes façons de faire: je n'ai plus de voix pour les chants superstitieux, mon tambour n'a plus de son, & ma bouche n'a plus de souffle pour tromper les malades." Father Buteux had told the neophyte, before his baptism that he had to abandon his drum, symbol of the *jongleur*: "Estant encore Catechumene, le Pere Buteux luy dit, qu'il ne falloit jamais plus manier son tambour: car il estoit du mestier des jongleurs, ou des Charlatans du païs, que quelques uns appellant Sorciers ; ce bon homme prit resolution d'obeir (...) [il] prend son tambour, le met en pieces, & le jette à ses chiens." Ibid., 256. We have reasons to question the authenticity of this particular

and bells vanquished drums and rattles, prayers defeated incantations, religious images won over manitous, and incense replaced calumets. At stake in this contest was not only power or control over native peoples, but also important cultural transformations and traumas. To the Jesuits, this was a fight between right and wrong, between Truth and Error: “as his art was founded upon falsehood,” explained Father Le Jeune about a Huron shaman who converted to Christianity, “and as we relied on truth, we cudged him so roughly that he surrendered.”<sup>646</sup>

\* \* \*

Regardless of the importance of the nonverbal in Indian oratory, mastery of language remained essential to persuasion and efficacy. Just as words without performance were empty, performance without words was futile. Before they were able to perform oratory properly in front of native audiences, Jesuit missionaries thus had to rely on other experts, and turn the talent of Indian *jongleurs* into a weapon of Christianity in the New World. But using native speakers to convey the Christian message may have been less an elaborate and conscious plan on the part of the fathers than a propitious turn of events that the black robes learned to put to their advantage. In 1636, Father Le Jeune admitted that “owing to our limited knowledge of the language, we say not what we wish,

---

transcription of Indian speech, although it was probably based on a real event. The account seems to belong to a long tradition of similar, fictional moral tales and “miracles” used since the Middle Age as edifying stories for clerics. Martine Clouzot reports a very similar story dating from the thirteenth century (1268) entitled *Tombeur de Notre-Dame*, in which a *jongleur* relates the many mistakes and sins he committed during his life and prevents him from entering an abbey. He also deplores that he only knows how to pray with his *vièle* [medieval string instrument similar to a violin] and by dancing in front of the altar dedicated to Marie. In the end, Marie provides him with the absolution for his sins, and he is taken to heaven by angels, abandoning his instruments and old ways behind him. Clouzot, “un intermédiaire culturel,” 20.

<sup>646</sup> *JR*, 16: 148. “mais comme son art estoit fondé sur le mensonge, & que nous estions appuyé sur la verité, nous le bastimes si rudement, qu’il se rendit.”

but what we can.”<sup>647</sup> He noted that, in this sense, the native oratorical tradition of repeating what the previous speaker had said before answering was highly beneficial to the Jesuits. For instance, after he had awkwardly made a present to “encourage [the Indians] to take the road to Heaven” in what must have been ineloquent ‘broken Huron,’ “one of the Captains felicitously repeated all that [Le Jeune] had said, and dilated upon it and amplified it better than [Le Jeune] had done, and in better terms.”<sup>648</sup> Indian superiority in terms of communicative competence was undeniable, and their contribution to conveying the Christian message extemporaneous. “Such a [Christian] discourse from the mouth of a native who declares thus genuinely the sentiments of his heart, often has more effect on these minds than from the most zealous missionary,” noted a father in the last decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>649</sup>

The Jesuits also witnessed the appearance of native “preachers,” a phenomenon that the Christian presence certainly contributed to but did not consciously manufacture, at least in the first decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>650</sup> It seems that, within native

---

<sup>647</sup> *JR*, 10: 258. “car en effet dans le peu de cognoissance que nous avons de cette Langue, nous ne disons pas ce que nous voulons, mais ce que nous pouvons.”

<sup>648</sup> *JR*, 10: 258. “Après que quelqu’un a opiné, le Chef du Conseil repete, ou fait repeter ce qu’il a dit : de sorte que les choses ne peuvent qu’elles ne soient bien entendues estans tant de fois rebatües. Ce qui m’arriva fort heureusement au Conseil dont je vous ay parlé, où je leur fis un present pour les encourager à prendre le chemin & la route du Ciel ; car un des Capitaines repeta fort heureusement tout ce que j’avois dit, & le dilata, & amplifia mieux que je n’avois fait, & en meilleurs termes.”

<sup>649</sup> *JR*, 56: 44. The father was Pierre Millet, who was part of the mission in Onnontaghé (Onondaga) in the Iroquois country in the early 1670s. “Un semblable discours party de la bouche d’un Sauvage qui declare ainsi naïvement les sentiments de son cœur, a souvent plus d’effet sur ces esprits que de la part d’un Missionnaire le plus zélé.”

<sup>650</sup> Sandra Gustafson traced the emergence of a new “extemporaneous preaching style” around the mid-eighteenth century that, she argued, was particularly successful among whites and non-whites alike because of “the prominence and symbolic value afforded oral performance within evangelicalism.” She writes: “Such elevation of the spoken word allowed native American and African American converts and preachers to adapt Christianity to their own spiritual practices and traditions, creating syncretic and hybridized forms of worship and belief.” While the emphasis on performance and hybridism is significant, her approach tends to place Indian and African American performers in a reactive rather than innovative position. It seems to me that the timeline and patterns of cultural transfers here are faulty, largely

communities, a number of young “converts,” who had been introduced to the new ideas brought by the missionaries, spontaneously started to perform the new religion. Le Jeune was a bystander to the actions of such a young novice, who “made himself an apostle in the midst of all these infidels.”<sup>651</sup> Not only did the young Huron repeat the message of the black robes, he developed an elaborate multimedia rhetoric around it in the Huron tradition, singing native versions of the prayers he had learned, touring the longhouses one by one, exhorting his people to accept the “mysteries of [the Christian] religion”.<sup>652</sup> This, noted Le Jeune, represented a significant amount of change in the Huron community. People listened to him out of curiosity for these novelties, but the novice was also gaining authority in a way that may not have been available to him otherwise: “he even reproved vice everywhere, with astonishing freedom, which will seem almost incredible to those who know the ways of these Savages, among whom the young men never speak in public, especially in presence of the elders and captains.”<sup>653</sup>

A mutually beneficial partnership thus emerged between some native orators who wedded new Christian themes and messages to their traditional forms and methods of persuasive eloquence, and the Jesuit fathers, still essentially deprived of the power of speech, but who brought new material, symbolic, and kinesic forms of influence into native communities. A single Indian individual could dramatically determine the fate of a mission. In the mission of the Immaculate Conception in the Huron town of Ossossanë

---

ignoring the opposite phenomenon by which the native American and African American oral traditions profoundly influenced early British American speakers. Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, 75.

<sup>651</sup> JR, 59 : 262. “Dans ce but, il se mit à faire l’apôtre au milieu de tout ces infidèles.”

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., 262. “Il chantait dans la chapelle les prières qu’il avait apprises ici. Cette nouveauté y attirait tout le monde, et il en prenant alors occasion de les instruire. Il allait hardiment dans les cabanes, et y prêchait les mystères de notre religion,…”

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., 262. “ et même il reprenait partout les vices avec une étonnante liberté, c’est ce qui paraîtra presque incroyable à ceux qui connaissent la façon de faire de ces Sauvages, parmi lesquels les jeunes gens ne parlent jamais en public, surtout en présence des anciens et des capitaines.” NB: Thwaites’ translation has a typo, translating “capitaines” as “captives.”

in 1638-1639, a convert named Joseph Chiwatenhwa (*Chi8atenh8a*) was such a pivotal individual. The Jesuits were in strong numbers in this mission, led by Superior Jean de Brébeuf and accompanied by Fathers Charles Garnier, Father Paul Ragueneau, and François Joseph Le Mercier, who wrote most of the accounts about the work of the missionaries during that time. Joseph Chiwatenhwa, who seemed to have mastered a commendable level of French and even wished to learn how to read and write, was critical in teaching the missionaries the rudiments of the Huron language, in translating Christian prayers and stories, and in assisting the Jesuits in staging their public performances.<sup>654</sup> Chiwatenhwa not only translated but essentially authored the Christian discourses in culturally appropriate terms. The “very judicious order” in which Le Mercier said Joseph composed “several discourses on our Holy Mysteries,” was an example of expert cultural translation and provided the fathers with efficient means to convince the rest of the population to turn to their God.

Thanks to Joseph Chiwatenhwa, the performance delivered on Sundays and Christian holidays in front of the Ossossane Hurons was successful in creating new cultural hybridity and introducing novel elements while preserving the multisensory appeal of pre-contact oratory. Among the things that “attracted” the Hurons, wrote Father Le Mercier, were the “images” presented to the crowd, the songs and hymns, and the rich dress of the Jesuits (their “*surplis*,” or linen surplice, a liturgical robe adorned with trimming and embroideries). The Jesuits realized the challenge of gathering the Indians

---

<sup>654</sup> JR, 15: 112. “En échange le profit a esté bien grand pour nous, car en luy servants de Maistres pour la lecture, nous nous sommes façonnez un bon Maistre en la langue, quand nous luy demandons les initiales ou finales des mots, ce qui est quelquefois imperceptible, il nous les dit fort distinctement ; si qu’il nous servira fort, avec l’ayde de Dieu, pour les conjugaisons. Il nous a mesme dicté plusieurs beaux discours sur nos Saints Mysteres, dans une suite fort judicieuse ; mais si distinctement que vous ne perdrez pas une syllabe.”



and speaking to them without being able to offer gifts or to hold a proper feast, for lack of resources.<sup>655</sup> While Father Brébeuf opened the ceremonies with a long, didactic oration in the Huron language—probably the product of Joseph’s talent—and sought to pronounce it “in the usual tone of the Councils,” while the rest of the fathers sang a Huron translation of an essential piece of Catholic dogma (“*symboles des apôtres*” or Apotles’ Creed), the most powerful part of the performance directly involved Joseph and his talents as an “actor.”<sup>656</sup>

In order to make their ideas as clear and convincing as possible, the missionaries turned to a method they commonly used in the French provinces and other colonies, by staging “dialogues” or small situation-scenes, to demonstrate specific precepts.<sup>657</sup> For the Hurons, this realistic play-acting, and the physical representation of varied characters and circumstances, was very familiar because it was one of the skills mastered by their best orators when they wanted to relate the true story of a recent adventure or battle. “Here, our Joseph does marvels,” said Le Mercier, “sometimes pretending to be reluctant, other

---

<sup>655</sup> *JR*, 15: 120. “Ce qui est le plus admirable pour le païs est, que ni les grands ny les petits ny ont autre atrait que le desit d’entendre, & la curiosite de voir, aussi nostre pauvreté ne suffiroit pas ou aux presents, ou aux festins.” This was in fact a testimony to the talent and authority of Joseph Chiwatenhwa.

<sup>656</sup> This seemed to be a common pattern as, in other episodes, the speeches of the fathers always appear to be outperformed by Joseph’s superior eloquence and authority over his people: “Et ce que l’assemblée admira le plus, ce fut la repartee de nostre Joseph, qui nous servit icy d’Advocat: car ce brave Chrestien reprit courageusement un de ses cousins...” *JR*, 15: 115. It was common for the missionaries to sing translations of traditional hymns and prayers in native tunes, but they also sometimes put native words to traditional French tunes, which also seemed to please the natives. In at least one instance, Father André and Father Allouez taught the Fox Indians’ children to play the flute and play French tunes “to declare war on Jugglers, Dreamers, and those who have several wives.” *JR*, 56: 132-134. “La cause pour laquelle on le recherchoit avec tant d’empressement, estoient certains Cantiques spirituels, qu’il faisoit chanter aux enfans sur des airs François, qui plaisoient extremement à ces Sauvages (...) Ce succes donna du courage au Père, & luy fit prendre resolution d’attaquer les hommes par les enfans, et de combattre l’idolatrie par des ames bien innocentes. En effet, il composa des Cantiques contre les superstitions (...) & les ayant enseignez aux enfans au son d’une flute douce, il alloit par tout avec ces petits musiciens Sauvages declarer la guerre aux Jongleurs, au Resveurs, & à ceux qui avoient plusieurs femmes.”

<sup>657</sup> Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire*, 169. “les méthodes convertisseuses des Jésuites consistent principalement à susciter l’émotion. Cela explique le caractère spectaculaire de leurs missions, conçues pour enflammer l’imagination et créer l’ambiance adéquate à la conversion.”

times ignorant, or learned, giving our Catechist the opportunity to explain through dialogue and with more clarity, what otherwise would be only half understood.”<sup>658</sup> Chiwatenhwa, far from being a puppet of the French, commanded everyone’s attention and respect and seemed to be at once the true architect and pillar of the performance: “it is incredible how these questions and answers please them, and keep them attentive.”<sup>659</sup> When the Jesuits were faced with the opposition of an elder of high status (perhaps a shaman), it was once again Joseph who debunked his arguments, “with so much modesty and prudence that he was admired by all. Never did he have so good an act, and it is truly with regret that I omit his beautiful discourses.”<sup>660</sup>

Just as native oratory was flexible enough to adjust to different audiences, a number of native orators may have manipulated the new knowledge brought by the Catholics, using new gestures (genuflexion, joined hands, murmured Latin words), objects (religious images, crucifixes, agnus dei, pieces of cloth), songs, and novel metaphors and stories to gain or increase their authority among their people.<sup>661</sup> Pre-

---

<sup>658</sup> *JR*, 15: 122 “Icy nostre Joseph fait merveilles, car par fois faisant du retif, tantost de l’ignorant, ores du Docteur, il donne sujet à Nostre Catechiste d’expliquer par Dialogue & avec plus de clarté, ce qui d’ailleurs ne se concevoit qu’à demy.”

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.* “ Il n’est pas croyable comme quoy ces demandes & ces reponses leur agréent, & les tiennent dans l’attentoin. Suit quelque Hymne de l’Eglise, pour finir le tout par une priere sur le ton de quelque air approchant de leurs chansons qu’ils aiment fort.”

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.* “Un certain aveugle d’environ cent ans, voulut à son tour faire son objection au Catechisme et apporta la pluspart de ses resveries ; mais nostre Joseph luy respondit avec tant de modestie & de prudence qu’il se fit admirer de tout le monde. Jamais il n’eût si beau jeu, et c’est vérité à regret que je tranche ces beaux discours.”

<sup>661</sup> This is not to suggest that the Indians who converted to the new faith did not so genuinely. Drawing some “practical” benefit from the adoption of new ideas or new objects was not incompatible with true feelings or beliefs and accurate knowledge of the content of the faith. For an insightful discussion of the issues of “pragmatism” and “cultural authenticity,” see Rachel Wheeler, “Hendrick Aupaumut: Christian-Mahican Prophet,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 25: 2 (Summer 2005): 187-220. “Christianity has always been enculturated by the host society. This seemingly commonsensical idea challenges imperialist missionary claims to be the sole arbiters of Christian truth and provides the basis for examining how the indigenous Christianity that emerged from the missions spoke to the subjective experiences of Indian individuals and communities, while also recognizing the severe cultural tensions that almost always arose with the development of Christian and non-Christian factions.” *Ibid.*, 191.

existing status or political influence made some Indian individuals particularly desirable spokespersons for the missionaries, because the French hoped to use this power indirectly to gain more followers among the Indian's broad entourage. But becoming an advocate for the French also allowed some natives to gain authority and to challenge existing status barriers, such as age or clan membership. The manipulation of a new nonverbal register for oratory thus contributed to the emerging power struggles that pitted converted Indians against non-Christians. Understanding how change subtly affected the native oratorical realm reveals that this was not a contest between "tradition" and "novelty." During a rhetorical joust against a chief of the Neutral (Petun) Nation who rejected the influence of the missionaries, Joseph Chiwatenhwa thus argued: "It is really you Captains, who know not what are matters of importance; you are the ones who have overturned our country by separating us from the maxims and good regulations of our ancestors; it is these black gowns here, whom you despise, who know what matters of importance are, and who come to teach us the same."<sup>662</sup> Adopting the "new" rhetoric could be a way to return to an idealized past and challenge a generation of leaders who had perhaps emerged relatively recently in reaction to the changes brought by the colonial contact.

This was clearly a risky endeavor, and few converts took the chance.<sup>663</sup> Even fewer became as successful as Joseph Chiwatenhwa or as Garankontié, a powerful

---

<sup>662</sup> *JR*, 20: 62. "Ce fut lors que nostre Joseph Chiouatenhoua fit plus paroistre son courage, & releva bien ce capitaine, qui s'estonnoit de ce que nous appellions les choses de la Foy affaires d'importance. Ce Chrestien donc prenant la parole, luy dit : C'est bien vous autres capitaines qui ignorez ce que c'est qu'affaires d'importance ; c'est vous qui avez renversé nostre pays nous separant des maximes & bons reglemens de nos ancestres ; ce sont ces robes noires icy que vous mesprisez qui sçavent ce que c'est qu'affaires d'importance, & qui viennent pour nous l'apprendre."

<sup>663</sup> *JR*, 8: 36. An Algonquin convert failed in his promise to Father Le Jeune to show religious images to his extended family and to try to spread the Word of God on behalf of the missionaries. He justified his failure by referring to "peer pressure" he felt (fear of mockery) and fear of punishment from the Christian God. Clearly, it took a special kind of individual to become a "Christian preacher" just as it took a special man to become a great native orator and leader. "Interrogé pourquoy il n'voit point prié le Fils du Tout

Iroquois chief, described as an important “ambassador” by the French, whose conversion to Christianity did nothing to reduce his prestige and power. In 1672, Garankontié came to Montreal as representative of all five Iroquois nations, and pronounced a series of orations to an audience of Ottawa (Odawa) Indians. The speeches covered a variety of topics, from current affairs and local geopolitics, to the fur trade and the alliance with the French. But the Indian orator drew additional power (“impressing the minds of the audience”) from an additional discourse he pronounced in a strong voice after all gifts and treaties were completed, in which he “showed his mind and good sense, but particularly his faith and zeal.” “He raised his voice to tell them that he had once been like them, in the ignorance of the true God, idolatrous of his dreams, and of all their superstitious customs; but that now he was Christian, and he lived happily, observing the commandments of God, and in the hope of eternal life, and he ended his harangue by eloquently exhorting them according to his custom, to imitate and follow his lead.”<sup>664</sup> By the late seventeenth century, aspects of the Christian message had been sufficiently integrated to the rhetoric of certain Indian leaders that it formed a new style of oration, one that implicitly suggested a certain relationship to the French and status within the native geopolitical map of northeastern North America.

The repertoire —verbal and nonverbal—of Indian orators who embraced the faith of the newcomers thus expanded, offering new devices for persuasion and bearing

---

Puissant, je m’en estois allé, respond-il, avec bonne volonté de le prier, j’avois conceu une bonne esperance, qu’il nous donneroit à manger, j’avois mesme retenu la meilleur de toutes les oraisons que tu nous as enseigné : mais estans arrivé à nos cabanes, j’ay eu peur que si je produisois l’Image, qu’on ne s’en moquast, et que celuy qui a tout fait ne se feschât contre moy, et nous fit mourir.”

<sup>664</sup> *JR*, 56: 44. “Car après avoir terminé leurs affaires, & confirmé par de nouvelles protestations d’amitié, & par des présens réciproques le traité de paix, il leva la voix pour leur dire qu’il avoit esté autrefois comme eux, dans l’ignorance du vray Dieu, idôlatre de ses songes, & de toutes leurs coutumes superstitieuses ; mais que maintenant il estoit Chrestien, & qu’il vivoit heureux, dans l’observance des commandemens de Dieu, & dans l’esperance d’une vie eternelle, & il finit sa harangue en les exhortant eloquemment selon sa coutume, à l’imiter et à le suivre.”

consequences for the complex power politics associated with oratory in native society. In 1640, a “good neophyte” thus expressed to Father Brébeuf his profound gratitude for being asked by Onontio to speak to his own people in the name of the French. He declared: “I would not know how to be silent. I take back my own language all entire, it has even improved much in this journey, I shall use it all, and in all places, to publish the truths of our belief.”<sup>665</sup> Similarly, rather than merely importing tested techniques from France, Jesuit missionaries also “improved their language” in the New World, not only through the acquisition of new native tongues, but by incorporating new oratorical strategies and nonverbal features with their already sophisticated rhetorical practices.

To reach their ultimate goal of converting the natives, the missionaries first needed to earn the respect—whether loving or fearful—of their audiences. Instead, more often than not, the fathers found themselves mocked, humorously taunted, humiliated, and even threatened by their native hosts for their strange looks and practices, including but not limited to celibacy and their choice to live in isolation from the tribe. Credibility and social recognition were necessary to the efficacy of their message, and conformity or resemblance to local norms and traditions contributed to being granted some legitimacy or at least temporary consideration.<sup>666</sup> Oratorical performances were a medium of choice in gaining some measure of recognition and control, because it was particularly familiar

---

<sup>665</sup> *JR*, 20: 227. “il m’a recommandé de publier cette faveur, je ne la sçauroit taire, je reporte ma langue toute entire, voire elle est accreüe de beaucoup en ce voyage, je l’employeray [sic] toute, & en tous lieux, à publier les vérité de nostre creance.”

<sup>666</sup> In his studies of language and symbolic power, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu emphasized as an absolute condition of speech efficacy and power, the necessity of adopting what he called a “legitimate language,” that is to say a set of conventions recognized as valid and meaningful by the recipient(s) of the discourse in a specific social setting. The condition for the “magic of words” to operate and have the desired result on the audience is the possession by the orator of a “symbolic capital,” a recognition of legitimacy that does not need to be institutionalized, among the group addressed. For the French, who did not have the numerical power to impose their rule upon the natives, carefully emulating the non-linguistic aspects of native ceremonies, provided this form of symbolic authority. Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique* (Paris : Editions Fayard, 2001), esp. 107-15.

to the fathers and fit native verbal art culture very well, and because it brought the most immediately observable and rewarding results to the missionaries. The Jesuits believed in the physical impact that words could have on people. Minds needed to be taken out of the apathy and ignorance where they had been lingering, hearts needed to be touched, tears to be drawn from the onlookers' eyes, shivers of fear and awe needed to be sent down the spinal cords of the listeners. Mastery of language and verbal eloquence provided one part of the apparatus to achieve these ends. When criticized by a Mohawk orator for not providing gifts that could be easily divided among the various Iroquois nations, Father Superior Le Mercier used flawless logic and the power of the written word to rebuke the "impostures" of the Indian.<sup>667</sup> But it was the surprise that the priest's fluency in Iroquoian (probably Huron) language caused to the Mohawks, who "thought that [the Jesuits] could only stammer in their tongue like the Europeans who have commerce with them," that truly won him the respect of his opponent.<sup>668</sup> It was similarly the passionate tone and vivid word choices of Father Chaumonot that fostered an atmosphere of awe and "approval" among the representatives of the Five Iroquois nations he addressed in 1656: "these words of fire, and quantity of other similar ones pronounced with a most Christian

---

<sup>667</sup> *JR*, 43: 164. " Le Père supérieur répliqua à leurs impostures d'une manière si pressante qu'ils se repentirent bientôt de leurs fausses accusations. Il leur dit que la mémoire ne manquoit jamais aux François qui avoient la plume en main, & que si leur esprit s'oubloit de quelques choses, leur papier les leur suggeroit a besoin. Il raconta en suite [sic] tout ce qui s'estoit passé au Conseil des François et des Iroquois Annieronnonns, fit un denombrement de tous les colliers de porcelaines, de toutes les arquebuses, de tous les capots, & en un mot de tous les presents qui avoient esté faits par le Grand Capitaine des François."

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-66. " Ce pauvre homme qui croioit que nous ne faisons que begayer en leur langue, comme les Europeans [sic] qui ont commerce avec eux, fut si surpris entendant le Père, qu'il rechercha depuis tous les moyens de se mettre bien dans son esprit."

vehemence, caused such an astonishment to these poor Barbarians that they all seemed transported, joy and fear wavering in their minds.”<sup>669</sup>

The Jesuits were conscious that every aspect of their performances, including the nonverbal, contributed to obtain the desired reactions and results. In the mid-eighteenth century, an anonymous Jesuit missionary among the Abenakis carefully designed his oration, he wrote, “to give to this ceremony all the splendor that was in [his] power.”<sup>670</sup> They thus combined traditional Catholic techniques and the impact of the ‘novel’ material culture they possessed, with attempts to borrow and emulate what they perceived as uniquely “Indian” nonverbal elements. In this sense, their sensory journeys of learning through native America profoundly determined which elements they chose to imitate or channel in new ways.<sup>671</sup> The hybrid performances that resulted revealed a profound understanding and knowledge of certain Indian oratorical and ritual practices, but also a tendency to overlook the cultural and semiotic boundaries of the same.

For instance, in March 1675, during his second voyage through the upper Mississippi Valley, Father Jacques Marquette carefully staged a spectacular oration for the Illinois Indians around the *Baie des Puants*, where a mission had recently been established as a result of his previous passage in the region. Father Marquette’s health was rapidly declining at this point, and it was particularly important to him that this ceremony be effective, for his time was running out to instruct the Indians in the core

---

<sup>669</sup> *JR*, 43: 176. “Ces paroles de feu, & quantité d’autres semblables poussées avec une véhémence toute Chrestienne jetterent un tel etonnement dans ces pauvres Barbares, qu’ils paroisoient tous transportez, la joye et la crainte partageant leurs esprits.” Chaumonot also touched the Frenchmen present at the ceremony: “Les larmes tombaient des yeux de nos François voyant nostre Seigneur si magnifiquement annoncé en cette extrémité du monde. Pour moy, j’avoue que ce que j’ay veu et entendu en ce rencontre, passe tout ce qu’on peut en dire ou en écrire.” *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>670</sup> *JR*, 70: 109.

<sup>671</sup> See Chapter Two.

principles of the Gospel. In accordance with the traditions he had repeatedly witnessed in past native ceremonies, he publicly called a “general assembly,” which gathered about 2,000 men and many more women and children.<sup>672</sup> Marquette chose his location carefully, in a large prairie near the town, that he had richly adorned with “mats and bear pelts” to convey the importance of the proceedings. The seating arrangements were also meaningful, with “five hundred chiefs and elders sitting in a circle around the Father and all the youth standing.”<sup>673</sup> Familiar with the practice of “speaking through gifts,” Marquette proceeded to elucidate his ten presents one by one to convey his ten-part message to the audience in a culturally acceptable and thus persuasive way.

One element in this sophisticated performance, however, may have puzzled the Illinois. Marquette indeed caused several ropes to be taut across the central space (like a clothes line), on which he hung “several pieces of taffeta from China,” upon which he displayed “four large images of the Virgin Mary that could be seen from all sides.”<sup>674</sup> It is difficult to reconstruct the sense the Illinois crowd made of this display. The chronicler only reported, as proof of success, that Marquette “was listened to with universal joy from all of these peoples who pressingly begged him to return promptly.”<sup>675</sup> Certainly, they must have understood that the woman represented on these beautiful images was a powerful being and the object of special worship in the new religion. The display of rare

---

<sup>672</sup> *JR*, 59: 186. “ apres avoir porté les instructions dans les Cabanes qui se trouvoient tousjours plaines d’une grande foule de peuples, il prit resolution de parler a tous publiquement dans une assemblée générale qu’il convoqua en plaine campagne, les Cabanes estant trop estroites pour tout le monde.”

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, 188. “L’auditoire estoit Composé de 500 tant de chefs que de vieillards assis en rond a l’entour du père et de toute la jeunesse qui se tenoit debout au nombre de plus de 1500 hommes. Sans compter les femmes et les enfants qui sont en grand nombre, le bourg estant compose de 5 a 600 feux.”

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*, 188. “le P. ayant faict estendre sur des Cordes diverses pieces de taftas de la chine, il y atacha quatre grandes images de la st. Vierge qui esotient veües de tous Costés.”

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, 190. “Il fut escouté avec une Joye universelle de tous ces peuples qui le prierent avec de tres grandes instances qu’il eust a revenir au plustost chés [sic] eux puis que sa maladie l’obligeoit a s’en retourner.”



and precious fabrics, such as silk taffeta, which was typically of bright color, with fancy motifs, and “watered” designs that shimmered in the light, was certain to impress the Indians who, as many scholars have shown, attributed particular symbolic meaning and power to certain types of European cloth.<sup>676</sup> From the Illinois’ point of view, then, the ropes and what they displayed would have seemed unfamiliar but comprehensible and worthy of attention. But what did the performer himself—Father Marquette—have in mind? This may have been nothing more than a practical choice motivated by the absence of walls on which to hang the portraits. But it is striking that Marquette could also very likely have witnessed a similar arrangement during native diplomatic embassies, where it was not uncommon to hang the gifts to be offered during the speeches on a rope across the central performance.<sup>677</sup>

A similar example of complex cultural borrowing and hybrid performance took place in 1667, in front of a large crowd of Mohawks who had gathered from multiple surrounding villages in present-day Vermont to witness the oration of Father Jacques

---

<sup>676</sup> Sagard, *Histoire*, 2: 476. Sagard reported the magical powers with which the Hurons invested the fathers’ chalice veil. “(...) pour nostre voile de Calice, nous leur monstrions assez librement, avec le beau chasuble que la Reyne nous avoit donné, qu’ils admiroient avec raison, & trouvoient riche par-dessus tout ce qu’ils avoient de plus rare, & nous venoient souvent supplier de le faire voir à leurs malades, la seule veuë desquels les consolait, & leur sembloit adoucir leurs douleurs.”

<sup>677</sup> *JR*, 40: 202. For instance, during an important council between French, Algonquins, and an unidentified tribe (either Iroquois or Abenakis) in 1653 in Sillery: hanging the gifts seems to have served as a support for metaphors, with the absence of “folds” in the displayed belts being seen as a symbol of the absence of dissimulation in the new friendship: “l’assemblée se tint en une sale de nostre petite maison, où nous recevons, & où nous instruisons les sauvages. On commença par l’exhibition des presens, qu’on estendit sur une corde, qui traversoit toute la sale. Ce n’estoient que des colliers de porcelaine fort larges, des bracelets, des pendants d’oreilles, et des calumets ou petunoirs. Chacun ayant pris sa place : le plus ancien de ces Ambassadeurs prit la parole, disans à toute l’assistance, qu’il venoit de déplier l’affection et l’amitié de ceus de sa nation, figurée sur ces colliers ; que le cœur estoit tout ouvert, qu’il n’y avoit aucun ply, qu’on voyoit dans ses paroles, le fond de leurs ames.” The problem in this case is that the participants in the council did not clearly identify the tribe who hung these gifts. The council occurred after a hunting party of Sillery Indians had captured a few men whom they thought to be Iroquois and wanted to execute. One chief argued that the prisoners were Abenaki hunters and should be returned home safely. After the captives were released, they were asked to return the following spring with their leaders to hold a formal council where these displays took place.

Frémin. Frémin, like Marquette, was eager to make an impression upon the Indians, who had only sparsely been evangelized.<sup>678</sup> The fact that the missionary had already acquired a good level of fluency in the Mohawk language is well documented by his peers. However, the chronicler who described this particular 1667 performance, given on the day of the “Exaltation of the Holy Cross,” emphasized not only his linguistic skills, but his nonverbal talents as well: “Father Frémin made a harangue before all this great assembly,” he wrote, “adapting himself in discourse and gestures to the usage of their most celebrated Orators, who speak not less by gesticulations than by language.”<sup>679</sup> His discourse included songs (the *Veni Creator*), music (from an unidentified “small musical instrument”), impassioned words that evoked stories of past wars and suffering, blamed the Iroquois for their cruelty and “sins” committed against the French and their allies, and glowing promises of a brighter future, in which he associated Christianity with the political alliance offered by the French governor.<sup>680</sup> In the eyes of the Jesuits, this could indeed pass for a very good performance of “Indian-like” oratory.

But Father Frémin then made a “present, so unusual” that it “astounded them all.”<sup>681</sup> “In order to inspire them with greater terror, and make more impression on their minds,” we are told, “the Father caused to be erected, in the middle of the place where the

---

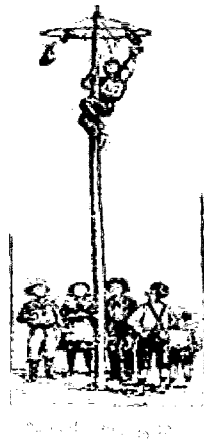
<sup>678</sup> In later years, Father Frémin actually continued to reside among the Iroquois (Mohawks and later Senecas), but, for lack of success in recruiting new converts ended up essentially caring for the community of Christian Huron captives who had been incorporated into the Iroquois tribes through “adoption.”

<sup>679</sup> *JR*, 51: 205. “le Père Fremin harangua devant toute cette grande assemblée, s’accommodant pour les discours & pour les postures à la façon de faire de leurs plus celebres Orateurs, qui ne parlent pas moins par gestes que de la langue.”

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, 204. “Il leur fit voire les grands biens que produisoit la paix, les malheurs qui accompagnent la guerre, dont ils avoient éprouvé les effets depuis un an, par l’embrasement de leurs Bourg. Il leur reprôcha les perfidies & les cruautés qu’ils avoient exercées, avec tant de barbarie sur nos François, sans en avoir reçu aucun mauvais traitement : il leur déclara en suite, qu’il venoit exprès pour changer cette humeur barbare, leur apprenant à vivre en hommes, & puis à estre Chrestiens ; & qu’en suite nostre grand Onnontio les recevoit pour ses sujets, & les prendroient desormais sous sa protection Royale, comme il a fait de tous les autres peuples de ces contrées.”

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, 206. “Il n’est pas croyable combien ce present si extraordinaire les estonna tous.”

Council was being held, a pole forty or fifty feet in length from the top of which hung a Porcelain necklace.”<sup>682</sup> The idea of hanging the belt from a tall pole may have emerged from the father’s recollections of Western folk practices, particularly the tradition of erecting a “*mat de cocagne*,” a smooth trunk often covered in soap or slippery liquid on top of which were hung prizes to be grabbed by brave and skilful climbers during popular



festivals.<sup>683</sup>

FIGURE 3: MÂT DE COCAGNE

Similar practice dating back to Antiquity was the erection of the “May tree” (*arbre de mai* or “May pole” in the English tradition), which carried spiritual meaning related to fertility and the return of the spring. This practice, which still endures in several parts of Western Europe today in various forms, however, was proscribed by the Church at the Council of Milan in 1579, making it unlikely to have been at the origin of the missionary’s actions.

---

<sup>682</sup> Ibid., 206. “ Mais afin de leur donner plus de terreur & faire plus d’impression sur leurs esprits, comme ces peuples se conduisent beaucoup par les choses exterieures ; le Père fit planter au milieu de la place, où se tenoit le Conseil, une perche longue de quarante ou cinquante pieds, du haut de laquelle pendoit un collier de Pourcelaine...”

<sup>683</sup> The *mât de cocagne* exists under various names in several parts of Western Europe (France, England, Spain, Portugal) and has been imported to some of the colonies in the New World (for instance known as *pau de sebo* in Brazil, and *palo enjabonado* in Uruguay). The etymology and historical origin of the *mât de cocagne* is subject to speculations, but seems to have been in existence by the seventeenth century.

But Father Frémin could just as well have found inspiration in Iroquois culture itself. Several earlier accounts mention the use of a pole from which were hung wampum belts in relation to orations that aimed to restore order after a murder within the community.<sup>684</sup> More specifically, a set of gifts were traditionally hung on a pole that stood above the head of the murderer and explained one by one by the orator as a means to convince the victim's family to forgive the criminal and accept reparation. We will never know for sure, but it seems likely that in both this case and the previous example involving Father Marquette, the Fathers may have consciously selected performative aspects of Indian ceremonies that were particularly striking to them because they evoked at the same time practices with which they were familiar, and which were particularly theatrical or spectacular.

These performances must therefore not be seen as the manifestations of unintentional and creative misunderstandings (the fortuitous and convenient misinterpretation of cultural patterns sharing general resemblance), but rather as the scene of an active bridging of cultures through *praxis*. Jesuit and Indian performers consciously manipulated nonverbal elements of public rituals that resonated in both cultures.<sup>685</sup> This, however, did not ensure the efficacy or cultural appropriateness of the performance. Frémin described the meaning of the wampum belt hanging from the pole by declaring that “in like manner, should be hanged the first of the Iroquois who should come to kill a

---

<sup>684</sup> The most compelling example is *JR*, 10: 217 [1636] “[the other presents] are put on a pole, which is raised above the head of the murderer, and are called *Andaerraehaan*, that is to say, ‘what is hung on a pole.’”

<sup>685</sup> This approach could help explain why certain practices became more popular in the process of mutual accommodation, such as the use of the “moon” metaphor for month, or the firing of canons or guns as manifestation of joy, which echoed the strong collective shouts uttered by Indians in similar occasions. Seeing these nonverbal elements as the objects of an active albeit complex and sometimes seemingly illogical selection process helps restore some agency to all colonial participants, challenging the predominant paradigms of “necessity” and hard-to-define “creative misunderstandings” as main motors of acculturation in the New World.

Frenchman or any of our Allies.”<sup>686</sup> This contradicted in every way the meaning and purpose of the similar pole in Iroquois mourning rituals, with the exception of the common reference to death.

Power and oratory were so intimately linked that we ought to wonder what consequences the use of such nonverbal means of communication—which echoed with Indian cultures but offered opportunities for multiple interpretations—may have had for mutual accommodation. How did natives react to the missionaries’ performances of oratory? Father Frémin, who sought to induce fear and awe in his audience, considered himself successful, by the sight of the Mohawks who “remained for a long time with their heads down, without daring either to look at this spectacle or talk about it, until the most prominent and eloquent of their Orators—having recovered his spirits—arose and performed all the apish tricks imaginable about this pole, to show his astonishment.”<sup>687</sup> While the natives may have pondered the meaning of the pole, or reflected on their possible response to the violent threat the missionary had just uttered, they were likely not as “dumbfounded” as the French chronicler believed. The ritual dance performed by their lead orator, far from expressing his “astonishment,” was perhaps aimed at conjuring the powerful and threatening object that had just been introduced by the Jesuits. The type of power with which Father Frémin was invested through his performance was therefore not necessarily the one he had intended. The Mohawks certainly attributed important, and perhaps potentially malevolent, spiritual power to the man who had raised a “death pole” to hold them to their word of peace in the center of their town.

---

<sup>686</sup> *JR*, 51: 206. “leur declarant que seroit ainsi pendu le premier des Iroquois qui veindroit tuer un François, ou quelqu’un de nos Alliés...”

<sup>687</sup> *JR*, 51: 206. “il demeurent long temps la teste en bas, sans oser ni regarder ce spectacle, ni en parler ; iusqu’à ce que le premier et le plus eloquent de leurs Orateurs, ayant comme repris ses esprits, se leva, & fit toutes les singeries imaginables autour de cette perche ; pour déclarer son estonnement.”

By the seventeenth century, many native groups had had multiple opportunities to observe the strange ceremonies and religious rituals of the French, who held public Mass, welcomed their own officials with great pomp, paraded their soldiers to the sound of trumpets and drums, and sang their folk songs. Therefore, the Indians certainly perceived the French efforts at performing “Indian-style” ceremonies, for what they were: a friendly and respectful effort at accommodation. Despite inevitable awkwardness, confusion, and other sour notes, natives knew that these performances were not “typically French.” But they may have shaped their own ceremonies to accommodate what they perceived to be the preferences of the newcomers in term of oratory. This, and other factors such as the changing balance of power in the region, could have caused the equivalent of “trends” in nonverbal components of cross-cultural ceremonies to emerge.<sup>688</sup>

Generally, the Jesuits reported positively the type of responses they received from native audiences when they performed hybrid “Christian-Indian” oratory. Beyond propaganda, this revealed that their performances brought immediate and significant psychological and emotional rewards to the missionaries. In this sense, another dimension of the connection between nonverbal oratory and power lay in the process of self-empowerment experienced by Frenchmen in the New World through the acquisition and enactment of multimedia eloquence. The silence and attention of native audiences during orations was the most common “sign” of success evoked by missionaries. “If the attention of the hearer and a modest deportment decided the effect of a discourse,” wrote one missionary among Eastern Abenakis, “I should have every reason to congratulate

---

<sup>688</sup> This hypothesis will be further explored in Chapter Five.

myself.”<sup>689</sup> At other times, Indian reactions were less elusive, as they seemed to express “joy,” “approval,” or general “satisfaction.”<sup>690</sup> The fathers emphasized that the Indians were pleased with the “efforts” of the missionaries, or with the quality of their attempts at adjusting to local practices, rather than the content of the speeches.

Performing oratory had transformative powers. By drawing a certain form of authority, both real and illusory, from their hybrid emulations of Indian verbal art, Frenchmen explored new dimensions of their selves. Father Joseph Aubery had once been a shy schoolboy from Normandy. The man who was to inspire Romantic author François-René de Chateaubriand for his missionary character in *Atala* (1801), did not nurture particularly fond memories of his novitiate at the Jesuit College in Paris, then in Québec (after 1694), before he was ordained in 1700. In 1710, while leading the mission of Saint-François de Sales among the Abenakis, he wrote to his superior in Québec and former mentor, Father Joseph Jouvency: “you will laugh, I am very sure; for you knew me when I was your pupil—how diffident I was.” Contrasting his past reserve at the seminary with the daring and self-confident harangue he had just performed in front of the local council of Indian elders, he stated: “I am quite another person since I live among these barbarians who are clever, eloquent, and trained by nature to speak.”<sup>691</sup>

---

<sup>689</sup> *JR*, 70: 108-110. “si l’attention de l’auditeur et un maintien modeste décidait du fruit d’un discours, j’aurais eu tout lieu de me féliciter de mes faibles efforts.” The author clearly makes use of irony here, and is realistic about the extent of his success and how much the Indians’ respect/silence really means. This missionary, like his predecessors stressed the performative aspects of his discourse: “Je n’oubliai rien pour donner à cette action le plus d’éclat qu’il m’était possible. Je chantais solennellement la Messe, pendant laquelle je leur fis la première exhortation Abnakise [sic] que j’aie faite dans les formes. (...) Les motifs les plus propres à faire impression, je tâchai de les présenter sous des couleurs frappantes.” *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>690</sup> See page 23. *JR*, 15: 120 “Ces Catechismes leurs plaisent grandement, et n’en sortent quasi jamais sans leur acclamation de joye et d’approbation, Ho, Ho.”; *JR*, 27: 266 ; *JR*, 59: 190 “il fust écouté avec une Joye Universelle de tous ces Peuples.”

<sup>691</sup> *JR*, 66: 177-179. Original in Latin.

Father Aubery, like many of his peers, conceived oratorical performances as both the main stage and the principal battlefield of the mission. Wishing to convince the Christian Indians to expel the “infidels” from their midst, but conscious of the difficulty he would encounter as a fairly young (thirty-seven years old) outsider to impose his ideas, he carefully pondered what oratorical “style” would be most persuasive. “I resolved privately to circumvent and soften the old men; I attacked them with all the arguments suggested by ingenuity and piety; I persuaded them.” His prose revealed the feeling of empowerment that accompanied his rhetorical feat: “I arose; I spoke in so loud a tone, with such vehemence, with such ardor, that I was myself astonished.”<sup>692</sup> In the end, “they surrender[ed]” and a “public decree” banned the agitators from the mission. Native oratory, and Indian society at large, gave an opportunity to Frenchmen to feel more empowered, more respected, and more successful than they might have been if they remained as teachers in France.

\*

\*

\*

A close analysis of nonverbal elements of Native American and European verbal art in the well-documented case of seventeenth-century New France, allows a deeper and more accurate understanding of the complex nature and role of cross-cultural oratory, and thereby of patterns of power, politics, identity, and society in the colonial Northeast. Nonverbal communication also helps explain why Frenchmen, and missionaries from the Society of Jesus in particular, perceived native ceremonies as theatrical performances and how this perception in turn shaped their own attempts at gaining power among Indians through an hybrid, multimedia brand of eloquence. Oratory conceived in these wider

---

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid*, 177.



terms can also shed light upon how French performances, discourses, sermons, and diplomacy, were in turn perceived and received by their Indian audiences. Lastly, the manipulation of this nonverbal rhetoric appears to have been crucial to patterns of power in colonial America at this troubled juncture: how it was gained, retained, transferred, challenged, manipulated, and sometimes lost.

Because it served as a unique space for mediating differences and tensions and for solidifying existing bonds between the groups, the oratorical stage was not only essential for daily Indian social life and religious debates with the missionaries, but was also situated at the center of external diplomacy. The fathers not only adjusted their methods and acquired a new nonverbal and verbal vocabulary to efficiently preach the Gospel, they also had to acquire a larger, more secular, nonverbal repertoire to be able to negotiate their settling in or passage through Indian territory, to obtain food, and preserve their own lives. As Father Julien Garnier noted in 1672, “The spiritual interests of these Missions depend largely on temporal affairs, and above all on the state of men’s minds regarding peace with the French.”<sup>693</sup> As a result, and because they were often among the first French “official” emissaries to venture into new territories, the missionaries often became ambassadors or diplomats. The next chapter will explore, beyond oratory, the wider repertoire for accommodation used by French and Indians in the diplomatic realm, comparing the use that the missionaries made of it with that of French merchants and lay officials, and exploring the trends in expansion, transmission, uniformization, or pauperization brought about by the French acquisition and use of a set of nonverbal “codes.”

---

<sup>693</sup> *JR*, 56 : 58. “Le spirituel de ces Missions dépend beaucoup des affaires temporelles, & sur tout de la disposition des esprits, pour la paix avec les François.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Nonverbal Diplomacy and the Symbolic Language of the Alliance (1650-1701)

“The negotiator must further possess that penetration which enables him to discover the thoughts of men and to know by the least movement of their countenances what passions are stirring within.” François de Callières, *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes* [1716] (1963), 19.

The second half of the seventeenth century marked the passage of the French colonial empire in America from its adolescence to maturity. After 1660 particularly, France’s position in the New World seemed to strengthen under royal intervention, with the notable exception of Brazil, where the dream of a profitable staple colony had been violently crushed by a Portuguese-native coalition by mid-century. Almost as soon as he acceded to the throne, a young Louis XIV, assisted and inspired by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, his minister of finance, sought to transform New France into a profitable, well-administered royal province and launched an active campaign to increase the French population of Canada, while promoting commerce and industry in the colony under the close monitoring of royal officers.<sup>694</sup> In the line of previous attempts at founding a permanent French colony in Cayenne around mid-century, Colbert also invested much effort and financial resources in the colonization of Guiana, under the supervision of the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales*, founded in 1664.<sup>695</sup> Despite multiple setbacks, such

---

<sup>694</sup> Louis XIV acceded to the throne in 1661 and quickly sought to increase France’s naval and commercial position. The transitional period, between the death of Richelieu, in 1642, and the colonial renewal promoted by Louis XIV, has been described as a paradoxical period during which centralized control of overseas possessions decreased, violent clashes between the French and indigenous people seemed at a climax in both New France and the Antilles, but during which the colonies prospered financially and colonial populations significantly increased nevertheless. For an overview of this period, see Philip Boucher, *Les Nouvelles Frances* (Québec: Éditions du Septentrion, 2004), esp. 41-63.

<sup>695</sup> In 1652 the *Compagnie de la France équinoxiale* launched a large promotional campaign to recruit investors and colonists to found a permanent colony in Cayenne. After the disastrous failure of the first expedition, several other attempts were made around 1656-1657 under the control of another company (*Compagnie de l’Amérique méridionale*). The main attraction of Guiana and the Caribbean to French

as the temporary capture of Cayenne by the Dutch (1660) and devastating attacks from the English (1667), the Lesser Antilles and Guiana continued to attract colonists and merchants with hopes of commercial success throughout the period. In France, many publications praised the Caribbean as an earthly paradise, with a better climate and more potential for profit than Canada, despite the threats of diseases, Indian attacks, and international competition.

During the same half-century, the French explored and claimed unprecedented expanses in the *Pays d'en Haut* (Great Lakes region), and down the Mississippi Valley, as far as the Gulf of Mexico, where they founded New Orleans in 1699. Through this wave of exploration, the French met and laid the foundations for new trade partnerships with Indian groups with which they had had little or no previous contact, including the Illinois, Miamis, and Dakota Sioux, whose customs and cultures often differed strikingly from those of their northeastern allies. The culmination of French successes in North America was the settlement of the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701, a multilateral alliance that united the French and nearly forty Indian nations. The Great Peace was the result of years of intensive and strategic diplomatic efforts, and put an end to decades of devastating sporadic wars between the Iroquois League and the French and their native allies.<sup>696</sup> This uncommon degree of success in the realm of intercultural diplomacy has

---

merchants and *engagés* seems to have been the combination of the potential for lucrative plantations (tobacco, sugar, indigo) and trade (precious woods, dyes, etc), and the convenient position for piracy against Spanish ships. The conversion of indigenous populations also constituted a significant motor for private and royal support of the colonies. Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale des Antilles Habitées par les François* (Paris : Thomas Jolly, [1667-1671]) (hereafter cited as Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale*).

<sup>696</sup> Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century*, translated by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montreal: McGill- Queen's University Press, 2001).

been deemed the greatest achievement of the French colonial world at the turn of the century.

In stark contrast, French-Indian relations in the Caribbean turned sour after 1640. The French, who had claimed to entertain more peaceful relations with local native groups than their European competitors (English, Dutch, and particularly Spanish) in the early decades of the seventeenth century, were now signing agreements with the English to restrict Carib populations to a few islands, and engaged in frequent guerilla-style warfare with Indians, while maintaining a few precarious alliances with local groups. Compared to Canada, the French Caribbean appeared a zone outside of the law, controlled by unscrupulous merchants and defiant governors, and constantly put in danger of native reprisal by the rash actions of uncontrolled French settlers and mariners.<sup>697</sup> While in New France successful missions were founded to welcome and convert Iroquois Indians who had broken away from the League, understaffed Caribbean missions were more reputed for the bitter strife opposing religious groups than for their indigenous conversion.<sup>698</sup>

---

<sup>697</sup> This image was particularly conveyed by missionaries who deplored their plight compared to their counterparts in Canada. Father Pelleprat, a Jesuit missionary based in St. Vincent as well as briefly in Guiana, attributes in several instances the blame for Indian attacks against French settlements to the "libertine" and unlawful actions of individual Frenchmen. One example given is that of a French trader who kidnapped Indians to sell them as slaves on another island. The governor caused these slaves to be restored to their people so as to facilitate future relations and potential conversions. Pierre Pelleprat, *Relations des Missions des PP. de la Compagnie de Jesus dans les Isles et dans la Terre Ferme de l'Amerique Meridionale Divisee en Deux Parties : avec une introduction à la langue des Galibis Sauvages de la terre ferme de l'Amérique* (Paris : Sebastien Cramoisy, 1655), 71 (hereafter cited as Pelleprat, *Relations des Missions*.) "car un marinier François ayant enlevé deux Caraïbes de S. Vincent, & les ayant vendus aux habitants de la Tortuë ; Monsieur le Général de Poincy de qui dépend cette Isle, ne le scût pas plutost qu'il les fit mettre en liberté, espérant que leur delivrance seroit une occasion favorable pour la conversion de toute leur nation."

<sup>698</sup> Jesuits, Dominicans, Capuchins, and Recollects as well as members of other smaller Catholic orders shared the Caribbean missionary field during the seventeenth century.

Despite this apparent disorder and omnipresent violence, however, the French maintained permanent land claims in the Caribbean, and commerce seemed to thrive. The French shared half of St. Christopher (St. Kitts) with the English, claimed St. Alouzie (or Alousie, today St. Lucia) after it was abandoned by the English in the 1650s, and had succeeded against many odds in settling in Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Vincent, and St. Domingue.<sup>699</sup> In 1655, a Jesuit missionary reported a population of about 16,000 French “islanders,” notwithstanding what he called the numerous “migratory birds,” a transitory population of mariners and traders who spent only five to six months at a time in the islands.<sup>700</sup> The French traded slaves, both native and African, and formed multiracial communities around sugar and tobacco farms. A handful of missionaries embarked on risky expeditions to remote Indian settlements, often following in the footsteps of independent French merchants, and served as ambassadors to native groups in the Lesser Antilles as well as on the “mainland” (*Terre Ferme*) in Guiana. Although often overlooked, the French presence in the Caribbean was far from negligible in the complex international, commercial, and strategic context of the region. The records paint a contradictory picture of serious diplomatic efforts and successful alliances maintained with Indian groups, in the midst of brutal raids, enslavement, and irreconcilable differences. If success in New France can be attributed to feats of cross-cultural

---

<sup>699</sup> “Concordat des deux nations Françaises et Angloises de St-Christophe du 20 janvier 1666,” CAOM, Fonds Ministériels, Collection Moreau de St.Méry, sous-série F 3, vol. 26, f. 32v, 33.

<sup>700</sup> Pelleprat, *Relations des Missions*, 15-16. “je n’ay pas neantmoins pretendu y comprendre les forains, & ceux qui n’y venant que pour le trafic n’y font pas le sejour ordinaire, & n’y sont que comme des oiseaux de passage. Il y faut adioûter grand nombre de Marchands, & de Matelots, qui y viennent tous les ans de divers ports de France, pour le commerce, & n’y resident que cinq ou six mois. ...Il ne se passe point d’année qu’il ne vienne quatre-vingts ou cent vaisseaux de toutes nations, qui donnent beaucoup d’occupation à nos Pères, nommément pendant leurs maladies.”

diplomacy, conflict and the ultimate breakdown of Carib-French relations cannot be adequately or fully explained by diplomatic blunders.

Much explanatory power has been attributed, with reason, to intercultural diplomacy in the maintenance and expansion of the French empire in North America.<sup>701</sup> Since Francis Parkman, the idea that the French entertained more “benign” relations with Native Americans than their English and Spanish counterparts has been refined to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex accommodation networks in which the French were involved, revealing the importance of indigenous agency and geopolitics in shaping the alliance.<sup>702</sup> Necessity as well as long-term tribal feuds seemed to drive mutual accommodation and the politics of alliance and warfare. Because trade, “friendship,” and military cooperation were all closely connected in native societies, diplomacy was the key to profits and the only way to ensure (or so it was hoped) that Indians would not trade their beaver pelts for weapons and other goods with the neighboring Dutch and English colonies. Even after decades of interaction, the French

---

<sup>701</sup> Gilles Havard, *Empire et métissages: Indiens et Français dans le Pays d'en Haut, 1660-1715* (Paris : Éditions du Septentrion-Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003); Richard White, *The Middle Ground : Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The ‘French genius’ thesis is particularly well-represented by the work of W.J. Eccles: “It is frequently stated that the French had a gift for conciliating native peoples, as displayed in Brazil and Canada. There is much truth in this, Jacques Cartier to the contrary... The one [English] had to displace—that is, destroy—the Indians, the other [French] preserve them, in order to achieve their aims.” W.J. Eccles, *The French in North America, 1500-1783*, 3rd ed. (East Lansing : Michigan State University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>702</sup> Cynthia Van Zandt, *Brothers among Nations : The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); David L. Preston, *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); José Antônio Brandão, “Your fyre shall burn no more”: *Iroquois Policy toward New France and Its Native Allies to 1701* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace : Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads : Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

still struggled to understand whether the “gifts” offered during conferences and treaties represented mainly symbolic or commercial exchanges, or both.

Because of numerical disadvantage, self-preservation also hung in the diplomatic balance for the French. As a result of multilateral alliances, going to war against one group would mean alienating other tribes and launching a potentially devastating domino effect from which the fragile French colony might not recover. The French thus “had to” become master-diplomats, adjusting to native codes and ceremonies, “playing” the part of native ambassadors, offering gifts, smoking the calumet, and even borrowing metaphors from their Indian allies when wording the terms of agreement. The “necessity argument,” however, is problematic in that it tends to conceal agency and the fact that there were possible “degrees” of accommodation. Why the French often “over-performed” when they could have been satisfied with simpler tokens of accommodation can only be explained by looking at more personal, psychological, and emotional motives. Why they favored certain nonverbal media over others in their efforts to accommodate native protocols also reveals much about the nature and processes of cross-cultural communication and syncretism.

While increasing attention has been given to native views of the alliance in New France, the idea still endures that whites ultimately prevailed in the continent because of their ability to imitate and manipulate native codes to their advantage, while supposedly maintaining a safe intellectual and cultural distance from “savage ways.” However, a closer look at acculturation from the angle of nonverbal practices shows that the Indians were just as skilled at emulating and distorting European signs, ceremonies, and behaviors to gain power over whites and other natives. Cross-cultural performance was a

shared reality, not a uniquely European one. In this sense, French-Indian diplomacy did not start inside the wigwam when the dancers started to move and the pipe was passed. Instead, successful diplomacy was part of a large ensemble of practices, often borrowed from Indian traditions but also typically syncretic by this time, that started with the first, even distant, visual contact between the groups.<sup>703</sup>

By the latter half of the seventeenth century, therefore, French-Indian diplomacy also seemed to have reached maturity. French and Indians had learned to know and enact each other's protocols and together had constructed a standardized, albeit still flexible, nonverbal repertoire of accommodation to regulate their various modes of interaction. In 1671, for instance, Jesuit father Charles Albanel embarked with an official expedition dispatched by Intendant Jean Talon to discover a land route to Hudson Bay. In June 1672, the French party encountered three individuals from the Mistassini (Cree) tribe who, said Albanel, came towards the explorers because they had "seen the great smoke signals that we had been making from time to time as we approached this Nation, to signal our arrival."<sup>704</sup> The French were thus using the same form of visual communication that the Indians of Acadia and New England had employed to guide Champlain nearly a century earlier.<sup>705</sup> Whether or not the Mistassinis themselves practiced smoke signaling did not affect the efficacy of this strategy. The three Indians asked the French to stop and wait

---

<sup>703</sup> When studying diplomacy, therefore, we must go beyond the official ceremonies, large conventions, and treaties to observe the necessary preludes to the peace/alliance in more mundane and everyday settings. In seventeenth-century French America, diplomacy was carried out by unlikely ambassadors and in surprising contexts, to secure safe passage through an area, to obtain food and directions, to obtain the restitution of hostages, etc. It simultaneously took place at the micro local level and at the larger regional one.

<sup>704</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1897), 56: 170 (hereafter cited as *JR*). "Ils venoient au devant de nous, ayant apperçeu de grandes fumées que nous faisons de temps en temps approchant de cette Nation, pour signal de nostre arrivée."

<sup>705</sup> See Chapter Two.



where they were until they could warn the rest of their people of the visitors' arrival. Three days later, eighteen canoes of Indians in full regalia (notably beaded ornaments and body paints) came to meet the French and guide them to their settlement. To welcome the chief, the leader of the French expedition "caused him to be saluted by ten musket shots as a sign of rejoicing," which satisfied the natives, clearly familiar with this type of homage.<sup>706</sup> The rest of the proceedings between the two nations included two days of orations and the explanation of several gifts by Father Albanel to secure the French safe passage through Mistassini territory, introduce the Indians to Christianity, and convince them to renounce trading with the English around Hudson Bay. After the Indians' leaders had made their response the next day, the rest of the time was spent in the ceremonial sharing of food, songs, and dances.<sup>707</sup>

Albanel's account is that of a veteran ambassador. He used phrases such as "all the people feasted us in their manner" and "thanks that are practiced here on such occasions" to convey his familiarity with Indian codes.<sup>708</sup> Like Albanel, many missionaries, merchants, and French officials had learned the lessons of the past, having often read the writings and advice of previous visitors to the New World, and had gained further personal experience through direct interaction with the natives. But as the French ventured farther from the St. Lawrence Valley, they became increasingly aware that the practices, material extensions, and ceremonial gestures they knew were as bound by

---

<sup>706</sup> *JR*, 56: 172. "Ce fit le 13. de Juin que dix-huit canots arriverent, la plupart ayant peints leurs visages, & s'estans parez de tout ce qu'ils avoient de precieux, comme de tours de teste, de colliers, de ceintures, et de brasselets de porcellaine. Ils vindrent descendre tout proche de nous, & le Capitaine mettant pied à terre, je le fis saluer de dix coups de fusils en signe de jouissance, & dès le mesme soir, je le fis appeler, avec les principaux d'entre eux, pour leur parler par deux riches presens."

<sup>707</sup> *JR*, 56: 174-78.

<sup>708</sup> *JR*, 56 : 178. "tous les particuliers nou regalerent à leur mode" ; " Apres les remerciements qui se pratiquent icy en ces occasions"

geography and culture as language itself. Acting “à la mode du pays” [“in the way of the country”] was complicated by the fact that there were as many “modes” as there were “pays.”<sup>709</sup> As they tried to export the painstakingly created practices that guaranteed peace with their ordinary allies, they were often met with limited success, if not complete failure. So, had the French learned any valuable lessons during their first century and a half of interaction with Native Americans that they could put to use as they tried to forge new bonds? And, in their eagerness to use familiar diplomatic codes, did the French contribute to homogenizing Indian diplomacy? Or did they ultimately have to adjust endlessly to local practices, thus contributing to create a complex mosaic of syncretic nonverbal repertoires for accommodation?

In the seventeenth century, the rules of official international diplomacy were still being established, notably through the active foreign policies of the court of Louis XIV.<sup>710</sup> Ambassadors did not yet represent a real profession, which could cause many problems at the hands of unskilled men, as pointed out by François de Callières—Louis XIV’s leading ambassador and personal secretary after 1700—in his landmark treaty *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes*.<sup>711</sup> This vacuum left room for improvisation and the free development of diplomatic strategies specific to an American context. This chapter does not claim to provide an exhaustive analysis of French-Indian diplomacy in all of its complexities, nor to find a single definite answer to the discrepancy between French-Indian relations in North America and in the Caribbean. Rather, it provides an

---

<sup>709</sup> JR, 40: 208.

<sup>710</sup> William J. Roosen, *The Age of Louis XIV : The Rise of Modern Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Pub. Co., 1976)

<sup>711</sup> François de Callières, *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains* (Amsterdam, 1716) ; An English translation appeared within a few months of the original : *On the Manner to Negotiating with Princes* (Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 1963).

overview of essential features or “practices” that participated in cross-cultural accommodation in several regions of French America, before exploring the example of the calumet (or ceremonial peace pipe) as a material device unique to North American French-Indian diplomacy, with its limits, successes, and failures.

This chapter thus offers a look at nonverbal practices in diplomatic proceedings across late-seventeenth-century French colonies. Some elements of intercultural communication and accommodation that had emerged during the first contact period of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries can be traced up to this juncture, and their evolution analyzed. Nonverbal communication remained central to peace, mutual intimidation, and war. This chapter offers an opportunity to describe the practical results of nearly two centuries of nonverbal interaction, the limits of the syncretic repertoire for accommodation that had been elaborated during that period, and some of the causes and consequences of the failure of these nonverbal media in providing a platform for intercultural harmony. Comparing three different regions of French-Indian relations, each with its specific geopolitical, demographic, and economic contexts, also allows us to see whether diplomatic “lessons” were transmitted or exchanged or if they remained relevant only locally, while questioning the overall power of colonial diplomacy.

\* \* \*

### **Practices**

In many ways, the basic goals of diplomacy in the second half of the seventeenth century differed little from those sought during first encounters in the age of exploration and early settlement. Because self-preservation and survival depended on amicable

exchange, one of the first and most critical functions of shared nonverbal behaviors was to identify friends from foes. By this time, however, the choice of the appropriate signs to signal friendly intentions clearly reflected decades of close acquaintance. When, in June 1671, Father Albanel and the French exploratory party reached a village of *Miskoutenagachit* Indians, with whom they already had contacts, the Indians jumped in the river up to their waist, carrying the Frenchmen and their baggage to land, and helping them to bring their canoes ashore. The chief, meanwhile, was “shouting at the top of his lungs as a form of compliment to us, ‘Black Robe is coming to visit us’” recalled Albanel. He then took the missionary by the hand, grabbing his paddle with the other to relieve him from the weight, and led him to his cabin.<sup>712</sup>

Close physical contact, what the French commonly called “caresses,” and spontaneous bursts of excitement on the part of the Indians could also cause fear, but the overall friendliness and affection of the Indians’ actions generally dissipated misunderstandings rather rapidly. “We suffered nothing other than fear,” recalled Jean Cavalier about a 1687 encounter, “which we experienced as soon as we passed a band of savages who came throwing themselves at us wholeheartedly; we thought ourselves in great danger of having our throats cut open, but we were soon proven wrong by the marks of friendships they gave us.”<sup>713</sup> “Great demonstrations of friendship” thus

---

<sup>712</sup> *JR*, 56: 188. “Du plus loin qu’on nous vit approcher, ils sortirent tous de leurs cabanes & se rendirent sur le bord de l’eau, Le Capitaine s’écrie à pleine teste pour nous complimenter, la Robe noire nous vient visiter, & soudain une bande de jeunesse se détache du gros, qui accourut à nous ayant l’eau jusqu’au ventre, les uns nous portèrent à terre, les autres s’attachèrent à nos canots, & le reste à notre équipage.” My translation.

<sup>713</sup> *The Journal of Jean Cavalier: The Account of a Survivor of La Salle’s Texas Expedition, 1684-1688*, ed. by Jean Delanglez, S.J. (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit History, 1938), 78. “nous neumes rien de mal que la peur que nous rencontrasmes des que nous fumes passes une troupe de sauvage qui vindrent se jeter sur nous a corps perdu, nous nous creumes en tres grand danger destre egorgés, mais nous fumes bientost detrompes par les marques damitie quil nous donnoit.” My translation. Also *ibid.*, 80. “ils sen vindrent a nous a toute bride et apres toutes les marques de surprise et de joye ils nous entrainerent a leur village a

remained one of the most reliable and universal forms of greetings given by Indians.<sup>714</sup> This was true in the Caribbean as well. On June 9, 1653, three Jesuit fathers reached the site they had selected for a new mission, an Indian settlement on the Ouarabiche River (near the modern-day Venezuela/Guiana border), and were “received by the Galibis with great testimonies of joy and friendship.” “These good people were doing us all the services they could imagine” recalled one of the missionaries, “and were assessing us through their eyes, as if not being able to be sated of looking at us.”<sup>715</sup>

Specific shouts or words were also used during that period when encountering new groups, or if unsure of the identity of the individuals in sight. Exploring territories unknown to whites beyond the Illinois country, Sieur Cavelier de La Salle came across an unidentified party of Indians in the winter of 1680, and put to use his decades of experience chartering new lands and building trade partnerships with Indians in North America. The Recollet missionary who accompanied him recalled: “We first gave the cry

---

toute force, et comme leurs manieres caressantes ne nous monroient que beaucoup de bonne foy nous neusmes pas grand peine de nous resoudre a les suivre.”

<sup>714</sup> Full-fledged hostility or scorn was also non-ambiguous. Pierre Esprit Radisson, *Being an Account of His Travels and Experiences among the North American Inians, from 1652 to 1684* (New York: Burt Franklin [1885] 1967), 217 (hereafter cited as Radisson, *Account*). “I was received wth great demonstrations of ffriendshippe. All that day we feated, danced, and sing [*sic*].”

One important caveat to this rule is the case of Indian groups who practiced ritual weeping. La Salle’s brother, Jean Cavelier, thus admitted being utterly confused by the fact that Indians expressed joy through tears, but danced when in mourning. This cultural gap was nevertheless mediated when the French understood that new “codes” applied to emotions. “quatre vieilles et quatre jeunes filles qui sen venoient a la rencontre de nous pleurant et se dechirant les cheveux elles passerent a costé de nous sans avoir la curiosité de nous regarder.” *Journal of Jean Cavelier*, 86. Father Pelleprat noticed the same ‘reversal’ of emotional manifestations in the Caribbean : “Comme les danses ne sont pas toujours des marques de la rejouissance de ces peuples, les larmes ne sont pas aussi des signes infaillibles de leur tristesse ; leur coûtume estant de pleurer aux occasions de joye ordinaire. Je fus surpris une nuit d’entendre des pleurs, & des Hurléments ; & j’eus crainte qu’une femme qui estoit malade dans notre Carbet, ne fut decedée ; ce qui m’ayant obligé de me lever, & de m’en informer, on me dit le sujet de ces larmes, qui estoit la venue de quelques estrangers arrivés le soir precedent, dont nos Galibis se rejoüissoient, en renouvelant les pleurs qu’ils avoient commencés des le soir.” *Relation des Missions*, 65.

<sup>715</sup> Pelleprat, *Relation des Missions*, 25. “ Nous fusmes receu des Galibis avec de grands témoignages de joye, et d’amitié. Ces braves gens nous rendoient tous les services dont ils se pouvoient adviser ; nous mesuroient des yeux, et ne se pouvoient saouler de nous regarder.” My translation.

according to the custom of these nations, as though to ask whether they wished peace or war, because it was very important to show resolution at the outset.”<sup>716</sup> By “these nations,” the French understood groups that belonged to the same general cultural area that they had been exploring, even if they had had no direct contact with this particular tribe. This relative homogeneity of customs —both real and imagined—among Indian nations and among bands belonging to large nations such as the Illinois or Miamis was the *sine qua non* of peaceful communication.

The “cry” given by La Salle was perhaps the same kind that another seasoned explorer and trader, Pierre Esprit Radisson, used in 1682: “In the morning wee discovered nyne canoos at the point of the Island coming towards us, & being within hearing, I demanded who they were; they return’d a friendly answer.”<sup>717</sup> Radisson had the particularity of mastering several Indian languages, both Algonquian and Iroquoian. Although the exact nature or meaning of the “cry” is seldom explicit in colonial records, it was likely an Indian term that might have crossed multiple linguistic boundaries and also served natives when they met distant nations. Father Allouez suggested that outward expressions of friendships and vocal greetings both belonged to Indian diplomacy (rather than European or syncretic), commenting about the Illinois Indians he had met in 1667 in these terms: “I find all those who I met, affable and humane, and it is said that when they meet a stranger, they utter a cry of joy, caress him, and render him all the testimonies of friendship possible.”<sup>718</sup>

---

<sup>716</sup> Louis Hennepin, *A Description of Louisiana* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: March of America Facsimile Series, Number 30 [New York: 1880] University Microfilms, 1966), 156-57.

<sup>717</sup> Radisson, *Account*, 262.

<sup>718</sup> *JR*, 51: 50. “Je trouve tous ceux que j’ay pratiqués, affables & humains, & l’on dit que quand ils rencontrent quelque estrange, ils font un cry de joye, le caressent, & luy rendent tous les témoignages d’amitié qu’ils peuvent.”

In July 1648, the French based in Trois-Rivières spotted on the opposite bank of the river the silhouette of a man agitating a blanket in the air. Thinking that the man was asking to be rescued (perhaps making a parallel with the ‘white flag’ of the battlefield), the French launched an armed rowboat (*chaloupe*) but then saw that the man was already making his way towards them on a makeshift raft, while “shouting in the French language, ‘come on, come, come’.” Hearing this call, the French concluded that the unidentified individual was one of the Frenchmen who had been taken prisoner by the Iroquois and had escaped. In fact, wrote the chronicler, “we finally recognized that he was a young Huron named Armand, who, for having served as [the Jesuits’] altar boy, can manage a little of the French tongue.”<sup>719</sup> The nature of the greetings or identifying shouts could thus vary with the source and recipient of the sonorous signals and with the context of the exchange. Once he reached the rowboat and later the settlement, Armand was properly greeted with expressions of friendship on the part of the French: “each one received him and embraced him with love.”<sup>720</sup>

Even when no greeting word was known, manifesting oneself openly and loudly was perceived as a positive sign, because natives typically conducted guerrilla-type warfare in which furtive approach and surprise effect on one’s enemy were key. Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette, who led an exploration down the Mississippi River in the mid-1670s, first came across an Illinois village by following what looked like a

---

<sup>719</sup> *JR*, 32: 160. “Le quatorzième du mesme mois [juillet], iour de saint Bonaventure, parut un homme à l’autre bord de la bourgade des trois Rivieres, faisant voltiger en l’air une couverture, en sorte qu’il sembloit demander qu’on l’allast secourir. On arme une chaloupe, mais comme elle retardoit trop à son gré, il bastit un petit caieul, se met dessus, & tire droit à ceux qu’il le venoient reconnoistre, criant en langue François, allons, venez, venez, on creut à ses paroles, que c’estoit l’un de nos deux prisonniers François qui s’estoit sauvé, mais enfin on reconneust que s’estoit un ieune Huron nommé Armand, qui pour avoir esté nostre Seminariste se demesle un petit, de la langue François. Il avoit esté pris l’an passé & conduit au pays des Hiroquois, où il a souffert d’horribles tourmens.”

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.* “Comme il est bien connu des François, chacun le receust & l’embrassa avec amour.”

well-beaten Indian trail. They observed the activities of the Illinois from a distance, until they “felt it was time to uncover [themselves], which [they] did by a shout [they] uttered with all [their] strength, while stopping without moving further.”<sup>721</sup> The Indians came out of their cabins, looked at the intruders, and dispatched four elders with calumet pipes as ambassadors of peace. Father Marquette suggested that the Indians had understood they had nothing to fear “having probably recognized us as French, especially seeing the black robe, or at least had no reason to fear since we were only two men, and we had warned them of our arrival.”<sup>722</sup> Dissimulation, or the perception that one was trying to conceal his true intentions was, since the early colonial period, a main trigger for distrust, while “openness” connoted genuineness and trust. The absence of weapons or hostile behavior, and the willingness of both sides to negotiate were, not surprisingly, also essential features of intercultural diplomacy.

But there were rules to how, where, and when the “greeting shouts” could be uttered. Most often the use of this vocal sign corresponded to encounters that involved significant distance between the participants, for instance, one group being on the river while the other was on shore, or, in the case of Marquette and Jolliet, between ‘villagers’ and strangers standing on top of a butte at the outskirts of the ‘village.’ When a band of Ottawas furtively entered by night the temporary camp that La Salle and his men had made by the river, and were discovered stealing a coat, “their chief called out that he was

---

<sup>721</sup> *JR*, 59: 114. “Nous suivons en silence ce petit sentier, et apres avoir fait environ 1 Lieües, nous decouvrimés un village sur le bord d’une riviere, et deux autres sur un Costeau escarté du premier d’une demie lieüe, ce fut pour lors que nous nous recommandâmes a Dieu de bon cœur, et ayant imploré son secours, nous passâmes outre sans estre decouverts et nous vinsmes si près que nous entendions mesme parler les sauvages. Nous crûmes donc qu’il estoit temps de nous decouvrir, ce que nous fismes par un Cry que nous poussâmes de toutes Nos forces, en nous arrestant sans plus avancer.”

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.* “Et nous ayant probablement reconnus pour françois, sur tout voyant la robe noire, ou du moins n’ayant aucun sujet de deffiance puisque nous n’étions que deux hommes, et que nous les avions avertis de nostre arrivée.”



a friend.” However, the French held the Indians up to their own protocols and “he was told in answer, that it was an unseasonable hour, and that people did not come in that way by night except to steal or kill those who were not on their guard.”<sup>723</sup> The context of the “codes” was thus as important as the codes themselves.

By the late seventeenth century, it seems that certain signs continued to be used exclusively in all-Indian contexts by the natives, while others were reserved for interaction with the whites. In the Caribbean, Father La Borde reported that the Caribs possessed an instrument made out of a large sea shell known as *Lembie*, which they used as “trumpets by the means of which they can be heard from a large league, and even further.” Nothing seems to suggest that the *lembies* were used to communicate with Europeans, and La Borde explained: “they have different tunes by which they made their needs heard, the success of their endeavors or wars, or of their hunting and fishing; and accordingly their wives often one hour or two before they arrive prepare, either the cauldron, or the *boucan* [grill], or bandages for the wounded.”<sup>724</sup> While being held prisoner by a band of Iroquois warriors in present-day New York State in 1651, Pierre-Esprit Radisson observed as an outsider an encounter between his captors and two other Indian men from a different tribe: “the day following we proceeded on our journey, where we mett 2 men, wth whome our wild men seemed to be acquainted by some

---

<sup>723</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 120-21.

<sup>724</sup> Sieur de La Borde, *Relation de l'Origine, Mœurs, Coustumes Religion, Guerres et Voyages des Caraibes Sauvages des Isles Antilles de l'Amérique* [1684], 11. “Ces lembies leur servent à deux usages ; sçavoir de trompettes par le moyen desquelles on les entend souvent d’une grande lieuë, & meme plus loin. Ils ont des tons par lesquels ils font entendre leurs besoins, le succez de leurs entreprises ou de guerre, ou de chasse, ou de pêche ; & suivant lesquels leurs femmes souvent une heure ou deux avant qu’ils arrivent preparent, ou la chaudiere, ou le boucan, ou dequoy les penser s’ils sont blessez;” My translation. La Borde also speaks of a sonorous signal given by Caribs when passing an island to signal that they are friends before continuing their journey: *Ibid.*, 28. “lorsqu’ils sont en mer, ils cornent une grosse Coquille, qui se nomme Dambis pour faire entendre aux voisins qu’ils sont amis, & continuent leurs voyages, & portent leurs lits par tout.”

signes.”<sup>725</sup> Clearly, even an expert in native protocols and communication like Radisson was not privy to some of the codes the natives used among themselves.

On the other hand, some shared, culturally syncretic signs also existed, which particularly indicated that French-Indian nonverbal communication had reached a new level of elaboration by the second half of the seventeenth century. These signs were generally visual or sonorous, and were practiced by Indians and Frenchmen indiscriminately, to express agreement, reassert the alliance, or as a means of joint celebration. When a group of Indians with whom the French did not have formal peace agreements approached a French settlement, they thus had to “[ask] by signs to negotiate.”<sup>726</sup> Native musical and more largely sonorous forms of celebration also often led to encounters and successful exchanges with the French. A group of Abenakis coming to the French and Algonquin town of Sillery on a diplomatic embassy in the spring of 1653, for instance, “made their drums beat, as a sign of peace, and of rejoicing” as they approached the settlement.<sup>727</sup>

One of the traditional naval greetings practiced by the French was to fire volleys of musket or cannon shots. In 1679, Father Hennepin performed the Christian sacraments during the launching of La Salle’s new ship, *The Griffin*, which the French had built on site (after passing by foot the great Niagara Falls) to explore the Great Lakes. “[A]nd having blessed it with the ceremonies prescribed by the Church,” wrote Hennepin, “it

---

<sup>725</sup> Radisson, *Account*, 36.

<sup>726</sup> *JR*, 32: 142. When two Iroquois canoes approached Montreal, “Monsieur de Maison-neuve Gouverneur de cette Isle, fit avancer quelques soldats pour les reconnoistre, ces Barbares les ayant aperceus, firent alte, & demanderent par signe à parlementer, on leur envoye deux Truchemens qui s’arresterent fort long-temps avec eux.”

<sup>727</sup> *JR*, 40: 202. “si tost qu’ils apperceurent la demeure des François et des Sauvages de Sillery, ils firent resonner leurs tambours, en signe de paix, & de réjouissance. Ils amenoient deux vieillards, des plus considerables de leur pays, chargez de presens, qui estoient comme les ordres, & les commissions qui leur avoient esté données.”

was launched into the water although it was not yet entirely finished...We fired three salutes with our cannons, and sang the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving, which was followed by several ‘*Vive le Roy.*’ The Iroquois who stood wondering at this ceremony, shared in our rejoicing. A glass of brandy was given to all of them to drink, as well as to the French.”<sup>728</sup> In other instances, Indians who were more accustomed to this practice participated more directly through rhythmic shouts or the firing of weapons. In 1666, a French expedition was greeted by the Iroquois in the town of *Gandaoüagué*: “with the discharge of all the artillery—each one firing from his Cabin, and two swivel-guns being discharged at the two ends of the village.”<sup>729</sup>

Cannon shots could serve as signs of both reassurance and warning against danger. When an Iroquois, prisoner of the French, was allowed to visit his fellow tribesmen who were camped nearby to testify to the good treatment he and other Iroquois captives had received from the whites, he requested that, when he returned to Montreal, cannons be fired to signal to his friends that he had safely journeyed back “without encountering any Algonquin.”<sup>730</sup> On the other hand, and around the same time, when relations further degraded between the Five Nations and the French, Algonquin allies

---

<sup>728</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 85-86.

<sup>729</sup> *JR*, 51: 202. The French were escorted by “two hundred men, who marched in good order” to the Iroquois town of Tionnontoguen, which the Jesuit chronicler described as the “Capital of this whole country.” Before entering the town, “the most Eloquent man of the Nation” pronounced a discourse. “Après quoy, il nous introduisit [sic] dans la Bourgade, où nous fûmes receus avec la decharge de toute l’artillerie, chacun tirant de sa Cabanne, & deux pierrriers faisant feu aux deux bouts du Bourg.” This was not a unique occurrence of Indians firing weapons as a form of salute. Iroquois, who had better access to guns, used it often when meeting the French, as early as 1640: “Monsieur le Chevalier de Montmagny (...) s’en va mouïller l’ancre devant leur fort, à la portée du mousquet, ces Barbares luy font un salue de trente-six ou quarante coups d’arquebuse, fort adroitement.” (“Monsieur the Chevalier de Montmagny...cast anchor before their fort, within musket-range; these Barbarians made, very adroitly, a salute or thirty-six or forty shots from their arquebuses.”) *JR*, 21: 42.

<sup>730</sup> *JR*, 32: 166-68. “Au reste ils supplient le Capitaine des François de leur envoyer des vivres & de faire tirer un coup de canon à mon entrée dans le fort, pour marque que je suis en lieu d’assurance, & que je n’ay fait rencontre d’aucuns Algonquins à mon retour....Monsieur de la Poterie fit bien tirer une volée de canon, mais il ne jugea pas à propos qu’on leur envoyast des vivres.”

warned colonists that an Iroquois war party was approaching Montreal, upon which news, Charles-Roy Bacqueville de La Potherie “caused the inhabitants to be warned by the ringing of the church bells, and by a volley of cannon shots, which is the ordinary signal to be on one’s guard.”<sup>731</sup>

Both French and Indian diplomatic elements were thus incorporated in the daily performative relations between the groups. The context and goals of the exchange determined which signs were used and how they were performed. As observed in Chapter Four, adopting certain practices or visual traits from the opposite party could constitute an important form of diplomatic strategy. Just as an Indian orator could wear French clothing or a Jesuit orator offer wampum belts to better reach their audiences and promote a more favorable outcome to their requests, both groups could also manipulate core diplomatic signals. At Michillimakinac, where La Salle and his men anchored their ship at the end of August 1679, “the Hurons who have their village surrounded by palisades twenty-five feet high and situated near a great point of land opposite the island..., proved the next day that they were more French than the Outaouïactz, but it was in show, for they gave a salute by discharging all their guns, and they all have them, and renewed it three times, to do honor to our ship, and to the French.”<sup>732</sup>

The firing of three volleys manifested the Hurons’ acquaintance with French practices because the colonists often fired three cannon shots on similar occasions. When relating this anecdote, however, Father Hennepin claimed that the Hurons’ actions had been dictated by a French trader well-acquainted with them, in an effort to please La

---

<sup>731</sup> JR, 32: 158. “un Algonquin ayant decouvert la piste de l’ennemy, en donna avis à Monsieur de la Potherie qui en fit advertir les habitants par le toxin, & par une volée de canon signal ordinaire pour se tenir sur ses gardes.”

<sup>732</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 100.

Salle for personal commercial gain.<sup>733</sup> Hennepin failed to perceive native agency and the significance of this performance in singling out the Hurons as the most powerful, closest allies of the French because of the many guns they possessed and fired on that occasion (“they all have them”). The performance was not only part of French-Huron relations, but clearly also pertained to internal Huron-Ottawa diplomacy. By proving themselves “more French than the [Ottawas],” the Hurons were also claiming preferred position and access to French goods and military support.

More generally, successful diplomacy and peace were figuratively translated in terms of nonverbal conformity or resemblance between the groups.<sup>734</sup> In this sense, diplomacy was conceived by colonial participants as physical as well as theoretical or rhetorical. Orations in the context of peace agreements often involved physical contact between the main orator and the most notable members of his audience. The French and Indians could be, for instance, physically, visually, and symbolically tied together by wampum belts that would become embedded with the power of this association and would guarantee its maintenance in the future.<sup>735</sup>

---

<sup>733</sup> Ibid. “this salute had been suggested to them by some Frenchmen, who come there, and who often carry on a very considerable trade with these nations, and who designed to gain the Sieur de la Salle by this show, as he gave umbrage to them, only in order better to play their parts subsequently by making it known that the bark was going to be the cause of destruction....”

<sup>734</sup> As seen in Chapter Four, this conformity could be verbal as well, when members of one group borrowed figures of speech and stock metaphors from the other culture, and delivered speeches in the foreign tongue.

<sup>735</sup> *JR*, 27: 259. “He tied a collar of porcelain beads on the arms of a Frenchman” and *Ibid.*, 261 “he took hold of a Frenchman, placed his arm with his, and with his other arm he clasped that of an Algonquin. Having thus joined himself to them, ‘here’ he said, ‘is the knot that binds us inseparably; nothing can part us.’ This collar was extraordinarily beautiful.” This was part of an elaborate ceremony between the Iroquois seeking peace with the French and Hurons in July 1645.

In June 1641, a group of Iroquois came to Trois-Rivières to express their desire to make peace with the French and their Algonquin, Montagnais, and Huron allies.<sup>736</sup> Despite much mutual distrust and the resistance of the Indians who suspected a “trick” from the Iroquois, the local French leader sent for Governor Montmagny in Quebec, who rushed to the scene and engaged into long parleys with the enemy, who held two Frenchmen captive (François Marguerie and Thomas Godefroy). During the diplomatic ceremony aimed at the restitution of the two prisoners and the sealing of a new peace between the groups, the Iroquois orator suggested that, during their captivity, Marguerie and Godefroy had become Iroquois: “formerly the mere name of Frenchmen struck terror to our hearts, their look appalled us...but at last, we have learned to change Frenchmen into Hiroquois.”<sup>737</sup> The redemption of the captives would not only turn them back into Frenchmen, but would contribute to merge both nations and their identities into one:

‘They are still Hiroquois, but immediately they will be French; let us rather say that they will be French and Hiroquois at the same time, for we shall be only one people.’ Saying that, he took the hands of Father Ragueneau, and of the sieur Nicolet, the delegates to negotiate peace, then touching them on the face and on the chin, he said to them: ‘Not only shall our customs be your customs, but we shall be so closely united that our chins shall be re clothed with hair, and with beards like yours.’ After some other ceremonies, he approached the captives, broke their bonds, and tossed these over the palisades of their fort.<sup>738</sup>

---

<sup>736</sup> *JR*, 21: 38-40. “Le lendemain trois canots ennemis se vindrent promener devant le fort, à la portée de la voix ; l’un des plus âgés de cette escoüade s’écria à pleine teste, parlant aux Sauvages ! Prestés moy l’oreille, je viens pour traiter de la paix avec toutes les Nations de ces quartiers, avec les Montagnais, avec les Algonquins, avec les Hurons, la terre sera toute belle, la riviere n’aura plus de vagues, on ira par tout sans crainte.”

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. “jadis le seul nom de François nous jettoit la terreur dedans l’ame, leur regard nous donnoit l’épouvante, ... mais enfin, nous avons appris à changer les François en Hiroquois”

<sup>738</sup> *JR*, 21: 44-46. “ils sont encore Hiroquois, mais tout maintenant ils seront François ; disons plutost qu’il seront François, & Hiroquois tout ensemble : car nous ne serons plus qu’un peuple : disans cela, il prit les mains du Père Ragueneau, & du Sieur Nicolet, delegués pour traiter la paix, puis les touchant au visage, & sur le menton, leur dit : Non seulement nos coustumes, seront vos coustumes, mais nous serons si étroitement unis, que nos mentons se revestiront de poil, & de barbe comme les vostres. Apres quelques autres ceremonies, il s’approche des captifs, brise leurs liens, les jette pardessus la palissade de leur fort.”

Acculturation and physical/sensory transformation were thus consciously associated with diplomacy. This did not necessarily entail a permanent change in identity, but a conscious effort to ‘become other’ for a specific circumstance by ‘switching codes.’ Because these “codes” or standardized behaviors and phrases were often more syncretic than purely ‘French’ or ‘native,’ and were perceived as distorted or not accurate by the recipients of a diplomatic discourse or gesture, the real efficacy of the system lay in the intention. In other words, the effort to adjust rather than the success of the adaptation determined the outcome of the proceedings. This explains why peaceful ceremonies could take place even when the French “over-performed” the ceremonies and misused Indian symbols and symbolic gifts, and why no violent conflict emerged as the result of diplomatic faux-pas, at least not as long as the two parties were involved in the formalized context of the interaction (what Richard White calls the “middle ground”).

Peacefulness of intention and willingness to compromise were also expressed during diplomatic ceremonies through the reciprocal exchange of gifts and the exchange of hostages. Jean Cavelier reported that, during his brother’s arduous exploration of the Mississippi River and Illinois country, the expedition had more stocks of “axes, knives, scissors, needles, thread, Brazilian tobacco etc., to give to the savage nations when crossing their land” than food supplies onboard.<sup>739</sup> These “trinkets” proved useful when the French crew came across an unknown people: “at first we put ourselves on the defensive in case of insults, but these people did not dare to approach us and on the contrary fled at once...we reassured them by signs, and we camped near the village and they slowly approached us and finally dared to enter our tents made of grass and tree

---

<sup>739</sup> *Journal of Jean Cavelier*, 64. “nous n'emportâmes avec nous que quelques haches couteaux cizeaux aiguilles fil tabac de brezil &c pour doner aux nations sauvages ches lesquelles nous passerions.”

branches, and we gave them small gifts. The next day they took us to their dwellings.”<sup>740</sup> Gifts could thus serve to reassure during first encounters, but they also fully participated in more elaborate diplomatic proceedings between groups who shared a long and often tumultuous history of interactions.<sup>741</sup> Gifts expressed compliance with foreign practices (particularly in the way gifts were distributed and explained), as well as generosity, a crucial element of native alliances.<sup>742</sup> Negotiations and gift-giving, and the outcome of both, were thus interdependent: “[the Iroquois] invited Onontio, that is, Monsieur our Governor to speak, in other words, to offer his presents. I shall not relate the speech he made to them by his interpreter; it will suffice to say a few words of the manner in which he offered his presents to them, in compliance with the code of these peoples; his gifts surpassed by far those of the Barbarians.”<sup>743</sup>

Similarly, the exchange or restitution of hostages could be part of lasting negotiations or used as the first step towards restoring or establishing peace. In the Caribbean in 1652, officials and missionaries devised a plan revolving around Indian captives, to ensure that the Caribs of St. Vincent would welcome a Jesuit father despite tensions between the groups: “a French mariner having kidnapped two Caribs from St. Vincent and having sold them to the inhabitants of [the Island of] La Tortue,” explained

---

<sup>740</sup> *Journal of Jean Cavalier*, 86. “nous decouvrimmes quelques personnes qui venoient de nostre coste, nous nous mimes dabort en etat de defense a cas d’insulte, Mais ces gens la nozerent pas nous aborder au contraire ils senfuirent tout aussitost. Nous poursuivimes nostre chemin et nous arrivasmes a un village dont les cabanes estoit faites de cannes entrelassee blanchies du plus beau plastre du monde, les sauvages voulurent prendre la fuite mais nous les rassurames par signes ; et nous campames aupres du village peu a peu ils saprocherent de nous et finalement ils se risquerent a entrer sous nos tentes derbe et de branches darbre, nous leur fimes quelques petits presents et le lendemain ils nous amenerent ches eux.”

<sup>741</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>742</sup> For the close connection between gift-giving, peace, and trade in native societies, see David Murray, *Indian Giving: Economies of Power in Indian-White Exchanges* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

<sup>743</sup> *JR*, 21: 51.



Father Pelleprat, “Monsieur the General de Poincy who is in charge of this island, caused them to be released as soon as he heard about it, hoping that their deliverance would be a favorable occasion for the conversion of their entire nation; particularly because one of those who had been captured was the son of one of the most prominent Caribs on St. Vincent island, which could greatly contribute to this goal.”<sup>744</sup> The plan succeeded, as the two liberated Caribs subsequently paid a courtesy visit to the governor in St. Christophe, and asked to take one of the priests back with them to their country.<sup>745</sup> Hostages were also exchanged after the conclusion of a peace, to ensure that both parties observed it.<sup>746</sup>

French-Indian diplomacy was in many cases preemptive. Friendly gestures were aimed at avoiding conflict, but intimidation and nonverbal displays of force often served a similar purpose. In the words of Father Hennepin, in dealing with unknown or hostile groups in particular, “it was very important to show resolution at the outset.”<sup>747</sup> Native warfare involved a range of intimidating behaviors and visual displays, both in North America and the West Indies. Father Jérôme Lalemant thus described “the [Iroquois’]

---

<sup>744</sup> Pelleprat, *Relations des Missions*, 71. “un marinier François ayant enlevé deux Caraïbes de S. Vincent, & les ayant vendus aux habitants de la Tortuë ; Monsieur le Général de Poincy de qui dépend cette Isle, ne le scût pas plutost qu’il les fit mettre en liberté, espérant que leur delivrance seroit une occasion favorable pour la conversion de toute leur nation : attendu qu’un de ceux qui avoient esté pris, estoit le fils d’un des plus considérables Caraïbes de l’Isle de S. Vincent, qui pouvoit beaucoup servir à ce dessein.”

<sup>745</sup> Ibid. “Ces deux sauvages ne manquerent pas de venir remercier leur liberateur dans l’Isle de S. Christophe : & ayant reconnu le grand desir qu’il avoit de les voir Chrestiens, ils luy demanderent instamment le Père Aubergeon, qui avoit déia quelque connoissance de leur langue : & ne se contentans pas d’en avoir parlé à Monsieur de Poincy, ils allerent eux-mesmes en prier le Père, & luy dirent, *Père, il faut que tu viennes avec nous, pour apprendre à prier Dieu à ceux de nostre nation.*”

<sup>746</sup> Father Jérôme Lalemant in his *Relation of 1647-1648* suggested to his superiors and, indirectly, to French officials, that the French use Iroquois children as hostages and as a form of psychological leverage against the League of Power. He emphasized the need for intimidation as well, suggesting that only fear would guarantee respect and safety. *JR*, 32 : 146-8. “Si nous avions un bon nombre d’Hiroquois entre nos mains, & qu’en les rendant on nous amenast les principaux enfans du pays, la crainte qu’auroient les grands, qu’on ne fit du mal aux petits, les empesheroient de nous attaquer mal à propos : mais tant qu’ils nous croiront incapables de leur faire aucun mal, ny de leur procurer aucun bien d’importance, nostre bonté ne nous mettra pas à couvert de leurs trahisons, & de leurs cruautez.”

<sup>747</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 156-57. See note 716.

ordinary yells and screams, which serve as trumpets and drums, to take the fear away from the soldier, and to intimidate the enemy.”<sup>748</sup> Pierre Esprit Radisson had several opportunities to observe similar behavior on the part of his Iroquois captors preparing for potential combat: “they spread themselves from off the side of the river a good way, and gathered together againe and made a fearfull noise and shott some gunns off, after wch followed a kind of an incondite [crude] singing after nots [sic], wch was an oudiousom [odious] noise.”<sup>749</sup> These practices gave courage to the warriors while instilling fear in the enemy (and captives), which could provide an edge in combat or even persuade the opposite side to retreat.

A similiar martial strategy was used by the Carib Indians against their *Allouages* enemies, according to the Sieur de La Borde. In 1684, this missionary among the Indians of Dominique, wrote that the Indians sculpted or painted the image of their most feared deity (“demon”), Mapoia, on the bow of their dugout canoes (*pirogues*) or wore its image around their neck: “they told me that it was to frighten the Allouages, their enemies, when they go to war, who, upon seeing this hideous face with its mouth wide open, fear to be eaten, and are so struck with terror that they can no longer paddle, and so they [the Caribs] can catch them easily.”<sup>750</sup>

---

<sup>748</sup> JR, 32: 180. “Les Hiroquois s’en viennent de furie sans toutefois faire leurs cris & leurs huées ordinaires, qui servent de trompettes et de tambours, pour oster la peur au soldat, & pour intimider l’ennemy ; estans quasi à brusle-pourpoint, comme on dit, ils firent une descharge de leurs arquebuses, que nos Hurons essayerent en se couchans par terre.”

<sup>749</sup> Radisson, *Account*, 31.

<sup>750</sup> La Borde, *Relation*, 14. “Ils apprehendent etrangement Mapoia qui leur fait du mal & je croy que c’est pour l’appaiser que quelques-uns portent son hideuse & horrible figure à leur col, & la peignent ou la taillent en bosse à l’avant de leur Piraugues. Ils m’ont dit que c’estoit pour faire peur aux Alloüages leurs ennemis lors qu’ils alloient en guerre, qui voyant cette laide grimace la gueule beante, craignoient d’en estre devorez, & demeuroient tous si espouventez qu’ils ne pouvoient plus ramer, & qu’ainsi ils les attrapoyent facilement. Alloüages est le nom d’une Nation située vers les bords de la Riviere d’Orenoque, ennemis perpetuels des Caraibes et des Galibys.”

The French were no less familiar with this indirect form of diplomacy, which consisted in dissuasion as much as “positive” diplomacy consisted in persuasion. The two were not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the success of peace negotiations often hinged on efficient displays of authority and military power. In 1653, the French engaged in yet another series of parleys with their Iroquois enemies to try to reach reconciliation and form a lasting peace between the Five Nations and the rest of their native allies from the Great Lake region and the St. Lawrence. “While the Iroquois Anniehronnons [Mohawks] were concluding the peace in their country, we made a collective procession in Québec,” described Father Le Mercier. “We made four hundred well-armed musketeers march, who appropriately discharged their weapons from time to time, and caused terror to the Iroquois, who had come down to discuss the peace; this made them consider that this peace was all the more necessary to them, as they observed the skills of our Frenchmen in manipulating weapons, of which they had just experienced the effects at Three Rivers.”<sup>751</sup>

Diplomacy thus consisted of more than official peace talks, ceremonial orations, and lavish gift-giving. It also entailed more subtle (although not always discreet) sensory elements, such as the choice of particularly impressive accessories or dress, spatial organization of one’s delegation, the performance of military drills, dances, and songs evoking bravery and strength, and the display of weapons. The more ostentatious these attempts at intimidation, the more insecure we can suspect the performers were about

---

<sup>751</sup> *JR*, 40: 160. “Le mesme jour de la naissance de la sainte Vierge, pendant que les Iroquois Anniehronnons concludoient la paix en leur paix, on faisoit une procession generale à Québec; pour gagner le Coeur du fils, par l’entremise de la mere. On y fit marcher quatre cens mousquetaires bien armez, qui faisans leur descharge de temps en temps bien à propos, donnerent de l’espouvante aux Iroquois, qui estoient descendus pour parler de la paix, ce qui leur fit juger que cette paix leur estoit d’autant plus necessaire, qu’ils remarquoient d’adresse en nos François, à manier les armes, dont ils venoient d’experimenter quelques effets, aux Trois Rivieres.”

their safety or possible victory in the event of an actual battle. Louis Hennepin, the Recollect missionary who accompanied La Salle's expedition in the Mississippi River Valley, described such parades of superiority on the part of the French when they arrived in Michillimakinac on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1679, where a large number of Indians, not necessarily friendly to the explorers, resided. The Indians, claimed Hennepin, "were all amazed to see a ship in their country, and the sound of the cannon caused an extraordinary alarm. We went to the Outtaoüactz to say mass and during the service, the Sieur de la Salle, very well dressed in his scarlet cloak trimmed with gold lace, ordered the arms to be stacked along the chapel and the sergeant left a sentry there to guard them."<sup>752</sup> Sometimes, desperate shows of courage and technology could save the lives of the colonists. This was the case for a group of ten Frenchmen, among them Father Pelleprat, who came face-to-face with a float of over three hundred Indians in six canoes while sailing from one island to another in the Lesser Antilles in 1654. Although the French saw themselves outnumbered and the situation desperate, they nevertheless positioned the two small artillery pieces they possessed, one at the front and one at the back of their embarkation. "The Savages, upon seeing [the weapons], feared their discharge and diligently raised sails, and left to La Grenade island, where they attacked a remote quarter."<sup>753</sup>

---

<sup>752</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 98-99.

<sup>753</sup> Pelleprat, *Relation des Missions*, 88 : "car à peine fusmes nous en mer que nous apperçueumes six pirogues de Caraibes qui nous alloient investir ; nous n'avions que huit ou dix hommes de defense dans nostre barque, & ils estoient trois cens guerriers dans ces pirogues ; n'ayant pu nous surprendre ils nous poursuivirent & nous ne leur pouvions échapper, si le desespoir de nos gens ne leur eust donné de la terreur ; ils estoient déia à la portée du fusil, ils avoient amené toutes leurs voiles, leurs arcs estoient ajustez pour le combat, & nous les voyions desia tous prests à décocher sur nous leurs fleches empoisonnées, lors que nous fismes quelque semblant de nous vouloir defendre, non pas tant dans l'esperance de la victoire, que dans la resolution de leur faire acheter nos vies bien chèrement : nous avoins dans nostre batteau deux mechans pierriers qui nous sauverent : car comme nous les eûmes braquez l'un sur le devant, et l'autre sur l'arriere de nostre barque, & pointez sur leurs pirogues, les

Even when all forms of diplomacy failed and violent conflict could not be avoided, nonverbal elements continued to play an important part in cross-cultural communication and miscommunication between the groups. In war more than in any other context, distinguishing between friends and foes was crucial, but this seemingly simple task proved cumbersome for Europeans to whom most natives looked identical. In August 1686, Monsieur de Denonville, governor of New France, composed an “instructive memoir of the measures [he had] taken for the war resolved against the Iroquois in the next spring of 1687 for Messieurs de Tonty, la Duranthaye, and Du Lhuse [Du Luth] in charge of assembling the Frenchmen who are in the woods to walk with the friendly savages that can be gathered.” He included specific instructions regarding certain important signs to be used in the midst of battle against the Iroquois: “we must remember to give each savage a signal to be recognized from the enemy savages. In pronouncing the name Louis, which will be the lookout word for all Frenchmen and their other friends and allies. Each savage to be recognized from our allies will wear a red ruban or red piece of cloth on their forehead as a headband. Each Captain will have on his canoe a white flag bearing a red cross.”<sup>754</sup> As if these precautions were not enough, he added: “each of these Sirs [Tonty, Durantaye, and DuLuth] must be careful that their Frenchmen and Savages do not charge each other; we can not take enough care in telling each of them to

---

Sauvages les appercevans, & craignant leur décharge, firent diligence de se remettre à la voile, & s’en allerent à l’Ile de la Grenade, où ils attaquèrent un quartier fort éloigné, qui ne pouvoient pas facilement estre secouru, massacrerent quelques François avec leurs esclaves, & bruslerent plusieurs cases.”

<sup>754</sup> “Mémoire Instructif des mesures que j’ay pris pour la guerre résolue contre les Iroquois au Printemps de l’année prochaine 1687. Pour Messieurs de Tonty, La Durantaye et DuLhuse Chargez de rassemblez les François qui sont dans les Bois pour marcher avec les Sauvages Amis qui se pourront ramasser, le 26 Août 1686.” CAOM, Fonds Ministériels, Collection Moreau de St.Méry, sous-série F 3, vol. 2, f. 220v. “il ne se faut pas oublier de faire prendre à chaque sauvage un signal pour se reconnoistre d’avec les Sauvages ennemis. En nommant le nom Louis, qui sera le mot du guet pour tous François et autres amis et alliez. Chaque sauvage pour être reconnu de nos Alliez Portera un ruban rouge ou morceau d’étoffe rouge en fronteau au tour de la teste. Chaque capitaine aura à son canot un pavillon blanc avec une croix rouge au milieu.”

take care of speaking early to declare themselves and to not be taken as enemies, by saying the lookout word and adding *Onontio* to it.”<sup>755</sup>

Natives possessed their own nonverbal codes in war, which could sometimes lead to confusions when the French were involved. An episode which occurred in 1648 may help explain why Governor Denonville took so many precautions to ensure that Indian allies would not be mistaken for Indian opponents. During a battle between the Hurons and Iroquois near the French settlement of Trois Rivières, a few Frenchmen decided to take part in the combat alongside their allies: “but when it came time to mingle, they were puzzled, not knowing who to hit: for they could not distinguish the Iroquois from the Hurons.” A misunderstanding followed when, mistaking a frightened Iroquois for one of their Huron allies, one of the Frenchmen “approaches him, touches him on the shoulder, [and tells him]: ‘take courage my friend...let’s fight valiantly.’” A Huron then captured the man to whom the French had been talking, who was in fact an Iroquois. “This prisoner later sung that he had been captured by a Frenchman, imagining that the man who had hit him on the shoulder had told him ‘you’re my prisoner’.”<sup>756</sup>

Conflicts between French and Indians in the Caribbean increased in frequency, scale, and brutality in the second half of the seventeenth century. Through what the

---

<sup>755</sup> CAOM, Fonds Ministériels, Collection Moreau de St.Méry, Sous-série F 3, Vol. 2, f. 221v. “Chacun de ces Messieurs doit bien prendre garde que leurs François et Sauvages ne se chargent pas les uns et les autres ; on ne sçauroit trop prendre soin de dire a chacun d’eux soins de parler de bonne heure pour se déclarer et pour n’être pas pris pour Ennemis en donnant le mot du Guet et en y ajoutant Onontio.”

<sup>756</sup> JR, 32: 180-82. “Trois François se trouverent [182] en ce combat, le Pere Bressany qui couroit par tout donnant courage aux Hurons, & prenant garde si quelqu’un n’avoit point besoin de son assistance, les deux autres combatirent vaillamment: mais quand on vint à se mesler, ils demeurèrent tout court, ne sçachant plus sur qui frapper: car ils ne distinguoient pas les Hiroquois d’avec les Hurons...L’un de ces deux François voyant un Hiroquois épouvanté, il l’aborde, luy frappe sur l’espaule: courage mon frere, luy dit-il, combattons vaillamment, il le prenoit pour une personne de nostre party, mais un Huron survenant se iette sur luy, & l’emmena, dequoy le François demeura estonné : ce prisonnier par apres chantoit qu’il avoit esté pris par un François, s’imaginant que celuy qui luy avoit frappé sur l’espaule, luy avoit dit, tu es mon prisonnier.”

French called “*courses*”—raids — the Caribs challenged the survival of small settlements already weakened by diseases and starvation. More than the number of casualties in battle, it was often the profound fear instilled by these surprise attacks that took the heaviest toll by pinning the French in their forts, limiting access to food and fresh water, and promoting epidemics.<sup>757</sup> After 1650, in the context of increasingly severe demographical and geographical pressures put on indigenous peoples by rapidly growing European and African populations, the French were always at war on one or more of the islands they occupied, with one or more groups of Indians. Multiple Carib nations, finding themselves forced to coexist on a reduced number of islands, sometimes formed large coalitions, even entering into military alliances with maroon communities (also rapidly growing in size and power during this period), in an attempt to oust French settlers from specific insular areas.<sup>758</sup>

Reflecting on the changes that affected the Caribs since the arrival of Europeans, Father La Borde wrote: “the first time they saw ships, and heard the cannon, they thought they were devils, and that the ship, and the men who were dressed and built differently from them came from the bottom of the ocean, and came to kidnap them and take their

---

<sup>757</sup> Interesting example of how fear affects perceptions and everything becomes a sign of potential danger: Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale*, 91. “Ces avantages neantmoins ne guerissoient point les habitans d’une certaine terreur panique, qui s’estoit emparée de leur cœur ; car toutes choses leurs faisoient peur ; les feuilles rouges du bois leur sembloient des Sauvages qui les poursuivoient, & leur faisoient donner l’alarme à toute l’Isle : ils prenoient un morceau de bois flottant, pour une Pirogue chargée de leurs ennemis ; & durant la nuit n’ayant point ce repos, ils ne sçavoient quel lieu choisir, pour y estre en assurance pendant le jour.”

<sup>758</sup> Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale*, 1 : 102-3. “Les Sauvages pourtant ne se croyans pas assez forts, crurent que pour chasser entierement les François de l’Isle, il falloit avoir recours à leurs voisins. Pour ce sujet, ils appellerent à leur secours, ceux de la Dominique, de Saint Vincent, & de la Guadeloupe ; et ayant composé un corps de quinze cens hommes, ils se presenterent sous le Fort, faisant mine d’y vouloir descendre.” And, about Maroons : Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale*, 1 : 468. “ils se fussent retirer sans quelques Negres marons (c’est-à-dire fugitifs) qui se joignirent à eux. Ces esclaves fugitifs firent bien plus de tort que les Sauvages, car ils se mirent avec eux à courir de quartier en quartier, brûlerent une vingtaine de cases, tuerent tout ce qu’ils trouverent, hommes, femmes, & enfans.”

land, and they ran into the woods.” “They have recognized since that they were mistaken in one of these points but that the other was true,” concluded La Borde, “they wished we would have never set foot in their country, and no matter what face they put on, they have an aversion to us; but they are no longer to be feared, for many have been destroyed.”<sup>759</sup>

The Caribbean thus provides an example of the breakdown of French-Indian diplomacy and the development of an endless cycle of war and destruction: “the experience of the past makes them fear the future,” Father Pelleprat concluded.<sup>760</sup> The narratives available for this period give greater importance to battles, bloody scenes, and mutual deception than to embassies and peace settlements and to the nonverbal elements that were part of them. However, the evidence also suggests that another form of diplomacy— taking place at the local and individual level rather than in formal ceremonial and inter-national contexts— endured, despite the overwhelming factors for division. In the midst of constant warfare, each side in turn gaining then loosing “advantages,” French and Indians also simultaneously maintained peaceful trading relations in certain areas. Despite the claims of some chroniclers that the offenses of a few Frenchmen against a few Caribs systematically brought a general and indiscriminating retaliation upon the entire colony, it appears that Indians could maintain friendships with French individuals while remaining at war with other members of that nation. Because

---

<sup>759</sup> La Borde, *Relation*, 8. “la premiere fois qu’ils virent des navires, & entendirent du canon, ils croyoient que c’estoient des Diables, & que le navire, & les hommes qui estoient vestus et bastis autrement qu’eux, sortoient du fond de la mer, & venoient pour les enlever, & prendre leur terre, ils se sauoient dans les bois. Ils ont reconnu depuis qu’ils se trompoient en un point, & que l’autre est veritable : ils voudroient que nous n’eussions jamais mis le pied dans leur pais, & quelque mine qu’ils fassent, ils nous ont en aversion, mais ils ne sont plus à craindre : car il y en a bien de détruits.”

<sup>760</sup> Pelleprat, *Relations des Missions*, 67. “Les Sauvages Caraïbes sont les habitans naturels des Isles qui portent leurs nom : ils en estoient autrefois les maistres, mais les Europeans s’y sont peu à peu si puissamment établis, qu’ils ont estés contraints de leur quitter la place, & de se retirer aux Isles de S. Vincent, & de la Dominique, où la crainte qu’ils ont que les Estrangers ne s’y habitüent, les obligent à se tenir sure leurs gardes, pour leur en empescher l’entrée : l’experience du passé leur faisant craindre l’advenir.”



identities and acculturation were negotiated and constantly reinvented at the level of personal and local relations, a Frenchman identified as a renegade could fight alongside the Caribs against “his people,” while another French go-between could feel safe among his Carib hosts while they waged war on a French settlement.<sup>761</sup>

Daily practices and ritualized daily interactions played an important part in the preservation of peaceful and mutually profitable relations between the groups, thus challenging our western and modern conception of diplomacy. Colonial chronicler and Jesuit father Du Tertre explained about the success encountered by the Sieur de Rousselan in maintaining peace after the French settled in Sainte-Alouzie that “the Savages loved him and had for him a very particular respect, because he had been married to an Indian woman for a long time, which served much to preserve their good intelligence [peace], and their small trade.”<sup>762</sup> Where the English had failed and had been expelled by the Indians in 1640, the Sieur de Rousselan and other Frenchmen succeeded through a less “conventional” and more difficult to define brand of diplomacy. This accommodation was founded on daily interactions, trade, even the seemingly mundane sharing of food and alcohol, which became jeopardized once the Caribs were expelled and constricted to certain areas within European-controlled islands or to all-native

---

<sup>761</sup> Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale*, 87. “Je ne puis oublier la douceur & la bonté naturelle de ce jeune Sauvage, qui montre bien qu’ils ne le sont que de nom, & que le dérèglement de la cholere rendoit nos gens plus sauvages et barbares qu’eux. Ayant rencontré au milieu de tous ces Sauvages un garçon François ; il ne luy témoigna aucun ressentiment de l’outrage qu’il avoit reçu de ceux de sa nation ; & au lieu de se venger sur luy, du sang qu’ils avoient si cruellement répandu, il se contenta de luy dire dans son baragouin, ‘ô Jacques, France mouche fâche, l’y matté Karaiibes,’ c’est-à-dire, ô Jacques, les François sont extrêmement fâchez, ils ont tué les Sauvages.” And *ibid.*, 91 “entre ceux qui furent tuez du costé des Sauvages, l’on a crû qu’il y avoit un François renegat, qui apres avoir pillé nos ornemens apres avoir mis en pieces un tres beau Crucifix, & foulé aux pieds un precieux Reliquaire, ayant pris un tison allumé pour brûler la Chapelle, fut tué ce tison à la main.”

<sup>762</sup> Du Tertre, *Histoire Générale*, 1: 435. “Les Sauvages l’aymoient & avoient pour luy un respect tout particulier, à cause qu’il avoit épousé depuis long-temps une Sauvage, qui servit beaucoup à entretenir leur bonne intelligence, & leur petit commerce.”

strongholds (like St. Vincent). Diplomacy, in its larger seventeenth-century New World definition, was disrupted by the physical separation of the groups that prevented sustained and intimate exchanges. Although multiple complex factors explain French-Indian conflicts in the Caribbean, nonverbal and performative practices can shed light on interesting dimensions of diplomacy and bring nuances to the image of the Caribbean as a war zone in stark contrast with the “Middle Ground” in New France.

Practices were thus central to intercultural diplomacy in late-seventeenth century French America. But despite a greater level of standardization and syncretism than in the earliest stage of French-Indian contact, these signs and nonverbal behaviors remained flexible, geographically-bounded, and subject to misinterpretation and misuse. Cross-cultural practices drove the performance of diplomacy in all regions of French America, and in all regions resulted in both successes and failures, constantly revealing at the same time their indispensability and limitations.

\* \* \*

### **The Calumet: Meanings, Limits, and Successes of a Native North American Diplomatic Tool in Cross-Cultural Settings**

According to historian Gilles Havard, author of the only exhaustive study of the Montreal peace treaty of 1701, this peace deserves its traditional qualification as “great” (or “grand”) for several reasons.<sup>763</sup> The first reason is because it was unique in bringing a strikingly large and varied tribal population together and fostering agreement between the

---

<sup>763</sup> Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century*, translated by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 179.

French and nearly forty different Indian nations, as well as between native groups that had been involved in brutal warfare with one another, sometimes for decades.<sup>764</sup> Although “the importance of the peace agreement of 1701 should not be exaggerated” because it did not fully or permanently put an end to “Indian wars” in Canada, argues Havard, the terms of the agreement and what it accomplished were extremely significant for natives and French alike at this juncture.

Peace with the Iroquois and the willingness of the Five Nations to cease hostilities against their western neighbors allowed the French to construct an important network of forts in the *Pays d'en Haut* (including Detroit), which greatly facilitated trade and enticed native groups to cut transportation costs for their pelts and turn away from the English colonies. The treaty also established Iroquois neutrality in the event of an armed confrontation between France and England, a provision that would be mostly respected for nearly a decade. While Havard disagrees with the interpretation of J.A. Brandão and William A. Starna that the Peace of 1701 represented “a triumph of Iroquois diplomacy,” it is clear that at least some pro-French factions within the Great League did reap significant strategic, political, and commercial benefits from the treaty.<sup>765</sup>

---

<sup>764</sup> Ibid., 183. “It was a tremendous achievement to bring together in Montreal the delegates of some forty nations, from the Missouri to north of Lake Superior and from Iroquoia to Acadia—some of whom were nomadic and others sedentary, some of whom were accustomed to using canoes and others for whom it was unusual—and to overcome the intertribal hatreds and the passion for war of so many and induce them to sign a peace treaty.”

<sup>765</sup> José Antonio Brandão and William A. Starna, “The Treaties of 1701: A Triumph of Iroquois Diplomacy” *Ethnohistory*, 43: 2 (Spring 1996): 209-44. Havard tends to side (with some nuances) with the interpretation of W.J. Eccles, who saw in the Great Peace of 1701 a manifestation of the forced capitulation of the much-weakened Iroquois Nations after a series of military loses. Havard acknowledges that the Iroquois achieved some short-term diplomatic, commercial, and political goals (such as access to French sources of supplies, the return of a number of prisoners, and the benefits of neutrality in a potential French-English feud), but he rejects Brandão and Starna’s, as well as Olive P. Dickason’s, argument that the Iroquois dominated the negotiations and deceived the French, the English, and other Indian nations to realize their ambitions. Havard particularly opposes the idea that the Iroquois gained control over large hunting territories as a result of the Peace. See Havard, *Great Peace*, 164-66.

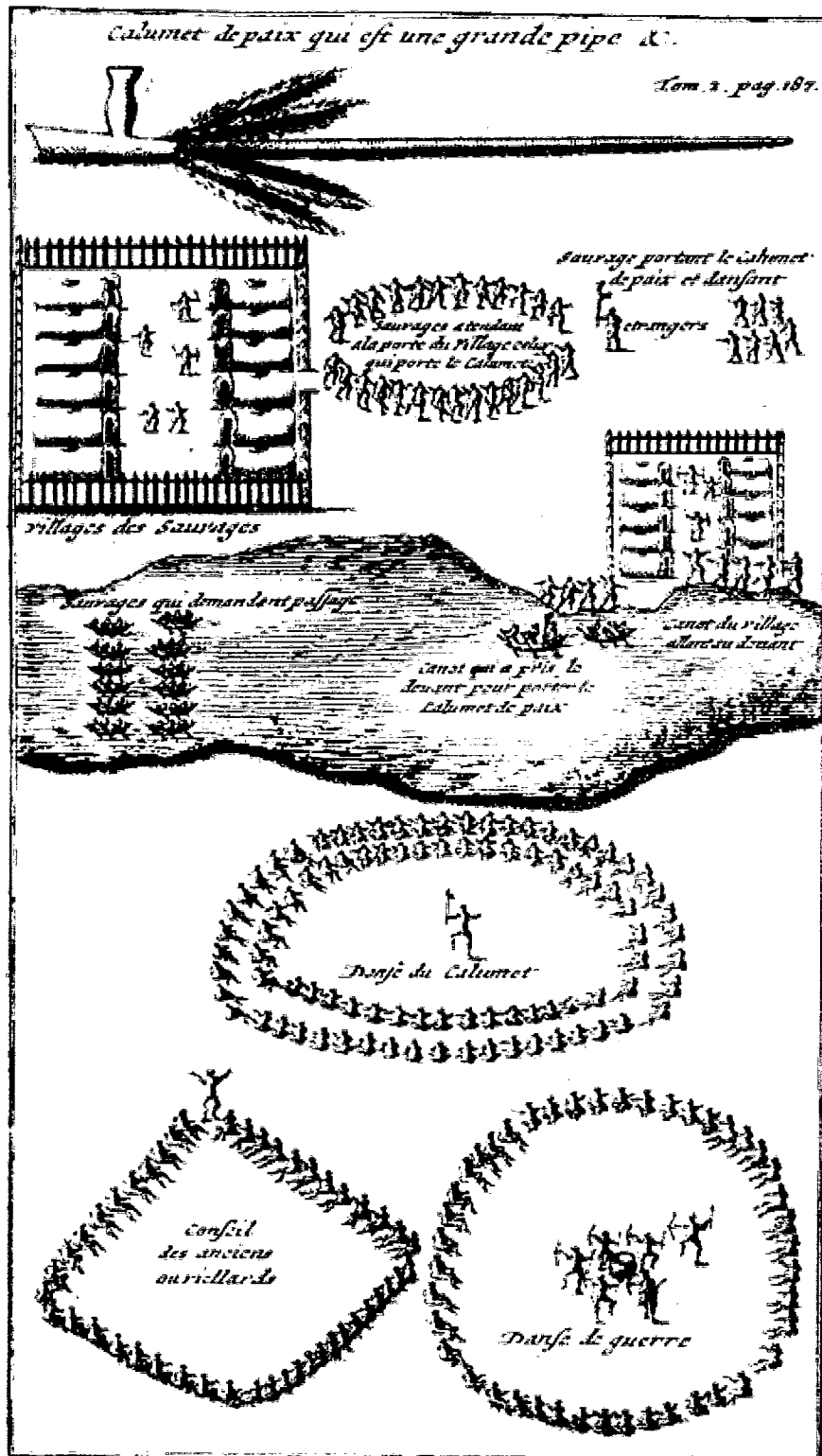
But, according to Havard, what makes the Peace of 1701 particularly significant is that it “was the crowning achievement of a certain form of colonialism based not on agricultural expansion and settlement, but on alliance with the indigenous peoples and adaptation (in large part tactical and manipulative) to their political customs.”<sup>766</sup> Channeling Richard White and his concept of the Middle Ground, Havard thus sees the Great Peace of Montreal as particularly interesting because “it provides a striking and evocative image of French colonization in North America,” one based essentially on cross-cultural alliances maintained through a complex system of ceremonial practices. One of the best known symbols of this mode of accommodation is the calumet pipe, also sometimes referred to as the “peace pipe.”<sup>767</sup> Along with wampum belts and the ritual exchange of gifts, the calumet appeared to be the quintessential tool of French-Indian diplomacy, being used by both sides to initiate and seal peace.<sup>768</sup>

---

<sup>766</sup> Havard, *Great Peace*, 181.

<sup>767</sup> A representation of a smoking pipe appears on the cover of Havard’s book.

<sup>768</sup> Historian Brett Rushforth discussed the intersection of two-regionally bound system of “symbolic diplomacy” at the Great Peace of Montreal, with particular attention to the calumet: “with such a fragile peace at stake, invoking the power of metaphor was imperative. Two rituals ratified the peace, one reflecting a European, the other an Indian, system of diplomatic ceremony. The first ritual was the signing of the peace agreement, a matter of grave import in European diplomatic negotiations...even more than the treaty document, the calumet represents a complex and regionally bound system of diplomacy that, when removed from its context, both lost and changed its meaning.” Brett Rushforth, “Smoking the Sun: The Calumet and Intercultural Diplomacy at the Great Peace of Montreal,” Paper presented at the Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting, New York, NY, March 2008, pp. 5-6.



**FIGURE 4:** The Calumet ceremony as symbol of peace. From *Mémoires de l'Amérique Septentrionale, ou la suite des voyages de Mr. Le Baron de Lahontan* [La Haye : Chez les Frères l'Honoré, Marchands Libraires, 1703], 2 :101.

The days-long ceremonies that took place in Montreal in the summer of 1701 were profoundly syncretic and illuminated the importance of ritual practices in mediating relations between the groups. Havard argues, in particular, that “the European protocol was truly the blend of the two diplomatic traditions, giving rise to original, hybrid rituals.”<sup>769</sup> This statement is problematic because it tends to ignore the Indian counterpart of French emulation of native ceremonies and the reciprocity of the acculturation process. While it could sometimes elude French colonists (and apparently modern scholars as well), many Indian diplomatic performances were catered to foreign nations (both French and Indian) in the audience, and thus incorporated more or less subtle variations on traditional themes and styles.<sup>770</sup> Havard is also mistaken in suggesting that the Peace of 1701 fostered the emergence of new cultural productions and diplomatic codes. The material and ritual elements used by all participants in the peace settlement were the products of intensive and lasting interactions between the groups, which had been tested, refined, and carefully calculated. There was room for improvisation, to be sure, but the core ceremonies and protocols that were used in Montreal in 1701 were neither unique nor new. Whether the memory of the events of 1701 contributed to transforming subsequent protocols between the groups needs to be demonstrated.

The calumet was the hybrid diplomatic object *par excellence*. The French had known of its existence and had used it in their dealings with certain native groups south of the Great Lakes for several decades by the time the Montreal gathering took place.<sup>771</sup> In the eighteenth century, steel pipes would be crafted in Europe for the colonial market

---

<sup>769</sup> Havard, *Great Peace*, 134.

<sup>770</sup> For a detailed discussion of how native performances and discourses could be adapted to specific audiences without losing their “authenticity,” see Chapter Four.

<sup>771</sup> The earliest mention of the word “calumet” in a French account seems to date back to 1639 (*JR*, 10: 219) but the word and description of the ceremony became widespread after 1660.

in the shape of hatchets because of the perceived connection between the calumet and weapons (the calumet being often used during mock combat in ceremonial context).<sup>772</sup> In this sense, the calumet epitomized how a native object invested with crucial political and spiritual power could be appropriated by the French and manipulated with some real successes, despite undeniable distortions. The peace pipe became increasingly present in cross-cultural dealings in the eighteenth century, which seems to suggest that the Europeans and the mounting pressures brought by the colonies upon native peoples contributed to the diffusion of the calumet and the Calumet Dance in parts of North America where it did not appear before the encounter.<sup>773</sup> The calumet was thus unsurprisingly part of the diplomatic proceedings in Montreal in 1701.

It is first mentioned in the context of the preliminary ceremonies that took place at the Iroquois mission of Sault-St-Louis (on the west end of Montreal island), when the delegates from the Great Lakes arrived. “All the delegates and the principals” were led into the longhouse of a mission Iroquois named Arioteka, who bore the title of “Chief of the Calumet.”<sup>774</sup> According to the French chronicler who attended the “entertainment of the calumet,” it “was a pipe [bowl] made of red stone, which stem was made of wood and covered with the feathers from the head of ducks, and eagle feathers hanging in the

---

<sup>772</sup> These steel hatchet-pipes are sometimes referred to as “tomahawk pipes” and are still a popular craft among western native artists. Their use is attested among the Cherokees in the 1750. Colin F. Taylor, *Native American Weapons* (London: University of Oklahoma Press through Salamander Books, 2001), 102.

<sup>773</sup> “Today Indians of all regions use the calumet although its use was historically most widely reported among the indigenous people of the eastern woodlands and Great Plains.” “Calumet” in Fred. E. Hoxie, ed., *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 98; Ian W. Brown, “The Calumet Ceremony in the Southeast and Its Archaeological Manifestations,” *American Antiquity*, 54: 2 (April 1989): 311-331.

<sup>774</sup> This title probably referred to Arioteka’s position as a “peace leader” or ambassador, specialized in friendly agreements with other groups rather than warfare.

middle.”<sup>775</sup> Arioteka gave the calumet to an Odawa leader who “danced” it while the rest of the assembly sang and shook gourd rattles in rhythm. Other ceremonies were performed, involving offerings of tobacco and speeches intended to “erase” the deaths of Iroquois at the hands of the Great Lakes nations, and the day ended happily with a feast of dog and bear meat. Behind this seemingly harmonious picture, however, lay tensions. According to La Potherie, the mission Iroquois were expecting their new allies from the Great Lakes to offer them their own calumet, and had even prepared various gifts in anticipation of the exchange: “The Iroquois were a bit surprised that [the Great Lakes Indians] did not present them with a new one. They were prepared to respond to it with a present of guns, cauldrons, shirts, and blankets.”<sup>776</sup> The absence of the calumet offering from the visitors did not seriously jeopardize the following peace negotiations, but it may have instilled some degree of caution among the Iroquois of the Sault, or manifested some reservations towards the peace on the part of the Great Lakes nations.<sup>777</sup>

The calumet may also have been used during some of the separate sessions that took place between the French and individual native groups, and between Indian tribes, in parallel to the main Settlement.<sup>778</sup> The most significant appearance of the calumet in the

---

<sup>775</sup> Claude-Charles le Roy, dit Bacqueville de La Potherie, *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*. 4 vols. (Paris : Brocas, 1753 [1722]), 4: 198. “Outachia OUtaouak de nation reçût le Calumet de la main d’Arioteka, et se tint debout derriere ceux-ci qui le chanterent. Le Calumet etoit une pipe de pierre rouge dont la tige etoit de bois, tout couvert de plumages de tête de canard avec des plumes d’aigles qui pendoient au milieu, ils chanterent donc en remuans leurs gourdes en cadence, pendant qu’Outachia de son côté agitoit avec adresse le Calumet au son de leurs voix.”

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 : 197. “Les Iroquois furent un peu surpris de ce que ils ne leurs en presenterent point un nouveau. Ils s’attendoient à y répondre par un present de fusils, de chaudières, de chemises, et de couvertures.”

<sup>777</sup> Reciprocally, the fact that they did not bring a calumet to the Iroquois may be a sign that the Great Lakes nations had some reservations towards the settlement of the peace with the Five Nations. It was a common theme throughout the period that the French allies distrusted the Iroquois who had repeatedly broken their promises in the past.

<sup>778</sup> Havard, 140. “From 23 July to 7 August, there was a succession of daily political councils between the French governor and various Native Ambassadors.”



records, however, occurred during the final ceremony of the Peace, following days of orations from each of the delegates, and the ultimate signing of the treaty by the various chiefs with distinctive pictographs representing clan lineages.<sup>779</sup> While the signing of the written document –albeit in an unusual manner—fulfilled a core requirement of French diplomacy and its emphasis on the written word, it was the smoking of the calumet that truly sealed the agreement.<sup>780</sup> The French apparently realized that, for the peace to be formally settled, Indian protocol rather than French etiquette had to be fulfilled and they chose the calumet for this purpose among other practices. “This great Alliance had to be confirmed by some brilliant action, and to do so properly and with all possible circumspection, Messieurs de Callières, de Champigny, and de Vaudreuil, smoked the calumet, which was then taken to the Iroquois and to the deputies of all the allies, who did the same.”<sup>781</sup>

Governor de Callières also borrowed from native oratorical repertoires during his opening speech, referring to the calumet as a symbol of friendship, and to a “common bowl” of food as a possible allusion to the peaceful sharing of hunting territories between newly allied groups:<sup>782</sup>

It is with extreme joy that I see all my children assembled here now, you Hurons, Sable Odawas, Kiskakons, Sinago Odawas, [Odawa] nation of the Fork, Saulteurs [Ojibwas], Potawatomis, Sauks, Puants [Winnebagos], Folles Avoines [Menominees], Foxes, Mascoutens, Miamis, Illinois, Amikwas, Nipissings, Algonquins, Timiskamings, Crees, Gens des terres, Kickapoos, people from the Sault, from La Montagne, Abenakis, and you the Iroquois nations; having one and all placed your interests in my hands that I can have you all live in tranquility, I therefore today ratify the peace agreement that we have made ... I attach my

---

<sup>779</sup> Heidi Bohaker, “*Nindoodemag*: The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region, 1600-1701,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 63: 1 (January, 2006): 23-52.

<sup>780</sup> Brett Rushforth, “Smoking the Sun,” 6.

<sup>781</sup> La Potherie, *Histoire*, 4: 252.

<sup>782</sup> For a discussion of the importance of hunting territories in the peace agreement see: Havard, *Great Peace*, 145-9.

words to the collars I will give to each of your nations so that the elders may have them carried out by their young people, I invite all to smoke this calumet which I will be the first to smoke, and to eat meat and broth that I have had prepared for you so that I have like a good father the satisfaction of seeing all my children united.<sup>783</sup>

Presenting himself as a benevolent and caring patriarch, the French governor used both verbal and nonverbal native elements to legitimize his claims to power and give the ceremony the proper pomp that both sets of cultures required. Borrowing the common metaphor of the “buried hatchet” to signify the end of war, he expanded on it by declaring that he would dig a trench so deep that no one would ever be able to uncover the hatchets and reignite the war.<sup>784</sup> After interpreters, who had been given written transcripts of his speech, translated his words to the various groups in the audience, thirty-one wampum belts were distributed to “carry” his words. The ceremony ended with the sharing of a frugal “feast” of buffalo meat, and more dances and songs. The calumet was thus only one of several complementary verbal and nonverbal elements that participated equally in the diplomatic rituals.

In fact, the calumet may have been the most problematic and potentially volatile performative diplomatic device used by the French in 1701. The calumet used by Callières and passed around in the multi-tribal audience belonged to the Miamis, who had offered it to the French governor during a previous separate meeting. It was certainly not destined to be used as the peace calumet for this particular gathering, and doing so certainly bore consequences for the importance of the object, which was thought to continue to bear the words of the agreements it sealed, and perhaps for the status of its makers as well. According to Indian etiquette, the French, as initiators of the peace,

---

<sup>783</sup> ANF, Col., C11A, vol. 19, f.41. Quoted in Havard, *Great Peace*, 136.

<sup>784</sup> La Potherie, *Histoire*, 4: 241. “Il ôta la hache a tous, faisant une profonde fosse, afin que personne ne rehaussat la hache.”

should have crafted and produced their own pipe, with ornaments that would express their unique identity and showcase the skills and labor of their community.<sup>785</sup> It is likely, however, that knowing the limitations of their hosts, the Indians were willing to bend the rules. More problematic, however, was the fact that the calumet ceremony was neither a universal nor a pan-Indian practice. The Iroquois in particular were reputedly reluctant to use it.<sup>786</sup>

Scholars have long been debating the origins, various usages, and exact geographical distribution of the calumet as an object and of the calumet ceremony more particularly. The difficulty lies partly in the fact that smoking pipes and the use of tobacco as a sacred substance are attested in all regions of North America before and after contact. What distinguishes the calumet from other smoking pipes seemed to be the combination of three elements: first, an elaborate pipe bowl, usually made of red stone or other valuable material and artfully carved; second, an equally elaborate wooden stem, carved and decorated with arrangements of bird feathers that uniquely represented the style and identity of the group that crafted it. For instance, the calumet could bear a fan made of eagle feathers hanging down beneath the stem, like that of the Miamis used by Callières, which a “regular” smoking pipe— notwithstanding the spiritual power

---

<sup>785</sup> “This calumet is a kind of large pipe for smoking, the head of which is of a fine red stone well polished, and the stem two feet and a half long is a pretty stout cane adorned with feathers of all sorts of colors, very neatly mingled and arranged, with several tresses of woman’s hair, [113] braided in various ways, with two wings, such as usually represented on the Caduceus of Mercury, each nation embellishing it according to its especial usage.” Hennepin, *Description*, 112.

“They say that according to the Manner in which the Feathers are disposed, they immediately know what Nation it is that presents it.” Pierre de Charlevoix, *Letters to the Dutchess of Lesdiguières Giving an Account of a Voyage to Canada, and Travels Through that Vast Country, and Louisiana, to the Gulf of Mexico* (London: Printed for R. Goadby, 1763), 134. Quoted in Rushforth, “Smoking the Sun.”

<sup>786</sup> “Eastern tribes such as the Iroquois were extremely resistant to the calumet and its rituals, although they did of course have tobacco and pipe rituals.” “The Iroquois evidence has been thoroughly reviewed by Fenton (1953:153-210), who finds that despite frequent contact with the Western Great Lakes Indians, the Iroquois did not adopt the custom.” James Warren Springer, “An Ethnohistoric Study of the Smoking Complex in Eastern North America,” *Ethnohistory*, 28: 3 (Summer, 1981): 226-27.

attributed to it— would be lacking. The calumet and its ceremony were connected to birds and the sun as particularly powerful entities, able to bestow strength upon those who smoked the pipe. Because wooden stems and feathers rarely survive archaeologically, it is difficult to trace the existence of the calumet before the historical period, although some scholars have suggested a lineage dating back to the Hopewell culture.<sup>787</sup> Last in distinguishing the calumet was the ceremony itself, which the French tended to refer to as “dancing” or “singing” the calumet. The earliest account of the Calumet Dance was given by Jesuit father Allouez in his 1665-1667 official Relation, after he observed it among the Illinois.<sup>788</sup> A similar description was famously produced by Father Jacques Marquette a few years later (1673) among another Illinois group, providing more details on the separate “stages” composing this complex ritual.<sup>789</sup>

Despite strong disagreements regarding when and why the calumet ceremony spread through the Eastern Woodland and Great Plains cultures, most scholars agree that, in the seventeenth century, the calumet was a regionally bound system of meanings and practices found under varying forms among the Caddoan, Siouan, and Central Algonquian peoples, in an area stretching approximately from southern Minnesota to the Gulf Coast, and from the Mississippi River to central Nebraska.<sup>790</sup> In addition, a close

---

<sup>787</sup> Donald J. Blakeslee, “The Origin and Spread of the Calumet Ceremony,” *American Antiquity*, 46: 4 (Oct. 1981): 759-768. Along with ethnohistorical evidence, Blakeslee considers what he calls “possible archaeological evidence of the calumet.”

<sup>788</sup> *JR*, 51: 47-49.

<sup>789</sup> *JR*, 59: 129-35.

<sup>790</sup> Rushforth, “Smoking the Sun,” 6. The only known exception among Eastern Indians is that of the Abnakis of the St. Francis mission (northeast of Montreal) who adopted it from the Fox in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Scholars of the calumet have not used accounts of the Great Peace of Montreal, which seems to suggest, as I mentioned above, that the mission Iroquois at the Sault Ste-Marie also practiced some form of calumet ritual. William A. Turnbaugh has based upon the case of the Abnakis his interpretation of the calumet as a religious revitalization and nativistic ritual, an idea strongly debunked by other ethnohistorians. William A. Turnbaugh, “Calumet Ceremonialism as a Nativistic Response,”

review of colonial records before 1701 reveals that the French, even when they witnessed the use of the calumet, rarely “danced” or “sang” it themselves. While French colonial narratives abound with instances of French missionaries and officials emulating Indian oratorical styles, metaphors, and pantomimes, using wampum belts and gift-giving in culturally appropriate ways, the calumet ceremony does not seem to have been a common subject of French reappropriation. The presence and use of the Calumet at the Great Peace of Montreal was therefore not as self-evident or natural as it may seem.<sup>791</sup> Were the French and their Great Lakes and Mississippian allies making a diplomatic and political statement against the Iroquois by bringing a protocol to the forefront of the proceedings that would have been less familiar to the latter than the use of wampum? Was the syncretic juxtaposition of multiple diplomatic rituals instead a conscious effort to represent all sides of the peace negotiations? Or was the calumet a diplomatic faux-pas on the part of the French who misunderstood and misused it?

A look at how some French explorers and missionaries perceived and used the calumet in the decades preceding the Great Peace may provide some answers to these questions. The French who encountered the calumet perceived the sanctity and “mystery” surrounding it. More so than the wampum belts, the calumet appeared to the French as invested with a sort of particular “magic” among the natives who used it. Father Marquette, who suggested that the ceremonial dances and songs he witnessed were made to revere the calumet itself, observed that “there is nothing among them more mysterious or more commendable; the Crowns and scepters of the kings are not the subject of as

---

*American Antiquity*, 44: 4 (Oct., 1979): 685-691. Donald J. Blakesless, “The Origin and Spread of the Calumet Ceremony,” *op.cit.*

<sup>791</sup> Hindsight and the growing popularity of the calumet in the eighteenth century may color our reading of the earlier sources.

much honor they render to it, and it seems to be the God of peace and of war, the arbiter of life and death.”<sup>792</sup> Father Hennepin also noted the omnipresence of the calumet in Indian social, political, and religious proceedings, with a special emphasis on diplomacy and external relations: “all their enterprises in war and peace and most important ceremonies are sealed and attested by the calumet which they make all smoke with whom they conclude any matter of consequence.”<sup>793</sup> Hennepin witnessed, for instance, the central role of the calumet in intertribal negotiations, when a group of Miamis “came...to dance the calumet to the Isliinois, and made an alliance with them against the Iroquois their common enemies.”<sup>794</sup>

Given the obvious significance of the calumet within certain Indian groups, the French quickly learned to comply with the practices surrounding it. Marquette sought to reassure his non-smoking readers: “you must not refuse it, unless you want to pass for enemy or uncivil, but it is enough to only pretend to smoke.”<sup>795</sup> Mentions were also made of the calumet being used as part of a propitiatory ceremony by Siouan people before a buffalo hunt, as well as in several instances in relation to adoption and mourning rituals.<sup>796</sup> The French struggled to understand the ceremonies involving the calumet when

---

<sup>792</sup> JR, 59: 130. “il ne reste plus qu’à parler du Calumet, il n’est rien parmy eux de plus mysterieux n’y de plus recommandable, on ne rend pas tant d’honneur aux Couronnes et aux Sceptres des Roÿs qu’ils luy en rendent ; il semble estre le Dieu de la paix et de la guerre, l’Arbitre de la vie et de la mort.”

<sup>793</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 113. He added: “they are convinced that great misfortunes would befall them, if they violated the faith of the calumet.”

<sup>794</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 186. “The Miamis came at the same time to dance the calumet to the Isliinois, and made an alliance with them against the Iroquois their common enemy. The Sieur de la Salle made some presents to unite these two nations more firmly together.”

<sup>795</sup> JR, 59: 116. “Après que nous eusmes pris place, on nous fit la Civilité ordinaire du paÿs, qui est de nous presenter le Calumet, il ne faut pas le refuser, si on ne veut pas passer pour Enemy ou du moins pour incivil, pourveu qu’on fasse semblant de fumer c’est assez.”

<sup>796</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 322-23. “While I was there, their old men, six days before setting out to hunt the wild cattle, sent four or five of their most alert hunters on the mountains to dance the calumet, with as much ceremony as to the nations, to which they are accustomed to send embassies to form an alliance.” Pierre Esprit Radisson, *Being an Account of his Travels*, 57-58. “He had a calumet of red stoane

they did not involve a peace settlement between two groups. After having been captured by an unidentified Indian war party, Father Hennepin observed “the youngest of these Indian warriors danced the calumet to four or five of their chiefs till midnight, and the chief to whom they went sent a warrior of his family to those who sang, to let them in turn smoke his war calumet, which is distinguished from the peace-calumet by different feathers.”<sup>797</sup> This set of ceremonies, described as a “kind of pandemonium,” proved to the French that the calumet was not necessarily synonymous with peace. The war party that captured La Salle’s men were on the war path against the Illinois and Miamis, and the rituals they performed certainly had to do with mourning their dead and perhaps, adopting the captives in their place: “All danced with their arms akimbo, and struck the ground with their feet so stoutly as to leave the imprint visible,” described Hennepin. “While one of the sons of the master of ceremonies gave each in turn the war calumet to smoke, he wept bitterly. The father in a doleful voice, broken with sighs and sobs, with his whole body bathed in tears, sometimes addressed the warriors, sometimes came to me, and put his hands on my head, doing the same to our two Frenchmen, sometimes he raised his eyes to heaven and often uttered the word Louis, which means sun, complaining to that great luminary of the death of his son.”<sup>798</sup>

Despite their realization that the calumet bore multiple and complex ritual meanings, the French tended to focus their attention on the diplomatic dimension of the pipe. This may have derived from the fact that most Indians used the shared smoking of

---

in his hands, a cake [medicine bag] upon his shoulders, that hanged downe his back, and so had the rest of the old men. In that same came are inclosed all the things in the world, as they tould me often, advertising mee that I should [not] disoblige them in the least nor make them angry, by reason they had in their power the sun, and moone and ye heavans, and consequently all the earth.”

<sup>797</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 213.

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-16.

tobacco as a social practice to welcome visitors, clear minds, please protective spirits before orations, and seal partnerships and friendships, regardless of whether they were familiar with the calumet.<sup>799</sup> The French also witnessed the use of the calumet by some natives as a peace signal, similar to the shouting of a specific word, or the conspicuous laying down of weapons: “it is enough to carry it on oneself and to show it to march with assurance among enemies, who in the heat of combat put down their weapons when you show it,” explained Marquette.<sup>800</sup> This was confirmed by Hennepin, who described a group of Illinois at first panic and flee to the woods upon sighting La Salle and his men on the river, and then presenting the French with a calumet once they realized the visitors had no openly hostile intentions: “those who were encamped on the side where we had landed,...sent two of the chief men among them to present the calumet from the top of a hill, soon after those who were on the other side did the same thing and then we gave them to understand that we accepted the peace.”<sup>801</sup>

In a way, the French “discovery” of the calumet around the mid-seventeenth century, greatly facilitated the frequent “first contact” situations for which an array of often unreliable peaceful signs had been elaborated over the previous century of interaction. As a result, when the French used the calumet themselves, rather than trying to perform the complex dances and songs they misunderstood as honoring the pipe, they

---

<sup>799</sup> “The ritual of the calumet, incorporating dances, songs, and speeches, served to dissipate fears and rivalries between hosts and visitors, and foster feelings of friendship, understanding, and peace.” Havard, *Great Peace*, 126. A French author equated the passing of the pipe between participants to the sharing of the same cup when drinking alcohol in social settings in France.

<sup>800</sup> *JR*, 59: 130. “C’est assez de le porter sur soy et de la faire voir pour marcher en assurance au milieu des Ennemys, qui dans le fort du Combat mettent bas les armes quand on le montre.”

<sup>801</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 157. A similar scene occurred when Marquette and his companion, Jolliet, wandered at proximity of an Illinois village and manifested their presence through a loud shout: “Et nous ayant probablement reconnus pour François, sur tout voyant la robe noire, ou du moins n’ayant aucun sujet de deffiance puisque nous n’étions que deux hommes, et que nous les avions avertis de notre arrivée, ils deputerent quatre vieillards, pour nous venir parler, dont deux portoient des pipes a prendre du tabac, bien ornées et Empanachées de divers plumages.” *JR*, 59 : 114.



limited their performance to producing the calumet as a white flag. “A calumet of this kind is a sure passport among all the allies of those who have given it,” confidently stated Hennepin after his party received a peace pipe from a group of Potawatomis.<sup>802</sup> “I should have perished several times during this voyage, if I had not used the calumet.”<sup>803</sup>

The calumet thus appeared as a god-sent nonverbal instrument for the French at a time when they were venturing outside familiar cultural and geographical boundaries. But perhaps more than other cross-cultural signs, by reason of its specific geographic and cultural distribution, the power of the calumet knew clear limits.<sup>804</sup> On April 11, 1680, Father Hennepin and his two travel companions unexpectedly came face-to-face with a large group of unknown Indian warriors who immediately encircled the Frenchmen, “with frightful cries and yells.” As they had successfully done a number of times before, the three Frenchmen pulled out the peace calumet that the Miamis had given them and showed it to their assailants, expecting an immediate positive outcome.<sup>805</sup> The Indians did recognize the calumet as a Miami production, but, unfortunately for the French, they were then on the war path against that tribe and their Illinois allies, whom they blamed for the deaths of some of their warriors. Rather than “a great cry of joy,” the presentation of the calumet resulted in more aggression and the capture of the three intruders: “one of them wrenched our calumet from our hands, while our canoe and theirs were made fast to

---

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>803</sup> Hennepin, *Nouvelles Découvertes*, 151.

<sup>804</sup> “The physical creation of the calumet also linked it to a regional diplomatic system that involved villages close enough to recognize the origin of a given pipe.” Rushforth, “Smoking the Sun,” 7.

<sup>805</sup> Hennepin, *Description*, 114. In a similar previous encounter where the French were felt in danger of being killed, the calumet acted its part to perfection: “as soon as the Indians perceived the peace calumet which one of our men carried, they rose uttering a great cry of joy, and began to dance after their fashion.”

the shore.”<sup>806</sup> Hennepin turned to other diplomatic remedies, offering tobacco bundles and two large turkeys the French had killed as a peace offering, then later “throw[ing] in their midst six axes, fifteen knives, and six fathom of our black tobacco.” Regardless of his efforts, he deplored, “[t]hese savages would not smoke our peace-calumet.”<sup>807</sup>

Father Marquette, who believed so strongly that the calumet could put an instant stop to any battle, was also confronted to the limits of the calumet.<sup>808</sup> During his exploration down the Mississippi, Marquette encountered a group of Indians he had never met before, but who seemed to be acquainted to some extent with Europeans, or at least with their technology. Trying to identify them, the father wrote that “they mark[ed] their bodies in the manner of the Hiroquois” and “the women are dressed and wear their hair like the Huron women.” Among them, as he shared a meal of buffalo meat, bear oil, and white plumbs, he noticed cloth, guns, hoes, knives, glass beads, and glass bottles, which they used to store their powder. But the calumet failed to enact its power. When Father Marquette presented “[his] feathered calumet while our Frenchmen took their defense positions and prepared to fire” and spoke to the Indians in the Huron language, he received for only response “a word that seemed to declare war upon us.” The encounter

---

<sup>806</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>808</sup> Another partially failed encounter involving the calumet took place near a village called Mitchigamea: “J’avois beau montrer le calumet, et leur faire signe par gestes que nous ne venions pas en guerre, l’alarme continuoit toujours et l’on se preparoit deia a nous percer de flêches de toutes parts...” *JR*, 59: 150-52. Ultimately, the Indians did understand the peace signs made by the French and laid down their weapons in their canoes. Although Father Marquette claimed that the initial misunderstanding was due to the distance and that the Indians had not been able to identify the calumet, it is also possible that this group was familiar with the calumet as a peace signal without partaking themselves in the full rituals surrounding it.

ended positively, the “word” of war being in fact “an invitation to come closer, to give us food to eat.”<sup>809</sup>

The example of the calumet as a medium of diplomatic communication and cross-cultural accommodation is particularly interesting in that it emphasizes the existence of a complex, regionally and culturally bound system of nonverbal rituals from which Indians and French borrowed during encounters and embassies, and were met with various degrees of success and failure. Use of the calumet by the French illuminates the intellectual and practical process through which alien cultural elements were appropriated and distorted during the colonial period. The French adopted only one aspect of the calumet, which does not necessarily suggest that they completely misunderstood or failed to perceive its other usages. In the context of encounters and trade agreements with the Illinois and Miamis, the calumet was presented most often to French explorers in connection with diplomacy and peace settlement. The French subsequently simplified the calumet ritual, using it as an inert object symbol of peaceful intentions rather than as a powerful multidimensional entity linked to the sun and capable of bestowing power upon its users for their various endeavors, such as hunting, warfare, and peace.

French appropriation of the calumet as a symbol of peace may also have been driven by the fact that Europeans were well aware of the ritual and spiritual potency attributed by all natives to tobacco. The French may thus have felt validated in expanding the simplified version of the calumet ceremony to all their allies—including those who

---

<sup>809</sup> *JR*, 59: 146-48. “comme nous ne laissions aller en ceste stat au gré de L’eau, nous apperceusmes a terre des sauvages armez de fusilz avec lesquels ils nous attendoient ; Je leur presentay d’abord mon calumet empanaché pendant que nos François se mettent en deffense, et attendoient a tirer, que Les sauvages eussent fait la premiere décharge ; je leur parlay en huron, mais ils me repondirent par un mot qui sembloit nous declarer la guerre, ils avoient neantmoins autant peur que nous, et ceque nous prenions pour un signal de guerre, estoit une Invitation qu’ils nous faisoit de nous approcher, pour nous donner à manger.”

did not possess an elaborate calumet ritual complex—because of the parallels they drew between the calumet and other similar smoking practices. Rather than a process of homogenization at the hands of the French, the calumet thus suggests a process of pauperization at least during cross-cultural encounters, with Europeans using truncated ceremonies and piecemeal nonverbal practices based on perceived congruences among native cultures. In some instances, the French were also guilty of semantic mistakes rather than conceptual ones, using the term “calumet” to refer to native smoking pipes that did not strictly belong to “Calumet Ceremonialism.” This makes it more difficult for scholars to trace the extension and spread of the calumet during the historic period. However, French use of the calumet can hardly be attributed to misunderstandings. The French had had enough experiences with the object to realize that there were other, more complex dimensions to it. Their selective adoption of the calumet was thus practical rather than accidental.

The case of the calumet also reveals how interconnected various ritual practices were in managing cross-cultural relations.<sup>810</sup> The calumet never functioned on its own and, when it failed, other signs and standardized practices still maintained peaceful interactions. Father Marquette dedicated an entire section of his relation to one specific ceremony he experienced among the Illinois in 1673, which he felt was one of the most solemn and civil welcomes he had ever witnessed. The meeting began with a nude elder Indian performing a series of gestures towards the sun and pronouncing a welcoming oration before the visitors could be introduced to the village. The calumet appeared afterwards, once the French had been seated in one of the main cabins where the village

---

<sup>810</sup> Further discussion of the calumet will appear in Chapter 1 of Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indians and the Making of Racial Slavery in French North America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, forthcoming.

elders shared the pipe with them. The French were then taken to a neighboring village, where the “*Grand Capitaine de tous les Illinois*” [“grand captain of all the Illinois”] awaited them with another calumet, which he danced and offered to the newcomers to smoke. Father Marquette then performed his own native-style protocol, and “spoke to them through four presents” through which he explained the intentions of the French and their desire to convert the Illinois to Christianity. In response, the chief offered to the French a young slave, and a “very mysterious calumet,” which seemed to have possessed a particular aura. Finally, the French partook in a feast “consisting of four dishes that we had to take with all their manners,” explained Marquette.

The first service was a large wooden platter full of sagamité, that is corn flour that they boil with water and season with grease. The Master of Ceremonies with a spoon full of sagamité presented it to my mouth three or four times, like one would do to a small child. For the second dish, he presented a second platter with three fish, and took a few pieces to take out the bones, and, having blown on them to cool them, he put them in our mouths, like one would feed a bird. As third dish, they brought a large dog, that had just been killed, but having learned that we did not eat it, they took it away. Finally, the fourth was a piece of wild beef, of which they fed us the fatest pieces in our mouths.<sup>811</sup>

The meaning and importance of the calumet during the Great Peace of Montreal cannot be understood in isolation from the other sets of rituals and practices that contributed to the success of the agreement. The calumet, like wampum belts and certain native metaphors and oratorical practices, were selectively borrowed and transformed by

---

<sup>811</sup> JR, 59: 123-24. “Le Conseil fut suivy d’un grand festin qui Consistoit en quatre metz qu’il fallut prendre avec toutes leurs façons. Le premier service fut un grand plat de bois plein de sagamité, cest-a-dire de farine de bled d’inde qu’ont fait bouillir avec de leau qu’on assaisonne de graisse. Le Maistre des Ceremonies avec une Cueillier pleine de sagamité me la presenta a la bouche par trois ou quatre fois, Comme on feroit a un petit Enfant, il fit Le mesme a Mr. Jollyet. Pour second metz il fit paroistre un second plat où il y avoit trois poissons, il en prit quelques morceaux pour en oster les arestes, et ayant soufflé dessus pour les rafraichie, il nous les mit a la bouche, Comme l’on donneroit la beschée a un oyseau. On approte pour troisième service un grand chien, qu’on venoit de tuer, mais ayant appris que nous n’en mangions point, on le retira de devant nous. Enfin le 4<sup>e</sup>. fut une pièce de boeuf sauvage, dont on nous mit a la bouche les morceaux les plus gras.”

the French, while others were not. The French, for instance, never adopted the ritual killing and eating of dogs as their own. They also restrained from rituals that involved physical contacts with which they were uncomfortable, even when these had some clear parallels in western Catholic culture, such as rubbing a visitor's body with oil to relieve his fatigue (similar to the washing of feet), or the finger-feeding described by Marquette in the previous passage (similar to caring for a small child). Analyzing the sensory and nonverbal elements that the French selectively borrowed as well as the ones they did not provides a more refined understanding of the acculturation process and the role of cross-cultural rituals. Understanding that both sides made conscious choices and enjoyed an important dose of flexibility in their performances of otherness, rather than blindly mimicking gestures that they barely understood, has the power to significantly challenge previous interpretations of colonial interactions and behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

### Understanding Misunderstandings

One of the hundreds of Indian delegates who spoke during the proceedings leading to the ratification of the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701 was a Fox leader and diplomat named Miskouensa.<sup>812</sup> Like other native ambassadors before and after him on the final day of the negotiations on August 4, he solemnly walked across the large rectangular arena that had been delineated with rows of branches on a plain outside the French town in order to host the two or three thousand peoples attending this historic meeting. As he approached the end of this rustic agora where stood the French officials accompanied by their scribes and interpreters, he knew all eyes were on him, detailing every aspect of his appearance and demeanor. French chronicler Claude-Charles Bacqueville de la Potherie found the Fox ambassador's appearance more noteworthy than the discourse he subsequently pronounced, dedicating more effort to describing it than to transcribing Miskouensa's words: "His face was painted red, and he wore on his head an old powdered wig, all tangled, without a hat."<sup>813</sup> What happened next sent an irrepressible burst of laughter across the French section of the audience: "wanting to show that he knew how to behave, he saluted the Chevalier de Callières with [the wig] as if with a hat."<sup>814</sup>

---

<sup>812</sup> His name is subject to various spellings in the sources. La Potherie, for instance, called him Miskouasouath. Claude-Charles le Roy de La Potherie, *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, 4 vols. (Paris : Brocas, 1753 [1722]), 4 : 247-48.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, 248. "Miskouasouath, chef des Outagamis vint de l'extrémité de l'enceinte, suivi de trois prisonniers. Son visage étoit peint de rouge, et il avoit sur la tête une vieille perruque poudrée, toute mêlée, sans chapeau."

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.* "voulant faire voir qu'il savoit vivre, il en salua le chevalier de Callières comme d'un chapeau." This episode also appears, but is treated differently, in Brett Rushforth, "Smoking the Sun: The Calumet and Intercultural Diplomacy at the Great Peace of Montreal," Paper presented at the Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting, New York, NY, March 2008. Rushforth sees in this scene an instance of cultural misunderstanding on the part of the Indian: "Having observed French men doffing their hats to

There are several ways to read and interpret this episode, and the numerous similar occurrences of Indians “acting French” and French “acting Indian” in early colonial French America. Gilles Havard proposes a double-standard approach to French and native imitative behaviors. Commentating on Miskouensa’s performance, he writes that despite the fact that the audience found it very amusing, “this mimicry was in no way facetious. It was rather a ritualistic, superficial form of acculturation intended to ‘cannibalize’ otherness. The European officers had quite different motives in imitating the gestures of the Native delegates; they were imitating the Other only for the purpose of manipulation...In imitating their partners, [the Indians] sought to integrate them by appropriating their difference, essentially adopting them as their own.”<sup>815</sup> This portrait, of a rather naïve, benevolent Indian mimesis facing a cynical, manipulative European one is unconvincing. It diminishes the depth of Indian agency while denying the possibility of genuine, emotional cultural empathy on the part of the French towards the cultures they encountered.

Despite Havard’s attempt to offer a revisionist image of colonial America that is more flattering to natives than to Europeans, his analysis remains in fact deeply ethnocentric. In effect, he claims that when they borrowed the calumet or used wampum belts, the French were consciously manipulating Indian protocols to reach their ends while keeping a safe intellectual and emotional distance. On the contrary, when an Indian delegate like Miskouensa wore a hat or a wig, or adjusted the stylistic content of his

---

social worthies, Misouensa bowed deeply, and with a great wave of his arm, doffed his wig, scattering powder to the wind and revealing his shaved head. The French audience roared with laughter. Not quite getting the joke, Misouensa stood proudly; apparently, he ‘took it as applause’.”Ibid, 10. As explained here, I do not fully agree with this interpretation.

<sup>815</sup> Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 139.



speeches, he did so because “the Amerindians were particularly fond of wearing hats” and to “[assert] himself politically by putting on a performance, making an exhibition of himself, presenting—without malice or sarcasm—a mirror-image of the world of the Other.”<sup>816</sup> This view is not very distant in tone from depictions of “vanishing” Native Americans becoming inescapably mesmerized and dependent on European technology after contact, which scholars have been debunking for decades. In reality, the French also embraced Indian behaviors and material culture for reasons other than cold intellectual calculation, and the Indians also “maliciously” manipulated signs of power to better reach their European audiences.

Havard’s interpretation is more largely based on Richard White’s idea of the “middle ground” as a process and a space for mutual acculturation. White argues that at a specific time and in the particular conditions of the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *Pays d’en Haut*, “diverse peoples adjust[ed] their differences through what amounts to a process of creative, and often expedient, misunderstandings. People [tried] to persuade others who [were] different from themselves by appealing to what they perceive[d] to be the values and the practices of those others. They often misinterpret[ed] and distort[ed] both the values and practices of those they deal[t] with, but from these misunderstandings [arose] new meanings and through them new practices.”<sup>817</sup> White ambiguously suggests that there were both intentional adaptation and unconscious (but nevertheless working) misunderstandings at play in the multi-sided process of cross-cultural adaptation. According to this approach, Miskouensa actively and consciously sought to please his French audience by adopting what he perceived were elements of

---

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>817</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x.

French etiquette; But, because of misperceptions and his ultimate failure at “properly” understanding why a wig was not the equivalent of a hat and could not be used as such to salute someone, his performance equated to one of the multiple “creative misunderstandings” that filled the middle ground. The French then laughed because they “misunderstood” Miskouensa’s action, and Miskouensa “misinterpreted” their laughter as approval. The “failure” did not affect the outcome of the exchange, because, according to White, “cultural conventions do not have to be true to be effective any more than legal precedents do. They have only to be accepted.”<sup>818</sup>

I would like to offer a third way to look at this episode.<sup>819</sup> First of all, what strikes me here is how much mutual knowledge and understanding is displayed, rather than the amount of misunderstanding taking place. La Potherie was ethnocentric and condescending, but he clearly understood the intention behind the Indian orator’s gesture: “he had made himself an ornament of it to follow the French manner,” he commented on the way Miskouensa wore the wig. The French recognized and appreciated Miskouensa’s effort at following French etiquette while mocking him because, as Havard justly notes: “he shocked their sense of good taste and offended their aesthetic sensibilities,” and seemed “‘ridiculous’ in that he was dressed in a style outside his condition, outside his ‘savagery’.”<sup>820</sup> The French were also very self-conscious in their mockery and concerned about the potential backlash that their unrestrained laughter could bring: “Despite the

---

<sup>818</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>819</sup> The purpose of my dissertation is thus not to radically challenge Havard’s and White’s interpretations, which both contain very valuable and subtle insights. I never conceived of my work as a “reaction” to the writings of others, but rather, as my personal contribution to existing, and often valid, analyses. Rather than dismissing White’s “middle ground,” I seek, like others before me, to bring a slightly different perspective and complement what scholars think they already understand about cross-cultural relations in New France.

<sup>820</sup> Havard, *Great Peace*, 138.

self-control that one is forced to maintain in front of people who are so composed, especially in such serious circumstances, we could not help but burst out laughing, and asked him at the same time very seriously to put it back on.”<sup>821</sup> This denotes a solid understanding of Indian tastes (to realize that the orator thought of himself as handsome), as well as a profound understanding and respect for Indian rules of civility and social behavior that prevented the French from unknowingly or dismissively offending their hosts.

In his account of this episode, Charlevoix claimed that Miskouensa did not take offense from French laughter, because he took it “for applause.”<sup>822</sup> This may be the most serious misunderstanding. I do not believe that Miskouensa was naïve enough to think that he was performing a French gesture to perfection nor that this was his intent. If Miskouensa had seen enough Frenchmen take off their hats as a mark of respectful greeting to be able to imitate this gesture in a socially and politically appropriate context, he was probably also aware that Frenchmen did not take off their wigs in public. His choice may have been driven by necessity (no hat available), or by personal preference. The reason why he was not offended by French laughter may have been because he expected it or because the French reaction was beside the point.

In Indian cultures, ceremonies and protocols were at the same time extremely standardized and open to improvisation and innovation. Miskouensa did not fool himself in thinking he was or looked French: he wanted to look like a Fox chief acquainted with French ways, whose personality and aestheticism connoted special political status in

---

<sup>821</sup> La Potherie, 248. “malgré le sang-froid que l’on est obligé d’avoir devant des gens qui sont d’un si grand flegme, principalement dans une conjoncture aussi sérieuse que celle-là, on ne pût s’empêcher d’éclater de rire, et de le prier en même temps fort sérieusement de s’en couvrir.”

<sup>822</sup> P. François Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle-France*, 3 vols. (Ottawa : Éditions Élysée, 1966 [1744]), 2: 282.

connection with the Europeans. A native commentary on Governor de Callières's presentation of the calumet earlier during this same meeting would probably reveal very similar sentiments: understanding that the French were performatively expressing their respect for Indian protocols, realization that, as foreigners, this performance could only be partially accurate, and sarcasm and feelings of superiority in view of the amusing "blunders" committed by the French.

As ethnohistorians, we must avoid taking sides, even if it is tempting to join the French colonial officials in finding the image of an Indian waving an old messy powdered wig amusing. Instead, we must seek to understand what a gesture like this one meant to each party that witnessed it, and what that reveals about their respective values, tastes, internalized social pressures, and personal sensibilities. Too often, important cross-cultural encounters are dismissed by historians and labeled as "misunderstandings." My attempt, throughout this dissertation, has been to redefine communication, taking into account the bodily signals shared by the groups and the process by which they became acquainted through their senses as well as their minds, in order to better distinguish between what could and was understood, what could not be grasped at all, and what was poorly or partially understood. By shifting the criteria for defining "communication," "understanding," and "misunderstanding," I hope to entice more scholars to look back in a new light and perspective at some of the early sources we thought we had exhausted.

Miskouensa's episode takes on new meaning when put within the larger context of French-Indian nonverbal communication and acculturation throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Cross-cultural emulation was not limited to formal diplomatic exchanges or embassies. It was also part of everyday interactions and contributed to

mutual discovery, understanding, and accommodation.<sup>823</sup> Performance of otherness emerged as a form of nonverbal communication before becoming a mode of interaction. Between the first encounter in the early sixteenth century and the Great Peace of Montreal of 1701, French and Indians constructed a complex repertoire of communication in which gestures, bodily actions, tones and pitches of voices, sounds, colors, and touch were as important as words. Nonverbal communication was not an imperfect and temporary remedy to the absence of language: it determined the acquisition of a mutually understandable tongue and the type of information exchanged, and it also continued to play a central role in the delivery and potency of speech after both groups achieved linguistic proficiency. Even “men of the Book,” such as the Jesuits, drew much knowledge and empowerment from their use of nonverbal performances in Indian contexts. Through the construction of this nonverbal repertoire, a complex, multi-sided process of sensory acculturation occurred. The French learned to know the natives as they learned to know the land, through physical, daily interaction, and the construction of shared memories and preferred modes of relation. Communication, like acculturation, was a dynamic process. People could acquire and master new “codes,” whether linguistic or nonverbal, and gain new layers of identity without being “less French” or “less Indian.”

Looking at other regions of French America in conjunction with New France also challenges a Canadian-centered analysis of French-Indian relations that tends to be

---

<sup>823</sup> I wholeheartedly agree with White that “the middle ground...existed on two distinct levels. It was both a product of everyday life and a product of formal diplomatic relations between distinct peoples.” White, *Middle Ground*, 53. For one of many instances of “everyday” emulation that has several layers of meaning, see *JR*, 32: 33. “Ce Huron...se met dans toutes les postures du monde, pour agreer à ses hostes, il fait le soldat, le laboureur, l’artisan avec une grande naisveté, qu’il estoit la recreation de tous.”

determined by events such as the Great Peace of Montreal, without much consideration for the complex social, cultural, and personal mechanisms that led to large syncretic agreements like this one. I also believe it is important to put the emphasis on the various native cultures the French encountered and to trace how cultural variations were felt and dealt with by the French in their attempts to accommodate. In other words, how did local conditions determine the style and means of colonization and acculturation? In the future, I intend to explore further the resources offered by material culture and archaeology to gain a better understanding of Indian aesthetics and cultures in various parts of the Americas. Because performance and the theme of “acting” are so predominant in the sources, more research will also be needed on French views of theatre. In the seventeenth century, diplomatic etiquette and strategies were still being elaborated at the court of Louis XIV and of other monarchs in Europe: it will be interesting to see how the changing meaning of the word *diplomacie* affected French attitudes towards their Indian allies, and how, in turn, diplomacy being enacted on the ground in the Americas shaped European conceptions of international relations. I hope that, through the unusual lens of nonverbal communication events, the reader will have learned, not only how firing a cannon could have become a mutually understood and desirable expression of peace and friendship in seventeenth-century French-Indian America, but will also perceive new connections between Brazil, the Caribbean, Canada, and the Mississippi Valley, and between a Jesuit missionary holding a wampum belt and a Fox Indian wearing an old powdered wig.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### **Manuscript Sources**

Collection Moreau de St.Méry, Fonds Ministériels, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

#### **Published Sources**

Abbeville, Claude d'. *Histoire de la mission des pères Capucins en l'isle de Maragnan et terres circonvoisines*. Paris : Imprimerie L. Perrin, 1876.

---. *L'Arrivée des pères capucins et la conversion des sauvages à nostre sainte foy déclarée par Claude d'Abbeville, prédicateur capucin* [1623]. Lyon : Imprimerie L. Perrin, 1876.

Avezac, M. d'. *Campagne du Navire l'Espoir de Honfleur, 1503-1504 : Relation authentique du voyage du Capitaine de Gonneville ès nouvelles terres des Indes*. Paris : Challamel Aîné, 1869.

Biggar, H.P., ed. *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*. 6 vols. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1922.

---, ed. *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*. Ottawa: Public Archives, 1924.

---, ed. *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval*. Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1930.

Boucher, Pierre. *Histoire Véritable et Naturelle des moeurs et productions du Pays de la Nouvelle-France Vulgairement dite le Canada, 1664*. Canada : Société Historique de Boucherville, 1964.

Breton, Raymond. *Les Caraïbes. La Guadeloupe 1635-1656, d'après les Relations du R.P. Breton*. Edited by Joseph Rennard. Paris : G. Ficker, 1929.

Callières, François de. *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains*. Amsterdam, 1716.

---. *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes*. Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 1963.

Cartier, Jacques. *Voyages en Nouvelle France*. Québec : Éditions Hurtibise HMH, 1977.

Charlevoix, François-Xavier de. *Letters to the Dutchess of Lesdiguières Giving an Account of a Voyage to Canada, and Travels Through that Vast Country, and Louisiana, to the Gulf of Mexico*. London : printed for R. Goadby, 1763.

---. *Histoire et Description générale de la Nouvelle France*, 3 Vols. Ottawa : Éditions Élysée, 1966 [1744].

---. *Journal d'un voyage fait par ordre du Roi dans l'Amérique Septentrionale*. 2 vols. Edited by Pierre Berthiaume. Montréal : Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1994.

Denys, Nicolas. *The Description and Natural History of the Coasts of North America* [1612]. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1908.

Dunn, Oliver, and James E. Kelley, Jr., eds. *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492-1493*. Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1989.

Du Tertre, R.P. *Histoire Générale des Antilles Habitées par les François Divisée en deux Tomes, et enrichie de Cartes et de figures*. 4 vols. Ann Arbor, Mich. : University Microfilms, 1976.

Errington, Joseph. "Colonial Linguistics." *Annual Review of Anthropology* , 30: 19-39 (2001).

Evreux, Yves d'. *Voyage au Nord du Brésil fait en 1613 et 1614*. Edited by Hélène Castres. Paris: Payot, 1985.

Hennepin, Louis. *A Description of Louisiana*. Translated by John Gilmary Shea. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1966.

Joutel, Henri. *The La Salle Expedition to Texas: The Journal of Henri Joutel, 1684-1687*. Edited by William C. Foster and translated by Johanna S. Warren. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1998.

Kellogg, Louise Phelps, ed. *Early Narratives of the Northwest, 1634-1699*. New York: C. Scribners's sons, 1917.

La Borde, Sieur de. *Relation de l'Origine, Mœurs, Coustumes Religion, Guerres et Voyages des Caraïbes Sauvages des Isles Antilles de l'Amérique*, in *Recueil de divers voyages faits en Afrique et en l'Amérique*. Paris, 1674.

Lahontan, Baron de. *Mémoires de l'Amérique Septentrionale, ou la suite des voyages de Mr. Le Baron de Lahontan, avec un petit dictionnaire de la langue du Païe*. La Haye : Chez les Frères l'Honoré, Marchands Libraires, 1703.



La Potherie, Claude Charles le Roy, dit Bacqueville de. *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*. 4 Vols. Paris : Brocas, 1753 [1722].

Léry, Jean de. *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* [1578]. Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 2004.

---. *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*. Translated and edited by Janet Whatley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Lescarbot, Marc. *The History of New France* [1609]. 3 vols. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1907.

Margry, Pierre, ed. *Découvertes et établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale (1614-1754) : mémoires et documents originaux*. 6 vols. Paris : D. Jouaust, 1776-1886.

Moreau, Jean-Pierre, ed. *Un flibustier français dans la Mer des Antilles, 1618-1620 : relation d'un voyage infortuné fait aux Indes Occidentales par le Capitaine avec la description de quelques îles qu'on y rencontre*. Paris : Seghers, 1990.

Pelleprat, Pierre. *Relations des Missions des PP. de la Compagnie de Jesus dans les Isles et dans la Terre Ferme de l'Amérique Meridionale Divisée en Deux Parties : avec une introduction à la langue des Galibis Sauvages de la terre ferme de l'Amérique*. Paris : Sebastien Cramoisy, 1655.

Perrot, Nicolas. *Mémoire sur les mœurs, coutumes et religion des Sauvages de l'Amérique Septentrionale*. Paris: A. Franck, 1864.

Peyster, Joseph L., and José Antônio Brandão, eds. *Edge of Empire: Documents of Michilimachinac, 1671-1716*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008.

Quinn, David B., ed. *New American World : A Documentary History of North America to 1612*. 5 vols. New York: Arno Press, 1979.

Radisson, Pierre Esprit. *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson, being an account of his travels and experiences among the North American Indians, from 1652 to 1684*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1967.

Sagard Théodat, F. Gabriel. *Histoire du Canada et voyages que les frères recollects y ont faits pour la conversion des infidèles*. 4 vols. Arras : H. Schoutheer, 1865.

*The Journal of Jean Cavelier, the account of a survivor of La Salle's Texas expedition, 1684-1688*. Translated and annotated by Jean Delanglez. Chicago: Institute of Jesuit history, 1938.

Thévet, André. *Les Singularités de la France Antarctique, autrement nommée Amérique et de plusieurs terres et isles découvertes de nostre temps*. Anvers : Imprimerie Christophe Plantin à la Licorne d'Or, 1558.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold, ed. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*. 73 vols. Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company Publishers, 1896-1901.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Armstrong, Virginia Irving, ed. *I Have Spoken: American History Through the Voices of the Indians*. Chicago: Sage Books, 1971.

Auroux, Sylvain, et al., ed. *History of the Language Sciences: An International Handbook on the Evolution of the Study of Language from the Beginnings to the Present*, 3 Vols. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000.

Axtell, James. *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

---. *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

---. *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Bahr, Donald M. "Oratory." In *Dictionary of Native American Literature*, edited by Andrew M. Wiget. New York: Garland, 1994.

Bailey, Gauvin Alexander. "'Le style jésuite n'existe pas': Jesuit Corporate Culture and the Visual Arts." In *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*. Vol.1, edited by John W. O'Malley et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 38-90.

Baker, Theodore. *On the Music of the North American Indians*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1977.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge Press, 1994.

Barbeau, C. Marius. *Huron-Wyandot Traditional Narratives in Translations and Native Texts*. National Museum of Canada Bulletin 165, Anthropological Series 47. Ottawa: Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 1960.

Barbour, Philip, ed. *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

- Barr, Juliana. *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Rowley, MA: Newberry House, 1977.
- Becker, Marshall Joseph. "Matchcoats: Cultural Conservatism and Change in One Aspect of Native American Clothing." *Ethnohistory* 52: 727-787 (2005).
- Belyea, Barbara. "Inland Journeys, Native Maps." *Cartographica* 33 (1996).
- . "Amerindian Maps: The Explorer as Translator." *Journal of Historical Geography* 18 (1992).
- Berkhofer, Robert F. Jr. *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Blackburn, Carole. *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632-1650*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.
- Blakeslee, Donald J. "The Origin and Spread of the Calumet Ceremony." *American Antiquity*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Oct. 1981): 759-768.
- Bloch, Marc. *Les Rois Thaumaturges : étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*. Paris : A. Colin, 1961.
- Bohaker, Heidi. "Nindoodemag: The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region, 1600-1701." *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 63:1 (January 2006): 23-52.
- Bonnet, Juan Pablo. *Reducción de las letras y arte para enseñar a hablar a los mudos*. Madrid : Francisco Abarca de Angulo, 1620.
- Boucher, Philip P. *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- . *Les Nouvelles Frances*. Québec : Éditions du Septentrion, 2004.
- . "Revisioning the 'French Atlantic' or, How to Think About the French Presence in the Atlantic, 1550-1625." In *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, edited by Peter C. Mancall. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement*. Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1979.
- . *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*. Paris : Fayard, 2001.

- Boysse, Ernest. *Le Théâtre des Jésuites*. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970.
- Bragdon, Kathleen. "Linguistic Acculturation in Massachusetts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." In *Papers of the Twelfth Algonquian Conference*, Ottawa, 1981, 121-32.
- . "'Emphatical Speech and Great Action': An Analysis of Native Speech Events Described in Seventeenth-Century Sources." *Man in the Northeast* 33 (1988): 88-101.
- Brandão, José António. "*Your fyre shall burn no more*": *Iroquois Policy toward New France and Its Native Allies to 1701*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.
- . *Nation Iroquoise: A Seventeenth-Century Ethnography of the Iroquois*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.
- Brandão, José Antonio, and William A. Starn. "The Treaties of 1701: A Triumph of Iroquois Diplomacy." *Ethnohistory*, 43: 2 (Spring 1996): 209-44.
- Brathwaite, Kamau. *The Colonial Encounter: Language*. Foreword by Bruce King. Mysore: University of Mysore, Center for Commonwealth Literature and Research, 1984.
- Brown, Ian W. "The Calumet Ceremony in the Southeast and Its Archaeological Manifestations." *American Antiquity*, 54: 2 (April 1989): 311-331.
- Brown, Jennifer S.H., and Elizabeth Viber, eds. *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*. Second ed. New York : Broadview Press, 2003.
- Bruce, Scott G. *Silence and Sign-Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition c. 900-1200*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Bull, M., and L. Back, eds. *The Auditory Culture Reader*. New York: Berg, 2003.
- Burke, Peter. *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . *Cultural Hybridity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.
- Calloway, Colin G. *New Worlds For All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Camp, Charles. "American Indian oratory in the white image: an analysis of stereotypes." *Journal of American Culture* 1: 811-17 (1978).
- Campbell, Lyle. *American Indian Languages: The Historical Linguistics of Native America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Campeau, Lucien. *La Mission des Jésuites chez les Hurons, 1634-1650*. Montréal-Rome: Bellarmin-IHSI, 1987.

Carp, R.M. "Perception and Material Culture: Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspectives." *Historical Reflections/Reflexions historiques*, 23(3): 269-300 (1997).

Carpenter, Roger M. *The Renewed, the Destroyed, and the Remade: the Three Thought Worlds of the Huron and the Iroquois, 1609-1650*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004.

Castagna, Paulo. "The Use of Music by the Jesuits in the Conversion of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil." In *The Jesuits : Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*. Vol.1, edited by John W. O'Malley et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 641-58.

Castillo, Susan. *Colonial Encounters in New World Writing, 1500-1786: Performing America*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Chafe, Wallace. "The Earliest Encounters with Iroquoian Languages." In *Decentring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective 1500-1700*, edited by Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

Chesterton, G.K. *St. Francis of Assisi*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1924.

Chippis Smith, J. *Sensuous Worship: Jesuits and the Art of Early Catholic Reformation in Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Churchill, Ward. "Reclaiming the Native Voice: Reflections on the Historiography of American Indian Oratory." In *Native American Speakers of the Eastern Woodlands: Selected Speeches and Critical Analyses*, edited by Barbara Alice Mann. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Clark, W.P. *The Indian Sign Language* [1885]. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Classen, Constance. *Worlds of Senses: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Clements, William M. *Native American Verbal Art: Texts and Contexts*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996.

---. *Oratory in Native North America*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002.

Clendinnen, Inga. *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 2003.

Clouzot, Martine. "Un intermédiaire culturel au XIIIe siècle : le jongleur." *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre*, [en ligne], Hors Série n°2, 2009, mis en ligne le 24 janvier 2009. URL:<http://cem.revues.org/index4312.html>

Coeyman, Barbara. "Opera and Ballet in Seventeenth-Century French Theatres: Case Studies of the Salle des Machines and the Palais Royal Theatre." In *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Staging from the Late Renaissance to the Time of Puccini*, edited by Mark A. Radice. Portland: Amadeus Press, 1998.

Cohen, Matt. *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Cook, Peter. "Kings and Captains and Kin: French Views of Native American Political Cultures in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries." In *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 150-1624* edited by Peter C. Mancall. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Corbin, Alain. *Le miasme et la jonquille : l'odorat et l'imaginaire social, XVIIIe-XIXe siècles*. Paris : Flammarion, 1986.

---. *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*. Translated by M. Kochan, R. Porter, and C. Prendergast. Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986.

---. *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth Century French Countryside*. Translated by M. Thom. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Cummins, Thomas. "From Lies to Truth: Colonial Ekphrasis and the Act of Crosscultural Translation." In *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, edited by Claire Farago, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Darwin, Charles. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898.

Day, Gordon M. "Oral Traditions as Complement." *Ethnohistory* 19 (1972): 99-108.

Day, Gordon M., and Michael K. Foster. "Oral Literatures of the Northern Algonquians and the Northern Iroquoians." In *Handbook of Native American Literature*, edited by Andrew Wiget. New York: Garland, 1996.

Delâge, Denys. *Le Pays renversé: Amérindiens et Européens en Amérique du Nord-Est, 1600-1664*. Montréal : Boréal, 1985.

Delâge, Denys. *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in the American Northeast, 1600-1664*. Translated by Jane Brierley. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993.

- De L'Épée, Abbé Charles-Michel. *La véritable manière d'enseigner les sourds et muets : confirmée par une longue expérience* [1784]. Paris : Fayard, 1984.
- Dening, Greg. *Beach Crossings: Voyaging Across Time, Cultures and Self*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Dennis, Matthew. *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- De Sales, François, Saint. *Œuvres*. Edited by André Ravier. Paris : Gallimard, 1969.
- Deslandres, Dominique. *Croire et faire croire: Les missions Françaises au XVIIe siècle, 1600-1650*. Paris : Fayard, 2003.
- . "Exemplo aequè ut verbo : The French Jesuits Missionary World." In *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, edited by John W. O'Malley and Alexander Bailey. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 2006.
- Dickason, Olive P. *the Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984.
- DiPaolo Loren, Diana. *In Contact: Bodies and Spaces in the Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Eastern Woodlands*. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2008.
- Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965-.
- Donnelly, Joseph P., S.J. *Jacques Marquette, S.J., 1637-1675*. Chicago : Loyola University Press, 1968.
- Duranti, Alessandro. "Oratory." In *International Encyclopedia of communication*, ed. by Erik Barnouw et al., 3: 234-36. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Du Val, Kathleen. *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Ebacher, Colleen M. "The Old and the New World: Incorporating American Indian Forms of Discourse and Modes of Communication into Colonial Missionary Texts." *Anthropological Linguistics*, 33, No. 2 (1991): 135-65.
- Eccles, W.J. *The French in North America, 1500-1783*. Third Edition. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998.
- Einhorn, Lois. *The Native American Oral Tradition: Voices of the Spirit and Soul*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000.

Farago, Claire, ed. *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Farnell, Brenda M. *Do You See What I Mean? Plains Indians Sign Talk and the Embodiment of Action*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Fausz, Frederick J. "Middlemen in Peace and War: Virginia's Earliest Indian Interpreters, 1608-1632." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95 (Jan. 1987): 41-64.

Feister, Lois M. "Linguistic Communication between the Dutch and Indians in New Netherlands, 1609-1664." *Ethnohistory*, 20:1 (Winter, 1973).

Feld, Steven, and Keith H. Basso, eds. *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Seminar Series, 1996.

Fenton, William N. *The False Faces of the Iroquois*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

Fernandez, James. *Persuasions and Performances: the Play of Tropes in Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Filippi, Bruna. "The Orator's Performance: Gesture, Word, and Image in Theatre at the Collegio Romano." In *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, edited by John W. O'Malley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Fine, Elizabeth C. *The Folklore Text from Performance to Print*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Fisher, David Hackett. *Champlain's Dream: The European Founding of North America*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.

Fitzhugh, Frederick J., ed. *Cultures in Contact: The Impact of European Contacts on Native American Cultural Institutions, AD. 1000-1800*. Washington D.C., 1985.

Fogelson, Raymond D. *Southeast*. In *Handbook of North American Indians*, 20 vols., edited by William C. Sturtevant. Volume 14.

Foster, Michael K. *From the Earth to the Sky: an Ethnographic Approach to Four Longhouse Speech Events*. Ethnology Division, Mercury Series Paper No. 20. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1974.

---. "On Who Spoke First at Iroquois-White Councils: An Exercise in the Method of Upstreaming." In *Extending the Rafters: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Iroquoian*



*Studies*, edited by Michael K. Foster, Jack Campisi, and Marianne Mithun. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984, 183-207.

---. "Another Look at the Function of Wampum in Iroquois-White Councils." In *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy*, edited by Francis Jennings, William N. Fenton, and Mary A. Druke. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985.

Fournier, Martin. "Le voyage de Radisson et des Groseilliers au Lac Supérieur, 1659-1660." *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, 52 : 2 (Fall 1998).

Fumaroli, Marc. "The Fertility and the Shortcomings of Renaissance Rhetoric: the Jesuit Case." In *The Jesuits : Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*. Vol.1, edited by John W. O'Malley et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 90-106.

Gagnon, François M. *La Conversion par l'image: Un aspect de la mission jésuite auprès des Indiens canadiens au XVIIe siècle*. Montréal : Bellarmin, 1975.

Galgano, Robert C. *Feast of Souls: Indians and Spaniards in the Seventeenth-Century Missions of Florida and New Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.

Galloway, Patricia K. *La Salle and His Legacy: Frenchmen and Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982.

---. "Talking with Indians: Interpreters and Diplomacy in French Louisiana." In *Race and Family in the Colonial South*, edited by Winthrop D. Jordan and Sheila L. Skemp. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987.

---. *Native, European, and African Cultures in Mississippi, 1500-1800*. Jackson: Mississippi Dept of Archives and History, 1991.

---. *Practicing Ethnohistory: Mining Archives, Hearing Testimony, Constructing Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006.

Goddard, Ives. "The Use of Pidgins and Jargons on the East Coast of North America." In *The Language Encounter in the Americas*, edited by Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, 61-75.

Gray, Edward G. *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Gray, Edward G., and Norman Fiering, eds. *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800: a Collection of Essays*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.

Gray, Hannah H. "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24: 497-514.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century." In *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, 2 vols, edited by Fredi Chiapelli. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, 1: 561-80.

---. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 2000.

---. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonders of the New World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Greer, Allan. *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Gruzinski, Serge. *La Colonisation de l'imaginaire. Sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique espagnol, XVI-XVIIe siècle*. Paris : Gallimard, 1988.

Gustafson, Sandra. *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Haile, Edward W., ed. *The Jamestown Narratives*. Champlain: Roundhouse Ed, 2001.

Hamell, George R. "Mythical Realities and European Contact in the Northeast during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." *Man in the Northeast* No. 33, (Spring 1987), 63-87.

Hanks, William. "Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice." *American Ethnologist* 14: 668-92.

Hanzeli, Victor Egon. *Missionary Linguistics in New France: A Study of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth- Century Descriptions of American Indian Languages*. Mouton: La Hague, 1969.

Havard, Gilles. *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century*. Translated by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

---. *Empires et métissages: Indiens et Français dans le Pays d'en Haut, 1660-1715*. Paris : Septentrion, 2003.

Havard, Gilles, et Cécile Vidal. *Histoire de l'Amérique française*. Paris: Flammarion, 2003.

- Hemming, John. *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500-1760*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Hoffer, Peter Charles. *Sensory Worlds in Early America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Howes, David, ed. *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
- , ed. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2005.
- Hoxie, Fred. E., ed. *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
- Huguet, Edmond F., ed. *Dictionnaire de la langue française du XVIème siècle*, 7 Vols. Paris : M. Didier, 1925-1973.
- Hulme, Peter. *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Hymes, Dell. "Toward Ethnographies of Communication: the Analysis of Communication Events." In *Language and Social Context: Selected Readings*, edited by Pier Paolo Giglioli, 21-44. Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1972.
- Jackson, Jason Baird, and Raymond D. Fogelson. "Introduction." In William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 14, "Southeast," edited by Raymond D. Fogelson. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2004.
- Jacquin, Philippe. *Les Indiens Blancs: Français et Indiens en Amérique du Nord (XV-XVIIIe siècle)*. Paris : Payot, 1987.
- Jaenen, Cornelius J. "Amerindian Views of French Culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century." *Canadian Historical Review*, LV (1974): 261-91.
- . *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.
- . "Native Oral and Inscribed Discourse." In *History of the Book in Canada*, vol.1, *Beginnings to 1840*, edited by Patricia Lockhart Fleming, Giles Gallichan, and Yvan Lamonde, 13-21. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- Jennings, Francis. *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
- Julien, Ch. André. *Les Français en Amérique pendant la deuxième moitié du XVIe siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953.

Kartunnen, Frances. "Interpreters Snatched from the Shore: the Successful and the Others." In *the Language Encounter in the Americas*, edited by Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.

Kennedy George A. *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

Krupat, Arnold. "Post-Structuralism and Oral Literature." In *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, edited by Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, 113-28. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Kupperman, Karen. *Settling with the Indians: the Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1980.

Lauzon, Matthew. "Savage Eloquence in America and the Linguistic Construction of a British Identity in the Eighteenth Century." *Historiographia Linguistica*, 23, no.1/2 (1996): 123-58.

Lavonis, William J. *A Study of Native American Singing and Song*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004.

Leahey, Margaret J. "To Hear with My Eyes: The Native Language Acquisition Project in the Jesuit Relations." Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1990.

---. "Comment peut un muet prescher l'evangile?": Jesuit Missionaries and the Native Languages of New France." *French Historical Studies*, 19: 1 (Spring, 1995).

---. "Iconic Discourse: The Language of Images in Seventeenth-Century New France." In *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800: a Collection of Essays*, edited by Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, 102-11.

Leavelle, Tracy Neal. "'Bad Things' and 'Good Hearts': Mediation, Meaning, and the Language of Illinois Christianity." *Church History* 76: 2 (June 2007), 363-94.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford : Blackwell, 1991.

Lestringant, Frank. *Le Huguenot et le sauvage : L'Amérique et la controverse coloniale en France, au temps des guerres de religion (1555-1589)*. Paris : Klincksieck, 1990.

Lévy-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. Paris : Librairie Plon, 1955.

---. *Tristes Tropiques*. Translated by John Russell. New York: Criterion Books, 1961.

Lewis, Malcolm G. "Native Americans' Cosmological Ideas and Geographical Awareness: Their Representation and Influence on Early European Exploration and

Geographical Knowledge.” In *North American Exploration*, Vol. 1, *A New World Disclosed*, ed. by John Logan Allen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

---. *Cartographic Encounters: Perspectives on Native American Mapmaking and Map Use*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Lienhard, Martin. “Las prácticas textuales indígenas: aproximaciones a un nuevo objeto de investigación.” *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 7, no. 14-15 (July 1994-June 1995).

Lindman, Janet Moore, and Michele Lise Tarter, eds. *A Center of Wonders: The Body in Early America*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Litalien, Raymonde. *Les Explorateurs de l'Amérique du Nord : 1492-1795*. Paris: Éditions du Septentrion, 1993.

Loach, Judi. “Revolutionary Pedagogues: How Jesuits Used Education to Change Society.” In *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, edited by John O’Malley et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Lockhart, James. “Double Mistaken Identity: Some Nahua Concepts in Postconquest Guise.” In *Of Things of the Indies: Essays Old and New in Early Latin American History*, edited by James Lockhart. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

McCabe, William H. *An Introduction to Jesuit Theatre: A Posthumous Work*, edited by Louis J. Oldani. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1983.

Mallios, Seth. *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke and Jamestown*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006.

Mancall, Peter and James Merrell, eds. *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Mann, Barbara Alice. *Native American Speakers of the Eastern Woodlands: Selected Speeches and Critical Analyses*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Martin, Laurence W., ed. *Diplomacy in Modern European History*. New York: Macmillan, 1966.

Mathieu, Jean. *La Nouvelle-France: Les Français en Amérique du Nord, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*. Québec : Presses de l’Université Laval, 1991.

Mattingly, Garrett. *Renaissance Diplomacy*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1970.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris : Gallimard, 1945.

---. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Merritt, Jane T. *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Metcalf, Alida C. *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.

Meyer, Jean. *Les Européens et les autres*. Paris : Armand Colin, 1975.

Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Miller, Christopher L., and George R. Hammell. "A New Perspective on Indian-White Contact: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade." *The Journal of American History* 73, no. 2 (Sept. 1986): 311-28.

Miller, Wick. R. "The Ethnography of Speaking." In *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 17, *Languages*, edited by Ives Goddard, 222-43. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.

Moffitt Watts, Pauline. "Languages of Gesture in Sixteenth-Century Mexico: Antecedents and Transmutations." In *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, edited by Claire Farago. New Haven: Yale University press, 1995.

---. "Pictures, Gestures, Hieroglyphs: 'Mute Eloquence' in Sixteenth-Century Mexico." In *The Language Encounter in the Americas*, edited by Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.

Monteiro, John M. "The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: Coastal Brazil in the Sixteenth Century." In *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, edited by Bruce Trigger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Moreau, Jean-Pierre. *Les Petites Antilles de Christophe Colomb à Richelieu, 1493-1635*. Paris: Karthala, 1992.

Moussette, Marcel. "An Encounter in the Baroque Age: French and Amerindians in North America." *Historical Archaeology* 37 (4): 29-39 (2003).

Muchembled, Robert. "The Order of Gestures: a Social History of Sensibilities under the Ancien Régime in France." In *A Cultural History of Gestures*, edited by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, 129-52.

Murphree, Daniel S. *Constructing Floridians: Natives and Europeans in the Colonial Floridas, 1513-1783*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006.

Murray, David. *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

---. *Indian Giving: Economies of Power in Indian-White Exchanges*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000.

---. *Matter, Magic, and Spirit: Representing Indian and African American Belief*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2007.

Murray, Laura J. "Vocabularies of Native American Languages: A Literary and Historical Approach to an Elusive Genre." *American Quarterly* 53: 4 (December 2001): 590-623.

O'Malley, John. *The First Jesuits*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

O'Malley, John W., et al., eds. *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge, 2001 [1982].

Ostler, Nicholas. *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005.

Ouellet, Réal. *Rhétorique et conquête missionnaire: le jésuite Paul Le Jeune*. Sillery: Septentrion, 1993.

---. "Gestualité et perception de l'autre dans les *Relations* de Cartier." In *Culture et Colonisation en Amérique du Nord*, edited by Jaap Lintvelt, Réal Ouellet, and Hubert Hermans. Sillery : Septentrion, 1994.

Padgen, Anthony. *The Fall of the Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Parkin, David, Lionel Caplan, and Humphrey Fisher, eds. *The Politics of Cultural Performance*. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996.

Parkman, Francis. *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1867.

---. *Pioneers of France in the New World* [1885]. Edited by Colin G. Calloway. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

Paxman, David B. *Voyage into Language: Space and the Linguistic Encounter, 1500-1800*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.

Perrone-Moisés, Beatriz. "L'alliance normando-tupi au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle : la célébration de Rouen." *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 2008, tome 94, n° 1, mis en ligne le 25 juillet 2008. URL : <http://jsa.revues.org/document8773.html>. Consulted February 5th, 2009.

Peters, John Durham. *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Preston, David. *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Rath, Richard Cullen. *How Early America Sounded*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Red Shirt, Delphine. "These Are Not Indians." *American Indian Quarterly* 26: 4 (2002): 643-44.

Rice, Julia. "Oral Literature of the Northeastern Algonquians and Northern Iroquoians." In *Handbook of Native American Literature*, edited by Andrew Wiget. New York: Garland, 1996.

Richter, Daniel K. *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

---. *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Richter, Daniel K. and James Merrell, eds. *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and their Neighbors in Indian North America*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987.

Riley, Carroll L. "Early Spanish-Indian Communication in the Greater Southwest." *New Mexico Historical Review* 46 (1971): 285-314.

Riva, Giuseppe, ed. *From Communication to Presence: Cognition, Emotions, and Culture towards the Ultimate Communicative Experience*. Washington D.C.: IOS Press, 2006.

Robie, Harry. "Kiotsaetson's Three Rivers Address: An Example of 'Effective' Iroquois Oratory." *American Indian Quarterly* 6 (Fall-Winter 1982): 238-53.

Rondón, Víctor. "Sung Catechism and College Opera: Two Musical Genres in the Jesuit Evangelization of Colonial Chile." In *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, edited by John W. O'Malley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.



- Roosen, William James. *The Age of Louis XIV: The Rise of Modern Diplomacy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1976.
- Rosenfeld, Sophia. *A Revolution in Language: the problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-century France*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Rushforth, Brett. "Smoking the Sun: The Calumet and Intercultural Diplomacy at the Great Peace of Montreal." Paper presented at the Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting, New York, NY, March 2008.
- . *Bonds of Alliance: Indians and the Making of Racial Slavery in French North America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, forthcoming.
- Salisbury, Neil. *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- . "Embracing Ambiguity: Native Peoples and Christianity in Seventeenth-Century North America." *Ethnohistory* 50: 2 (Spring 2003): 247-59.
- Salmon, Vivian "Missionary Linguistics in Seventeenth-Century Ireland and a North American Analogy." *Historiographia Linguistica* 12: 3, (1985): 321-49.
- Schein, Jerome Daniel, and David A. Stewart, eds. *Language in Motion: Exploring the Nature of Sign*. Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1995.
- Schlesinger, Roger, and Arthur P. Stabler, eds. *André Thevet's North America: A Sixteenth-Century View*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986.
- Schwartz, Stuart B., ed. *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounter between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Seed, Patricia. *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Silverman, David. "Indians, Missionaries, and Religious Translation: Creating Wampanoag Christianity in Seventeenth-Century Martha's Vineyard." *William and Mary Quarterly* 62: 2 (April 2005): 141-74.
- Silverstein, Michael. "Dynamics of Linguistic Contact." In *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 17, Languages*, edited by Ives Goddard. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1996.

- Sleeper-Smith, Susan. *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.
- Smith, Mark M. *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Spence, Jonathan D. *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*. New York: Viking, 1984.
- Springer, James Warren. "An Ethnohistoric Study of the Smoking Complex in Eastern North America," *Ethnohistory*, 28: 3 (Summer 1981): 226-27.
- Steele, Ian K. *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Stokoe, William C. *Language in Hand: Why Sign Came Before Speech*. Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2001.
- Street, J.S. *French Sacred Drama from Bèze to Corneille: Dramatic Forms and their Purposes in the Early Modern Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Sturtevant, William C., ed. *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 15. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978.
- Summers, William J. "The Jesuits in Manila, 1581-1621: The Role of Music in Rite, Ritual, and Spectacle" in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, Volume 1, edited by John W. O'Malley et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
- Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Taylor, Allan R. "Nonspeech Communication Systems." In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 17, *Languages*, edited by Ives Goddard. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1996.
- Taylor, Colin F. *Native American Weapons*. London: University of Oklahoma Press through Salamander Books, 2001.
- Thérien, Gilles. "Jacques Cartier et le langage des signes." *Colloque Jacques Cartier: Histoire, Texte, Images*. Montréal : Société Historique de Montréal, 1985.
- Thomason, Sarah Grey, ed. *Contact Languages: A Wider Perspective*. Amsterdam : J. Benjamin Pub. Co., 1997.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *La conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982.

- . *The Conquest of America*. New York: Harper Collins, 1984.
- Tomkins, William. *Indian Sign Language*, original title: *Universal Indian Sign Language of the Plains Indians of North America* [5th ed. 1931]. New York: Dover, 1969.
- Tremblay, Roland, ed. *Les Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent: peuple du maïs*. Montréal: les Éditions de l'Homme, 2006.
- Trigger, Bruce. *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*, 2 vols. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976.
- . ed., *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, 3 Vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Trudel, Marcel. *The Beginnings of New France, 1524-1663*. Translated by Patricia Claxton. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973.
- Turgeon, Laurier, et al. *Les productions symboliques du pouvoir, XVIe-XXe siècle*. Sillery, Québec : Septentrion, 1990.
- Turgeon, Laurier, Denys Delâge, and Réal Ouellet. *Transferts culturels et métissages Amérique/Europe, XVIe-XXe siècle/ Cultural Transfer, America/Europe : 500 years of Interculturation*. Sainte-Foy, Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996.
- Turnbaugh, William A. "Calumet Ceremonialism as a Nativistic Response." *American Antiquity*, 44: 4 (October, 1979): 685-691.
- Valentin, J.-M. *Les Jésuites et le theatre (1554-1680): Contribution à l'histoire culturelle du monde catholique dans le Saint-Empire romano-germanique*. Paris : Desjonquères, 2001.
- Van Zandt, Cynthia. *Brothers among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580-1660*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Vaughan, Alden. *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Wagley, Charles. *The Welcome of Tears: the Tapirapé Indians of Central Brazil*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Wallace, Anthony F.C. *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*. New York: Vintage, 1972.
- Warkentin, Germaine. "In Search of 'the Word of the Other': Aboriginal Sign Systems and the History of the Book in Canada." *Book History* 2 (1999): 1-27.

- . *Decentering the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.
- Waselkov, Gregory A. "Exchange and Interaction Since 1500." In William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 14, "Southeast," edited by Raymond D. Fogelson. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2004.
- Whayne, Jeannie M. *Cultural Encounters in the Early South: Indians and Europeans in Arkansas*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995.
- Wheeler, Rachel. "Hendrick Aupaumut: Christian-Mahican Prophet." *Journal of the Early Republic*, 25: 2 (Summer 2005): 187-220.
- White, Bruce M. "Encounters with Spirits: Ojibwa and Dakota Theories about the French and their Merchandise." *Ethnohistory* 41 (Summer 1994): 369-405.
- White, Richard. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- . "Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings." *William & Mary Quarterly* 63: 1, January 2006.
- Whitehead, Neil L. "Carib Cannibalism: the Historical Evidence." *Journal de la Societé des Américanistes* 70 (1984): 69-87.
- Whitehead, Neil L., and Michael Harbsmeier, eds. *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Wiget, Andrew, ed. *Handbook of Native American Literature*. New York: Garland, 1996.
- . "Native American Oral Literatures: A Critical Orientation." In *Handbook of Native American Literature*, edited by Andrew Wiget. New York: Garland, 1996.
- Woodard, Buck W. "Degrees of Relatedness: the Social Politics of Algonquian Kinship in the Contact Era Chesapeake." M.A. Thesis, The College of William & Mary, 2008.
- Wogan, Peter. "Perceptions of European Literacy in Early Contact Situations." *Ethnohistory* 41: 3 (Summer 1994): 407-29.
- Wurtzburg, Susan, and Lyle Campbell. "North American Sign Language: Evidence of Its Existence before European Contact." *International Journal of American Linguistics* 61: 2 (April 1995): 153-67.
- Zampelli, Michael, S.J. "'Lascivi Spettacoli': Jesuits and Theatre (from the Underside)." In *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*, edited by John W. O'Malley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

## VITA

### Céline Carayon

Born in Montpellier, France, February 1, 1980. Graduated from the Lycée Paul Valéry in Sète, France in June 1998, before entering a two-year école préparatoire aux grandes écoles at the Lycée Joffre in Montpellier. Obtained a double licence (BA) in History and Archaeology from the Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier III in June 2002. Conducted research for her master's thesis at the College of William and Mary and on the archaeological site on Jamestown Island in 2002-2003, and graduated with a MA in History from the Université Paul Valéry Montpellier III in June 2004. Entered the Ph.D. program in Early American History at the College of William and Mary in 2004, with a concentration in Indian-white relations (ethnohistory) and Native American history, and a subfield on Colonial Latin America. Participated in archaeological excavations in Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown Island, and Plymouth, Mass. Worked for several years as a graduate assistant and program coordinator at the Reves Center for International Studies at the College of William and Mary. Assistant at the Virginia Historical Society during the making of the 2008 exhibit "Jamestown, Quebec, Santa Fe: Three American Beginnings," handling correspondence with French Canadian museums and captions for the Quebec artifacts. In the Fall 2010, she will be joining the department of History and Political Science at Utah Valley University in Orem, UT, as Assistant Professor of American History.