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# The Life Elixir of Amazonian Societies in a Multi-Sensory Museum Exhibition

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“In short, artifacts body forth specific ‘ways of sensing’ and they must be approached through the senses, rather than as ‘texts’ to be read or mere visual ‘signs’ to be decoded. Otherwise put, things have sensory as well as social biographies” (Classen and Howes 2006:-200).

## Abstract

Amazonianists have discussed how Amazonian indigenous people are both the object and subject of the artful manipulations of substances in sensuous landscapes. Multi-sensory experiences that are essential to the embodiment of the Amazonian alchemical person challenge classic modes of representation in the museum. Drawing in our experiences as guest curators of two exhibitions, one in a museum of art and one in a museum of ethnography, we attempt to canvas anthropological theory, indigenous social practices, and the approaches employed in museum exhibitions by considering how effectively they communicate Amerindian being. Our aim is to contribute to the conceptualization of how Amerindian processes of being (com)ing an alchemical person could be represented in a museum.

## Introduction

The multi-sensory experiences that are essential to the embodiment of the Amazonian alchemical person offer a special challenge to the museum curator. Despite this, it is paramount that the sensory and social biographies of things (following Classen and Howes 2006: 200; 2013), which manifest in objects, be accurately represented and (re)contextualized in the museum setting. Most ethnographic exhibitions generally consist of a “hands-off” display of objects, which are often de-contextualized and aim to be visually pleasing. This contrasts to the actual embodiment of the Amazonian alchemical person, as a “hands-on” sensory experience unfolding against the background of what Amazonian scholars know to be perspectivist worlds. Granted, curators<sup>1</sup> of some permanent exhibitions representing Amazonian indigenous people designed during the 1980’s and 1990’s, have acknowledged that those exhibitions are outdated mainly because they pre-date technological advances in multi-media tools, as well as the fact that in the past the perception of the multi-sensory experiences was perhaps inapt to be represented in the museum setting. Ethnographic museum work is moving towards new ways of defining perhaps outdated concepts of ‘the exhibition’. However, the broad spectrum of aromas emanating from tobacco smoke, regurgitated cassava beer, the smells of smoking fish and bush-meat, or the eye-burning smoke produced when roasting black peppers, remain outside the realm of the museum visitor’s experience. It is understandable that museums are unlikely to display century-old objects with the intention of having them handled, especially if the objects are fragile or made from perishable materi-

als. Also it is unlikely that the sensation of smoking or licking Amazonian tobacco (e.g., Russell and Rahman 2015) and the smell of regurgitated cassava beer would feature in contemporary Euro-American exhibitions representing Amazonian indigenous people, mainly due to the concern of liability and national laws governing the use and distribution of tobacco and alcoholic beverages. The crucial question remains how achievable it would be to experience the multi-sensory life of the Amazonian alchemical person in a museum setting; how can Amerindian personhood be presented; and how are relevant sensory and social objects to be represented in museum exhibitions?

Regarding the Amazonian alchemical person, it is essential to understand indigenous Amazonian ontologies or “*Amerindian Modes of Knowledge*” (Santos-Granero and Mentore 2006) whereby the diverse sensory expressions and the sense and sensibility of indigenous peoples are prominent. Fernando Santos-Granero (2006) foregrounded the senses and a theoretical discussion thereof in “*Sensual Vitalities: Noncorporeal Modes of Sensing and Knowing in Native Amazonia*”. He specifically detailed the notion of Amerindian perspectivism, since the surrounding discussion has “mainly focused on sight and on how different kinds of beings ‘see’ other beings” (ibid: 72). Animals and humans do things differently because their bodies differ, but these corporeal envelopes (“cloths”) are not covering or masking “an internal ‘essence’ of a human type” (Viveiros de Castro 1998:482; Rivière 1994). These techniques of the body are more than a habit or custom, they are *habitus*, varying especially between societies, educations, fashions, and prestige (Mauss 1936). Whereas it has been argued that “the body is the origin of perspectives” (Viveiros de Castro 2004:475), it has also been argued that “behaviour is a better guide than appearances” (Rivière 1994:261). Additionally to the continuing debate regarding the nature of *Amerindian Perspectivism*, George Mentore and Fernando Santos-Granero (2006:4) addressed a key concern, namely the tension – if not friction – between indigenous modes of knowledge and the modern nation state (see also Duin 2011). This concern is fundamental to our premise since museums are a product of – and embedded within – the modern nation state.

The following account is an illustration of how indigenous modes of knowledge differ from a Western mode of knowledge. “*Tipanakmai?*” (Do you hear?) the Wayana potter asked the anthropologist after she had said that “this is fire wood (*napot*) to fire the pottery” (Duin 2008). As there was no reply because Duin intended to objectively film the production process without interfering, the potter reiterated the question as follows: “*tipanakmai kalep?*” (Do you not hear? Whereby *ka* is a pronounced question mark and *~lep* is a suffix that translates to “in vain”). The potter laughed prior to explaining that *this* is firewood to fire the pottery. Other Wayana present during this exchange between the potter and the ethnographer began to laugh and mocked the practice of anthropological inquiry. In a broader sense the Wayana expression “*tipanakmai?*” means “do you understand?” From an indigenous Wayana perspective, observation is not enough to understand the process, and this was expressed by the Wayana potter. The ability to know is also a recurrent theme in various Wayana myths (Duin 2009). In the Wayana language ‘to hear’ is *to understand*, whereas from a western point of view *seeing is believing*.

In an attempt to address the key question as how achievable it could be to implement multi-sensory experiences of the Amazonian alchemical person in an museum setting, the present article discusses our experiences participating as guest curators in two very different exhibitions: the first in a museum of art in the U.S.A. and the second in an ethnographic museum in Europe.

### Voicing Indigenous ARTifacts

The first example is based on the authors’ experiences as guest curators of the exhibition *Voicing Indigenous ARTifacts: Amazonian Featherwork*<sup>2</sup> at the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, Florida, USA. This exhibition had the specific aim of giving an indigenous voice to indigenous artifacts. During this exhibition we intended to (re)contextualize a selection of objects from the Florida Museum of Natural History Amazonian Collection.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1.** *Voicing Indigenous ARTifacts: Amazonian Featherwork* at the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL (Duin 2009).

The exhibition *Voicing Indigenous ARTifacts: Amazonian Featherwork* showcased nine spectacular objects of the Florida Museum of Natural History Amazonian Collection. The exhibition was intended to establish the cultural and historical context of body ornaments that could be viewed both as artifact and work of art, emphasizing their social rather than their utilitarian import. Since the mid-twentieth century similar objects have been transformed into art works for the global art market. The objects in this exhibition originated from six Brazilian Amazonian communities, namely the Kayapó, the Wayana-Apalaí, the Tapirapé, the Rikbaktsa, the Urubu-Ka'apor and the Bororó. In these societies, objects such as headdresses, masks, necklaces, lips plugs and other body ornaments, are considered to be an extension of the human body, a “social skin” (in the sense of Turner 1980) endowing the individual with a collective identity. Amazonian Featherwork is a beautiful means of presenting the body to others, as it situates individuals in their societies. In their indigenous context, they are designed for use during rituals such as initiations, name-giving ceremonies and funerals, and the very production of the ornaments is also ritualized. During initial planning, we discussed how to exhibit the objects with accompanying audio visual film clips demonstrating how such feather headdresses would be made, used in performance and actively experienced during the respective ritual. It was agreed to display objects as art objects and to offer some contextualization by way of anthropologists’ field photographs.

A headdress has to be performed, yet in a museum setting a headdress is often rendered silent. The Wayana headdress (*oloké*), for instance, is a multifaceted combination of various composite elements containing featherwork. This headdress features in the ritual generally known as *maraké* (in Wayana: *éputop*, the stinging ant rite) which encompasses three different rites, including an initiation ritual and a ritual for the consolidation of power (discussed in detail in Duin 2009; 2012). The performance of Amazonian headdresses is often a group event, rather the action of a single individual. The movement of the headdress, accompanied by the rhythmic sounds of flute music and/or singing and the fluttering of feathers, provides a setting that transcends both the dancer and the audience experience of the headdress. The *grand maraké* ritual is the most important socio-political gathering among the Wayana and this ritual is a pre-requisite of being Wayana. A Western audience is also captivated by this ritual and in particular drawn to the elaborate feather headdresses in use

and now presented in several ethnographic museums as ‘master-pieces’ (e.g., The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University 1978).

During the Wayana *grand maraké* ritual the dancers and the audience would enter into what alchemist analyst Nathan Schwartz-Salant (1998) calls “a deeper level of their relationship, into a domain they both share, in which neither is ‘doing’ anything to the other. Indeed, they would have to discover that they share not only a conscious but also an unconscious relationship” (Schwartz-Salant 1998:1). Duin (2009; 2012) has hence posited that the *grand maraké* is a performance conducted in order to produce a larger social body beyond the individual person. It is the performance of the *olok* headdress that embodies Wayana heterarchical relations within various social subgroups. Wayana society, just as the *olok* feather headdress, is a composite of various elements – including foreign elements – that need constant maintenance and renewal in an intricate process of becoming.

An additional layer of complexity of Amazonian indigenous artifacts is materialized in the objects of the Florida Museum of Natural History Amazonian Collection. These artifacts are adorned with feathers and other faunal parts such as bones and shells of endangered wildlife and as such, were confiscated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS).<sup>4</sup> Overlooked in the various legislations is the complexity involved in understanding the social and spiritual values of some endangered species, a context pertinent to the Amazonian indigenous people (Duin 2011; *in progress*). The framework of USFWS defines those objects as animal objects – or objects including animal parts from endangered species – while UNESCO’s framework defines similar objects as cultural objects (Duin *in progress*). The exhibition *Voicing Indigenous ARTifacts: Amazonian Featherwork* (Duin and Duin 2009) demonstrated the complexity of the FLMNH Amazonian Collection.

Although we were unable to re-contextualize these objects using the media of sound and video projections, the mere presence of Amazonian indigenous featherwork in a Museum of Art generated some lively conversation (cf. Price 2001).<sup>5</sup> Exhibiting what Price (2001) called “*primitive art*” in a “*civilized*” museum of art makes us ponder over a crucial insight regarding the sensory expressions and practices experienced by western and non-western societies as best summarized by Howes and Classen:

“The ways we use our senses, and the ways we create and understand the sensory world, are shaped by culture. Perception is informed not only by a personal meaning or particular sensation has to us, but also by the social values it carries. We are perhaps best able to recognize this is the case of sight ... sight has a high cultural value in Western society. It has been exalted as a ‘noble’ sense and associated with both spiritual and intellectual enlightenment [...] vision and knowledge was enhanced when books and paintings became more commonplace after the Renaissance [...].

It is not only how, and how much, we see that is shaped by culture, however, it is also *what* we see. The subject matter ... reflects not only the preferences of artists and patrons, and not only the reigning artistic conventions, but also particular ideologies that support –or sometimes challenge– the social values and hierarchies of the day” (Howes and Classen 2013:1).

To illustrate Western perception of the ‘noble’ sense of sight, as outlined by Howes and Classen (2013), it was during the exhibition *Voicing Indigenous ARTifacts: Amazonian Featherwork*, that a museum patron – amazed by the symmetry of the displayed objects and the balanced color scheme of primary colors; red, yellow and blue (Figures 1 and 2) – posited that these Amazonian indigenous peoples must have had been influenced by European art, inferring that non-western indigenous people could not possess the same ‘noble’ sense of sight in experiencing symmetry and a balanced colour scheme of primary colours as the patron observed in the objects of the Amazonian *ARTifacts*.



**Figure 2.** Tapirapé *Upé* mask or *Cara Grande*. Anthropology Collection of the Florida Museum of Natural History Amazonian Collection- temporary inventory number: T2128 (Duin, 2009).

The representation of Amazonian Featherwork in a museum of art generated animated discussion as these objects became ‘subjects’ in the sense used by Gell (1998). The objects became subjects as these objects are ‘agents’: “an agent is one who ‘causes events to happen’ in their vicinities [...] an agent is the source, the origin, of casual events, independently of the state of the physical universe” (Gell 1998:16). These events are not necessarily confined by their vicinities, as in the case of the FLMNH Amazonian Collection, these objects as ‘agents’ affect events beyond borders, i.e. locally, nationally and internationally; unintentionally these objects as ‘secondary subjects’ become exhibition pieces as art in a museum of art and simultaneously an educational tool to bring awareness about objects made from endangered wildlife. In the sense of Gell, “art objects are not ‘self-sufficient’ agents, but only ‘secondary’ agents in conjunction with certain specific (human) associates” (Gell 1998:17), for example, an agency that objects acquire “once they become enmeshed in a texture of social relationships” (ibid.:17). ‘Secondary agents’: “the origination and manifestation of agency takes place in a milieu which consists of artefacts, and that agents, thus, ‘are’ and do not merely ‘use’ the artefacts which connects them to social others” (ibid.:21). How the FLMNH Amazonian Collection objects became secondary subjects and how these objects-subjects are crucial for the understanding of the relationship between the western and non-western Amazonian indigenous societies is a topic that will be explored in-depth elsewhere (Duin *in progress*). Following Thomas’ (1991:4) statement that “objects are not what they were made to be *but what they have become*” (emphasis added), the FLMNH Amazonian Collection objects are not merely objects containing endangered wildlife parts but entangled cultural objects as well.

Howes and Classen (2013:2) further argue that “like sight, hearing has a strong association with the intellect [...] In fact for many centuries the ability to hear and to speak was taken to be prime indicator of an ability to reason,” and that there are “instances of sounds being invested with cultural significance, of ‘ways of hearing’” (ibid.):

“Sounds have meanings that can only be fully understood within their particular cultural context. Music is perhaps the best example of this. Certain themes will evoke particular concepts and emotions due to their cultural associations. From the modern West Mendelssohn’s Wedding March instantly conjures up images of

marriage...A non-Westerner, however, could listen to these pieces without any such associations. Similarly, a Westerner listening to, for example, the music produced by the Desana people of the Columbian rainforest would have no cultural associations beyond, perhaps, 'exotic' or 'tribal'. However for the Desana different musical sounds and melodies carry definite meanings" (Howes and Classen 2013:2).

In an attempt to bring in the sensorial repertoire of the Wayana, we decided to include songs related to the exchange of cassava beer – *kanawa* and *maipuli* <sup>6</sup>– for the exhibition *Amazonian cassava beer: the Life Elixir of Amazonian Societies*, which will be discussed below. While the Western audience may neither understand the lyrics in the Wayana language nor have any cultural associations with these songs. *Kanawa* and *maipuli* songs convey certain meaning for the Wayana indigenous people, meanings related to the social aspects of cassava beer were presented in the panels and accompanied the exhibition catalogue.

### Drinking Skills (Trinkkultur – Kultgetränk)

Most contributions to this Special Issue of *Tipiti* describe how the alchemical person is shaped and hardened through the intake of substances. This is a perspective that we tried to convey as guest curators of the exhibition *Trinkkultur – Kultgetränk (Drinking Skills: Milk, Palm Wine, Cassava Beer, Kava, Tea, and Rice Beer)* at the Völkerkundemuseum Universität Zürich, Switzerland (<http://www.musethno.uzh.ch/ausstellungen/trinkkultur.html>). The special focus here was on the social aspects and experiences related to the production and consumption of Amazonian indigenous beverages made from manioc and its derivatives. The *Drinking Skills (Trinkkultur – Kultgetränk)* exhibition focusses on the social and ritual aspects of the production and consumption of beverages from around the world; from Swiss alpine farming produced milk, sour milk in Africa, palm wine in the tropical regions of Africa and Asia, Kava in Oceania, Tibetan butter tea, Japanese tea culture, rice beer in the Himalayas as well as Amazonian cassava beer. In *Amazonian cassava beer: the Life Elixir of Amazonian Societies* we explored the diversity of beverages based on manioc, some occasionally sweetened with maize or sugar, both among and within indigenous communities across Amazonia.

Accompanying the displayed objects, the exhibition includes audio-visually related materials and the multi-sensory experience of the exhibition *Trinkkultur – Kultgetränk* is enhanced by means of multi-media devices providing the patron with a selected range of supplementary information ranging from additional texts, sound recordings, and short film clips. During the planning phase of the exhibition we suggested that raw tuberous sweet manioc in a typical carrying basket be displayed and in this way, provide the museum visitor with the olfactory experience of unprocessed raw tuberous. Interaction with the object would also give the visitor a sense of the weight of a full load of manioc tubers (Figure 3).

Our request was politely denied with the explanation that this would present a liability since this could become infested with pests. To provide a sense of direct experience the museum commissioned a replica of the archetypal manioc squeezer, based on a Yekuana manioc squeezer (Völkerkundemuseum Universität Zürich inventory number 12798). This was displayed and museum visitors were encouraged to manipulate it, contracting and extending the *tipiti* (compare with -Figure 4). The visitor could not fully experience the mechanisms of the manioc squeezer as even the replica could not contain manioc paste; however a short film clip available on hand-held multi-media devices demonstrated the use of a comparable manioc squeezer among the Wayana indigenous people (Duin 2014). To discover the fundamental principle of the mechanism of the manioc squeezer, a ready-to-make kit developed by the Museum's restorers (who were also keen weavers) was available at the museum shop, and intended to encourage children to weave their own replica.



**Figure 3.** Wayana woman carrying a heavy load of manioc tubers from the garden to the village (Duin, French Guiana, August 2003).



**Figure 4.** Manioc processing: grating the tubers and squeezing the pulp in a manioc squeezer (in Wayana: *tinkii*) (Duin, French Guiana, April 2002).

The elaborate process of brewing manioc tubers into saliva fermented cassava beer, whereby women chew pieces of boiled cassava roots and subsequently spit the chewed roots mixed with saliva into a large cooking pot, often adding maize kernels to sweeten the brew, has been renowned since its first illustrated descriptions by Europeans (Figure 5). In sixteenth century Brazil, this type of brewing was known as *kawi* (Staden 2008:73, 117-118), *cauim* or *caouin* (de Léry 1994:237-256) or *cabouin* (Thevet 2011:150-151),<sup>7</sup> and today it is generally known in Amazonia under the name *cachiri* (in the Andean Amazon as *chicha*, *masato*, or



*asua*). In his notes, Grillet (1698:52) even wrote that “seeing this way of its preparation turns ones stomach more than the reading of it.”



**Figure 5.** Cassava beer production in Amazonia in the late Sixteenth Century (Thevet 1557:151).

The production process of another type of cassava beer is even more intricate and laborious. The initial production process includes the baking of thick cassava cakes, which are soaked in water and wrapped with banana leaves. Within a few days this cassava bread is covered with mould and the fermentation process begins. Next the fermented cassava bread is placed in a wood carved canoe-shaped trough and water is added. This type of brew is not produced for daily consumption, but rather it is specifically produced for distribution during larger social gatherings. In Guiana this type of beverage is known as *paiwari* (Carib; Farabee 1924:39; Roth 1924:227-228), *parikari* (Arawak; Farabee 1918:43; Farabee 1924:39), or *umani* (Wayana; Duin 2009:299), and large social gatherings were referred to as “paiwari feasts” (Im Thurn 1883: 319-327). Elaborate alchemical processes of the mould-induced fermentation of detoxified bitter manioc cakes, or the earlier described saliva induced fermentation of sweet manioc paste, or sweetening the manioc brew with maize, both produce cassava beer and are also vital process in be(com)ing human. Further studies may determine the moulds developing on the moist cassava bread to contain antibiotic substances, possibly even penicillin. The production of Amazonian cassava beer could be considered elaborate alchemical processes rather than simply culinary techniques (compare with Echeverri’s 2015 account on the making of ash-salt and tobacco paste), mainly due to the mould-induced fermentation and the fact that the fermentation is further secured through saliva, a substance produced by the human body. Cassava beer is key in the process of social reproduction of Amazonian societies, which is further gaining significance through its elaborate alchemical processes of fermentation.

As discussed earlier, to spit saliva into the cooking vessel to enhance the fermentation of the cassava beer, is not only a necessary component of the beer production process, but also a necessary component of the consumption process. Regurgitation contributes to a ritual conviviality (Schoepf 1999). Regurgitation should not to be mistaken with vomiting which is an involuntary process; among the Wayana, the regurgitation of cassava beer is a voluntarily induced process. A mid-twentieth century explorer best described the regurgitation practice as follows: “a more serious investigator than I [Hassoldt Davis] would take off his glasses, wipe them, reflectively fill his pipe, and state that this was Ritual Degurgitation [sic. Regurgitation, for they] simultaneously opened their mouths and spewed, not as you and I, sporadically, but in a series of thick golden streams across the moon” (Davis 1952:209).

This regurgitation of large quantities of cassava beer, rather than the consumption thereof, is key in the ritual economy of Amazonia (Duin 2009; 2012). Surplus quantities of cassava beer are produced to be consumed during communal gatherings, yet, above all, to be regurgitated.

Beverages (in German: “*Kultgetränk*”) associated with the socio-cultural identity of each of the cultural regions presented in the exhibition “*Drinking Skills*” (*Trinkkultur – Kultgetränk*), the Völkerkundemuseum Universität Zürich, could be tasted during the vernissage of the exhibition. Renowned Swiss sommeliers Yvo Magnusson and Jan Kubler from Park Hyatt Hotel in Zurich were invited by the Völkerkundemuseum Universität Zürich to sample and describe each beverage. Their description was superimposed over a surface photograph of each beverage. A beverage based on boiled sweet manioc tubers was amongst those tasted and described by the sommeliers as follows:

Cassava beer is a milky, cloudy, bound fluid with a beautiful lustre. Flaky cereal residues are floating in it. The subtle, almost mild aroma is refreshing. Its smell evokes notes of grated coconut, maize, yeast and whole grain. On the palate the cassava beer has a slightly sweet taste and is dominated by a noticeable yoghurt-like sourness. The body feels voluminous and is very intense. The finish is quite long-lasting and conveys aromas of butter, cream, mashed potatoes, zests, grated lime, and molasses. - Yvo Magnusson and Jan Kübler (in: Powroznik, Duin and Duin 2014:97).



**Figure 6.** Tasting bar (*kostBar*)<sup>8</sup> during the vernissage of the exhibition “*Trinkkultur – Kultgetränk*”, patrons could sample various beverages, including the beverage based on sweet manioc tubers (Duin, 2014).

Information cards displayed next to the relevant beverage provided the sommeliers’ description during the tasting (Figure 6). Visitors were delighted with the experience of sampling beverages and they suggested that the museum café should make these beverages available to the public on a regular basis. The museum visitor could thus engage in an exceptional olfactory experience.

## Sensorial Experiences in Museum Collections

Generally museums are silent spaces and visitors often focus on the visual features of objects. The ethnographic museum conforms to this context in which visitors are constrained to a purely visual appreciation of the displayed objects and are devoid of multisensory stimuli. Other-than-visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory systems can be included using innovative methods and techniques, that allow the visitor a multisensory experience of the Amazonian alchemical person and facilitate an understanding of the social life of objects and societies that produced it.

Important to the multisensory approach of museum collections – other than in museums of science<sup>9</sup> in which this is already better established - is the research conducted by Concordia Sensoria Research Team (CONCERT) at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. CONCERT examines the cultural life of the senses, since “artifacts body forth specific ‘ways of sensing’ and they must be approached through the senses, rather than as ‘texts’ to be read or mere visual ‘signs’ to be decoded, as things have sensory as well as social biographies” (Classen and Howes 2006:200; Howes and Classen 2013). Howes and Classen (Howes 2013), continue to explore to what extent the return of the non-visual senses into the ethnographic museum may enhance cross-cultural and a historical understanding of the objects on exhibit, adding that sensory techniques such as the use of scent and the presentation of “living” displays, have been devised in some exhibitions in order to enhance the museum encounter.<sup>10</sup>

Other than the visual, there is often no interaction between the exhibited object and the visitor, and therefore there can be no intermediate realm or what Schwartz-Salant (ibid.:5) calls the “third area” wherein one is “*both* an observer but *also* contained within the space itself” (emphasis added), allowing for an “alchemical way of thinking” (ibid.:7); that is, relationships wherein people do things to one-another are being transformed into a space of interaction that both occupy. Such a similar experience occurs during the *grand maraké* ritual whereby Wayana performers and their audience enter “into a deeper level of their relationship, into a domain they both share, in which neither is ‘doing’ anything to the other. Schwartz-Salant (1998) discussed relationships between humans, yet while Gell (1998) advocated a secondary agency of objects, Schwartz-Salant’s position is that of the “transformation within a relationship [that] can only begin with an acknowledgement that we are unconsciously projecting on to the other person, thereby distorting the other’s reality and our own” (ibid.:4). This can be applied to the relationship between the museum visitor and the objects in a museum exhibition. We furthermore posit that a similar clash as described by Schwartz-Salant (1998:10-11) can be found between the modern scientific demand for objectivity and causality versus the alchemical tradition that is a testimony to the power of subjectivity. A hands-on sensorial approach providing the museum encounter with an experience of the auditory, olfactory and gustatory senses, may result in a multisensory interaction with the world of the Amazonian alchemical person.

Although current museological methods are engaged in decolonizing museums,<sup>11</sup> many contemporary museological approaches, however well-meaning, marginalize the indigenous voice and continue to preserve rather than challenge stereotypes (Lonetree 2012). In North America the Mille Lacs Indian Museum in Minnesota was established and managed by both the local community and museum authorities, which in turn lead to the formation of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C. (Lonetree 2012). In Canada the Manitoba Museum, the “Ojibwe Personhood: Museum Meanings” acknowledges the distributed personhood of museum artefacts (Matthews 2013). Maureen Matthews (2013) describes distributed personhood as a grammatical and metaphorical starting point for many Ojibwe museum objects, offering a way of breaking down colonial barriers to a sympathetic, collegial modern ethnographic practice.

In South America - specifically in Brazil - during the 1980’s there was an evolving space for indigenous causes that led to the establishment of a museum by Amazonian indigenous people, the Maguta Ticuna Museum. This was seen as a remarkable achievement that bril-

liantly described the milieu where the ‘other’ (i.e., Amazonian indigenous people) could tell their story in the first person.<sup>12</sup> In 1995 the Maguta Ticuna Museum received the prize “museum symbols” from the International Council of Museum (ICOM) and the same year received the Brazilian National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) prize for its contribution to the preservation of Amerindian Brazilian culture. For this innovative approach the Maguta Ticuna Museum has a place in the history of museology in Brazil.

While the perception of the western museum visitor will differ from the perception of an Amazonian person, by offering a hands-on multisensory experience, a museum experience might well animate the lived worlds of the Amazonian alchemical person to a non-indigenous person. While Amazonian museum exhibitions, i.e., Voicing Indigenous *ARTi*-facts, may be object-focused and visually pleasing, Amazonian exhibitions often lack the multisensorial experience that is crucial in the representation of an Amazonian alchemical person.

## Conclusion

The Amazonian alchemical person is situated in a multi-sensory experience of the visual, auditory, olfaction and gustatory systems. It would be memorable and informative to the museum encounter to have Amazonian multi-sensory life materialized in ethnographic museum exhibitions. It is understandable that museums are unlikely to display century-old objects with the intention of having them handled, especially when made from fragile and perishable materials. The smell of tobacco and regurgitated cassava beer are also sensory experiences that sanitary and liability claims make difficult to reproduce. A multi-sensory experience – including smell, touch, local narratives, ambient sound, and the occasional laughter<sup>13</sup> – rather than merely looking at motionless objects in a silent exhibition hall, may generate an alternative museum experience wherein the museum visitor is both observer and contained within a common space allowing for an alchemical way of thinking.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with several curators from museums in the U.S.A. and in Europe; out of courtesy for those curators, we wish not to disclose their names and museum affiliations.

<sup>2</sup> The authors fully acknowledge the contentious issues regarding the topic “voicing indigenous peoples” or the lack thereof (Lonetree 2012). The exhibition was aimed at clarifying the complexity related to the acquisition of the collection, and in this sense to give a “voice” to the objects. Initially we proposed this exhibition to be used as a platform for the indigenous people from whom these objects originate, but unfortunately this was considered financially and logistically unfeasible.

<sup>3</sup> Florida Museum of Natural History (FLMNH) is the repository of the FLMNH Amazonian Collection. These objects were confiscated within the United States by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in violation of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), U.S. Endangered Species Act, the Lacey Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and U.S. Customs. The FLMNH Amazonian Collection contains over 2500 objects, the Collection was donated to the Board of Trustees of the University of Florida in 2005 by the USFWS under USFWS Investigation number 305 000 215, case name: “Macaw Feathers” (Transfer order surplus personal property, USFWS form 3090-0014. March 29, 2005). Under the guidelines of the Transfer Order, the conditions of donation also specified no sale, barter, or trade of items. Amidst guidelines as to the purpose of the donation are stipulations to educate the public about the illegal trade in wildlife products. During possible museum exhibitions it must be overtly stated that the objects were exported out of Brazil illegally (Duin 2011, in progress).

<sup>4</sup> The cultural subjectivity of the objects was overlooked by the fact that these objects were in violation of the guiding principles of the internationally CITES convention, and nationally

in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, US Endangered Species Act, and US Customs and Border Protection (Duin 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Indigenous people have been largely excluded from the global nation-states' geopolitical discussion over self-determination – and thus are 'voiceless'. Posey (2004) eloquently posited that Traditional Resource Rights (TRR) are central to the discussion of international politics and law, which includes human rights, labor law, environment and development, trade, religious freedom and cultural and property/cultural heritage. TRR could be a venue to give 'voice' to the 'voiceless' because, not only does it bring to the forefront a possible dialogue between indigenous people and the nation-states over their self-determination, but it is also a means through which to protect their natural resources, cultural, *social reproduction* (Posey 2004:166). See Chapin (2004) for a discussion about the disenfranchised, e.g., indigenous people, in the global debate about biodiversity conservation regarding decision making and policy design held at the national and global level, to the exclusion of the local.

<sup>6</sup> *Kanawa* refers to the canoe-shaped trough, whereas *maipuli* refers to the portable recipient for cassava beer. These particular songs were recorded in 1965 by Jean Hurault (1969) *Musique Boni et Wayana de Guyane*, Collection Music de L'Homme (LP) Vogue.

<sup>7</sup> A bottle of *Cervejaria Colorado Caium* from a Brazilian beer brewer is on display at the exhibition (whereby "*caium*" is a reference to sixteenth century accounts of cassava beer in Brazil).

<sup>8</sup> The German term for "tasting bar" (*kost Bar*) is simultaneously a pun on "exquisite" (*kost-bar*).

<sup>9</sup> Multisensory experiences are applied, for example, in the Museum of Science, Boston, Massachusetts, USA (<http://www.mos.org/>) in the current exhibition *Maya: Hidden Worlds Revealed*

([http://www.mos.org/sites/develvis.mos.org/files/docs/offerings/mos\\_educator\\_guide\\_maya-hidden-worlds-revealed-final.pdf](http://www.mos.org/sites/develvis.mos.org/files/docs/offerings/mos_educator_guide_maya-hidden-worlds-revealed-final.pdf)), as well as at the NEMO Science Center in Amsterdam, the Netherlands (<https://www.e-nemo.nl/en/>) where patrons can discover the science of sense and how exceptional daily life experiences are (<https://www.e-nemo.nl/nl/ontdek/zintuig/>).

<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Howes (2013), convener of panel MUS03: *Experiencing collections: display, performance and the senses*, 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the IUEAS - Evolving Humanity, Emerging Worlds, University of Manchester, 5-10 August, Manchester, UK.

<sup>11</sup>. Providing an extensive list of museums working towards museum decolonization is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>12</sup> Between 1996-1997, the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, organized a large exhibition "Amazonia" in collaboration with Ticuna representatives.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding the practice of laughing, often "in favor of deceit" (Basso 1987), Lagrou (2006) foregrounded how people laugh at dangerous situations as an important aspect of Amerindian modes of knowledge, with a positive correlation between the dangerousness of the situation and the grotesqueness of the performance, resulting in laughter creating a disarming morality. Suffice to say that the disarming power of laughter is only applicable *within* a single social group, as mocking and laughing at the social other in their presence may provoke a certain and disastrous rupture between the different natures of the social other. It may be of future interest to explore this power of laughing and its representation in museum exhibition.

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