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Introduction

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The Perspective from Germany: Steps towards a Dialogue on Objects

Michael Kraus

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Alemania
mkraus@sowi.uni-goettingen.de

Ernst Halbmayer

Philipps-Universität Marburg, Alemania
halbmayer@uni-marburg.de

Ingrid Kummels

Freie Universität Berlin, Alemania
kummels@zedat.fu-berlin.de

“Objects as witnesses of cultural contact – intercultural perspectives on the history and the present times of the indigenous populations of the upper Negro River (Brazil/ Colombia)” was the theme of a workshop and conference that took place in July and August 2014 at the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin. Both events were deliberately designed to act as a new avenue of transcultural cooperation and were initiated with the objective of generating knowledge about artefacts that had become ‘ethnographic’ objects over a hundred years ago. Our idea was to congregate the protagonists of the societies historically linked through these objects. This would allow us to interpret, exchange and discuss both the multidimensional meanings of the collection’s objects as well as their actual relevance from different perspectives. Therefore, during the course of these events, it was not exclusively these artefacts – which we referred to as ‘witnesses’ – that became the object of our attention. These objects were acquired by the German anthropologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg in the years between 1903 and 1905 during his travels along the upper Río Negro in Amazonia, in the border region between Brazil and Colombia, with the purpose of delivering them to the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin (at the time known as *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*). In addition to the objects themselves, we were interested in how they were interwoven with social relations – as they still are today. Indigenous experts from the region where the artefacts were originally located participated in the workshop and conference, as well as specialists from European and South American museums and universities (Brazil, Colombia, Germany, Great Britain, and Switzerland), where the objects have been kept or studied since they were first collected. As organizers, when designing these events, we took the objects

of the Koch-Grünberg collection as a starting point to set up a dialogue with Diana Guzmán, María Morera, Gaudencio Moreno and Orlando Villegas – representatives of the Wira Poná ('Desana') and Kotiria ('Wanano'), from the Department of Vaupés in Colombia–,¹ in an attempt to learn from them and to carry out joint research on the meaning of the objects, the ways they were used, as well as their insertion into different regimes of value and spheres of exchange during the last hundred years.²

Hence, our project connects with a series of recent approaches that focus on some of the existing collections, and rely both on cooperation as well as research in museums. During the last few years, debates as to who are the true owners of the collections kept in anthropological museums have become more relevant. Put differently, these debates are geared to the following question: Whose patrimony is it that these collections embody? This implies conceding to collections not only the ability of 'embodying' the past, but also the present and future of the heirs at issue. Based on concepts such as shared cultural heritage, the discussion has evolved even more intensively around the current significance which objects have for the descendants of the societies where these collections originate.³ In the wake of collaborative projects between museum anthropologists and universities and representatives of the so-called source

1 Both ethnic groups belong to the eastern Tucano linguistic family. The four persons mentioned above were born in different places, but today all live in Mitú, the departmental capital. The Vaupés River is one of the main tributaries of the upper Río Negro. For an introduction to the indigenous societies and cultures of the Vaupés River see Borrero Wanana & Pérez Correa (2004); Correa (2012).

2 On regimes of value see Appadurai (2008: 15f., 57f.); on spheres of exchange see Kopytoff (2008: 71f.).

3 There is a discussion from conflicting positions as to the extent to which the expression 'shared' is an acceptable claim in this setting or if it perpetuates the current inequalities due to the colonality of power and the geopolitics of knowledge (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2000). Nevertheless, this concept has helped towards taking greater consideration of the perspectives of the 'source communities' on museum collections. On recent discussions about 'material culture' see Appadurai (2008); Bräunlein (2012); Hahn (2005); Miller (2008); Samida, Eggert & Hahn (2014). For specific scholarship on 'material culture' in the Amazon region see e.g. Augustat (2012); Guss (1989); Herzog-Schröder (2014); Hill & Chaumeil (2011); Münzel (1988); Myers & Cipolletti (2002); Santos-Granero (2009); Suhrbier (1998); Tejidos Enigmáticos (2006); Vander Velden (2011); van Velthem (2003), and for an overview of recent articles Schien & Halbmayer (2014). On the concept of the interview in ethnographic research as an intersubjective exchange of knowledge and dialogue see Corona Berkin & Kaltmeier (2013); Kvale (1996). On the critical discussions surrounding 'participation', 'collaboration' and 'cultural heritage' see Boast (2011); Brown (2003); Tauschek (2013). For a bibliography on further collaborative projects in museums see footnote 5.

communities,⁴ the method of field research gained access or was extended to the museum. This method rests on the dialogue between researcher and research subjects to foster an intersubjective exchange of knowledge. The *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin played a prominent role in this development. As early as 1997 it hosted innovative collaborative research, such as the research carried out by Ann Fienup-Riordan with representatives – both men and women – of the Yup'ik on objects of the collection assembled by J.A. Jacobson between 1881 and 1883 (Fienup-Riordan 2005; see also Sanner 2007).⁵

The objective of the project “Objects as witnesses of cultural contact” was to bring together the perspectives and expertise of the members and representatives of the source communities with that of scientists from museums and universities on the material dimension of indigenous culture(s), mythology, ethnohistory, the history of collections and the current situation in the region. Likewise, it was an attempt to reflect jointly on the role played by the diffusion and location of this anthropological collection, in the context of shifting hierarchies of knowledge. The double format of workshop and conference allowed us to combine the advantages of these different forms of exchange and collaboration. As a first step, the participants⁶ analyzed a representative part of the collection at the internal workshop. Immediately thereafter, in a public conference, the first results of the workshop were presented, as well as the findings of historical and current research of the indigenous cultures of the upper Río Negro. The talks included research results from other Amazonian regions as well for comparative purposes.

4 The term ‘source community’ is currently being debated because it can imply a hierarchy between the societies of the collectors and the societies from where the objects were extracted. According to the definition of Peers & Brown (2002: 3) the term ‘source communities’ “refers both to these groups in the past when artefacts were collected, as well as to their descendants today. These terms have most often been used to refer to indigenous peoples in the Americas and the Pacific, but apply to every cultural group from whom museums have collected [...] Most importantly, the concept recognizes that artefacts play an important role in the identities of source community members, that source communities have legitimate moral and cultural stakes or forms of ownership in museum collections, and that they may have special claims, needs, or rights of access to material heritage held by museums”. In what follows, we use the term in this inclusive sense.

5 On recent discussions regarding objects of the north-west coast from the Jacobson collection see Egges *et al.* (2014). For another current collaborative project of the *Ethnologisches Museum* with the *Universidad Nacional Experimental Indígena de Tauca* (UNEIT) see Scholz (2014 y 2015: 292f.). On forms of cooperation and the results of these projects in other places see, e.g., Brust (2013); Clifford (1997); Peers & Brown (2003); Sleeper-Smith (2009); Broekhoven *et al.* (2010); Lonetree (2012). For early approaches and discussions on collaborative projects see, e.g., Harms (1993).

6 The following persons participated in the workshop: Ernesto Belo, Diana Guzmán, Richard Haas, Ernst Halbmayr, Michael Kraus, Ingrid Kummels, Germán Laserna, Ilja Labischinski, Gaudencio Moreno, María Morera, Aura Lisette Reyes, María Rossi, Jennifer Schmitz, and Orlando Villegas. The workshop was held between July 21 and 30, 2014, the conference between July 31 and August 2, 2014.

Starting points

From his travels to the upper Río Negro, Theodor Koch-Grünberg handed over 1,298 objects to the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin (Kraus 2004: 194). He had previously sold a smaller collection to the *Museu Goeldi* in Belém (today's *Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi*) (see López in the present volume). According to the standards at the dawn of the twentieth century, the objects of these two collections were documented in an exemplary manner. In a number of books and several articles, the researcher describes in detail the conditions of his travels and acquisition of objects, as well as the ethnographic results of his expeditions. A key element of this expedition was the work, which later was also translated into Spanish and Portuguese, *Zwei Jahre unter den Indianern. Reisen in Nordwest-Brasilien 1903/1905* (*Two years among the Indians. Voyages through the Brazilian Northwest 1903-1905*) (1967). Besides presenting the objects and information in a written version, Koch-Grünberg brought many high-quality photographs back to Germany that documented the production and use of the collected objects in their original context.



Figura 1. Theodor Koch-Grünberg amidst his equipment on the banks of the Iauarete-Cachoeira ('Christmas Camp 1904') (Photograph: Otto Schmidt, 1904. *Ethnographische Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg*. KG-H-II-78).



Figura 2. Utapinopona ('tuyuka') with dance ornaments (Photograph: Theodor Koch-Grünberg, 1904. Ethnographische Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg.



Figura 3. Manufacture of dancing masks among the Pāmiwa ('cubeo') (Photograph: Theodor Koch-Grünberg, 1904. *Ethnographische Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg*. KG-H-II-117).

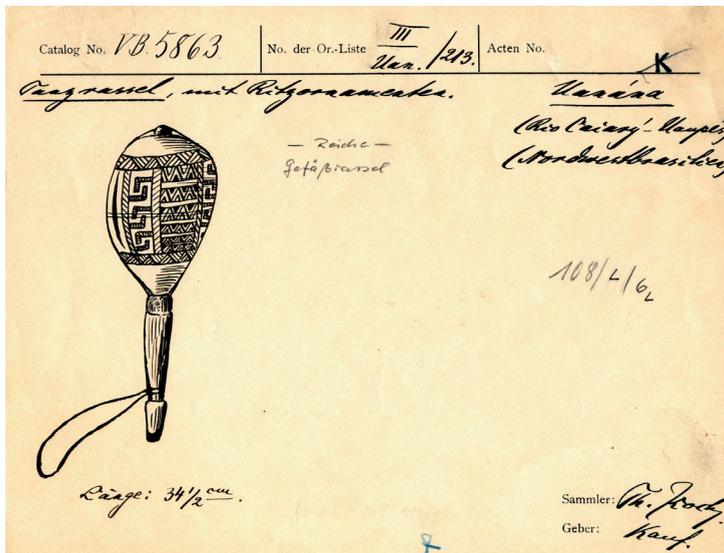


Figura 4. Index card with Koch-Grünberg's annotations. *Ethnologisches Museum Berlin*.

Upon arriving in Berlin, Koch-Grünberg himself inventoried the collection. Proof of this, among other things, are his index cards, exactly the same ones used to this very day to identify the objects in the museum.

Apart from that, the collection acquires particular significance in light of the immediate historical events in the upper Negro River, where both missionaries and rubber companies contributed to the partial physical elimination and cultural destruction of the settings of indigenous life in that era.⁷

In those days, researchers who gathered ethnographic collections from the Amazon were motivated not only by their interest in scientific research, but also because the sale of a collection to a museum was a common method of financing the expedition itself. This fact had a great influence on the researcher's behavior during his stay in the field, with the outcome that the quest of collecting often took priority over other research interests.⁸ In letters he wrote afterwards, Koch-Grünberg repeatedly stressed his desire to return to the upper Río Negro, "with the explicit intention of compiling the many myths and tales before it is too late [...] In my view, it is not important to acquire a large ethnographic collection. These are only an additional burden on the journey, given the need to carry along many objects of exchange, which make the baggage extremely heavy".⁹ However, his wish to return to the Río Negro River to carry out extensive mythological studies never became a reality. Koch-Grünberg died in 1924, when he initiated his fourth trip to South America.

After the first phase of documentation had been carried out by the researcher and collector himself, and once the objects were stored in the museums, their use in the museum focused, to a great extent, on the conservation and presentation of the collection. Since these ethnographic objects were conserved, and in many cases restored, they are currently in excellent condition despite dating back more than a century; they have also been displayed periodically in several special exhibitions.¹⁰ Furthermore, since 2007 objects from the upper Río Negro River have been exhibited at the *Museum im Spital* in Grünberg – Koch-Grünberg's birthplace –

7 See Koch-Grünberg (1967). For a complete bibliography see Lehmann (1925). For a history of Koch-Grünberg's travels and collections in the upper Río Negro see Ortiz Rodríguez (1995); Kraus (2004). For an analysis of his photographs see Hempel (2009). On the historical development of the Río Negro region see Hugh-Jones (1981); Andreollo (2006); as well as the articles by Pineda C. and Kraus in this volume.

8 Regarding the importance of objects to museums and indigenous communities, as well as social relations during the voyages of exploration in the times of Koch-Grünberg see Kraus (2014). On the importance of objects for the relationship between the Barasana or eastern Tucano and the 'whites' see Hugh-Jones in this volume.

9 Letter from Koch-Grünberg to Hermann Schmidt, Stuttgart, 10.5.1916 (VK Mr A.23).

10 Hartmann (1979); Ethnologisches Museum Berlin (2002); Hennig & Andraschke (2010: 254-257). The collections of the upper Negro River acquired by Hermann Schmidt, which are found in Stuttgart's Linden Museum, were exhibited, among others, in 2002. See Kurella & Neitzke (2002).

on long-term loan from the repository of the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin. Likewise, in the new exhibit structure of this last museum, which will be part of the Humboldt Forum currently under construction in Berlin's town center and expected to open in 2019, objects from this region will be integrated. However, practically no specific research has been carried out on the objects themselves. Some occasional publications are mainly descriptive, such as for example the inventory by Günther Hartmann (1967) of the masks kept at the Berlin museum, wherein the masks collected by Koch-Grünberg in the upper Río Negro region figure prominently. The explanations of particular objects rarely contain more information than the first documentation provided by Koch-Grünberg. Apparently, the *Museu Goeldi* in Belém likewise did not carry out any research after acquiring the objects (see López in the present volume).¹¹

Nevertheless, the knowledge now available about the indigenous peoples of the border region between Brazil and Colombia has increased considerably since the days of Koch-Grünberg's research. Several anthropologists, scholars from other disciplines, as well as many members of the indigenous groups themselves have published comprehensive studies on the cultures of the region's ethnic groups.¹² In these works – and specially from the 1980s onwards – greater attention has been paid to the significance of 'material culture' and its close interconnection with the mythological conceptions of the indigenous peoples of this region. Hence, several experts, some of them indigenous people themselves, have elaborated larger publications dealing with the mythology and cosmology of the societies of the upper Río Negro. In their texts and illustrations they clarify the importance of 'objects'. In many cases an ontological status as parts of the body or people is ascribed to them (see Panlón Kumu & Kenhíri 1980; Lana 1988; Santos Gentil 2005). Hugh-Jones (2009: 41) synthesizes these conceptions in the following manner: "In their myths, the Tukanoan groups envisage the human body as made up of cultural artefacts and present creation as human reproduction carried out in the modes of fabrication and assemblage". He adds: "If people are progressively built up and socialized as assemblages of objects, so may objects socialize people" (Hugh-Jones 2009: 48).

11 A counterexample was the 1988 Frankfurt exhibit "Die Mythen sehen. Bilder und Zeichen vom Amazonas" ("See the myths. Images and signs of the Amazon"), which was based on contemporary ethnographic research and also took into account the work of Berta Ribeiro, as well as that of Feliciano Lana, on the link between mythology and material culture of the upper Negro River populations. See Lana (1988); Münzel (1988); Ribeiro (1988). For new interpretations of possible functions and meanings of masks, see Correa and Rossi in the present volume.

12 On the debates about indigenous publications see Andrello (2010). It is not possible to list the large number of scientific works here, from the early monographs of Irving Goldman (1963) and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1986) to the current books of, for example, Luis Cayón (2013) or Santos & Ortiz (2015). For an introduction and a summary see Hugh-Jones (2004).

On the relation between objects and parts of the body, Geraldo Andreello (2010: 16) notes:

The body of the ancestor comes to existence through an assembly of objects [...] the stool is the hip, the stand for the gourd is the thorax, the gourd is the heart and ability to breathe. These objects, together with the cigar holder and ritual staff, compose the prototypical body of the ancestor, and its raw material would be the white quartz of the underworld. It can be said that they constitute the internal counterpart of the ceremonial ornaments that demonstrate the external aspects of the human body. In these they were vomited and delivered by the Grandfather of the World to the demiurges responsible for the appearance of humanity, they became their instruments of life and transformation with which they marked the start of the emergence of the world (our translation).

The project's trajectory

A series of initiatives on this subject¹³ preceded this project, which started in 2012 when we applied for financial support at *Volkswagen* Foundation. The project we proposed in our application included preliminary conversations in Mitú, capital of the Vaupés department, inviting indigenous experts to Berlin and the organization of a joint workshop, as well as a conference that would unite additional specialists and which would take place following the workshop. To develop these aspects, the cooperation between the indigenous experts and ourselves, as well as cooperation between the museum and the universities was decisive. In August and September 2013 Michael Kraus, who knew the region from his previous trips, presented the project in Mitú. The first interlocutors were Diana Guzmán (Mirigó = respondent to the dance, Wira poná/Desana) and Orlando Villegas (Maha-piria = macaw tooth, Kotiria),¹⁴ who both work at the local superior school ENOSIMAR (Escuela Normal Superior Indígena María Reina). Both actively engage in the strengthening of indigenous cultural elements as part of their everyday school routine. Both are 'Heritage Guardians' (*vigías del patrimonio*, an honorary title that the Colombian state confers to those who excel in contributing to the conservation of traditions and in cultural endeavors). Moreover, Diana Guzmán oversees the school's ethnographic collection. They were invited and the invitation of

13 Among such examples we find the exhibit shown in 2002 at the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin "Deutsche am Amazonas. Forscher oder Abenteurer?" ("Germans at the Amazon River. ;Researchers or Adventurers?"), in which many of the objects of the upper Río Negro were displayed (Ethnologisches Museum Berlin 2002), as well as a revision of the legacy of Theodor Koch-Grünberg, which is now part of the ethnographic collection of the University of Marburg (*Völkerkundliche Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg*). The revision was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) from 1999 to 2002. Added to these works the applicants have conducted research in the setting of the three universities, which deal with diverse aspects of indigenous societies of the Amazon region in Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Peru.

14 Contact with Diana Guzmán and Orlando Villegas had already been established in 2010 thanks to the mediation of Roberto Pineda C.

two other representatives was also coordinated. Since it was not feasible to invite representatives from each of the 27 ethnic groups that live in Colombia's Vaupés department, other criteria were applied to select additional participants, such as their knowledge and interest in taking an active part, harmony within the invited group, and their potential role as multipliers after their return. Consequently, we accepted the proposals from our interlocutors regarding the composition of the group. They stressed the need to, above all, include the knowledge of the older generation. Thus, we also invited Gaudencio Moreno (Dianumia Waikhapea = duck of the overflow, Kotiria), who at that time was 74, as well as María Morera (Horiphoko = owner of figures, Kotiria), who was 80 years old. Practical problems, such as the journeys that the four indigenous guests had to make to Bogotá to obtain their passports and visas that were still required in 2014 to access the Schengen area, were solved thanks to the support of the *Volkswagen* Foundation, which allowed us flexibility in handling our budget. Likewise, the German Embassy in Bogotá made itself available to us and was of great support and help with the applications.

Together with Richard Hass, deputy director of the *Ethnologisches Museum*, and taking into consideration the time the restorers would be able to dispose of, we preselected approximately 130 objects, around 10 % of the whole collection, in order to analyze them in the context of the workshop. However, we did not dedicate the first day of the workshop to these objects. We began with a round of introductions and presentations, and with a guided tour of the depot (and later of the museum), so that the participants could also get an idea of the size of the total inventory of the museum's Americas collection and the way that the museum displays the objects in public. In the course of the workshop, however, much of structure that we had originally planned was quickly discarded. With the aim of encouraging dialogue, during the preparation of the workshop we had provisionally sorted particular objects as to arrange them in general thematic groups, such as 'ritual objects, objects of power', 'dance and music,' or 'objects and childhood'. Likewise, we had included transversal themes such as 'symbols and ornaments'. However, the workshop quickly developed its own dynamic independent of these classifications. The indigenous experts had prepared intensely before their trip and systematically defined the proceedings of the coming days. For us it was amazing to experience how they transmitted their cultural concepts during the workshop, especially the very form of transmitting knowledge. From the start, Maria Morera stressed the importance of the workshop for them (translation to Spanish by Orlando Villegas):

The objects here are for us like the center of the body, like its backbone. Right now, we do not have many of the things that we lost, we don't have them because of the passage of time and the influence of other cultures. But they are here, and their presence here gives us strength. But somehow, this also makes us think, it makes us sad, because we don't have them back home. But it would be good to find a way for us to have all of these cultural elements back in our homeland. Because for us it would mean empowerment, an enhancement of our culture. But what will we now see when looking at how they are? Because there are objects that we ourselves do not know. Let's see then, in what shape they are (Workshop, 21.7.2014).

And Diana Guzmán added:

For us it is very important because [...] it allows us to meet our ancestors again. It is exciting to have them close again. We have high expectations, because this means being close to our roots, our ancestors, things that we have lost, but that thanks to you we are able to see again. And that allows us to grow stronger as indigenous peoples, strengthen our identity and think of our children's future (Workshop, 21.7.2014).

Given that from the point of view of the indigenous representatives the objects in the depot are not mere objects, but in many cases living beings, they have the capacity to act and exert a powerful influence.¹⁵ That is why one can only approach them by following certain rules that include several protective measures. Our guests applied such measures during their stay in Berlin.¹⁶ Most importantly, before entering the depot they would smoke tobacco, pray, and apply face paint.

These measures were rarely executed publicly, they would generally be carried out in silence and without our presence; only in subsequent conversations would we find out about these activities, especially the prayers and the blessings.

Sometimes they would apply face paint to us as well, which in indigenous societies of the Amazon region is used to protect oneself from dangers, as well as against the power and energy of objects. It can also be an expression of happiness or a festive decoration. In order not to spend all of the time in the depot, in the midst of the many living objects, the indigenous representatives also decided that our conversations should take place in an adjacent room, where we would sit around some objects that were specifically selected for each session of the workshop.

15 Between different Amazonian groups as well as within them there are diverse concepts about objects, the forms of life they assume and how they act (Santos-Granero 2009).

16 On their first day in Berlin, to familiarize themselves with the new environment, the guests had chosen to visit Pfaueninsel (Isle of the Peacocks), an attraction from the city guide which M. Kraus took along during his second preparatory trip to Mitú. When they reached the Havel River, they sprinkled themselves with its waters on the shore. They explained that because of the living beings that inhabit them, it is necessary to introduce oneself to a new river, as a means of preventing diseases, among other things.



Figura 5. Diana Guzmán and María Morera applying face paint (Photograph: Germán Laserna, 2014).



Figura 6. Selection of objects in the depot of the *Ethnologisches Museum* by Gaudencio Moreno and Orlando Villegas (Photograph: Michael Kraus, 2014).



Figura 7. Selection of objects in the depot of the *Ethnologisches Museum* by Diana Guzmán y María Morera (Photograph: Germán Laserna, 2014).



Figura 8. Workshop: Discussion of the objects in an adjacent room of the museum depot. From left to right: Orlando Villegas, Diana Guzmán, María Morera, Jennifer Schmitz, Ingrid Kummels, Michael Kraus, Ernst Halbmayr, Aura Lisette Reyes, Gaudencio Moreno, and María Rossi (Photograph: Germán Laserna, 2014).

Diana Guzmán explained to us:

The first day we were not able to have good dreams precisely because of that, because there are many people here, so each one has different knowledges and wisdoms. That is why I suddenly told you at the beginning: ‘For you these are objects, for us they are not objects, they are people and are alive, they have energy’ [...] We paint ourselves because they are very powerful, to protect ourselves, and also to enter without offending them, without disturbing them too much so that they will not do us any harm. That is why we paint ourselves (Workshop, 28.7.2014).

And Orlando Villegas added to that as he translated Gaudencio Moreno’s explanations:

Don Gaudencio is saying that there is much strength, energy from the different ethnic groups. From our area here we have what is called *yurupari*, the feathers, staffs, rattles, all of the stones, the necklaces. All of that has life. So, if we enter without permission, ourselves, even if it’s ours, we can get ill. Therefore, from the first day he entered, he [Don Gaudencio] asked for permission, he spoke with our ancestor Mukhotiro Yairo, who is above. That is why we can have a conversation in some way, since otherwise we would have become sick already. We need to execute that same ceremony, that same rituality on the day that we depart from here: bid farewell, speak to him, ask for forgiveness since we upset him. We have to do the same, that same greeting (Workshop, 28.7.2014).

Diana Guzmán pointed out the relation to living objects:

You have had all of this for a long time here. Many [objects] might be asleep, yes, asleep. So, we come in again, even if you are constantly coming in to them, but you are different. When we come in, they wake up. It is sort of a way their reaction is fierce. We are constantly bothering them, saying that he scolded us. Like until now, if not, it is a complaint. That’s why those energies that they conserve, [provoke] a sudden awakening. It is very harsh, because dialogue has not been maintained with them, we have not made use of them. Hence, they sleep, while being here they are sleeping, that is what is happening (Workshop, 28.7.2014).

Although we received much information about some objects – which was one of the original purposes of the workshop¹⁷ – one of the most outstanding experiences for us was to watch how the indigenous experts took over the direction of the workshop and structured the dialogue. They changed the order of the museum depot – which up to now had ordered objects according to the criteria of economizing space and had also grouped particular materials based on the conservation measures they required, such as feathers, plant material, pottery, etc.¹⁸ In contrast, they selected objects according

17 See the article by Haas in the present volume; another volume containing a detailed documentation of the workshop is in preparation.

18 The order in the depot is not subject to classification of objects according to ethnic group and region – the criteria indicated on the index cards of objects collected since the nineteenth century. Instead their order is due to situational factors, since objects have been divided into groups and kept in different cabinets according to their constituent material and former use. This economizes on space for the great quantity of collected objects. To date, around 500 000 objects from all over the world have been gathered in the depot of the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin.

to the chronological order of their appearance and importance in their creation myths. Our joint sessions did not begin with detailed questions about material, function, or symbolism, but with extensive explanations about the origin and mythological use of the objects, which were first narrated in their native language – usually in Kotiria by Don Gaudencio – and then translated into Spanish for us. During the explanation in Kotiria the indigenous representatives would always dialogue and discuss among themselves. After these explanations the discussion would be opened for questions. Thus, for example, on the first day of the workshop they selected the staff, the ceremonial rattle lance, the cigar ‘holder’ in the shape of a fork, as well as the corresponding cigar (the tobacco of origin), because these were the objects central to creation.



Figura 9. Workshop: Conversation on the objects of the creation myth. From left to right Ernst Halbmayr, Gaudencio Moreno, Orlando Villegas, and Ernesto Belo (Photo: Germán Laserna, 2014).

At first, Diana Guzmán and María Morera would not go to the part of the depot where the flutes were kept because traditionally it was taboo for women to see them; this meant that they had transferred the spatial order of the northwestern Amazonian *maloca* to the museum depot. One morning we discussed these objects, observing the traditional division of gender in societies of the upper Río Negro. Another indigenous element defined the final phase of the conference. The indigenous representatives asked the editors of this publication and the deputy director of the museum, Richard Haas,

to stand at the center of the conference room while they left. Shortly after entering the room again they danced, shouted, and sang, whirling around us, before handing us a series of gifts from their homeland. Although they did not give us food, as is their tradition, but handicrafts, it was clear that they were celebrating a *dabucuri*, a ritual exchange in which social relations are reaffirmed between different settlements or kin groups.

Both the workshop and the conference took place in a friendly and cheerful atmosphere that was at the same time focused and productive. Nevertheless, this did not mean that delicate or painful issues did not come to the fore. This was most clearly articulated by the indigenous representatives with respect to the box of feathers, carrying the meaning of the backbone of their society, as they repeatedly explained to us. The box of feathers holds ritual objects of utmost importance which have been handed down since the times of mythical creation, and from which the ancestors of contemporary humans were made¹⁹ During the workshop, Orlando Villegas summarized the explanations that Gaudencio Moreno had given in Kotiria in the following way:

Yesterday we talked of the place, Panoré [...]. In that moment of origin, the box of knowledge was handed over, the box of dance. That's where everything comes from, the staff, the necklaces, the headdresses, everything. That was all in one box. That is why we said that it was so important, it is all one thing, nothing should be missing, and if one thing is missing, it will progressively become weaker. To complement those feathers that we see there, they had a very special place. Not everyone could touch them. That is why it always remains at the center, at one side of the *maloca*, protected in a place that isn't humid, but dry. That is why there is always a hearth burning in the *maloca*, as a sign of life, also to be able to preserve all the things that are in the house, in the *maloca* (Workshop, 23.07.2014).

19 Recently Hugh-Jones analyzed in great detail the meaning of the box of feathers. Referring to experiences that the indigenous experts from Mitú had in Berlin, he summarizes: "the material identity between the walls of the *maloca* and the walls of the box of feathers suggests that the box of feathers is itself a *maloca*, and the ornaments that it contains are, in their own way, people" (Hugh-Jones 2015: 668). In a publication of the ʘtapinoṇa ('Tuyuka') one can read: "The life of ʘtapinoṇa, the Sons of the Stone Anaconda, is in this *tōko* fruit box. Each part of a person's body belongs to this box [...] All the decorations and ornaments kept in the Box of Adornments had already been used by the Transformation People [...] Most of the ornaments the singer-dancers (*baya*) use [when they dance are also kept in the Box of Adornments of the Sons of the Stone Anaconda. These ornaments include: • Curassow down (*wanopi sibo*), together with the *yuyuri sitia* • a circular ceremonial pendant made from bromeliad fibre with hanging yellow Oropendola tail feathers • string of Oropendola tail feathers (*umupikō sitia*) • palm bast divider (*wediro sātaro*) • pair of good quality yellow-and-red macaw-feather frontal crowns (*mapoari*) • another palm bast divider • other pairs of feather frontal crowns • macaw tail feathers (*mapikori*) stored end-to-end • feather-tipped down stick (*witōgu*) • another palm bast divider • egret feather panache (*uka*) • howler-monkey fur cord (*emoapoañapori*) • bracelets (*dikayosaripa*), stored end-to-end • egret wings (*yekasero*) • cord of fur and bromeliad fibre (*poasiarida*); jaguar bones (*koādukari*) • cane *weru weru* flute (in the middle). [...] The feathered cord for the rattle-lance (*yukubesugu dukata yorida*) is not kept in the feather box and is stored elsewhere" (AEITU 2005: 166ff; our translation).

He had already pointed out:

[B]efore opening the box of feathers a prayer was said with tobacco, a prayer for tranquility, protection, to sweeten the environment. The environment is always sweetened and the whole attire is worn, with their staffs of authority [...] and they always place the feathers, the entire outfit of adornments is laid out on the colander. It is always done this way, the box it is not opened at once, it is necessary to create the right environment, through a ritual, a prayer of protection (Workshop, 23.07.2014).

The treatment given to the box of feathers by the museum up to now was a shocking experience for our indigenous colleagues. The original contents of this box had been stored separately in several showcases. In the past, when the religious meaning of the intact box with its entire contents was ignored, its elements had even been distributed among different museums. The indigenous experts compared keeping the box and its contents separately with the dismemberment of a person. At such moments we came close to what Amy Lonetree (2012: 5) had demanded when she wrote of the necessity of speaking about the 'hard truths' of collaboration between museums and indigenous groups (which also includes the work that indigenous groups carry out in their own 'tribal museums').

Such painful moments were also part of our intercultural dialogue. Confronted with the longing of the indigenous representatives to reunite the objects of the box of feathers and store them in an integral way, the non-indigenous participants of the workshops remained almost paralyzed between fascination with the cosmological dimensions that these offered and the practice of storing different materials separately, according to this conflicting requirement of conservation. We became aware that up until now scholarship had primarily discussed issues of representation, and had left aside matters of storage, which, from an indigenous perspective, are just as important.

We asked ourselves to what extent gaining new knowledge truly paves the way to a change in existing procedures or if indigenous logic was irreconcilable with the logic of the museum. It is important to highlight that the workshop demonstrated how generating knowledge about a collection's objects requires further dialogue and exchange of knowledge on an equal footing. Any change implies calling into question a whole range of established conventions and logics. So far neither non-indigenous experts working in museums nor academics working in universities have challenged them sufficiently. These conventions range from matters of storage and preservation to ways of doing research and presenting and disseminating knowledge concerning the objects and their different conceptions.

Immediately after the workshop a conference with the same name was carried out, and the talks given at the latter are edited in this volume. At the conference, Diana Guzmán and Orlando Villegas recounted their current life in the Vaupés department.

Instead of giving a talk, the two oldest indigenous participants, María Morera and Gaudencio Moreno, instead of giving a talk, chose to express themselves in a way practiced in their culture. After the words of the Brazilian Ambassador, H.E. Maria Luiza Viotti, and the director of the *Ethnologisches Museum*, Viola König, they inaugurated the conference with Kotiria chants.

For the conference, we also invited colleagues who had not participated in the workshop, but had carried out extensive field research or were well acquainted with the collections that Theodor Koch-Grünberg and Hermann Schmidt had gathered almost simultaneously.²⁰ Today, these collections are found not only at the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin, but also in the *Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi* in Belém (both own parts of the Koch-Grünberg collection), the *American Museum of Natural History* in New York, as well as the *Linden-Museum* in Stuttgart (the last two museums hold the Schmidt collection). Our idea was to reunite in some way the original collections, at least in the form of conference talks and images. The intention was to compare some of their aspects and to share knowledge about them. Yet what might seem obvious to one culture is not necessarily perceived so by another. In our case, we have become to some degree accustomed to the fact that important anthropological collections about a region and its peoples have been divided and kept at different places around the world. Our guests from Mitú, who had prepared themselves for the encounter with the objects and their exerting agency in Berlin, once again experienced ambivalence, when they realized the extent to which the historical patrimony of their cultural objects was dispersed and stored far away from their homeland.

The subject of the future of the artefacts also came up during the conference. In the final round of questions, a person in the audience asked if they had considered demanding restitution of some of the objects, to which Orlando Villegas answered:

Actually, at this moment we represent 27 ethnic groups from Vaupés, each with their respective language and laws of origin. Before we came here we spoke about this issue with many people. So, we made a proposition of what we would be doing here. But, looking further into the matter, we would like to [...] we would not like to take them back to Vaupés. Why? In the first place, because we have the knowledge. The knowledge is in our heads, in the minds of our wise people, who are still alive! [...] With it, we can revive our culture. Also the pieces are very well kept here. Although the objects are ours, we do not have the same technology that you have in Germany to conserve the objects, all the collections. But with the knowledge that we have, and knowing that they are here, we can visit them and bring them back to life, like we are doing right now. Yes, we are feeding, singing with them, they are alive! That goes far so far, that when we saw the pieces the first day, we could not sleep well, because they have much energy. We dreamt of the past, with our ancestors. But the idea is not to take them back just like that. We would have to wait a long time, go through the process. Maybe someday we will be able to, but right now that is not what we have on our minds (Conference, 31.7.2014).

20 For information on Schmidt see Herrera (2014) as well as Kraus in the present volume.

And Diana Guzmán pointed out:

We take home with us many teachings. We have also learned from you. But in the collection the most important lesson was that despite the passage of time, despite these objects being somewhere else, it is true that they still live with us [Puts her hand on her chest]. They are always present. It is a very large task. Weaving, like someone said at the beginning, weaving the words with you, opening more paths to continue feeding spiritually everything coming from us that still remains here. And teaching and showing new generations that we are still alive. We have the desire to continue working, many years have gone by and we hope that we have infected you with that desire of wanting to work with us as well (Conference, 31.7.2014).

These newly acquired perspectives on knowledge, and plans to publish on them in the future, are tangible evidence of the learning process in Berlin. They are also evident in the declarations of the deputy director of the *Ethnologisches Museum*, Richard Haas. In a TV interview with the German television network ZDF (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*), he highlighted that the experiences of the workshop motivated him to once again modify the exhibit plans for the *Humboldt Forum* to include results from the dialogue.²¹ In addition, after the workshop and conference, the museum has shown the will to conserve the objects that once were included in the box of feathers in its traditional form.²² Both initiatives would signify important steps. Nonetheless, we should not ignore the fact that at this moment we are still at the starting point of a journey that requires developing more careful reflections on the different conceptions of objects, including their conservation and use. We have to search for ways of bringing these differences into line.

Presentation of the contributions in this volume

The contributions gathered in this book show the results of the second phase of the project, the international conference. This introduction is followed by another one that also discusses how the subject was approached, but in this case from the perspective of Mitú. In their part of the introduction, Diana Guzmán and Orlando Villegas reflect on the different perceptions of those contemplating ‘objects’. They emphasize that according to the indigenous conception, these ‘objects’ are not just lifeless artefacts, but instead represent and possess life. They also point out that the ‘objects’ were not made with the aim of storing them in a museum, but formed part of a wider system of exchange, in which they would be returned to their true owners after their use. The

21 See the documentary “‘Die Indianer kommen!’ Indigene Völker im Humboldt-Forum” (“‘Here come the Indians!’ Indigenous peoples in the Humboldt Forum”) by Carola Wedel. <<https://www.zdf.de/dokumentation/jahrhundertprojekt-museumsinsel/die-indianer-kommen-berliner-schloss-humboldtforum-soll-ein-100.html>> (20.10.2017).

22 Personal correspondence between Andrea Scholz (*Ethnologisches Museum*) and Michael Kraus, March 2017.

authors complement their characterization of the indigenous conceptions with critical thoughts on the use of ‘objects’ in foreign places and their possible effects, referring both to the opportunities that this displacement offers and the dangers it engenders.

The rest of the volume is divided into three sections, basically according to the thematic structure of the conference program.²³ As a way of rendering the character of the different contributions to the workshop and conference visible, we have included a wide range of articles in this publication. We have given more importance to maintaining the diversity of perspectives than to unifying them according to a single scheme of methodological rigor. In this publication we gave room to both personal experiences as well as to historical reconstructions, analyses of current situations, and theoretical contributions. Likewise, we considered it important to integrate cases of specific collections on which there was hitherto a lack of information.

The first section of the book adopts a historical perspective and carries the title “From Research Expeditions to Ethnographic Collections: Past and Present Contexts”. Here articles are presented that deal with the contact history between the indigenous population and the European invaders. They also focus on the trajectory of the acquisition and the whereabouts of the anthropological collections that come from the upper Río Negro. The relations between the indigenous populations and researchers and collectors are analyzed, as well as the conditions prevailing in the contexts that shaped these social relations. The commercial routes and museological classifications allow for tracing both the biographies of several collections as well as the new hierarchies of knowledge to which the indigenous objects were subjected. Moreover, the articles include reflections on the changing meanings ascribed to the objects throughout their history; they inquire as to the reasons for these shifts in meaning. Implicitly and explicitly, they deal with the following issue: How can the objects, their history, and the relationships currently associated with them be represented in an adequate manner?

Robert Pineda C. begins his article with an overall picture of the role which ‘things’ played at the moment of cultural contact between the diverse representatives of ‘white people’ and indigenous societies. Pineda C. builds an arch from the arrival of Columbus, through the colonial era, to the ethnographic expeditions at the end of the nineteenth century and the institutionalization of anthropology and archeology in Colombia. Taking concrete examples, he analyzes the behavior of the conquerors and missionaries, as well as of explorers and anthropologists, like the Italian Ermanno Stradelli, the Germans Theodor

23 With the contributions of Roberto Pineda C. and María Susana Cipolletti, the book contains two articles from colleagues who were invited to the conference, but unfortunately were unable to attend. Conversely, four conference presentations were not included in this volume. Nevertheless, we would like to thank once again Ernesto Belo, Alexander Brust, Carolina Herrera, Karoline Noack and Jennifer Schmitz for the talks they gave in Berlin, as well as for participating constructively in the conference.

Koch-Grünberg and Konrad Theodor Preuss, and the Colombian Gregorio Hernández de Alba. He reflects on the type of relations, as well as the categorization of artefacts – subject to constant changes – that foreigners not only took with them, but also introduced. All these objects contributed to shaping mutual perception to a large measure. Pineda C. mentions ruptures and changes in relation to indigenous objects through the course of time, as in the case of the ‘satanization’ and the frequent destruction of artefacts. This contrasted with collecting and exporting objects with the aim of preserving them to be able to display them based on diverse interests in multiple contexts.

With regard to Colombia, **Aura Lisette Reyes** analyzes how the resignifications ethnographic collections have experienced as a result of processes of musealization. In a detailed analysis, she illuminates how the status of objects in the museum has changed in the course of history. Initially they were classified as ‘curiosities,’ then the status of ‘antiquities’ or ‘relics’ was attributed to them until they finally became ‘ethnographic objects’ – although during some phases of this process particular attributions overlapped. Signs of these processes of reinterpretation are to be found in contemporary writings and in documents that described the arrangement of objects in the museums as well as in the objects themselves. Some objects have up to four different file numbers. The article shows which processes and historical interests determined categorizations, among them the construction of a national history, securing the country’s borders, or the prevalent development concepts. It also illustrates how discourses and values were repeatedly intertwined and how ways of collecting and presenting individual objects (for example, the accent on weapons used by indigenous groups) corresponded to particular views on native societies. At the same time, Reyes highlights the growing efforts to determine the cultural value of the objects on site, instead of mainly instrumentalizing them as a showcase of one’s own interests. Taking as an example the early expeditions of Gustaf W. Bolinder from Sweden, as well as the work of Gregorio Hernández de Alba from Colombia, Reyes discerns different stages that paved the way for scientific approaches specialized in the indigenous cultures in Colombia.

Michael Kraus describes in his article the effects the rubber boom had on the research trips and the collection of objects of Theodor Koch-Grünberg and Hermann Schmidt. He examines, on the one hand, the information provided by the respective publications and archival documents of the two German travelers concerning the advance of the *siringüeros* (rubber tappers) in the upper Río Negro region. On the other, he analyzes the contacts between the travelers and the rubber merchants. He examines how the violent context of the rubber boom era influenced the collecting of ethnographic objects. Despite Koch-Grünberg’s efforts to maintain good relations with the indigenous peoples that he visited,

living sometimes in their communities for several weeks and maintaining friendly contacts, there can be no doubt that the terrible experiences they had with other ‘whites’ had an impact on their behavior toward Koch-Grünberg as a foreign visitor. It was difficult for them to assess the intention of an outsider who introduced himself to them. The European travelers themselves also had various opinions about the persons they encountered during their expeditions. Hence, Kraus points out that Koch-Grünberg and Schmidt in some instances held different opinions regarding some of the protagonists of the rubber era.²⁴

The next three articles explore the Amazonian collections of ethnographic objects in the anthropological museums of Berlin, Belém, and Stuttgart and focus on presenting the objects from the upper Río Negro acquired by Koch-Grünberg and by Schmidt. **Richard Haas** offers a brief summary of the history of the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin and its extensive collection from the South American lowlands and dwells on the collections of northwestern Amazonia. In his article, the author also presents the initial outcome of our workshop. Thus, he describes selected objects from the Koch-Grünberg collection considering the information that the indigenous guests shared with us during our collaboration, which is why the article is also published under the names of **Gaudencio Moreno and María Morera**. The text includes information on the meaning of the objects related to mythology, such as the staff, the tobacco holders (‘forks’) and the tobacco, as well as the quartz, the dancer’s headdress, and the box of feathers. Another key object included in the article is a *maraca* (rattle) from a *payé* of the Pámiwa, which in both its aspect and meaning differs markedly from a simple dancing rattle. Koch-Grünberg was able to acquire this object from the Vaupés River, although other shamans to whom he later showed the maraca criticized the fact that it had been sold.

24 The travels and collecting activities of Hermann Schmidt and Louis Weiss and the interest of institutions and scientists in the conditions of Amazonian regions have also been analyzed by Carolina Herrera, who participated in the conference. Much like Reyes (in this volume), although using different examples, she sheds a light on how the forms of acquisition and representation of ethnographic objects reflect certain development concepts and ways of constructing national identity. Her explanations center on the activities of Schmidt and Weiss, who a few years after Koch-Grünberg, traveled along the upper Negro River and visited some of the same settlements. They also witnessed the *siringueros*’ advance in this region. In 1907 they sold a large ethnographic collection from the upper Río Negro to the *Museum of National History* (AMNH) in New York. In addition, the collectors’ correspondence with the museum is kept there, along with numerous photographs of their travels. Herrera analyzes them in her article. The author also deals with debates in the United States regarding museums in general at this particular moment in history. She describes how the collection gathered by Schmidt was assessed in this context. He offered the AMNH another ethnographic collection, which it did not acquire and instead ended up in the *Linden-Museum* in Stuttgart. Herrera’s text has already been published and can be read online (Herrera 2014). We recommend this important article to any reader interested in the matter, which was originally presented at the Berlin conference.

The carved design of the maraca, for which, despite his intense queries, Koch-Grünberg was unable to obtain an explanation, received an exegesis during the workshop thanks to the knowledge of the indigenous experts. Finally, his text informs us about the projected collaboration between the *Ethnologisches Museum* and, especially, Diana Guzmán and Orlando Villegas as representatives of the Escuela Normal Superior Indígena María Reina (ENOSIMAR) in Mitú.

Claudia Lopéz offers us an introduction to the history of the *Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi* (MPEG) in Belém, Brazil. The museum's name commemorates the Swiss zoologist Emilio Goeldi. Approximately 5 % of the MPEG's collections from Amazonia are from the upper Río Negro. In her article, Lopéz describes the collections from this region, which include the 500 objects acquired by Koch-Grünberg and given to the museum in 1905. They make up the largest individual collection. Some objects can be attributed to the activities of collector Louis Weiss, whom Herrera explores (see footnote 24). To the degree that existing documents allow her, López contextualizes the acquisition of the objects gathered by Koch-Grünberg by the MPEG. She also considers the relation between Koch-Grünberg and Goeldi. In addition, she highlights the need for a detailed investigation of the collection, which so far has only been carried out by Lúcia Hussak van Velthem (1975) and Thiago Oliveira (2015), and presents a summary of the types of objects and the precise ethnic origin of the artefacts Koch-Grünberg handed over to MPEG. In the last part of the article the author describes the MPEG's present relations with indigenous groups from other regions of Brazil, such as the Tikuna and the Mebêngôkre-Kayapó. She synthesizes forms of previous collaborations and their results thus far. The author defines existing collections as 'fields of representation and practical action' and suggests reflecting critically on how these collections are currently handled.

Finally, **Doris Kurella** presents a brief summary of the emergence of the *Linden Museum* in Stuttgart. Giving continuity to Herrera's explanations (see footnote 24), she follows the trail of the objects of the second collection gathered by Hermann Schmidt and Louis Weiss, which the *American Museum of Natural History* did not acquire. After their detour through New York the objects from this collection finally landed in Stuttgart, together with objects from other regions of the Amazon - thanks to the financial support of Emil Zarges, a banker and German consul in Brazil. However, for some objects the journey did not end there. Some of them were destroyed during the Second World War, while others were resold to other European museums.

The second section of the present volume, titled "Recent Investigations in the Upper Río Negro River: Objects and the Transformation of Traditions and Knowledge", deals with the current and historical situation of the upper Río Negro River, both from the

Brazilian as well as the Colombian perspective. With one exception, the articles in this section present the outcomes of many years of field research in the Río Negro region. The almost thirty ethnic groups of the area include several eastern Tucano groups²⁵ that are the focus of this section's articles. They are organized in phratries and exogamous patrilineal clans and are associated with different languages of the Tucano linguistic family.²⁶ The logic of exogamous marriage establishes, at the same time, a logic of linguistic exogamy. This leads to elaborate exchange relations that are ritualized and founded in mythology among the local groups (see Hugh-Jones in this volume).²⁷ These relations of exchange and kinship also play a central role for the indigenous movement of the region and their different regional developments in Colombia and Brazil, which are the subject of the articles by Andrello and Laserna. At the same time, however, these exchange relations are not limited to 'real human persons,' for they include relations with spirits and white people (Hugh-Jones), as well as animals and the dead (Correa; Rossi), and the anthropologists (Hugh-Jones; Laserna; Rossi). The question of how indigenous knowledge and practices are transformed is discussed in the articles of this section in the light of loss, recovery, the critique of representation and of anthropological practice, without omitting the potential of these representations for the future of indigenous communities.

Geraldo Andrello's article deals with the cultural initiatives of the Brazilian indigenous movement in the upper Rio Negro. According to Andrello's thesis, these constitute a cultural movement within the indigenous movement. The article illustrates the profound changes and paradoxes from which the indigenous movement in the upper Rio Negro emerged in response to the issue of how to be indigenous while simultaneously forming part of 'civilized space'. The multiple initiatives range from the recovery of traditional malocas, passing through the written representation of indigenous knowledge, to the use of new media and the recognition of sacred places as intangible cultural heritage. These initiatives have led to what some authors have termed the rise of an indigenous modernity (see Halbmayer 2018), in other words, a third way between the culture of their ancestors and 'white civilization'.

25 Arapaso, Bará, Barasana, Desana, Karapaná, Kotiria, Letuama, Makuna, Mirity-Tapuya, Pámiwa, Pira-Tapuya, Pisamira, Siriano, Taiwano, Tanimuka, Tatuyo, Tukano, Tuyuca, Yauna, Yuruti (see Hugh-Jones 2004: 406; Cabrera Becerra 2010: 368; Correa 2012: 189).

26 Furthermore, there are Arawak speakers in the north at the Içana River (Baniwa, Curipaco, Tariana, among others), as well as in the interior region of the great rivers, the so called 'Makú' groups (Hupda, Yuhupde, Dow, Nadöb, Kakwa, Nukak). Currently in this region, the *lingua geral* is also partly spoken, which is based on Tupí and was introduced by the first missionaries (for a critical reflection about the historical spread and persistence of the *lingua geral* language in the upper Río Negro - Vaupés region see Cabrera Becerra 2010).

27 For an introduction to the indigenous cultures of the region, see footnotes 1 and 12.

This has also produced a new collective understanding of culture, as a unity that separates them from the ‘whites’ and as being part of a plural diversity of the different ethnic groups of the region. The ancient kin and affinity relations between these groups are at the basis of the current cultural discourse at the Río Negro.

Stephen Hugh-Jones performs an analysis of the origin myth of the Barasana and the objects inscribed in it, as well as an analysis of the transformative processes it addresses. He shows that inscribed in this origin myth there is an ethnography of the foreigners and ‘others’ that is manifested in their goods, or the *gabeuni*, the ‘things of Others’. Both the ritual objects of the indigenous peoples and the industrial goods of whites are included. The ritual objects and the industrial goods are two sides of the same coin, both being associated with fertility and reproduction. Both ‘owner- mothers’ of these goods personify these forces: the one responsible for the indigenous people is located in the west, while the one in charge of the white people is located down the river, in the east. These goods belong to the spirit world, the world of the ancestors and the world of dangerous foreign Others. According to the story of the journey of the spirits in the anaconda canoe, these abandon the water as they approach each house. They transform into human beings, celebrate with *chicha*, then become spirits once again and continue their journey. The dwellings represent a series of transformations between the two states, water, and earth, from conception to birth, initiation, and adulthood, linking the journey in a common logic with pregnancy and the cycle of life. Hence stages of differentiation are illustrated. Processes of development, such as fermentation, maturity, and pregnancy take place in containers similar to wombs, for example, the trough for beer, the anaconda canoe, and the slot drum. Despite the preparation of *chicha* being a feminine activity presented as less mysterious than male shamanism, Hugh-Jones shows that women are involved in the mythical process that gives life, on a par to shamanism, without which the whole ritual cycle would collapse. Therefore, the ritualistic indigenous objects and industrial goods are analogous to a force of creation that is specifically feminine.

François Correa’s article evolves around the reflection on masks used in the funerary rituals of the Pâmiwa (‘Cubeo’). He queries the relation between masks and their bearers and the role that animals play in the transformation of people. He therefore examines the mythology dealing with the origin of the masks and the funeral ceremony, which is no longer practiced today. At its center was the relation between the dead and the living. Correa’s contribution also highlights the special relation between human beings and animals, as well as that between the dead and the living, among the Pâmiwa. For the Pâmiwa – as well as for those in other regions of the Amazon (Chaumeil 2007) and

specially the non-Amazonian north of the continent (Halbmayer, 2013; under review) – permanent relations with the dead are pivotal, since their transformation into animals must be prevented. This stands in opposition to the classic Amazonian model.

For common human beings, the transmutation into animals is a dangerous social pathology. While after their death animals return to their *maloca* to be reborn as animals once again, for human beings it is only at birth that their ancestors decide on transferring their souls to the living. Although the shaman accompanies the deceased to the *maloca* of their ancestors, these sometimes adopt the corporality of animals, returning and causing disease and death among the living. The last act of funerary ritual leads to the definitive dissolution of this corporality. Burning the masks makes the animal spirits and ‘devils’ return to their *maloca*, while consuming their ground bones transformed into powder in *chicha* beer liberates the soul of a deceased person in a definitive way. The soul may return to the clan’s *maloca* and transfer knowledge to the bodies of the living.

What follows in the next part of this section are three works that reflect on cooperation and local interaction with indigenous groups from different perspectives. **Maria Rossi** describes the reactions of two Pámiwa communities in the upper Río Negro when reading texts written or edited by anthropologists. On the one hand she ponders the practice of representation, and on the other she raises questions as to the Pámiwa masks collected by Koch-Grünberg and kept in the *Ethnologisches Museum* in Berlin. The Cubay community responded to the explanations given by Koch-Grünberg and Irving Goldman regarding the funerary masks with surprise, disgust, and deep mistrust. They asked Rossi who had given permission and in what way had they acquired this knowledge, which they consider private and confidential and not to be disseminated. Only after this initial shock was it possible to talk about the origin and availability of these materials.

In contrast, the response was positive when readings from the book *Relatos míticos Cubeo* (Correa 1992) took place in Cubay and the community of San Luís de la Rompida. This allowed for collective reflection both with and within the community, as well as for the establishment of new relations. Taking this reaction as a point of departure, the author reflects on the consequences of the anthropological practice, its forms of research and writing, by referring to the writings of Johannes Fabian (1983) and James Clifford (1991), among others. She explores the possibilities of using existing ethnographies and collected objects to collectively revise our knowledge about the groups that have been studied. This can serve to avoid the selective homogeneity and othering that underlie these products, and allows moving from the codification of identities to a discursive negotiation that is open for redefinition.

She asks how the masks collected by Koch-Grünberg might contribute to such a revision in the present situation: While funerary rituals are no longer carried out,

they have not been substituted by other mourning practices. What possibilities do the collected masks offer to cope with loss now that suicide among the Pámiwa is a growing problem? What does it mean that the masks in Berlin were not burnt, as was the custom, but were stored in a museum? How can they be used to reflect on the existential crisis contributing to these suicides?

As Rossi argues, it is not because the masks are stored in Berlin that the Pámiwa funerary rituals no longer take place; on the contrary, these historic masks could be used to remember those rituals and inspire new interpretations and forms of mourning. The issue is not only about what these masks once were, but also about what they are and how they can contribute to new ways of understanding within the community today.

German Laserna presents the current developments and challenges of local indigenous movements and the Vaupés region in Colombia in a historical context and anchors them in contemporary national and international dynamics. He begins by describing the collaboration between Antonio Guzmán and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff and reveals that the contributions of Guzmán in the works of Reichel-Dolmatoff about the Desana went far beyond those of a mere informant, but this was not properly acknowledged. (Antonio Guzmán is the father of Diana Guzmán, who took part in the conference in Berlin and is a contributor to the present volume.) From this diagnosis Laserna offers a bridge to the current debates on the Departmental Plan of Science and Technology. These debates likewise show that there is still much to be done to establish conditions of equality in the production of scientific knowledge about local culture and advance alternatives in view of criticism of current research. At the same time the author stresses the validity of the ‘urgent anthropology declared by Reichel and his wife, which would lead to the commitment of indigenous organizations and several NGOs and to the implementation of international protection measures.

The author outlines the history of social indigenous movements, from the early messianic movements, touching on the impacts of the mission and the changes to which it was subjected, the establishment of protection zones, the crisis in the Vaupés Indigenous Regional Council (CRIVA) and the cooptation of indigenous leaders by the state. Currently a Strategic Departmental Plan of Science, Technology and Innovation is being formulated for the Vaupés region. In this context the lack of a center or museum in the Vaupés becomes evident: a center able to order, archive, and make available to the actors historical and current knowledge on tangible cultural heritage, its documentation, and archeology. The author emphasizes the urgent need for a mutual exchange and an honest partnership – a *dabucuri* among local, Colombian, and international researchers, holders of knowledge, and local authorities – while insisting that first and foremost internal conflicts among indigenous leaders and their communities require a solution.

Gabriele Herzog-Schröder's article is primarily devoted to personal experiences in the context of current exchanges between indigenous representatives of the Río Negro and Germany's anthropological museums. Herzog-Schröder describes the research stay of João Paulo Lima Barreto, an anthropologist of Tucano origin, at the *Museum Fünf Kontinente* in Munich, where he was a key contributor to research of the Fittkau Collection. The article narrates in an anecdotal manner the occurrences inside and outside of the museum, such as personal encounters and intercultural exchange in Bavaria. In this setting experiences like those we had during the workshop in Berlin are reflected on: Lima Barreto took ritual protection measures, he addressed the power of 'objects' and highlighted the importance of bringing together the separate parts of the ritual crest, the 'box of feathers' (*bahsá busá*). Another point in common was that he did not demand restitution, despite the fact that the objects in the Fittkau Collection were 'stolen,' that is, they had not been voluntarily handed over to the Salesians, from whom Fittkau in turn acquired many objects. The reason these artefacts were not claimed by Lima Barreto is related to the fact that objects with the same shape were created by different ethnic groups, so it is difficult to pinpoint their exact origin. At the same time these objects are fundamentally different. Their former owners spoke to them and blessed them in different tongues, which is why they only understand the language of their respective owners, making their force potentially dangerous for others.

While Lima Barreto (2014) characterized the objects as being dead and the museum as a palace of the deceased, Herzog-Schröder rightly asks, how dead are these objects? What kind of life do they possess? And, to what extent are they people? As we mentioned above, the experts invited from Mitú actually described them as asleep. They awake when someone comes in contact with them and they react fiercely. We can interpret this characterization of the objects as an expression of a relational Amazonian ontology. This coincides with what Herzog-Schröder confirms: the objects can only be maintained alive by integrating them into the multiple and diverse relations of a fragmented world.

The third section of this volume is dedicated to "Comparative Studies on Objects and Forms of Generating Knowledge about them from the Perspective of Other Amazonian Regions". Included here are research questions about material culture in and from Amazonia in an intercultural context. These are enriched by comparative case studies from the regions inhabited by the Secoya (a group from the West-Tucano language family) of Ecuador, the Yukpa (a group from the Cariban language family) of Venezuela and Colombia, the Apalai-Wayana and Tiriyo (also groups of the Cariban language family) of Guyana, as well as the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga (belonging to the Arawak language family) of Peru. A common characteristic of the experts contributing to this section is that they deal with case studies that depart from the current debate in anthropology on material culture (the 'material turn') regarding Amazonian native

peoples. They have developed their research through both ethnographic field work as well as through close collaboration with anthropological museums.

María Susana Cipolletti examines collaborative projects carried out by several anthropological museums with members of indigenous communities of Amazonia, among them the Secoya, as a way of assembling current exhibitions of objects collected in the past. The author problematizes the naïve assumption that today's native people have the greatest familiarity with the function and meanings that objects had for their source communities in the distant past, just because they are descendants of the ethnic groups from whom the objects were collected. Instead, Cipolletti proposes a more differentiated approach to the Amazonian 'inside view' of the past. This approach takes into account, among other things, internal differences in knowledge of the objects according to specialization and age in the source community. The author departs from the hypothesis that there are significant differences as to the knowledge about artefacts. Therefore, the reliability of oral traditions as a source of 'trustworthy' data varies widely according to the distribution of knowledge. She then evaluates the potential as well as the limits of an emic approach, that is, an approach that considers the meaning of the artefacts according to the cosmovision of their producers. A counterexample to this approach was seen at an exhibition in Frankfurt's *Weltkulturen Museum* in 2011. There the work of seven artists was presented, in which they interpreted ethnographic objects from several continents without having engaged in an exchange with members of the source communities.²⁸ In contrast, Cipolletti points out how anthropological research reveals diverse emic perspectives regarding the objects to be collected. She emphasizes that these emic approaches require, among other things, the rigorous collection and literal transcription of mythic texts, along with song lyrics that refer to the objects. The anthropological studies let us discern how artefacts are related to cosmovision. There are objects of the material culture that have fallen in disuse among the Secoya, like the palm canoe and the war shield. She presents examples of how Secoya actors, who have never seen these objects, were able to reconstruct them based on oral traditions that transmit knowledge of them as part of the origin myths. This particular case shows the durability and reliability of the oral tradition of the Secoya. Due to the complexity of the emic perspective on interpreting objects in relation to their origin and attributing cosmic qualities and strengths to them, Cipolletti argues that information from these emic perspectives should be integrated into museum cataloging practices. As yet, this is not a common practice.

28 For a detailed critique of this genre of museum exhibition see Kraus (2015).

Ernst Halbmayer's contribution addresses the current rapprochement between anthropology and material culture in the Amazon as a central theme, triggered in part by the ontological turn, from which a renewed interest in this topic emerged. A starting point for his reflections and analysis is the concept of 'fabrication' coined by Fernando Santos-Granero (2009), who argues that from the perspective of Amazonian groups things and people have a common symbolic framework of fabrication. From the perspective that these groups have on history, artisanal procreation, that is, fabrication, precedes sexual procreation. Halbmayer seeks to operationalize this concept and consequently examines the practices through which, according to the Yukpa, the world, animals, people, and objects, were created. Among those objects are baskets, bags, bows and arrows, and mats. The analysis of the stories and myths reveals the specific notions the Yukpa have of fabrication: in their myths, objects appear as things that already exist; instead, the cultural hero excels by carrying out activities that contribute to the fabrication of the world with its living beings, thereby transforming it into a habitable space. Here he highlights, among other things, the Yukpa idea that proto-animal beings act as humans although they are not human. This differs from the animality that Eduardo Viveiros de Castro argued in his theory of perspectivism. Halbmayer specifies how fabrication and procreation are seen as vital processes that (re)organize, (re)structure, and (re)elaborate physical, social, and cognitive relations. He shows that objects are conceptualized not as living beings, but as attributes of persons. This analysis is ultimately useful to clarify the surprising continuity in the use of bags woven from cotton as part of Yukpa attire. This use persists despite the fundamental change resulting in the widespread use of western clothing. This may well be explained by the sustained use of the satchel's symbolism in communicating with non-human beings. Halbmayer ends his contribution with a criticism of anthropological museums and their 'naturalist ontology' with its focus on the 'physicality shared by objects'. He advocates a greater freedom of action within museology to promote alternative experiences and a decolonization of museums based on encounters with indigenous groups, their cosmologies, and their social practices.

Beatrix Hoffmann's research on the material cultures of the Apalai-Wayana and the Tiriyó is framed in a current project of the *Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität Bonn* that seeks to cast new perspectives on the past and current significance of objects and collections from both ethnic groups. She relies on participative methods to exchange knowledge about the production, use, and history of the objects in question. Hoffman's theoretical basis is a critique of the 'one tribe – one style' concept that influenced museology for a long time. This concept attempted to exclusively attribute the origin of objects to a single indigenous group by establishing specific characteristics of shape, color, material, and decoration. In contrast, the author advocates distinguishing and

perceiving multiple perspectives on objects. She refers to perspectives both within the 'preserving societies,' in which the majority of anthropological museums are currently located, as well as those within the societies that are represented in these museums, the 'source communities'. Using as an example three types of objects – baskets, fans, and glass bead objects – Hoffman traces the expansion and transformation of their meaning through their movements from one society to the other and their confrontation with the Other or what is foreign. First, she emphasizes the transformative processes the Apalai-Wayana and Tiriyó have had to face, which, in part, have been radical. They were triggered by the advent of the mission, the rubber and gold mining booms, and the state's indigenous policies during the last two centuries. Nonetheless, the varied forms of basketry have remained emblematic of both ethnic groups. Objects such as semi-circular fans and food mats are witnesses to the social relations of both groups, particularly with respect to their exchange of knowledge and artefacts. In her comparative study of variants of these objects of everyday use, Hoffman analyzes differences in the technology of design and the use of materials. In these both the cultural relations between diverse indigenous groups are inscribed, as well as the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people and, furthermore, between members of different generations within the respective indigenous community. In particular, artefacts made of glass beads give evidence to how cultural identities were reformulated. New materials were adopted and new objects invented, both as a way of satisfying the demands of external markets as well as recovering their own cultural roots.

Ingrid Kummels' final chapter on the transformation of the material culture of the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga departs from the reflections that were sparked by the workshop and conference on 'Objects as Witnesses of Cultural Contact'. The concerns expressed in these spaces by the experts of the Tucano-speaking ethnic groups pointed towards, among other things, ruptures within the material culture, caused by different extractivist booms, missionary proselytism, as well as internal conflicts. Kummels takes up these concerns in order to approach objects as 'versatile witnesses'. This enables her to take into account both these ruptures as well as the transculturality that they acquire when they travel between regimes of value. Revisiting them after twenty-five years, she asks what happened to emblematic objects from both groups such as the *cushma* (a tunic woven from cotton), the *amatserentsi* (a headdress used by men), and the *tsompironsti* (used to carry babies) when faced with the tragic events associated with the violent years of the Shining Path. She first examines how their material culture was represented by German anthropologists and museums at the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s. She analyzes the once dominant positivist and objectifying approaches, such as those of an Asháninka exhibition that the anthropological museum in Munich created at the time.

This exhibition was criticized by anthropology students and activists in Munich, who pointed out the region's colonial history and its legacy in Amazonia. From this critique arose a new current that studied the artefacts as key elements of this dynamic history and, therefore, recognized them as transcultural objects. We find in this current the use of photography as a method that reveals the intimate relation between objects and peoples (see also Kummels 2016). By revisiting the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga communities twenty-five years later, in a region still threatened by drug trafficking and terrorism, Kummels identifies new actors, such as teachers (instead of shamans in the past) who creatively engage in the elaboration and recreation of traditional objects such as *cushmas* and *tsompiroñstis*. Their continuity testifies to the desire of the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga to participate in more collaborative forms of dialogue about material culture and to retain these objects as part of a 'good living,' as they themselves choose to define it in their own cultural terms.

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Figura 10. Exchange of gifts (*dabucuri*) at the end of the public conference. In close-up, from left to right: Michael Kraus, Gaudencio Moreno, Richard Haas, Diana Guzmán, María Morera, Ingrid Kummels, Ernst Halbmayr (Photograph: Germán Laserna, 2014).

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The Perspective from Mitú, Colombia: Museums, Objects, and Narratives

Mirigó – Diana Guzmán

Escuela Normal Superior Indígena María Reina (ENOSIMAR), Mitú, Colombia
dianaguzman009@hotmail.com

Maha-piria – Orlando Villegas

Escuela Normal Superior Indígena María Reina (ENOSIMAR), Mitú, Colombia
orvillero7@hotmail.com

The Origins of Knowledge

After Yuruparí was created by the first gods with the bones of the younger brother, he began his journey and guided its evolution by bringing the knowledges of the indigenous peoples and drawing up the territorial boundaries for each culture during his trajectory. Thus, the territories were born, the indigenous cosmology was born, as well as science and wisdom that today allows for handling the ancestral and traditional world that exists throughout the department [...]

From there they travelled and carried out the first ceremony and traditional dance in that sacred place called Bajarowawi (Brazil), which means the maloca of the ancestral dance. In that moment the first healing of the world was performed, and nature was healed so that man could relate well to it. The first traditional dance was born. Jutibaja, in that ceremony too, the gourd of knowledge is used, the tobacco gourd, the gourd of the purity of the sky's sun. On that journey the Amazon River was born; Yuruparí had mainly traveled along its banks. Yuruparí was essentially at that moment the soul of traditions, the soul of ancestral knowledge." (León Marín 2014, emphasis added).

Museums are those institutions that have adapted their spaces for exhibiting collections or sets of objects from the material culture of people and cultures that for the most part have disappeared for different reasons. Their objective is to acquire, conserve, research, communicate, and exhibit these objects, with the aim of contributing to the study and education of humanity. Taking this concept as a point of departure, we should reflect on how these very same objects, which from the perspective of many people are lifeless, themselves represent the life of a people, since they speak about the history of origin of many peoples. They are representations of magical beings that were produced with the intention of conducting an exchange of knowledge at a certain moment. They demand and ask to be treated consistent with their reason for being within the philosophy of every indigenous people. Many of them were made to be used in just one particular moment; the materials were borrowed from the true owners of nature and the world.

Hence, they had to be returned once the activity ended, but as the fate of men would have it, they are still among us, maybe to remind us of what happened in that moment in an unknown and distant place; while others still retain the essence of the very same beings they represent.

They are conceptions of the world that are not shared, known, or understood by everyone, but they are now located jointly in the same space exposed to everyone's eyes: men, women, boys, girls, and teenagers, who might see them and ask: What is that? What was it used for? Who made it? Questions for which in most cases there are no answers.

For us, as indigenous peoples of the Vaupés, it was a pleasure to meet once again many of our ancestors at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. It was an encounter with mixed feelings and emotions: they are still present in this century, far from their true land, but perhaps, by being there, they fulfill the purpose of calling on new generations of indigenous people of the Vaupés given the importance to maintain their own culture alive, to relearn and re-appropriate what is ours, despite the new ways of life that are reaching us. The ancestors were always wise and sought to give us a life lesson in thousands of ways. They make humanity understand that it owns nothing, that we are here only in passing and our good living will always depend on how we behave towards other beings with whom we share this space. The earth, air, rivers, wind, stars, nature, the whole cosmos speaks to us and seeks to share its wisdom with us. The problem is that we no longer listen because of noise, because of other images that cloud our vision and understanding. Everything found in 'museums' has a life of its own, embodies the essence of a people and will live on as long as one of their descendants is still present in this world. What we should do is to try to understand these very diverse languages, so that we can express ourselves clearly about them, tell their story, importance, and function, as long as it is within the reach of human knowledge.

It is necessary to pause for a moment and reflect on the different phases that these collections have gone through when it came to their acquisition. Many of them arrived with certain information, some with more than others, recollecting information being the most arduous task that researchers have carried out. Currently, many of them have decided to spend long periods of time in certain communities to gather data, take photographs, carefully keep field diaries, and use other techniques that lead them to an understanding, according to the interpretations that they give to these objects and cultures.

In the particular case of the indigenous peoples of the upper Río Negro, especially the indigenous peoples of the Kotiria and Wira Poná (baptized and known in the literature as Guanano and Desana), there are still many very large gaps that in some way affect the narratives expressed in the exhibitions. For the indigenous peoples of the Vaupés, for the Eastern Tukano cultural complex, the distribution, cataloguing, and exhibition

of their objects inside museums has an impact on the life of and meanings they give to these representations of indigenous thought. The reason for this is that according to the ways of conceiving the world and the existing relations in this space in which men coexist – which refers to women as well – they are whole. They are a body linked to an origin, to a spiritual force that is condensed in the collections being exhibited, where they are explained in a fragmentary manner. Although it is true that cultural anthropology has made intensive efforts to study and interpret every aspect of these cultures, including their relations with other human beings, religious aspects, art, and differences among the very same cultures, many of these efforts are lost in the narratives in which the exhibitions rely. They are lost in the arrangement itself of objects within spaces assigned to them in the museums.

To understand and to feel a culture are two very different things, for it is very difficult to leave aside all subjectivity when it comes to interpretation; we are social and cultural beings, that live in very diverse and complex ways in each other's eyes.

It is worthwhile to learn about and to reflect on the journey that most collections have had to live through before arriving at their present location and how they were acquired. At first, meeting with objects that were elaborated by our ancestors, that bear their marks, in which the spirit is still alive and to feel their energies after more than a hundred years, to reencounter them again in a place so totally different from their place of origin, to know that they are still alive and exist there, reproaching us our absence or the lack of awareness on the part of new generations and the new ways of life learnt in the course of cultural contact, is something that cannot be described. Time comes to a halt, while voices we had never heard before and images we had never seen come to our minds. Part of the rainforest's heart lives in faraway places, far from our own, maybe hoping to return to their original homes. While at the same time they wish that the voices that speak about them should be fair about their true meaning. The spaces where they are being exhibited should not be so cold and distant. But that is precisely the big difference, for they represent structures of a different thought, which is why narratives and interactions with the same objects differ in significant ways.

It is difficult to speak of cultures and societies that are diverse, to try and explain them even more so. It is necessary to rethink the narratives that accompany these exhibitions and see how accurate they are with regard to the realities that still exist. For while many realities have disappeared, there are others that we still live with.

The task ahead of us is to join efforts to attain a true exchange of knowledge – a *dabucuri* of knowledge – opening doors that will allow us to cross those cultural barriers, languages, territorial limits, with the aim of raising awareness of the, truths and feelings that still exist. Maybe then museums will cease to be distant, alien, detached, and cold places, and will become centers of collective memory, circuits of knowledge and wisdom in large ancestral homes. We know that many peoples have disappeared, but we also

have to think about those of us that endured and must allow the words of living voices to circulate in these spaces. In this way we will achieve a way of learning that is more meaningful and rewarding, like the warmth that we feel when we hear the stories of our grandparents sitting around the fire...

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