Masked observers and mask collectors: entangled visions from the eighteenth-century Amazon

Neil Safier

To cite this article: Neil Safier (2017) Masked observers and mask collectors: entangled visions from the eighteenth-century Amazon, Colonial Latin American Review, 26:1, 104-130, DOI: 10.1080/10609164.2017.1287331

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10609164.2017.1287331

Published online: 07 Apr 2017.

Article views: 15

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Masked observers and mask collectors: entangled visions from the eighteenth-century Amazon

Neil Safier
Brown University

Across cultures and regions scattered around the globe, the material mask has been a locus of extraordinary interest to cultural outsiders and an object of artistic ingenuity by peoples and communities going back millennia. From the Japanese gigaku to the Kwakwaka’wakw hamatsa, from the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea to Renaissance (and present-day) Venice, facial coverings have frequently beguiled and bemused those who have observed them from afar. Whether worn as facial coverings or ported about during ritual ceremonies, the contested meanings of these sometimes metaphorical, sometimes anthropomorphic representations have given rise to polemics in anthropological literature regarding the power, or in some cases agency, inherent in these objects. As an attention to the material dimension of cultural practices has increased in recent years, the form and function of masks have come to be understood as intertwined. In the case of the Amazon River region, masks have been recognized as representing a world of ever-changing signification, a world in which even the most time-honored dyads—such as that between nature and culture—have been seen as mobile and fluid in character. They have become sites of analysis for sophisticated processes and the articulation of native ontologies, not just evidence of indigenous folk art traditions. But the metaphorical importance of masks in ethnohistorical literature—as items that represent or induce a certain transformation on the part of the wearer, or equally hide or ‘mask’ other features of the observed culture—can take us to a third kind of methodological innovation by validating alternative approaches to cultures of vision, observation, and participation in the early modern period. It is the suggestion of this essay that we can use the metaphorical power of the mask to bring observers and the observed in situations of cultural contact more closely together, fostering a productive dialogue in the present—and perhaps shedding light on less explicit, past dialogues as well—between materials and artifacts that have less traditionally been viewed within a single frame of analysis. Despite some of these objects not having the deep contextual backdrop or wealth of archival and textual evidence historians habitually require, scholars can nevertheless place uneven materials productively, if cautiously, side by side, engaging with them in the same analytical field of view and learning to draw some interpretive utility as a result.

But how do we achieve this? And what do we gain from the process? Recent ethnohistorical work in Amazonian history and anthropology has offered important models, helping to close the gap between two extremes: what native peoples in concert with anthropologists and archaeologists today are asserting about their past, on the one hand, and a one-sided historical representation drawn exclusively from European sources on the other, a perspective which in the words of one historian usually offered
only ‘impressionistic observations of outsiders’ (Roller 2015). An ethnohistorical approach where attention is paid to what we might call participatory representation can yield insights between these two extremes and provide perspectives on cultural encounters that have only scantily come into view in the past. A more effective model of representing historical processes that involve native peoples should include the use of evidentiary snippets from a host of sources, demonstrating the manner in which indigenous groups participated in their own representation and moving away from a historical model that limits native communities merely to ‘resisting’ European models, ‘retreating’ into spaces where they could more effectively control their own projects, or ‘disappearing’ at the effect of European violence and genocide. Participatory representation, even with scanty evidence, works alongside theories of indigenous ethnogenesis by insisting that native actors regularly functioned as participants in the identities that they created—complex and multifaceted identities that cannot be reduced to models of resistance alone. As John Monteiro has written, such new approaches create opportunities for ‘dialogue between processes highlighted in the study of contemporary communities and similar processes taking place during the colonial period’ (Monteiro 2012, 26).³

Until recently, the contours of Amazonian history appeared surprisingly flat in comparison to other Amazonian scholarly disciplines working on either side of the colonial period (c. 1500–1825). On one end, archaeological studies in the last twenty years have unearthed remarkable discoveries and developed sophisticated models for demonstrating abundant and dynamic populations living in the Amazon River basin during the Holocene period (the last 12,000 years), uprooting certain theories about the environmental poverty and cultural stagnation of the region.⁴ On the other end, starting with the pathbreaking mid-twentieth-century fieldwork of Claude Lévi-Strauss and continuing until today, anthropologists who work with local communities across the region have been amongst the most ardent proponents of innovative approaches to indigenous epistemologies that have gone unacknowledged for generations.⁵ Recent ethnohistorical works by Mark Harris, Heather Roller, and others have caused the pendulum to swing back toward innovative scholarly methodologies, acting in a salutary way to criticize earlier scholarship on early modern European representations of the non-European world. But in many instances, Amazonian history—so crucial to the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology—seemed often to have lost its way, emphasizing the empirical study of social and political change through a colonizer’s lens to the detriment of indigenous and Afro-descended peoples’ perspectives and their unique vantage points on the historical landscapes within which they actively participated.⁶

This is where masks—as metaphor and object—can assist us in our epistemological endeavors, if we allow the full range of their interpretive value to work on our behalf. As anthropologists and ethnohistorians have sought alternative ways of reconstructing encounters, not only giving voice to subaltern narratives but also employing material and other historical vestiges wherever possible, a whole sub-discipline of ‘representation’ literature has come under scrutiny. In analyzing situations of encounter, this literature has often fixed and reified certain conceptual categories that may in fact have been highly fluid, capable of being wielded by individuals being ‘represented’ as well as those doing the (oftentimes European) representing.⁷ Aggravating this situation, scholars have tended to analyze documents such as engravings and ethnographic portraits, textual and visual, using the same vocabularies that early modern Europeans provided,
disenfranchising other contemporaneous perceptions that may or may not have ever been written down, recorded in traditional media, or to which little attention has even been paid. If instead we expand our range of ethnohistorical materials and see them as a set of mobile, intersecting engagements—or entanglements—these objects and discourses can reveal deep particularities and provide a different vantage on forms of knowledge in visual and textual registers. By embracing an enmeshed and entangled history that neither ignores nor exalts the historical perspective of either group, this essay gently suggests that we should move away whenever possible from thinking about distinct ‘parties’ whose perspectives are clearly delineated and definable (even though our own language and historical categories make this task challenging, at best). While many scholarly traditions treating European colonial history have long emphasized the omniscience and omnipotence of imperial power and its often devastating ability to assert itself at a distance, recent approaches in both the history of science and indigenous studies have undermined the idea that knowledge and power are always so clearly allied, leading to a far more nuanced approach to how knowledge circulated across borders and how different actors generated distinct forms and matrices of representation.

One insight offered by archaeologists and anthropologists is that material culture can play a crucial role in offering scholars a less dualistic version of European and indigenous perspectives. When there are few written texts left behind in a situation of cultural encounter, which is often the case, the interpretive fluidity of objects that have tangible afterlives can be useful in understanding possible motives and behaviors for indigenous actors, especially when buttressed by contemporary anthropological evidence. The anthropologist Fernando Santos-Granero makes reference to an ‘occult life of things’ in Amazonia as a way of emphasizing the ability of objects to describe and define theories of indigenous personhood and agency through material culture. Meanwhile, a turn toward indigenous literacies in recent years has enabled scholars previously frustrated by a lack of textual evidence to gain new tools of insight into the ontologies of native communities. By including material objects as ‘documents’ that communicate a message and convey meaning through their physicality, a new generation of scholars has begun to take advantage of a toolkit previously reserved only for archaeologists, art historians, classicists, and medievalists.

Seeking to extend the methodological insights from archaeologists, on the one hand, and present-day anthropologists on the other, this essay takes the ‘occult life of things’ in the context of Amazonian populations in the eighteenth century and uses European representations and Amerindian objects in equal measure to shed light on ontologies of nature and observation in the South American tropics. By looking at characteristic objects through the prism of participatory representation—what particular items can tell us about how native peoples imagined themselves in tandem with European observers and their tales—this essay suggests new forms of dialogue and engagement between different actors in the historical arena. It is a manifesto for engaging indigenous terms, objects, and ideas. Another goal of this essay is to bridge the gap between anthropological and historical work by putting traditional historical source materials in dialogue with contemporary anthropological theory, as some historians have recently—and I would argue effectively and imaginatively—begun to do. A final, more specific goal is to reflect on the ways that rehabilitating masks as metaphor and as objects with social lives can
bring about multiple perspectives about indigenous and non-native entanglements in the early modern Americas.

**Masks of erudition**

In December of 1785, the banks of the Canaburí River—more specifically, the Amazonian village of Caldas—served as the backdrop for the arrival of one of the most ambitious scientific expeditions the Portuguese Crown had ever sponsored to an overseas colonial possession. Near the triple border of present-day Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela, the Brazilian-born and Portuguese-trained naturalist Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira (1756–1815) arrived as the leader of an expedition focused on natural-historical collection and ethnographic observation: the so-called *Viagem filosófica*, or philosophical voyage. This scientific project of imperial proportions—similar expeditions went contemporaneously to other Portuguese colonial territories—had been conceived during the administration of Martinho de Melo e Castro, Portugal’s minister of state and overseas affairs, who was keen to transform the distant possessions of the Crown into useful, effective spaces for the production of natural and industrial wealth. Over the course of nine years, the expedition traversed the widest extent of Portuguese America along the length of the Amazon River and its most significant tributaries, including the Negro, Branco, Mamoré and Guaporé rivers. The broader context of this expedition was two-fold: one was the Crown’s increasing interest in taking stock of its overseas territories through scientific expeditions, which were sent out to a host of possessions and territories of interest; the other was the dispute with Spain over the legitimate boundaries of Portugal’s South American colony, a dispute that led to a host of expeditions beginning early in the eighteenth century and reached its peak between 1754 and 1795.13 Accompanying Ferreira was a coterie of Amerindian rowers, guides, and interpreters, a botanist-gardener, and two artists, José Joaquim Freire and Joaquim José Codina. Freire and Codina had been trained specifically to accompany philosophical expeditions, and were part of a broader group of scientist-draughtsmen that would travel contemporaneously to Goa, Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, and Portuguese America to capture the visual dimensions of these colonial territories. They had been students within the ‘Casa de Risco,’ a Portuguese institution that was designed to capture the visual characteristics of these territories (Figueira de Faria 2001b).

One of Ferreira’s central goals—very much in line with and perhaps influenced by the global ambitions of the empire—was to create a generic representation of the *homo americanus* for his metropolitan readers, a textual equivalent of the seventeenth-century ethnographic atlases that contained detailed accounts of the physical and socio-cultural phenomena related to non-European populations worldwide. No doubt that part of this effort was meant to be achieved through the kinds of visual materials produced by Freire and Codina, some of which will be analyzed below. But the broader effort was through the written word. Using Spanish commentators and a host of other European observers, including the likes not only of Antonio de Ulloa and Pedro de Cieza de León, but also the Comte de Buffon, Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, George Anson, William Dampier, Adam Smith and William Robertson, Ferreira desired to show that there was, in all American natives, ‘a certain combination of characteristics and a certain air, so primitively theirs, that through it the characteristics of an “American
The description of native peoples of the Americas—and elsewhere—in the eighteenth century was part of an effort to describe the broader natural world, since the figure of the Amerindian was very much considered as a category of natural history along with plants, minerals, and animals to be found in non-European lands. And although the central conduit for communicating the characteristics of this ‘American figure’ would have been written texts, Ferreira also collected material objects to contextualize his textual descriptions. The reforms that restructured the University of Coimbra in 1772, and bringing with them a new orientation to the study of overseas territories, made quite explicit that visual images as well as textual descriptions stood lower on the hierarchy of empirical modalities than objects themselves:

No one thing can contribute more to the advancement of Natural History than the continued presence (a vista contínua) of the objects that comprise it, producing ideas that are more forceful and more truthful than the most exact descriptions and the most perfect figures: It is necessary and dignified to locate the Study of Nature at the center of the University, in order to make a Collection of Products that belong to the three Kingdoms of that same natural world. (cited in Fiolhais et al. 2013, 132)

Following this orientation and the instructions he received prior to his departure, Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira returned hundreds, even thousands, of specimens that were meant to supplement or supplant textual and graphic representations within the newly formed Cabinet of Natural History. They included ceramic vases, urns, and containers, elaborately engraved oars and clubs, feathered clothing and headdresses, spears, knives, and arrows, bowls and vessels, and musical instruments.

Ferreira very much saw himself as a neutral intermediary sitting at the intersection of several competing flows of objects, and he sought to channel those flows of material and information.\textsuperscript{15} ‘I am nothing more than a missionary of Natural History,’ he wrote. As a proselytizer of the natural historical world, Ferreira received animals, rocks, and other objects, items that would become transformed into names that in turn named their sender: ‘Everyone sends me an animal, someone else a rock, because in the Royal Cabinet of his majesty they tell them that [these items] will be named after them’ (Ferreira 1783). The process anointed him as a scribe that transformed this set of spiritual and material interactions into a letter sent to his superiors, archived in an imperial repository for later retrieval. Ferreira thus implicated the circulation of objects in a broader economy of exchange that revolved around reputation, imputing that the importance of a naming opportunity trumped the characteristics of the item itself. Unfortunately, many of these items were left in the king’s Cabinet of Natural History as silent testimonies to the
bounty they were expected to yield, packed in boxes that remained unopened until it was too late to receive much benefit from them, a point to which we will return.  

One class of object Ferreira did manage to send back was masks, and these masks have been amply studied and successfully preserved in collections in Portugal. Made of stitched or interlaced bask fiber—that is, plant material from the Amazon—these objects represent a unique grouping of just under 30 masks. They range in shape and size, sometimes sparsely decorated but occasionally quite elaborately adorned. In most cases we know little about their creators or the specific circumstances of their creation. They do, however, permit us to assess certain strategies of self-representation amongst indigenous groups of the eighteenth-century Amazon. For instance, one area of artistic elaboration seems to have been body parts—such as ears and eyes—that lead us to think in a sensorial vein, even if visual and aural impressions are often impossible to access historically. In offering a window onto the sensorial sphere—sight, sound, even taste and smell—the physical masks suggest its importance as a contact zone of its own. Ears of distinct shapes and sizes—some round, some elongated, some painted to look like human ears, others distinctly animal-like—adorn masks that are at times anthropomorphic and at times distinctly different. These masks are roughly the size of human heads, and we know that some were donned and used in ritual performance. Whether others were meant to be worn over human faces or merely ported about is unclear. Several masks include painted features over the eyes and nose that to a modern observer evoke eyeglasses; others impose painted human ears onto shapes that are round or square and that extend outward from the central part of the mask. One interpretive possibility would be that the use of masks in native performances could enable different experiences of sights and sounds, thus augmenting human sensation and justifying the artistic application of these sensorial symbols. But the meaning to those who made or wore them remains somewhat beyond our grasp, another topic to which we will return.

While physical masks employed by local Amazonian groups may have a special relevance for understanding cultures of indigenous self-representation in the eighteenth century, a topic discussed in the third section of this essay, they also, inherently, pose a separate question: the extent to which early modern European actors used figurative masks as they represented themselves and others in observing what the Abbé Pluche called in a European context ‘the spectacle of nature.’ Peeling back the rhetorical shades that often adorn natural historical writing in the early modern period—and taking a more critical stance toward the false modesty that frequently attaches itself to texts penned by European travelers—we may ask what masks of erudition Ferreira might have used to obscure or transform his own perceptions as he floated downstream in his covered cabin. What veils may have hung over his eighteenth-century eyes as he sought to make order of the natural world that surrounded him? During the period of Ferreira’s expedition, the natural-historical methodology promulgated in Portugal—and elsewhere in Europe—sought to draw a clear distinction between bookish knowledge and what certain reformist authors called the ‘art of observation.’ Most eighteenth-century naturalists followed a definition of observation similar to that proposed by Rafael Bluteau when defining ‘eyes,’ which for him obscured as much as they revealed. According to Bluteau, ‘eye derives from oculus, and oculus from occultus, either because the eye is hidden by the veil of the eyelids, or conversely, because by the light of our eyes nothing is obscured’ (Bluteau 1789). In short, these eighteenth-century observers preferred to privilege on-the-
spot observation and debunked what they considered to be the mindless repetition fostered by bookish study.

Born in Salvador da Bahia in 1756, Ferreira arrived in Coimbra in time to become ensconced in a new generation of students trained under the Italian naturalist Domenico Vandelli. The innovative ‘Curso Filosófico’ put forward by Vandelli in the 1770s was understood by many to be among the most important changes of Portuguese science to date, and it signaled a profound transformation in the training of naturalists to reconnoiter Portuguese territories overseas as well. Vandelli was in regular contact with naturalists throughout Europe as well as imperial agents stationed in key sites of Portugal’s ever-expanding eighteenth-century empire. Like Linnaeus before him, Vandelli institutionalized the practice of receiving correspondence and specimens from agents abroad, such as in the case of Mozambique, where the governor Pedro de Saldanha e Albuquerque sent him pictures of a green pigeon and a white parrot he had collected alongside other ethnographic images of moors and Kaffirs. Vandelli’s detailed instructions to all of his disciples emphasized how understanding the physical and moral characters of native populations was part of a larger project to put agricultural production and human labor to effective use, a larger project that included many Portuguese institutions such as the Typographica do Arco do Cego, a printshop that drew on the broadest expertise within and without the Portuguese empire and was both textual and visual in its orientation.

The museum, in Portugal as elsewhere, was also seen as a critical party to this broader set of institutional transformations. The Coimbra cabinet and the Ajuda natural-history museum were not only spaces for the entertainment of the royal family; they served as one of the prime repositories for new materials from overseas to be collected and displayed. These were the spaces where the spoils from Ferreira’s expedition would eventually be brought together, despite many of the objects remaining sealed in crates and boxes for lack of an elaborated program to publish the results of the expedition. Vandelli likened these museums to an ‘open book, in which the observer instructs himself easily and with pleasure, [and in which] memory is aided by the eyes, and attention is fixed through the pleasure of sight’ (Vandelli, in Brigloa 2003, 589). The all-powerful minister Marquês de Pombal created for this very purpose the Faculty of Natural Sciences and the Cabinet of Natural History at Coimbra, whose new buildings would eventually become filled with birds and butterflies, two-headed cats and alligators, turtles, snakes, corals, shells, and fossils, many of which came in directly from Portugal’s overseas possessions, including Brazil (Carvalho 1987, 52–53).

But how would the kinds of materials the museum contained affect the formation of travelers who would fill the museum with new objects? The kinds of bookish metaphors employed by Vandelli were certainly appropriate for a museum that showcased the acquisitive power of the empire at home, but visual practices were emphasized in new instructions for travelers as well. For Vandelli, what he called the ‘pleasure of sight’ aided memory and fixed the attention of observers. Objects were to be classified into two separate classes: the first were those that could be collected, ‘like all plants with their flowers, minerals removed from their place of birth, and animals that can be transported; […] the second] are those objects that cannot be transported, such as villages, mountains, rivers, springs, large trees, ferocious animals, and even some plants with their flowers, for fear of not being able to conserve them perfectly. These should all be drawn (debuxados), and if possible, illustrated with all due precision” (Vandelli 2008, 93). José Antonio de Sá, author of
an important guidebook for instructing Portuguese travelers in the second half of the eighteenth century, encouraged the use of sketching and painting to capture those objects that ‘narration was not capable of describing […] with clarity’ (cited in Raminelli 2001, 974). These works emphasized the way in which didactic texts and new forms of graphic technologies were adapting themselves to a renewed emphasis on portability, which in turn relied on material supports that enabled note-taking and other forms of on-the-move inscription. 23 In one of the most influential Portuguese instruction manuals, Sá laid emphasis on the qualities of the traveler, and emphasized characteristics of the traveler’s ‘soul’: ‘With respect to the character [dotes] of the Soul, it should be agile, perspicacious, docile, [and] capable of insinuating itself into the desires of the peoples and nations [gentes] of whom [the traveler] must research and learn an infinite number of things’ (Sá 1783, 46). This idea of a concert or connection between the souls of the European traveler and his indigenous counterparts is particularly relevant for Ferreira since his own form of ethnographic description insisted upon a clear distinction between those who allowed ‘superstition’ and ‘enthusiasm’ to enter their assessments of the natural world and a European ontological stance that purported to refute anything that entered without empirically derived evidence. 24

The range of these principles and practices was very much in evidence in Ferreira’s prose accounts, which highlighted his engagement with diverse local populations and landscapes. His initial exploration took place along the upper and lower arms of the Rio Negro, which he divided textually into thirteen segments or ‘participações’ that chronicled his observations in extended reports to the captaincy’s governor. The accounts of these ‘participações’ ranged from historical treatises on the foundation and maintenance of towns to the articulation of new borders and urban expansion projects during a moment of considerable growth in Portuguese cities along the tributaries of the Amazon (Araujo 1998). His writings included ‘population maps’ [mapas de população] that enumerated the indigenous and other residents of villages to which Ferreira traveled as well as remarks on the kinds of natural products (including indigo, hemp, and fruit trees) that could be used to power the colonial and metropolitan economies. 25

Alongside these ‘participações,’ Ferreira’s visual team produced an elaborate series of water-colors that accompanied the texts from his ‘Philosophical Voyage.’ Many portrayed careful depictions of the passing riverbanks in landscape perspective, including formations of villages as well as peculiar natural settings such as waterfalls and fluvial intersections. Other visual portraits functioned as highly particularized taxonomic views of indigenous populations, identifying the cultural and anatomical features of Amerindian groups in ways that could be understood as creating an encyclopedia of Amazonian behavior and customs (Figure 1) (Raminelli 2001, 969–92). Individuals from the group known as the Juripixunas, to whom we will return below, were portrayed as exemplars of an eccentric practice of facial scarification. In the report that accompanied this figure, Ferreira described how they poked their faces with the needles of the pupunha palm and inserted the ashes from its burnt leaves inside their open wounds. This was the aspect that was highlighted in the taxonomic views made by Ferreira’s artists as well. Like most ethnographic portraits, they served to freeze in time and space a single cultural characteristic of this group, representing little if at all the range of interactions he or the Portuguese had with them. The Brazilian historian Ronald Raminelli has emphasized that one of Ferreira’s ethnographic modes focused largely on groups that according to Ferreira had
become increasingly ‘deformed’ over time. The category ‘monstrous through artifice’ that Ferreira employed included features that were thought to be unnatural: ‘In this group, the Cambebas or Omaguas deformed their heads, making them appear to be a miter; the Uerrequenas [...] scraped the extremities of their ears; the Miranhas possessed perforated bellies …’ (Raminelli 1997, 167). In many ways, this discourse echoes the earliest expectation by European explorers that Amerindians would be monstrous or deformed. As Christopher Columbus wrote following his arrival in the Caribbean, ‘Until now I have not found any monstrous men in these islands, as many had thought’ (cited in Mancall 2011, 194). But unlike Columbus, Ferreira seems to have found what others were looking for, and he was unabashed about inserting these and other observations about such ‘deformities’ into his text.

Figure 1. Facial scarification by the Jurupixuna was only one element that was portrayed by artists that accompanied Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira during his ‘Philosophical Voyage’ to the Amazon River region (1783–1792). These artists were keen to portray technologies and artifacts that placed Amazonian groups into a broader hierarchy of the ‘American Indian,’ comparable across geopolitical lines with their fellow autochthones to the north and south. Coleção Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Rituals such as those understood to be ‘deformative’ by Ferreira had been long observed in the Cambeba or Omagua Indians, who were associated since early in the eighteenth century with the custom of flattening their childrens’ foreheads at birth (Figures 2 and 3). In the text that accompanied the second image (Figure 3), Ferreira explained that he had visited with ‘the last member of this nation who still has the flattened forehead,’ and that this interaction had yielded a host of useful information regarding the rites and ceremonies of the Cambebas. This figure was based on interactions Ferreira had had with the portrayed individual, an indigenous man named Dionisio da Cruz. Dionisio’s right hand held a long flat wooden object called a ‘palheta,’ which Ferreira had asked his sketch-artist to portray, and which was used to launch arrows, something Dionisio apparently demonstrated to Ferreira during their exchange. Of this image, Ferreira wrote in his report:

The entire image is painted according to nature [pintado ao natural]; without any difference at all other than the form of the Indian’s dress, which [the sketch-artist Freire] explained to

---

**Figure 2.** An image of a member of the Cambebas, or Omaguas, tribe in the central Amazon, known for the manner in which they compressed the foreheads of their youth. Coleção Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
me was in the manner in which he had copied it. In this, as well as everything else that [the Indian] said, I did nothing more than faithfully write and organize the information [he had provided to me]. (Ferreira 1974)

Ferreira’s description of this portrait as having been painted ‘according to nature,’ and his explanation that he did ‘nothing more than faithfully write and organize’ the information as portrayed by Dionisio, belies the very staged aspect of many of his iconographic presentations. The so-called ‘Casa de Risco,’ a more humble Portuguese equivalent of the

Figure 3. The portrayal of Dionisio da Cruz, a member of the Cambebas tribe, is shown against a sparse visual backdrop that is typical of the stylized portrayals of the Portuguese Casa de Risco. The tools he wielded were meant to place the entire Cambebas group within a hierarchy of ‘American industry’ that coincided with the Portuguese Crown’s own interest in the technical and agro-industrial dimensions of their overseas dominions. Coleção Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Parisian École des Beaux Arts, transformed simpler images into more complex tableaux, embellished in order to portray aspects of the Amazonian landscape that could not be drawn in situ. The artists were particularly attentive to the artifacts with which the different groups surrounded themselves, often fabricated from forest products, such as an image demonstrating the various tools and instruments for creating and inhaling the hallucinogenic paricá, as well as the heads of two Tukano Indians shown in action. Indeed, Ferreira was keen on collecting these objects and descriptions in order eventually to create a ‘History of American Industry,’ a text that would ‘show the Amerindian [americano] in all of the diverse situations to which Nature has exposed him, to follow his steps in the different degrees of sociability …’ (Ferreira 1974, 228). This work, if genuinely contemplated, was never completed. Nevertheless, the Brazilian historian Raminelli has argued that the nomenclature and taxonomic representations of Ferreira’s work functioned as a ‘rich and multifaceted mirror, in which Europe was able to project itself as the driving force behind a planetary expansion’ (Raminelli 2001, 991). According to Raminelli, the images from Ferreira’s ‘philosophical voyage’ transformed Amazonian nature into an ‘object to be maintained and exploited’ for agricultural and commercial ends. There was, of course, a highly instrumental relationship between networks of imperial power and the production of knowledge in a colonial context that underlies the broader relationship between colonialism and scientific representation. However, the dominant imperial visuality that sought to capture all aspects of the natural world and portray them syllogistically for an eighteenth-century audience was also subject to other powerful dynamics that are opaque to us today. To glean the perspectives of indigenous interlocutors, we turn now to their masks.

**Unmasking the Jurupixuna**

In the previous section, we examined three distinctive aspects—or layers—of Portuguese engagement with the natural world in the eighteenth century, focusing on the Crown’s interest in texts, images, and objects as part of a renewed emphasis on collecting and codifying the empire’s vast expanse. What is clear from this brief analysis is that the Portuguese—like other European powers—deployed extensive resources toward the production of visual imagery in addition to written records, all the while acknowledging that museums and their agents in the field needed to focus increasingly on the collection of objects. By looking at an empire’s strategies through a particular expedition, we see an ever-shifting hierarchy—infrequently made explicit—about what matters in the collection and registration of ethnographic and natural historical materials. There was also little sense of interrelation amongst the different media—with the exception of the occasional reference to a particular mask or sketch—but it is clear that objects continued to play a critical role at the intersection of scientific practice and imperial management. What is less clear is the kind of explicit role museums and physical repositories could play as functional archives, which might have unified these different media as imperial agents sought to apply their collected—and collective—knowledge. In the case of the Portuguese, the failure to correlate the objects with the images, or the objects with their texts, led to an incoherence which few eighteenth-century natural historical practitioners would have advocated, as well as the ultimate dispersal of much potentially useful information (Simon 1983). This was not the age of the wunderkammer, where curious arrangements
were encouraged; it was the age of the encyclopedia, attempting to merge function and utility at every turn.

With these concerns in mind, let us return to December of 1785. Ferreira’s arrival to the Canaburí River, land of the Jurupixunas, had brought his entire entourage into contact with a native community described by Ferreira as ‘humble Indians who were subject to the white [Europeans].’ Other indigenous groups referred to them as Jurupixunas because of the ritual scarification they practiced in adolescence. In the ‘lingua geral,’ or Tupi-based language that was a lingua franca among the native communities of eighteenth-century Brazil, ‘Juru’ meant ‘mouth’ and ‘pixuna’ meant ‘black.’ In Ferreira’s first encounter with the Jurupixunas, he described them not in terms of their relationship to Portuguese colonial culture, nor in terms of the other indigenous groups with which they had contact, but rather with reference to a performance he had witnessed while traveling through their territory. ‘I observed as much as I might desire in order to understand the form and motivation of the dances I had seen,’ he wrote in the report he penned following his visit, ‘and from what I understood of them, I am able to provide the following explanation’ (Ferreira 1974, 44).

Ferreira’s explanation focused on the physical accoutrements of the natives’ dramatic display as well as his own imagined notions of what he thought he was seeing. At the outset, he was simply intrigued by the way the Jurupixuna constructed elaborate facial coverings for use in their rituals, benefiting from colored dyes and other natural fabrics to build physical masks that covered the facial scars described previously, and for which they were widely known. Based on an analysis of the masks’ variegated components by the ethnographic museums where they are now held, the Jurupixuna would have applied ochre, urucum (also known as anatto plant), and paste from the seeds of the carajuru plant (*Arrabidaea chica*) in order to construct these masks, carefully working the natural fabrics so that they would fit comfortably on the heads of the wearers. But Ferreira was also intent on classifying the animals to which the masks corresponded, and the descriptive dissonance between some of the masks and Ferreira’s preconceived notions is striking. Certain of the masks appeared to Ferreira as symbolic forms that were at least to some degree appropriate to the particular rites they were performing: large fish-heads were displayed when the rivers’ offerings had been particularly generous, and the head of a ‘porco-do-mato,’ or collared peccary, made its appearance when the hunt had gone smoothly. But other less discernible shapes passed before his eyes as well, described by Ferreira as ‘mere caprices of their enthusiasm, without a real object to which [they] might correspond’ (Figure 4) (Ferreira, 1974). These descriptions led to a clear instance where the categorizing impulse clashed with what was potentially a much more fluid manner of understanding the nature of the human-animal relations being experienced and performed.

Once decorated with tints and colors, the Jurupixuna were ready to deploy these objects for their performative use. During Ferreira’s visit, the Jurupixuna began a dance that transfixed his gaze and provided an opportunity for the Portuguese naturalist to describe what he had seen through the ethnographic filters of his own late-eighteenth-century dramatic imaginary:

The dance [we observed] was a bona fide [theatrical] scene, in which the military campaigns of the Indians were represented as if one were watching the departure of the Army [and] its
march toward the land of [the Jurupixunas’] enemies. [One can see] the precautions they take as they build their camp, the astute manner in which they place some divisions in ambush, the way they surprise their enemy, the tumult and ferociousness of the combat, [and] the triumph of their victories. […] The actors who appear onstage race to occupy their posts with such ardor and such enthusiasm, with so many gestures and facial expressions […] that to us Europeans who were observing them it was difficult to believe that what we were seeing was merely a dress rehearsal and not actual combat. (Ferreira 1974, 42)

Ferreira’s recounting of the sylvan theatrics of the Jurupixuna was, to the eyes and ears of his Portuguese superiors who may have been reading his account back in Lisbon, also a form of theatricality: a representation of his own observational skills and the limits inherent in European perception at the fluid margins of eighteenth-century South America. Although he tempted his readers into believing that the Jurupixunas may have been undertaking a militaristic crusade, Ferreira ultimately recognized that the dance, far from being merely a form of entertainment, also performed a very important social function for the Jurupixuna, and that it ‘involved every aspect of [their] public and private life.’ Indeed, in the extended version of his report, Ferreira borrowed William Robertson’s language to explain that dances were ‘the favorite passion of the savages (selvagens) of this part of the globe,’ despite the fact that they mostly lived in a
state of ‘languidness and indolence (de languidez e de indolencia)’ (Ferreira 1888, 13–14). Dancing was a political and a bellicose act at the same time: beyond allowing them to ‘put into action [their] active natural faculties,’ Ferreira also stated that ‘if it were necessary for two villages to come to an agreement, dancing is how ambassadors would present themselves […] if war were declared on an enemy, a different dance is what would begin to express the resentment and vengeance that was contemplated’ (Ferreira 1974, 14). For Ferreira, these actions were evidence that the socio-cultural value of the dance was dramatically different than what might have appeared at first glance. So how do we incorporate Ferreira’s observations into a more participatory representation of what was taking place? What role can we attribute to the masks and their performers from the other side of the peephole?

Ferreira had made clear that European observers frequently had a challenging time understanding the contours of native knowledge, and often did an about-face on their own interpretations when their interests were at stake. In a discussion of the Manaos tribes in his Viagem Filosófica, Ferreira railed against the idea—frequently articulated from the earliest moments of European observation in the Americas, it should be said—that the thoughts of indigenous communities were exclusively inspired by the devil. ‘It is true that among the diverse principles of the religion that some of them [the Indians] profess, one sustains that there are gods who act as authors of the evils that afflict the human species,’ Ferreira wrote. But he insisted that missionaries exceeded their authority by treating as suspect ‘everything that [the Indians] do or speak,’ seeing in them only the work of the devil (Ferreira 1888, 9). But when they decided to accept Christian doctrine, these missionaries imbued them with the ability to learn and think and generate ideas: ‘from that point forward, they attribute to them ideas that they are capable of acquiring, just like other humans’ (Ferreira 1888, 9).

As present-day observers far removed from the world of Ferreira and his eighteenth-century companions, the observations and musings he provided on the ritual performances of the Jurupixuna may seem rather one-sided. Today, it may feel less than satisfying to read his account unfiltered by the kinds of cultural preoccupations—and native engagement—that Monteiro has pointed out in an earlier critique of Ferreira’s work.28 Peering through the early modern eyes of an ethnographic observer can provide crucial insights into how Europeans and Amerindians came to understand—and misunderstand—one another in the eighteenth-century Amazon, but looking at these observations in a broader methodological frame may yield even greater prizes. So how?

In the first instance, Ferreira’s observations bring us closer to the work of anthropologists working with present-day communities who have seen in Amazonian masks the ‘awakening’ of a ‘system of transformations that can hide, reveal, or create new ritual characters’ (Barcelos Neto 2004, 52). In Aristóteles Barcelos Neto’s reading of masks from the Wauja communities of the Upper Xingú (southern region of the Amazon River basin), masks themselves serve as actors in a transformational drama, one that goes through ‘multiple ontological stages’ just as theatrical performances follow a clear pathway through the various ‘acts’ that comprise them. In the cases that Barcelos Neto describes, masks move between different instantiations, which may refer to animals, monsters, artifacts, spirits, cultural heroes, or shamans—or a combination of several. Barcelos Neto argues that the material elements that are apparent to the outside observer in the masks of the Wauja are far more effective at showing transformation as an ontological notion—one that
drives to the heart of Amazonian knowledge systems—than anything verbal in their rituals, an indication of the central importance of accessing the multiple states of Amerindian consciousness and culture through the objects and clothing that form part of the Waujas’ ritual activities.29

While the location of present-day Wauja communities (close to the border between southwestern Brazil and Bolivia) is geographically quite distant from the region visited by Ferreira in describing the Jurupixuna (in the northwestern region of Amazonia, west of present-day Manaus and north of the Japurá river), there is a certain similarity between the two groups in the central role that masks, facial scarification, and artistic design have played in their cultural lives. Their physicality—if we are open to perspectives like those provided to us by contemporary anthropologists—can be seen as effective in creating an alternative space for understanding how forms of representation slide fluidly between one another, something toward which historians have traditionally been less inclined. This space takes us away from the all-too-rigid analytical dichotomy between observer and observed in the context of naturalists or artists and those who populated New World landscapes they were depicting for European eyes. For Ferreira, his observations of the Jurupixuna and other Amazonian groups bore witness to a clear sense of division between his own background and expertise—as a representative of a European scientific tradition based on observation and empirical fact—and the practices revealed by the Jurupixuna, based (from Ferreira’s perspective) upon the explanation of ‘mysteries’ and ‘marvels’ by native ‘sorcerers’ whose near-omnipotent influence on native daily life extended from healing plagues to predicting the future (Ferreira 1974, 44).

The central idea here—highly relevant for the notion of entangled trajectories that this essay seeks to convey—is that European naturalists and those who accompanied them may have been implicated in the fluid ontologies—that is, the subjective ordering of experience—that were proposed by the objects which the Jurupixuna and other indigenous groups wore, and through which they themselves observed those individuals who purported to observe and describe them. For the Jurupixuna, elaborate facial painting—as shown in this image from Ferreira’s Viagem Filosófica, depicting a Jurupixuna Indian with facial design and a Jaguar cloak—was likely in close dialogue with the material and symbolic vestments they wore that derived from animals, demonstrating the close correlation that existed between native and animal life in the daily practices of the Jurupixuna (Figure 5). Indeed, in this depiction, the Jurupixuna’s eyes seem woven into the visual tapestry that includes the facial painting and the pelt itself, both of whose designs seem to elide together with the other.30 Of course, we are clearly looking at a European representation on the surface. But we may be drawn into a different modality if we metaphorically squint our own eyes and see the elements within this frame as a coherent unit. One possible analytical frame, following the claim articulated above, would be to see the sketch-artist as being influenced here by an indigenous ontology that seeks to blur the boundaries between the animal and the human, and possibly reflecting in his art as much an indigenous understanding of this division (or lack thereof) as the practice and graphic rhetoric of the Portuguese Casa de Risco.

This idea that European observers of Amerindian realities were living far more deeply within the socio-cultural worlds of their hosts than they imagined—and thus subject to the ontological realities of their environment with increasing force as their engagement and interaction progressed—has been transformational in recent anthropological studies,
and merits a methodological detour. For instance, the work of anthropologists such as Barcelos Neto and Carlos Fausto on masks in South American indigenous culture follows a broader move within anthropology that has sought to uncover how Amerindians made—or, indeed, more frequently failed to make—rigid distinctions between peoples, animals, and spirits within their own cosmology. Anthropologists and archaeologists have long recognized the social character of relations between people, objects, and natural and supernatural environments, as María Nieves Zedeño has made clear (2009, 407–17), but many scholars have not taken the further step of insisting that these relationships can be used as analytical tools to help in understanding the ordering of social relations. One proponent of such an interpretive view is the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who has focused on

... the numerous references in Amazonian ethnography to an indigenous theory by which the manner in which humans see animals and other subjects that populate the universe—gods, spirits, the dead, meteorological phenomena, vegetable, sometimes even objects and

![Figure 5. A Jurupixuna man dressed in a jaguar cloak and adorned with an elaborate facial design. Coleção Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.](image)
artefacts—is profoundly different than the manner by which these same beings see themselves or see their beholders. (Viveiros de Castro 1996, 116–17)

Although Viveiros de Castro’s theories have accrued criticism even as they gain adherents in and outside of the anthropological sphere, he continues to emphasize the transformative operations in this Amazonian world, whereby ‘the manifested form of each species is a mere envelope which hides an internal human form, normally visible only to the eyes of the particular species or to certain trans-species beings, such as shamans.’ Peter Rivière called this universe proposed by Amazonian ontologies a ‘highly transformational world,’ where spirits, the dead, and shamans assume animal forms but more broadly there exists a fluidity between different instantiations of being, not only within the world of myths but also in the active vision of Amazonian populations (Rivière 1994, 256). All of these theories have laid the groundwork for understanding historical materials such as texts and images as equally subject to being understood in a co-produced, entangled manner.

If we allow European-produced images of masks and facial paintings to speak of relationships that are only hinted at in the objects themselves, as we apply the methodologies discussed above, we begin to develop an understanding of how the masks may have molded not only the spirits of their wearers but those they observed as well. Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivism, like Rivière’s own assessments of Amazonian thought more generally, can help us to see ‘permanence, eternity, and immortality’ as descriptors that relate as much to the material presence of masks and objects employed by the Jurupixuna to ‘view’ the observers around them as to the conceptual vocabularies themselves. These methodologies allow us to see Amazonian theories and transformative processes as ‘hard’ and reciprocal realities, affecting the dynamics of interactions equally within a European scientific treatise as within a Jurupixuna ceremonial dance. How might we view and understand Ferreira, for instance, if we allowed for the possibility that his own writings were no less subject to the ‘enthusiasm’ which he ascribed solely to the medicine man or the movements of the dancing Jurupixuna? Can we use Ferreira’s own analysis of the passionate dances of these native Amazonians and see in his categories a key to his own passions, an analogue to those he claims to have observed?

These are, of course, largely open-ended questions, since the correspondence between objects whose purpose or meaning we do not clearly understand and early modern ways of apprehending cultural difference is not straightforward. The aim here is not to provide new and detailed evidence for this relationship based on archival research, nor is it necessarily merely to ask more methodological questions. Rather, it is to suggest a backdrop that may allow for the development of a new set of interactions between emerging forms of evidence. If we begin by ascribing to objects like Amazonian masks some of the characteristics that their present-day wearers deem them to have had, those characteristics might help us to understand the entangled ontologies of the early modern period and re-narrate histories of different populations who inhabited the Amazon. As Fernando Santos-Granero and Stephen Hugh-Jones have written, objects have long been given short shrift in analyses of Amerindian cosmology since they were often seen as vestiges of an antiquated method—no longer in fashion—of writing Amazonian anthropology (Santos-Granero 2009). One of the characteristics of the ‘occult life of things’ as proposed by Santos-Granero is the invisibility to lay people of the \textit{personas} of objects: their ‘animic’
character and their interaction with other social beings, including plants, animals, and spirits. Exploring the possible layering of that subjective experience within the early modern world requires us to ask how that history might be rewritten if we allowed certain objects—inanimate or not—to speak.

**Conclusion: evidentiary bridges between silence and meaning**

If we can claim to better understand some of the aspects of the cultural framework through which Ferreira was assessing the objects of his eighteenth-century vision, we have less to say about how native Amazonians understood the foreigners in their midst. The veils that clouded or clarified the interpretations they brought to understanding the outsiders that regarded them are frequently inscrutable. When we ask, then, how Ferreira was seen by the masks—and their wearers—that stared back at him, there is little that leaps quickly to the evidentiary fore to respond in a satisfying manner. While anthropological research and oral traditions can offer insights into how present-day indigenous groups may understand such encounters, little evidence has remained from other historical sources to corroborate these findings. As discussed earlier, on-the-ground interactions between European agents and indigenous actors can emerge sporadically in the archival record, as Roller’s work has meaningfully demonstrated, while gaps and inconsistencies in Europeans’ accounts of their native informants reveal spaces that could show other kinds of proactive engagement on the part of local populations. And anthropologists and historians are increasingly finding that dialogues between indigenous and scholarly communities function to bridge gaps, or at least begin this process. But silences and absences remain frequent participants in this ongoing dialogue. They represent opportunities for meaningful conversations to take place: to experiment, explore, and engage new sources and new kinds of data. They offer the chance to examine how those who have been thought to be silent participants in the process of their own representation actually may have created objects and materials that provide insight into their own participatory representation. Sometimes, however, the silences and absences are just perplexing, if potentially significant, as are the sounds and sights of a dance or a masquerade.

The masks that now comprise the ethnographic section of the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa and a portion of the Museu e Laboratório Antropológico of the University of Coimbra can serve as a bridge between these two worlds of silence and meaning, gently pressing them closer together as they oscillate between representational fields. These objects may seem inert within the static cases of the anthropological museum, but they were inhabited by individuals whose passionate energies—as reported by Ferreira and others as well—gave meaning to the forest matter molded into new forms. Ferreira spoke pejoratively of many aspects of the native character—‘those who are not used to communicating their feelings frankly are naturally suspicious, and will open their heart to no one, will trust no one…’32—but the dancing and masquerading seemed to move into a realm that went beyond suspicion. Despite this higher level of truth which was communicated to Ferreira by their dances and designs, he incessantly portrayed the Amerindians he met as a silent and subdued people: ‘Accustomed to think very little, they [also] speak very little’ (Rodrigues Ferreira, cited in Mello Moraes 1858, 2:270).

The masks of the Jurupixuna, like the figurative masks or veils of Ferreira’s education and training, represented the coming together of different forms of knowledge: material
and visual knowledge for the native Brazilians who wore them, and textual knowledge for the Europeans who wrote them representationally into the archival record. These forms of knowledge were occasionally conjoined but then just as frequently sundered apart, in different configurations, in different settings, and at different times, speaking unevenly if intriguingly about the pasts they individually or collectively represented. They were occasionally stored in museums and crates, but often left to languish in even more interstitial spaces. The entangled visions of eighteenth-century Amazonia presented in this essay were also mediated largely through physical eyes and their artistic representation. In the visual culture of the Jurupixuna, eyes played an important role, as evidenced by the painted eyes on their facial coverings and the eyeholes through which the performing Jurupixunas observed their dancing compatriots (Figure 6). Freire and Codina, on the

Figure 6. According to a recent catalog, Memórias da Amazonia (Universidade de Coimbra; Museu e Laboratório Antropológico, 1994), this mask was the one that Ferreira referred to as a ‘mere caprice of the [Jurupixuna’s] enthusiasm, without a real object to which it might correspond.’ Note the artistic emphasis on the eyes and ears, although the red dye may have been added later. Courtesy of the Museu da Ciência da Universidade de Coimbra.
other hand, represented those same indigenous eyes as small, empty, and without vigor, conforming to a broader philosophical outlook that was confirmed by Ferreira’s prose, itself reliant on a series of contemporary European travelers who wrote about the relationship between the native eye and the Amerindian soul.33 While Europeans denigrated Amerindian intelligence by portraying their eyes as small, suggesting in turn that their souls were likewise simple, the material resonance of Amazonian cultures in the present offers a useful counterpoint. An examination of some of the artifacts collected from the Ferreira expedition—as well as several that have a distinct but not wholly unrelated provenance—yields an extraordinary range of representations. By bringing masks and their graphic representations into conversation with a range of ethnographic meaning as proposed by anthropologists and archaeologists, and by comparing the activities described by Ferreira with similar cultural practices from other Amazonian groups, we can better understand the transformations taking place not only in indigenous masks, but in the activities of those who engaged with them.

The silences that permeate the history of Ferreira’s voyage as a whole beg us to see a more explicit connection between the material world of Amerindian objects and the silent world of Ferreira’s expedition. As the nineteenth-century Brazilian literary scholar Silvio Romero wrote, ‘Ferreira was not a man who was misunderstood by his age […] he was a man who was ignored by his age’ (Romero 1888, 384). Because of the inability of his colleagues at the Portuguese museums in the early nineteenth century to adequately systematize and describe the accumulated archives created by his voyage, little if anything managed to get communicated to anyone beyond an extremely narrow band of government officials. For Romero, it was an impossible task to conduct a ‘complete historical rehabilitation’ of this voyage:

[Ferreira] was a victim of his medium and today is merely a bibliographical curiosity. There is immense injustice in this fact, but history does not live by justice alone. It also enjoys felicity, force, and victory. What does not enter into general circulation of the social organism, as a live element, is forgotten and eliminated. (Romero 1888, 384)

The masks and other objects sent by Ferreira to adorn a king’s collection ended up serving as the unconscious symbol of an expedition that failed in one of its central missions: to advance the study of natural history through the accumulated texts, objects, and images that the museum contained. Ferreira’s expedition and the challenges of its communication to a broader scientific world ultimately served a questionable role in the history of European natural history, on the one hand, and the history of native peoples, on the other. Indigenous history, ‘forgotten and eliminated’ like so many of Ferreira’s papers, may yet be tied up in the masks and other objects that today form the pride of so many Portuguese (and European) museums. But they have yet to be asked to speak on their own behalf or in concert with other descriptive materials for whose creation they served as catalyst centuries ago.34

Although these analyses are merely incipient explorations in a different kind of entangled history told through the lens of historical source materials, material objects, and anthropological fieldwork, it seems clear that the forms of observation carried out by all of these actors are at the very least interrelated, if not deeply imbricated. We should continue to look for ways that native communities, through their historical and present-day objects, participate in their own representation, as a counterpart to
ethnographic accounts that continue to emerge from the scouring and scrubbing of traditional textual sources. More examples from Amazonia and beyond are undoubtedly required to assert with confidence the relevance of native cosmological practices for the observation and collecting practices of early modern European naturalists as well. But there is no question that turning the instruments of observation around—and finding instances of participatory representation through silences and ellipses—might yet yield some faint sounds and stimulating effects, barely audible but nevertheless present and revelatory amidst the dense foliage of the early modern Amazon.

Notes
1. For an especially illuminating account of the relationship between ontological, formal, and pragmatic analyses of masks in the Amerindian tradition, see Fausto 2011.
2. Unsurprisingly, in the English language, the definition of a mask as a 'representation (usually carved or sculpted) of a human face or animal head, originally made for religious or ceremonial purposes but later often produced simply as a decorative artefact,' dates from a collection of works related to circumnavigations published in the 1790s but referring to voyages in the 1760s. See 'Mask' in Oxford English Dictionary 2000.
3. The late Brazilian ethnohistorian, Monteiro, effectively historicizes the changes that have taken place in indigenous history and anthropology over the course of the last half-century, with particular reference to the contributions of Florestan Fernandes, Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, among others. Pointing toward the present moment when ethnohistorical materials are brought into contact with anthropological fieldwork related to present-day indigenous communities, Monteiro insists that indigenous groups did not have to reject the foreign in order to maintain their own identity, fleeing to neutral spaces away from the colonial presence, but rather had to adapt—'capture and domesticate'—the symbols, objects, and discourses of their enemies to maintain and advance their own identities. For an incisive article discussing representation and ontology in the context of indigenous artifacts and art, see Dean 2014.
4. For a broad introduction to this burgeoning scholarship, see Heckenberger et al. 2008, and Erickson 2008.
5. This Amazonian literature is vast, but important recent works that take part in these debates include Viveiros de Castro 2013, Descola 2013, and Kohn 2013.
6. Fortunately, two recent ethnohistorical works related to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Amazon demonstrate innovative strategies for bringing new kinds of creative source materials to bear on that history. See Harris 2010, and Roller 2015.
7. This literature is vast, but for representative examples see Greenblatt 1992, and Pratt 1992, which are still routinely cited.
9. See, most recently, Matt Crawford’s exemplary study of cinchona bark as a case of the ‘entanglement of science and empire’ where the dynamics between naturalists and bureaucrats is in no way straightforward or derivative (2016). See also Safier 2008, introduction.
10. This is not to deny the idea that cultural practices might have changed over time, which they certainly did, but rather to give credence and credibility to perspectives that have been brought forward by native communities who have passed along crucial cultural knowledge through oral and embodied practices. See Monteiro (2012) for one scholar’s explanation of why this is so necessary.
11. This literature is broad and growing, but a good starting point is Cummins and Rappaport 2011. Other recent work pushing the boundary on how to define indigenous intellectual engagement includes Ramos and Yannakakis 2014. On the ontological turn in contemporary anthropology, see Venkatesen 2010.
12. Marcy Norton’s recent essay in the *American Historical Review* (2015) is a salutary example of such recent efforts by historians to revisit fundamental structural categories through which anthropologists have sought to define and organize many of their actors—and their discipline’s—conceptual categories. See also Descola 2013, Kohn 2013, and Viveiros de Castro 2014.

13. For a recent discussion of borders in the Iberian context, see Herzog 2015. The classic work on the eighteenth-century border conflicts between Spain and Portugal is Cortesão 1952.

14. All translations from Portuguese into English are mine unless otherwise noted.

15. On the importance of the scientific intermediary, see Schaffer et al. 2009.


18. For a broad overview of the multi-faceted development of scientific observation, see Daston and Lunbeck 2011. For a more detailed view of Portuguese natural history during this period, see Brigola 2003.

19. For an understanding of Portugal’s earlier global scientific empire, see Breen 2015. On Vandelli’s natural historical contacts and connections, see Cardoso 2003.

20. On the Arco do Cego, and more specifically its visual elements, see Figueira de Faria 2001a.

21. Several classic works, including Schnapper (1988) and Findlen (1996), trace the museum’s role in this broader transformation, and have given rise in recent years to studies that emphasize the material and mercantile nature of collecting and museology. See, among others, Cook 2007, and Schiebinger and Swan 2008.


23. On the notebooks and note-taking practices of eighteenth-century travelers, see Bourguet 2010.

24. The origins of this division have been explored more fully in the recent work of Philippe Descola 2013. In writing about schemas, Descola has discussed ‘the role played by abstract structures that organize understanding and practical action without mobilizing mental images or any knowledge conveyed in declarative statements’ (102), emphasizing that in Europe, since the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, this can be most effectively connected to an ‘analogical ontology’ that has been described by Arthur Lovejoy as a ‘great chain of being.’ In this schema, the world is composed of ‘distinct things’ each of which was different from that which preceded and followed it. See Descola 2013, 202–6.

25. For a broad description of the population map (*mapa de população*) in the context of the mapping of the Amazon River region and its indigenous groups, see Safier 2009.

26. For more on Amazonian hunting and the symbolism behind it, see Conklin 2001.

27. An impressive collection of Jurupixuna masks collected by Ferreira is today held by the Academia Real das Ciencias de Lisboa; they are reproduced in Ferreira 2003, 60–74.

28. According to Monteiro, Ferreira was ‘frustrated by [Indian] women’s refusal to hand over an object of great ethnographic interest’ for him, which in this case was a set of *cuias* and *muir-aquitãs*. Monteiro insists that ‘the persistence of distinctive cultural practices’ that were seemingly unaffected by Europeans’ insistence that they adapt to different ways made clear that ‘the Indians had something to say about the terms of their own transformation.’ See Monteiro 2012, 25–26.

29. Emphasizing their construction, Barcelos Neto provides a typology of these masks based on their relationship with specific animals and vegetables (from monkeys and frogs to feather-bearing monsters), including their material (cotton and palms) and their basic geometrical forms. Describing in particular the visual patterns and symbolic formulas reflected in these masks, he concludes by granting a high degree of agency to the decorative objects of
the Wauja in the cosmic processes that appear at the center of their communal festivities: at times they turn into animals and travel independently into the forest, at times they merely serve the Wauja as reflections of their own ‘aesthetic efficacy.’ These present-day interpretations should not be grafted onto the historical interpretations of Ferreira tout court, but may be used to guide our assessments of reported interactions as well as the many-layered constructions of the masks themselves.

30. Descola has argued that the dominant way of apprehending the relationship between ‘human nature and nature alien to man,’ regnant during the Middle Ages and Renaissance when these dichotomous perspectives were elaborated fully for European artistic practice, was controlled by a sense of the material continuity between beings, an analogism that ‘predominated’ in early modern Europe and created order in a world that was otherwise quite chaotic. For more on his ontological schemas, and analogism in particular, see Descola 2013.

31. Viveiros de Castro (1998, 470–71). Some recent critical perspectives on Viveiros de Castro and his work can be seen in Turner (2009), where Turner makes the observation that although Viveiros de Castro successfully animates a dialogue between equals by placing an ‘integral, homogenous system of […] Western Modernist ideas’ against an ‘equally homogenous system’ of Amazonian ideas, ‘the result is the misrepresentation and mistranslation of the form, content and meaning of the ideal categories and social meanings of many Amazonian cultural systems, not to mention some of the Western ideas drawn upon for comparison.’

32. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, as cited in Mello Moraes (1858, 2:270). I thank Heather Roller for pointing this passage out to me.

33. Ferreira’s prime authority here was Thibault de Chanvalon, author of the Voyage à la Martinique, who wrote in reference to the Carib populations he had known during his childhood that ‘their stupid eyes are the true mirror of their soul; [their soul] appears to have no function’ (Thibault de Chanvalon 1763, 51). Ferreira also relied upon Antonio de Ulloa, who wrote regarding the Indians of Quito that the ‘limits of their intelligence appear incompatible with the excellence of their soul,’ even if they do not see or observe as expertly as other members of the human race (Ulloa 1748).

34. In a short but magisterial introduction to Lévi-Strauss’s Longe do Brasil, the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro tells about Lévi-Strauss’s failed return journey to the Bororo communities he first visited in 1935, and his inadvertent participation in the Bororo myth in Mythologies that he himself did so much to popularize: the Bird-Nester’s Aria. In this retelling, Lévi-Strauss was confined to hover in an airplane without landing, due to a rainstorm, and was therefore unable to visit the first community that received him and made his anthropological career. See Viveiros de Castro 2011.

Notes on contributor

Neil Safier is Beatrice and Julio Mario Santo Domingo Director and Librarian of the John Carter Brown Library, with a joint appointment as Associate Professor in the Department of History at Brown University. He received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in 2004 and has held teaching and research appointments at the University of Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania, and most recently at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He is the author of Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America (2008), which was awarded the 2009 Gilbert Chinard Prize from the Society for French Historical Studies and the Institut Français d’Amérique. He has held numerous research fellowships at libraries and archives, including the Huntington Library, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, and the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, and has a wide collection of published books and articles, including essays in Isis, Book History, The Huntington Library Quarterly, and Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales. His current research relates to the environmental and ethnographic history of the Amazon River basin, and the circulation of ideas in the Atlantic world during the age of revolutions.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank members of the Seminar at The Johns Hopkins University and the Early Modern Empires Workshop at Yale University for incisive comments that helped me to refine arguments in this essay, as well as the three reviewers for CLAR whose generous assistance strengthened this piece immeasurably. Finally, my thanks to Dana Leibsohn, Marcy Norton, and Ralph Bauer for their support and encouragement. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Neil L. Whitehead, a pioneering scholar in the theory of entanglements, who first invited me to present on these questions nearly a decade ago.

Works cited


Sá, José Antonio de. 1783. *Compendio de observações, que fomento o plano da viagem política, e filosófica, que se deve fazer dentre da patria.* Lisbon: Francisco Borges de Sousa.


