

CHEWING GUM CODEx

A photograph of astronaut Neil Armstrong in a red jacket, smiling and holding a long wooden spear. The background is a dense, green rainforest. The text 'CHEWING GUM CODEx' is overlaid in large white letters across the center of the image.

Astronaut Neil Armstrong holding
a (Shuar) spear in the Amazon rainforest. 1976.

CHEWING GUM CODEX

{PROCESS DOCUMENTATION}

In 1976 astronaut Neil Armstrong joined a scientific expedition to the Amazon; the main goal was to explore a large cave called "Tayos" in the Ecuadorian side of the rainforest. Seven years prior he had become the first human to step on the moon. Along with many scientists, Ecuadorian soldiers in charge of the logistics, and a few members of the Shuar community (natives to that area of the rainforest), Armstrong ventured into this cave which encompasses hundreds of kilometers.

One of the Ecuadorian soldiers, Francisco Guamán, was closely following the steps of Armstrong. His only interest was to collect anything that would be discarded by the astronaut, "whatever I could get –he said– would become a valuable memorabilia" taken from one of the most famous people on Earth. It is not clear what type of items he expected, the truth is that a mundane piece of gum, which had been chewed by the astronaut, was all that he managed to gather.

After hearing rumours about this story, in 2018 the artist tracked down the family of Mr. Guamán –who had already passed away– to ask about it. The soldier's granddaughter confirmed the story and proceeded to retrieve the little old gum from a box. She entrusted the artist with it.

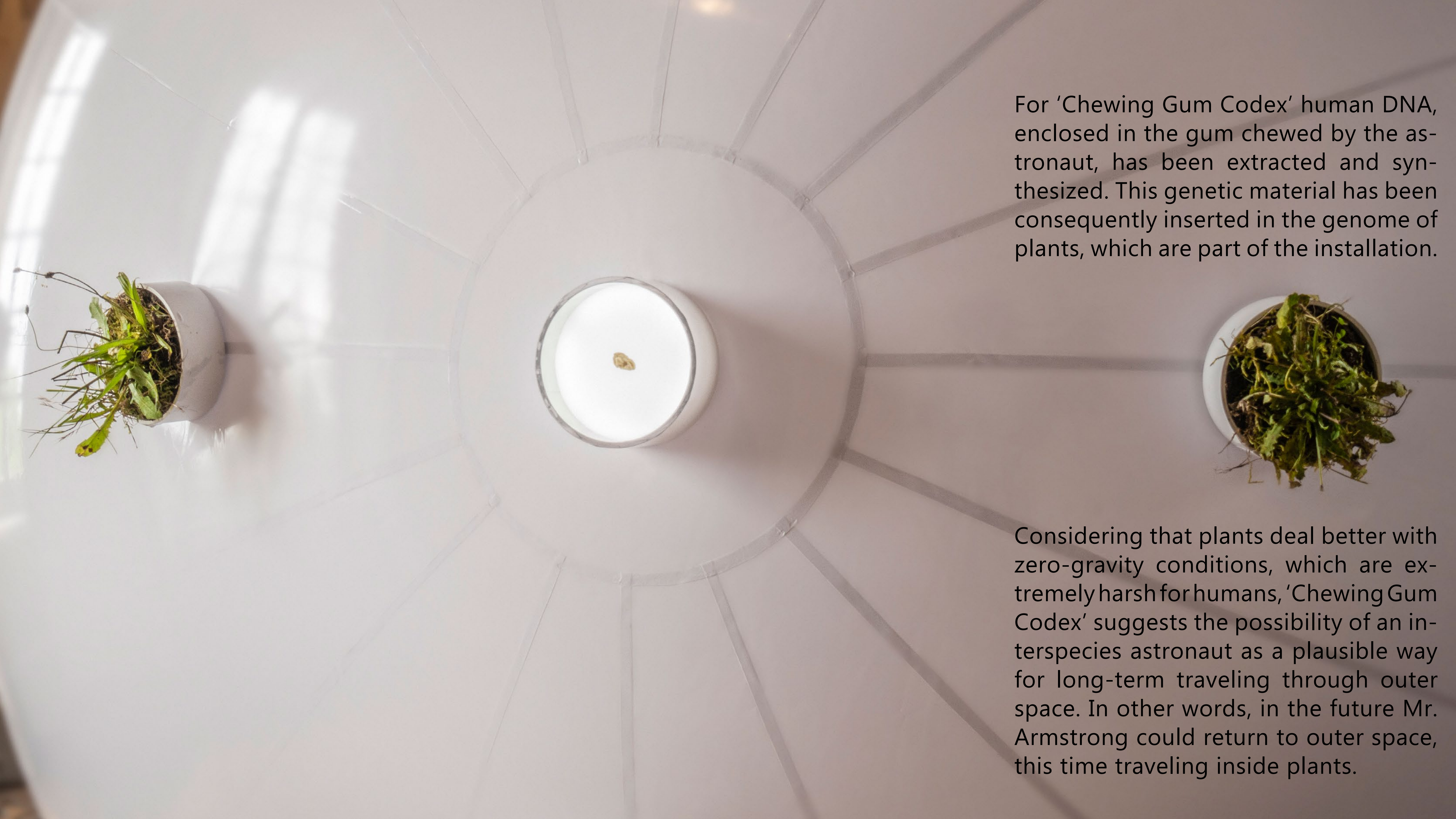


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Installation (inflatable, astronaut's DNA hosted in plants, and the process documentation presented as texts displayed on two screens).

2018-2020





For 'Chewing Gum Codex' human DNA, enclosed in the gum chewed by the astronaut, has been extracted and synthesized. This genetic material has been consequently inserted in the genome of plants, which are part of the installation.

Considering that plants deal better with zero-gravity conditions, which are extremely harsh for humans, 'Chewing Gum Codex' suggests the possibility of an interspecies astronaut as a plausible way for long-term traveling through outer space. In other words, in the future Mr. Armstrong could return to outer space, this time traveling inside plants.



