The spirit with no anus and the pots that fart: ceramics of life and death in Northwest Amazonia

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El espíritu sin ano y las ollas que se tiran pedos: cerámicas de vida y muerte en el noroeste de la Amazonía

Stephen Hugh-Jones
The spirit with no anus and the pots that fart: 
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This paper takes as its starting point the story of a spirit with no anus whose inability to fart leads to his death and transformation into clay. In particular, it examines the relationship between pottery trumpets associated with this spirit (played in exchange ceremonies) and bark Jurupary trumpets and suggests that the two instruments stand in a relationship of “flesh” and “bone”. Uncovering this parallelism provides an opportunity to revisit noise, putrefaction, and beer in Northwest Amazonian mortuary rituals, where other types of pottery trumpets are used in conjunction with Jurupary trumpets. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the relevance of these mythical and ritual materials to Amazonian archaeology and the interpretation of anthropomorphic burial urns. [Keywords: pottery, trumpets, Jurupary, mortuary rituals, beer, archaeology, Northwest Amazonia.]

L’esprit sans anus et les pots qui pètent : céramiques de vie et de mort en Amazonie du Nord-Ouest. Cet article a pour point de départ l’histoire d’un esprit sans anus que son incapacité à péter conduit à la mort et à une transformation en argile. Il examine plus particulièrement les relations entre les trompes en poterie associées à cet esprit (jouées lors de cérémonies d’échange) et les trompes en écorce de Jurupary et il suggère que le rapport de ces deux instruments est homologue à celui entre « chair » et « os ». La mise à jour de ce parallélisme permet de revenir sur le bruit, la putréfaction et la bière dans les rituels funéraires du nord-ouest amazonien, où d’autres types de trompes en poterie sont utilisées conjointement avec les trompes de Jurupary. L’article se termine par une brève discussion sur la pertinence de ces matériaux mythiques et rituels pour l’archéologie amazonienne et l’interprétation des urnes funéraires anthropomorphes. [Mots-clés : poterie, trompes, Jurupary, rituels funéraires, bière, archéologie, Amazonie du Nord-Ouest.]

El espíritu sin ano y las ollas que se tiran pedos: cerámicas de vida y muerte en el noroeste de la Amazonía. Este artículo toma como punto de partida la historia de un espíritu sin ano cuya incapacidad para tirarse pedos le lleva a la muerte y a la transformación en arcilla. En particular, examina la relación entre las trompetas

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de cerámica asociadas a este espíritu (tocadas en las ceremonias de intercambio) y las trompetas de corteza juruparies y sugiere que existe una relación entre ambos instrumentos entre “carne” y “hueso”. El descubrimiento de este paralelismo nos permite revisitar el ruido, la putrefacción y la cerveza en los rituales mortuorios del noroeste amazónico, donde se utilizan otros tipos de trompetas de cerámica junto con las trompetas juruparies. El artículo concluye con una breve discusión sobre la relevancia de estos materiales míticos y rituales para la arqueología amazónica y, en particular, para la interpretación de las urnas funerarias antropomorfas. [Palabras clave: cerámica, trompetas, jurupary, rituales mortuorios, cerveza, arqueología, noroeste de la Amazonia.]

The main work is not to make pots, but to allow them to come, to allow them to grow, to allow them to be alive, and to communicate warmth and life. (Richard Batterham, potter. Harrod 2021)

Ed elli avea del cul fatto trombetta. (Dante, La Divina Commedia, Inferno, Canto XXI, v. 139, see Alighieri 2021 [1472])

Vile brass emanating from the Devil’s arse.¹

In principle, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s (1998) perspectivism and Philippe Descola’s (2005) animism should apply as much to artefacts as to animals. In practice, animal personhood and human-animal relations have occupied centre stage with relatively little space for the personhood of objects. This fits uneasily with Northwest Amazonia, a region where personified objects play a central role in myth and ritual, and philosophical ideas are conveyed as much in the forms, colours, and textures of materials and artefacts as in the appearance and habits of animals. This is no doubt why objects have occupied a prominent position in my research on the Tukanoan-speaking peoples of the Pirá-Paraná region in Southeastern Colombia.

In this paper, I explore the personhood of objects with reference to a story about a spirit with no anus, tracing links between the story and various pottery trumpets. Some of these are used in Tukanoan dabucuri rituals. Others were used, alongside bark Jurupary trumpets, in the Kubeo,² Baniwa,³ and Saliba

¹ In Terence Tiller’s translation of Chaucer’s *House of Fame* for the unpublished BBC radio script “*Ladies Lost and Found*” (Michael Berkeley, composer, pers. comm.).
² Many “Kubeo/Cubeo” prefer the self-name Pamiwa. As I am mainly dealing with historical sources, I have retained the name these sources use.
³ In this paper, “Baniwa” is used as a catch-all term covering Northwest Amazonian Arawakan speakers, including Kuripako, Piapoco, Puinave Tariana, Warekena, etc.
mortuary rituals described in the pioneering ethnographies of Irving Goldman (1979) and Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1967 [1910]), and much earlier writings of Jesuit missionary Joseph Gumilla (1745). Pottery trumpets similar to those described by Gumilla are still used in the Warime ritual of the Piaroa, close eastern neighbours of the Saliba speaking a closely related language. In space, my focus covers a broad arc of Northwest Amazonia inhabited by Tukanoan, Arawakan, and Saliban speakers sharing broadly similar culture, mythology, and ritual (Figure 1, next page). In time, it spans nearly three centuries, the aim being to bring contemporary ethnography into dialogue with historical sources, so each may elucidate the other, and to explore the possible relevance of this material to archaeology.

In parts, this exercise is inevitably tentative. I am reasonably confident about the recent ethnography of Northwest Amazonia. But relating this ethnography to fragmentary information in older historical sources can be like reconstructing a jigsaw puzzle picture with several pieces missing. As I do not always know if past practices continue today, I have also opted for a simpler ethnographic present instead of repeated qualifications of tense.

The story of the spirit with no anus

The popular story of the spirit with no anus (~wati gîde ~bagî [bsn]), a figure often identified with the Devil, comes in three principal versions. Tukanoan-speaking Bará, Barasana, Eduria, Makuna, and Tatuyo of the Colombian Pirá-Paraná region, and their Arawakan Kawiyeri neighbours living along the Cananari immediately to the west, tell Version 1, which accounts for the origin of the clay used to make pottery. Version 2, told across the frontier in Brazil by neighbouring Desana, Tukano, and Tuyuka, accounts for the origin of sarapô [yrl] (“knifefish”, Gymnotiformes spp.), which also figure in a Baniwa story. Version 3, told by Pira-Paraná peoples and by the Yuhupdeh of the Brazilian Tiquié (Lolli 2010, p. 188-190), tells of a dragonfly and two beiju [yrl] (“manioc bread”) sisters, personified as women and transformed into parrots. My main concern is with clay, pottery, and trumpets but, because these different versions

4. Koch-Grünberg’s information regarding Kubeo funerary dances on the Aiary River relates principally to the Maulieni [bwi]/Caua [yrl] people, a group who migrated from the Kubeo Querary River homeland during the rubber boom, bringing the dances to the Aiary River Baniwa. In the 1960s, the Caua converted to Christian evangelicalism and abandoned their masked dances. The violence, sorcery, and many deaths associated with the rubber boom made the dances especially visible at the turn of the 20th century (Wright pers. comm.).

5. Unless otherwise stated, all indigenous terms are given in Barasana [bsn]. Relevant ISO language codes are listed the Appendix.

6. Outsiders gloss the Tukanoan ~watí, “forest spirit, ghost, shadow, image”, as “devil” or “ogre”, as do insiders when speaking Spanish and Portuguese.
Fig. 1 – Map of peoples mentioned in text
(map Chris Bruce, 03/2023)
make sense of each other, I treat them as parts of a single story, indicating minor variants with a forward slash.7

Version 1, concerning potting clay, is usually told simply for its amusement value, its scatological tone inviting burlesque performances guaranteed to make an audience laugh. But, behind this apparently light-hearted tale, pots and pottery-making emerge as vehicles for serious philosophical reflection about the human body, the processes of life and death, and the genesis and structure of the cosmos.

These are also the themes of Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1985) *La potière jalouse*. In this work, the author explores an indigenous philosophy based on the open or closed state of the body’s apertures, showing how Amerindian myths about pottery encode openness or closure through reference to the anatomy and behaviour of wide-mouthed nightjars; full-throated oven birds; noisy, incontinent howler monkeys; and the fastidious toilet habits of sloths. As pots are retentive containers, it follows that female potters should be similarly retentive. In mythology, women potters typically display jealous (“retentive”) tendencies and, in practice, tend to avoid making pottery when menstruating.

In a previous commentary (Hugh-Jones 2019b), I noted a surprising absence of references to musical instruments in *La potière jalouse*, suggesting that, although Lévi-Strauss had chosen not to discuss Northwest Amazonian mythology, on the grounds of its explicit philosophical bent, Tukanoan and Arawakan myths concerning Jurupary, and the instruments bearing this name, provide a succinct, comprehensive insight into the bodily philosophy that he had in mind. Alongside flutes and trumpets identified with Jurupary’s bones, feather headdresses, rattle-lances, ceremonial stools, and hardwood cigar holders make up a set of valuables identified with the body-parts of primordial ancestors. These personified objects play a pivotal role in male initiation rituals and origin stories (Hugh-Jones 2009, 2019a), taking up much of the space occupied by animals in the mythology of other Amazonians.

Keeping Jurupary mythology and ritual in mind, I want here to turn my attention to the seemingly mundane story of the spirit with no anus, to the apparently less important world of women’s pottery, and to various pots used as noisy musical instruments. With openness and closure coded in terms of pots rather than animals, I shall argue that the spirit is a figure complementary to Jurupary, that pottery trumpets have a special affinity with bark Jurupary trumpets used in mortuary rituals, that the amplified, farting sound of these trumpets is closely related to the strong odours of fermentation, decomposition, and burning, and that the light-hearted manner in which our story is told belies its deeper significance as a narrative of cosmogony and perpetual renewal. In examining

7. For a discussion of this strategy, see Hugh-Jones 2019a.
musical instruments made of pottery, and in exploring continuities between the story and rituals of Jurupary and the mythology and practice of pottery-making, I bring my previous commentary on Lévi-Strauss’ work full circle.

Before pursuing these points, I first provide a summary of the story of the spirit with no anus and the origin of clay.

The spirit with no anus – version 1. Clay (Bará, Barasana, Eduria, Makuna, Tatuyo, Kawiyeri)

In the time of the Universe People, before ordinary mortals existed, the spirit with no anus began visiting the children in the house of his neighbour, whilst the adults were out working in the gardens. The spirit would arrive with a basket of peccary-teeth belts, ankle rattles, and maracas, and invite the children to dance, swearing them to secrecy and running away as soon as their parents approached. In the end, the youngest child could keep the secret no longer and told his parents what was going on. They told the children to cut through the strap on the spirit’s basket. The next time the spirit visited, he ran off, leaving his basket behind.

The angry spirit vowed revenge. When he came back, he brought a basket of edible caterpillars and invited the children to help him cook them. As the children gathered round the bubbling pot, he pushed them in. Only the youngest escaped, flying off as a bird of bad omen. When the anxious father heard the bird, he rushed back to the house. Seeing what had happened, he retrieved his children’s bones from the pot. Laying them out on a banana leaf and covering them with kapok, he brought the children back to life by beating their bones with leaves. Transformed into capuchin monkeys, the children ran off into the forest calling “hô hô hô”.

A long time afterwards, the spirit was invited to drink manioc beer by his neighbour/came across his neighbour fishing in a lake. The man began to fart loudly.

“How did you do that?” asked the spirit.

“With my anus, of course,” replied the man.

“But I haven’t got an anus,” said the spirit. “Look! My backside is all round and smooth.”

“We can soon fix that,” said the man. “My mother made my anus, and I made anuses for all my kids. If you like, I could make one for you too.”

“Oh, yes please!” replied the spirit.

The man fetched the stick used to stir the boiling leaves when making carayurú [yrl], a red body-paint. Pointing to the blood-red stain coming half-way up the stick, the man said, “Don’t worry, it won’t hurt! It only goes in up to here!” Telling the spirit to cling to a post, the man began hammering the stick further and further into his body. When the stick came out through his throat, the spirit fell down dead.

8. Variously identified as ~Bedi ~Kubu [bsn], “Maker of all things”, ~Húdià [bao]; “Jurupary” and Hehechu [cbb], an earth-jaguar deity and related as cousin, brother-in-law, or paisano, a Spanish rendering of hako ~bakɨ [bsn], “mother’s son”, “affine of affine”, a relationship midway between affine and agnate.
The spirit is Clay Father, the Owner of clay. The flesh and other soft parts of his body became the pungent, bluish-grey potting clay that women extract from holes in the banks of streams. The spirit was a creator deity who gave rise to the earth. Before his death, he made his children, the Ayawa, the organizers of the universe, from lumps of clay he obtained from *sita hiro*, a cicada nymph that makes tall clay chimneys on the forest floor.

Men’s versions of this story usually end here, but when women tell it, they talk of a Clay Mother and often include a detailed account of their craft. My summary is based on my own observations and Gomez-Imbert (1990).

A woman tried in vain to make good pots. While her friends were out in their gardens, Clay Mother came and made perfect pieces for her, swearing her to secrecy. On their return, the friends asked who had made her pots. “I did,” said the woman. Not believing her, the friends forced her to reveal her secret, whereupon all her pots broke into pieces. Angered by this betrayal, Clay Mother turned what once had been quick and easy into the long, laborious, specialized task it is today (Figure 2).

Fig. 2 – Paulina. Expert potter and engaging storyteller (photo Brian Moser, Caño Colorado, Pirá-Paraná, 11/1969)

9. Reference to *sita hiro* in Deltgen n.d. See also Hugh-Jones 2016.
After removing lumps and stones, the clay is mixed with a temper of crushed, sieved ash from burned *caraipe* [yrl] (*Licania* sp.) bark, sometimes with added, crushed pottery fragments. Viscous liquid, prepared from various leaves, is then added to give the polished pot a smooth, shining surface. The walls of the pot are built up from serpentine pieces of rolled clay (*dii pirô* [tuo], “clay snake”) coiled in a spiral and smoothed with a piece of gourd. The finished vessel is then polished with a special stone (Figure 3) to give it a smooth skin and reveal small stones liable to cause the pot to crack on firing. When hard and dry, the pot is fired upside-down in a “tent” of burning wood and bark (Figure 4). Finally, the terracotta-coloured pot is painted with sap and smoked over a smouldering fire of damp wood and leaves to give it a hard, black, waterproof varnish.

Fig. 3 – Pot-polishing stone (photo Thiago Oliveira, Museu do Índio-FUNAI, Ucuquí Cachoeira, Rio Içana, 2012)

Fig. 4 – Firing pottery in “tent” of burning wood and bark (author’s photo, Caño Colorado, Pirá-Paraná, 07/1969)

11. These precious stones, from the remote Apaporís river basin, are passed from mother to daughter or mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, sharing the heirloom quality of the Jurupary instruments and feather ornaments that pass from father to son.
Lévi-Strauss was clearly delighted when Elsa Gomez-Imbert sent him a Tatuyo version of this story, for the new myth offered direct proof of a connection between potting clay and subterranean spirits with no anuses that he had only been able demonstrate by laboriously tracing links along a chain of Amerindian myths scattered across both South and North America. Lévi-Strauss writes “Or ce parcours sinuex, où interviennent à chaque étape de nouveaux postulats, de nouvelles hypothèses, se trouve immédiatement et globalement validé quand un mythe jusqu’alors inconnu émerge, qui court-circuite les intermédiaires et fait rejoindre la conclusion et les prémisses” (2013, p. 246).

But there is more to this story than meets the eye for it turns out that the spirit prefigures his own destiny. If the spirit’s dead body is the source of clay used to make pots, his living body already is the pot this clay will become. Gustavo Kawiyeri makes this clear when he observes, “Yakamamukute [cbb: spirit with no anus] no tenía ano –como olla cocinada no tiene culo” (Bourgue 1976, p. 138). Once this is understood, we can begin to see the world from the perspective of this animated pot. The smooth backside the spirit shows his neighbour is none other than the underside of a cooking pot (Figure 5); the boiling pot’s loud “keba keba keba”, essential to any good telling of the story, evokes the spirit’s gleeful anticipation of the children’s death; the pot’s mouth is his voracious, open maw; and from the pot’s point of view, when the father retrieves his children’s bones, the pot vomits them from his open mouth.

This personified pot is but one of a whole crowd of anthropomorphic ceramics that people the ethnographic and archaeological record of lowland South America. Most of these pot-persons are funerary urns, but Baniwa women give their water jugs a human face and their Saliba sisters produce splendid pottery vessels in human form (Figure 6, next page).
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Fig. 6 – Pot Persons: Baniwa (left); Saliba (middle; right) (author’s photos and collection, Presteigne, 11/2022)
Another Jurupary story?

As a child-eating cannibal with a pierced rear-end enabling him to make trumpeting farts, this loud-mouthed pot would appear to be a Jurupary figure in another guise. Let us explore this possibility further. In a previous essay (Hugh-Jones 2019b), I suggested that the philosophy of body-tubes that Lévi-Strauss (1985) sees as characteristic of Amerindian pottery mythology is perhaps best exemplified in the story of Jurupary. Here is a summary.

Jurupary was the child of a woman with no vagina. Impregnated via her mouth, the mother had first to be pierced to enable her to give birth. Jurupary himself started life with no mouth and could produce no sound. But, as soon as he was given a mouth, he began to emit terrifying, thunderous noises and eventually became a cannibal monster.

One day, some boys at play imitated Jurupary’s voice using buzzing wasps tethered on strings inside a clay pot used for beer. Annoyed by this insult, Jurupary revealed himself to the boys, telling them that he was the real Jurupary and adding that, because they had seen him in person, they were now initiates so would have to fast. Today, when neophyte boys first see Jurupary in the form of his flutes and trumpets, they, too, must fast.

The boys were unable to control their hunger and ate forbidden foods. Angered by their disobedience, Jurupary once again produced his thunderous noise, causing heavy rain to fall. Seeking shelter, and mistaking Jurupary’s open mouth/anus for a cave, the boys dashed inside. Only the youngest escaped, flying off as a bird to tell his father what had happened.

As the boys’ bodies decomposed inside Jurupary’s body, he produced noisy, smelly farts and belches. Later on, when Jurupary was invited to a feast, he returned the bones of the boys to their parents, vomiting them into the same enclosure where, today, initiates are confined after they see the Jurupary instruments. In revenge for their sons’ death, the boys’ fathers burned Jurupary on a fire. When a palm tree sprang from the ashes, the men cut it into sections to make the flutes and trumpets, Jurupary’s bones, now used in initiation rites.

The story of the spirit is a clear transformation of the first part of this story. Beyond the obvious parallels of a spirit with no anus, a child Jurupary with no mouth, and his mother with no vagina, and between the spirit and Jurupary as two open-mouthed, child-consuming ogres, the play on open vs closed apertures extends to a child revealing the spirit’s secret visits, a pot-making woman revealing the secret of a helpful Clay Mother, and initiates breaking a fast, all of them people unable to keep their mouths shut. In each story, too, it is only the youngest child who escapes being eaten, each time becoming a bird who alerts his father to his siblings’ fate.

12. In broad-brush terms, “Jurupary” can be taken here to include figures known as Kuwai and Poronominaré. Limitations of space preclude detailed discussion of all the variants of the copious mythology involved.
Both stories also concern initiation as a process of death and rebirth by swallowing and regurgitation. This hardly needs explication regarding Jurupary, whose story tracks the initiation ritual stage by stage, from ingesting initiates via his mouth or anus, through ‘cooking’ them in his belly, to vomiting up their bones. In the case of the pot-spirit, he first pushes children into an open mouth that must also serve as his anus, cooks them in his belly, then vomits them up as his father retrieves their bones from his mouth. The children’s status as initiates, “larval” persons on their way to becoming adults, is also suggested first by their being cooked together with caterpillars, larval beings that become adult butterflies or moths, and then by their transformation into monkeys, creatures that seem to combine childlike and adult characteristics.

During initiation, after a symbolic death, the initiates are brought back to life by breath and music from flutes and trumpets, and by spells blown by ritual specialists into substances that the initiates then eat or smear on their bodies. Transformed into young men, the initiates emerge from seclusion wearing feather crowns known as “crows of potent kapok”. The father’s bringing his dead children’s bones back to life by wrapping them in kapok is a life-giving transformation of the same kind. As lightweight, filamentous materials that float on the wind and register the movement of air, feathers, down, and kapok are assimilated to breath (Hugh-Jones 2019a). Transformed by cooking and returned to life by their father’s breath, the children run off as monkeys.

A final point concerns Jurupary’s fiery death. Jurupary is an embodiment of the forest, and his death by burning is clearly related to slash-and-burn agriculture, a cyclical process of death and regeneration. But the story is also related to pottery manufacture. If potting clay comes from the soft flesh of a dead spirit, the firing of pots to render them hard and durable recalls the fiery origins of the flutes and trumpets from the palm springing from the ashes of Jurupary’s burned body, instruments identified with his hard, durable bones. The firing of pots, and burning of Jurupary, also recall the burning of caraipe bark to obtain the ash used as a temper. In a Kawiyeri story, we learn that “all the blood that spurted from [the spirit’s body] remained in the ogre tree. It was left for us indigenous peoples to make pots” (Correa 1989, p. 37, my translation). Basáokówi, the Barasana term for caraipe, can be glossed as “blood-tree”, from ~basá, “people”, okó, “liquid, water”, -wi: “tree”.

The evidence just presented would seem to suggest that the spirit with no anus is indeed a counterpart of Jurupary. But is the spirit also embodied in a musical instrument, and did he ever fulfil his ambition to fart?

In addition to pottery, used to prepare food, drinks, and stimulants, and store poison, Tukanoan potters produce vase-shaped, side-blown uriro trumpets of black-varnished earthenware, often decorated with chalk-filled engraved designs similar to those engraved on maracas and Jurupary flutes. This pot’s pierced bottom and loud sound make it a perfect candidate for the spirit endowed with
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an anus and now well able to fart (Figure 7). This connection between spirit and *uriro* had not crossed my mind during fieldwork but, by chance while writing this paper, I was able to speak with Reynel Ortega, a noted Barasana ritual specialist. When asked if the *uriro* was indeed the spirit, he replied, “Of course it is! Surely you knew that?”

![Fig. 7 – Uriro pottery trumpet, the spirit with anus](author’s photo and collection, Presteigne, 11/2022)

Unlike the Piaroa *Warime* and Saliba mourning rites, where trumpets of bark and pottery are used together, in contemporary Tukanoan rituals, *uriro* and Jurupary trumpets are normally used separately. The *uriro* is played at *dabucuri* [yrl] where smoked fish or meat is exchanged, typically between affines. The instrument’s loud, penetrating sound announces the donors’ arrival, asserts their valour, and adds weight to the scale of their offering. By contrast, Jurupary trumpets, made from a palm-wood tube wrapped in bark, are played at rituals where uncooked, gathered foods are exchanged. Jurupary rituals have strong agnatic connotations, especially when forest fruit is brought into the house to mark the first stage of initiation and, even more so, when initiates see the most potent instruments during full initiation (Hugh-Jones S. 1979). Reynel Ortega explained the relation between the two trumpets in terms of the life cycle. The pot trumpet comes first because a man meets his wife at a *dabucuri*. When the pair have male children, bark trumpets then mark the two stages of their initiation.
Noisy pots

The complementary relation between *uriro* trumpets, made of cooked clay derived from the spirit’s flesh and blood, and Jurupary trumpets, made from raw bark and identified with Jurupary’s burned bones, suggests that Reynel’s reference to the life cycle is worth taking further. The pairing of flesh and bone echoes to the respective contributions of women and men in the composition of an infant’s body at the start of life (Hugh-Jones C. 1979, p. 116) whilst, at the end of life, the separation and decomposition of these two components is dramatized in mortuary rituals involving procedures of fermentation, cooking, and burning. Significantly, neither the spirit’s bones nor Jurupary’s flesh is ever mentioned. The pot spirit is an exoskeleton whose avatar is a tortoise (Bourgue 1976, p. 8). By contrast, Jurupary’s assembled instruments make up an animated endoskeleton whose avatar is the “walking palm” (*Socratea exorrhiza*).

A full treatment of Northwest Amazonian mortuary rites is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, there are grounds for treating Tukanoan, Arawakan, and Saliban-Piaroa burial practices as parts of a single, continuous whole.\(^\text{13}\) On the one hand, there are obvious continuities between the Kubeo-Baniwa masked mourning and secondary burial rites described by Koch-Grünberg and Goldman, and the Saliba funerals described by Gumilla. On the other hand, Barasana elders provided me with detailed descriptions of their own masked mourning rituals, according well with Goldman’s Kubeo *oyne*, which featured in days gone by. In broad outlines, Goldman’s account of the Kubeo rites can probably be taken as applying to the Pirá-Paraná region. No Barasana ever mentioned the use of any kind of trumpet in connection with these rites—but I had not thought it pertinent to ask.

Given the similarity between the Kubeo and historical Pirá-Paraná mourning rituals, and the links between the stories of Jurupary and the spirit with no anus, clay, and pottery, the latter story may have relevance to the ceramic trumpets used together with Jurupary trumpets at Kubeo and Saliba mortuary rites. Some Saliba trumpets resemble the elongated, end-blown version of the Pirá-Paraná *uriro*; other Kubeo and Saliba trumpets recall the cooking pot with buzzing wasps the boys used to imitate Jurupary’s voice, a game I have witnessed first-hand.

With the source of sound inserted directly into the mouth of a pot, this wasp-trumpet recalls an instrument first described by the Jesuit missionary José Gumilla in 1745 in relation to Saliba funerary rites. Gumilla’s illustration (Figure 8) shows a Jurupary trumpet flanked by two end-blown clay trumpets with bulbous swellings along their length, analogues of the end-blown *uriro* (Figure 9). Below this is an open-mouthed pot with tubes inserted into two lateral

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\(^\text{13}\) Compare Mansutti-Rodriguez’s (2012) treatment of Northwest Amazonian Jurupary instruments and masked rituals as a single tradition.
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Fig. 8 – Saliba funerary trumpets
(Gumilla 1745, p. 208; https://archive.org/details/A300066/page/n263/mode/2up [ark:/13960/t23c1rf7r])

Fig. 9 – End-blown uriro trumpet
(photo Karl-Georg Scheffer, San Miguel, Pirá-Paraná, 14/03/1977)
openings. These trumpets were used at mourning rites following the death of an important individual, in this case the brother of Chief Pugduga. Gumilla makes no mention of masks, nor of the consumption of beer mixed with pulverized burned human bones but, in other respects, his account is reminiscent of Goldman’s (1979) Kubeo oyne, especially his description of giant bark trumpets carried by two people, and his portrayal of a ritual transformation from sadness and weeping to dancing and jollity.

Gumilla’s Saliba pot-trumpet with lateral inserts appears to be near identical to one used by the neighbouring Piaroa during their Warime, a ritual featuring masks like those of the Kubeo and, in other respects, very like Tukanoan Jurupary rites (Mansutti-Rodríguez 2012). In Warime, this pot trumpet and two bark trumpets make up a single, composite instrument embodying the deity Worá. Here I quote Mansutti-Rodríguez’s (ibid., p. 55) engaging account of how the pot is played.

Worá es la madre de todas las voces musicales del Warime. Está constituida por […] un par de tubos cilíndricos de corteza o de plástico PVC […] y una olla de barro cocido que puede tener, sea como en el diseño de Gumilla […] dos orificios laterales y opuestos, sea sin los orificios laterales […], en las que se introducen alternadamente las flautas simples ejecutadas cada una por un músico quien balancea su cabeza de manera que cuando él está ejecutando la suya dentro de la olla, su compañero tiene la suya fuera pero presto para introducirla cuando el otro esté sacando la propia. Dado el balanceo constante de los ejecutantes, uno de cada lado de la olla, se produce una alternancia de sonidos graves, profundos y rápidos que promueve un ambiente de excitación al interior de la maloca.

Koch-Grünberg (1967 [1910], p. 134-136) and Goldman (1979, p. 225) describe a similar instrument featuring in Baniwa and Kubeo mourning rituals, a pot hung with brown bark fringes but with only a single cecropia-tube trumpet in the vessel’s mouth (Figure 10a). Like that of Worá, the deep hoo hoo hoo of this trumpet is the angry voice of the jaguar (Figure 10b) and, as with its Saliba counterpart, this one is used in combination with two giant bark trumpets, a “grandmother” and “grandfather”, each carried by two people (Goldman 1979, p. 228).

Koch-Grünberg (1967 [1910], p. 136) tells us that the pot contains small stones that the dancer rattles from time to time, a feature making it a hybrid between a trumpet and a maraca. Another such trumpet-maraca hybrid is the Jurupary trumpet (sawiro [bsn]) played as the leader of a chorus of bark-tube piston-whistles at special dabucuri where raw, gathered animal foods (small fish, ants, caterpillars, frogs, etc.) are exchanged instead of the usual smoked fish or game. Like a normal Jurupary trumpet, the body of this instrument is made of spiralled tree-bark but here specially folded to produce a vibrating sound.14 Porero ([tuo], [des]), the name of

14. For details see Diakuru and Kisibi 2006, p. 76.
The spirit with no anus and the pots that fart

this instrument, refers to a giant grasshopper (*Tropidacris violaceus*) whose loud stridulation sounds like a maraca. Young boys use these insects as maracas, just as they use wasps tethered in pots as trumpets.

The combined sound of fart and rattle produced by these hybrid trumpet-maracas takes us back to the basket of maracas the spirit was forced to abandon when he fled the house, a deprivation of his noise-making capacity underlining his inability to fart. In strictly acoustic terms, the sounds of trumpets and maracas are different, but their combination in a single instrument, together with the consistent use of maracas at the dances following the playing of Jurupary trumpets at rites involving forest fruit, suggests that, for the people concerned, their sounds share qualities in common, something requiring further investigation.

Before returning to funeral rites and treatment of the dead, I will deal first with a second version of the story of the spirit with no anus that brings up the related issue of unpleasant odours.

If a spirit with no anus eats, he must defecate through his mouth, making food and excrement coincide. Nonetheless, food, defecation, and odours hardly figure at all in versions of the story dealing with clay. However, in versions dealing with knifefish, it is not the spirit’s lack of anus and inability to fart that lead to his downfall. Instead, because his anus is in the *wrong place*, the spirit has problems with eating and odours. Recasting the story in terms of anal location and odour instead of presence and sound also changes its outcome. Instead of
the spirit’s flesh becoming rolls of clay coiled into pots, his intestines become sarapó (“knifefish”). Here is a summary of the story.¹⁵

*The spirit with no anus – version 2. Knifefish: food, defecation, and problems with odours (Desana, Tukano, Tuyuka)*

Wasu was a lonely bachelor on the lookout for a wife. He went to stay with his cousin the spirit with no anus. Wasu was mystified. Although the spirit claimed to live alone, there was plenty of beiju [yrl] (“manioc bread”) available, with all the equipment used to process manioc clearly in evidence. One day, on his way to defecate, a hungry Wasu found and ate what he took to be some freshly cooked beiju. In fact, it was the spirit’s steaming excrement.

Some days later, when the spirit left his house on a visit, his sleeping guest was woken by strange noises. He saw a beautiful woman emerging from a chest high up on a shelf who came down and proceeded to make beiju. Wasu fell in love with and seduced her, and so plotted to kill the spirit as his rival because the spirit had previously burned Wasu’s children.

Much later, when tempers seemed to have cooled, the spirit came back to visit Wasu. Seizing his opportunity, Wasu invited the spirit to bathe. On reaching the river, Wasu went to defecate in full view of the spirit/made farting noises with a gourd upturned on the water.

“How do you do that?” asked the spirit.

“With my anus, of course,” replied Wasu.

“But I can’t do that,” said the spirit. “My anus is here in my neck!”

“That must smell horrible! You shit right next to your nose! Look, my anus is way back here!” replied Wasu, offering to make him one in the right place.

Putting the spirit at ease by first pretending to use softer instruments, Wasu told him to hold onto a post, then pushed his pointed, hardwood rattle-lance through the spirit’s backside and up though his body till he died (Figure 11). Using a hooked vine, he pulled the spirit’s intestines out through his new anus and threw them into the river, where they became sarapó, fish whose anus is situated just behind the mouth (Figure 12).

¹⁵. Based on Tenório and Tenório 2005; Anonyme 2007; Sampaio n. d.
The spirit with no anus and the pots that fart

Sometimes caught in large numbers with barbasco, sarapó are an important source of food and often exchanged at dabucuri, a point emphasized by Barbosa and Garcia (2000, p. 229-231). From clay to fish, the story’s focus shifts from container and contents, from spirit as pot and source of clay, to spirit as source of food cooked in clay pots. This shift towards food is also evident in the person of Wasu’s wife, an embodiment of the beiju she makes. It is also evident in the person of Wasu/Wahi. The name \(^{16}\) refers to a species of rubber (Micrandra spruceana, cunuri [yrl]) whose seeds, along with those of biiti [bsn] (Hevea nitida), form an important element in the local diet (Schultes 1956). Rubber seeds are like another version of bitter manioc. To make them edible, they, too, must be processed to remove their cyanogenic glycosides. Personified food, here as edible rubber seeds, beiju,

16. Inconsistent orthography used in relation to different Tukanoan languages, and sound shifts between “s” and “h” make Wahi [bsn] and Wasu (waso [tuo]) equivalent.
or the ingredients of *beiju*, also plays an important role in a third version of the story that leads to the origin of parrots.

*The spirit with no anus – version 3. Dragonfly and his beiju-daughters who became parrots (Pira-Paraná peoples; Yuhupdeh)*

Wahi (*Micrandra*) and Biiti (*Hevea*) were supposed to marry Dragonfly’s daughters but instead went off to dally with White, female sex workers (*~robia ~hadera batia*, ‘female grandchildren’). Having killed and eaten Wahi’s children and his brother Biiti, the women now threatened to eat Wahi. Wahi managed to escape again, this time with Dung Beetle in pursuit. He comes upon the spirit-Dragonfly, emptying the water from a lake in order to catch fish (a reference to the dragonfly’s habit of dipping its tail in the water when depositing its eggs). When Dung Beetle arrived, the spirit/Dragonfly hid Wahi under the water and denied all knowledge of him.

The spirit took Wahi back home with him. Although there was plenty of *beiju* in the house, there were no women to be seen. The spirit had hidden his wife/two daughters, Manioc Fibre (*Kɨhao*) and Starch (*Wetao*), under a basket on a shelf. When the spirit was out, Wahi saw the wife/daughters come down and proceed to make *beiju* from their own bodies. Wahi grabbed the Spirit’s wife/daughter and was instantly covered in a white dusting of tapioca powder. When the spirit returned, he could see quite clearly what had happened.

Tricking him by farting in his presence and offering to make him an anus, Wahi then killed the spirit-Dragonfly by hammering a stick into his backside/hitting him with a whip as he flew past. Out from the spirit’s came snakes, spiders, scorpions, and wasps. Wahi went to visit his mother/grandmother with his host’s wife/daughters but, instead of bringing them into the house, he told the mother/grandmother that he had brought two parrots and left them outside. He told the woman to bring the parrots into the house but, when she tried to reach them, they flew off, Starch to the west and Fibre to the east. They became Southern Mealy Parrots (*Amazona farinosa*), whose feathers are covered with a whitish bloom.

Finally, Cornelio’s (1999) story of Nhiaperikuli, a Baniwa variant of the Jurupary tale, brings together the three principal versions of our story: clay, *sarapó*, and dragonfly. In this Baniwa story, a *sarapó*, who fishes in the manner of a dragonfly, features not as the cannibal spirit’s transformed intestines but rather as himself a cannibal whose inability to fart allows his enemies to kill him in revenge for the death of their kin. With their long, tubular bodies clasped head-to-tail in a closed torus (Figure 13), the mating habits of dragonflies explain why they should figure, along with spirit and *sarapó*, as variants of the same kind of being. The dragonfly’s circular copulation suggests, on the one hand, the spirit’s closed body-tube and, on the other hand, a *sarapó*, another creature with a bodily orifice in the wrong place.
The spirit with no anus and the pots that fart

The ceramics of life and death

We can now begin to pull this material together. Version 1 of our story tells us that pots for cooking food are made from clay released when the retentive body of a spirit with no anus is pierced by his neighbour in revenge for cooking the neighbour’s children. In Version 2, this same piercing, now by a rival in love, releases fish, offered in dabucuri exchanges between affinally related communities, and made edible by cooking in pots. In Versions 2 and 3, this piercing at the hands of a man embodying edible rubber seeds (“wild manioc”) also serves to release women embodying beiju ("domesticated manioc") from an anally retentive spirit who keeps them beyond the sight and reach of visitors. This liberated beiju then flies off in the form of parrots.

We have also established that the spirit is embodied in the uriro, a pottery trumpet and hallmark of dabucuri. Dabucuri are motors for the production of food and reproduction of people. At each one, the men of a visiting community give fish or meat in exchange for abundant manioc beer produced by their female hosts. Over time, the two communities exchange fish for meat or meat for fish. Dabucuri are also the motor for reproduction since they underpin relations between inter-marrying communities and provide the arena where spouses typically meet one another. The uriro’s loud, fart-like sound proclaims...
the open flows of breath, speech, food, people, and bodily substances associated with *dabucuri*, the flows on which all human life depends.

But there is a darker side to *dabucuri*, for the donor visitors are midway between marriageable affines and dangerous outsider-enemies, a status sometimes leading to outbreaks of fighting and to accusations of sorcery and poisoning. This dark side is suggested by the poisonous, stinging creatures that emerged from the spirit’s pierced body, a detail evoking the ceramic poison pot in which night was stored (Hugh-Jones 2019a) and also by *upiti*, the Tukano term for the clay-pot trumpet. Literally “tooth pot”, *upiti* is better glossed as “war pot”. The ambiguity present in the sounds of the *uriro* trumpet is much like that of Jurupary trumpet. The augmented, shamanic breathing of both instruments embodies the life-force of a living universe, manifest in the sounds of thunder, wind, rain, waterfalls, and in the sound-filled seasonal breeding of animals, birds, and spawning fish. But, like the shaman’s powers to both heal and harm, these cosmic powers are at once life-giving and potentially death-dealing. This takes us back to the issues of death, mortuary rituals, and to Kubeo and Saliba ceramic funerary trumpets.

The fact that the spirit’s desire to have an anus is explained with reference to either sound (flatulence) or odour (excrement), and the association of noisy trumpets with the sounds and smells of flatulence and putrefaction, point towards the more general relation between noise and corruption, or din and stench, explored by Lévi-Strauss (1966) with reference to Amazonian mythology. This same relation is also evident in slang terms for “to smell bad, in the English “to honk” or “to hum” and the French “*taper*”, “*cogner*”, or “*claquer*”, “to hit”, “bump”, or “slap”. It also figures in Dante’s elision of arse with trumpet (Alighieri 2021 [1472], v. 139) and in Chaucer’s comparison of the “foul sound of trumpets” with the noxious sounds and smells of farts and cannon-fire (Travis 2004, p. 334). The relation is also explicit in the case of Jurupary, whose loud noise was accompanied by a foul, animal odour potent enough to kill the initiates (Tôrämû Bayar and Guahari Ye Ñi 2004, p. 37), a further reason for considering the spirit with no anus as a version of Jurupary. This association between din and stench would seem to shed light on why noisy ceramic trumpet-pots were often used in the context of funerary rituals, and specifically in connection with rites of secondary burial involving procedures and substances producing strong and unpleasant odours.

As a first stage, the body of the deceased was allowed to decay in some form of container. Desana authors Diakuru and Kisibi (2006, p. 119-120) mention a clay pot, presumably a large pottery vessel used to ferment beer; C. Hugh-Jones (1979, p. 110) and M. Oliveira (2016, p. 315) mention a canoe, perforated
The spirit with no anus and the pots that fart to allow the separation of flesh from bone. The cleaned bones were then burned in a fire or toasted in a container. Wallace (1870, p. 498) speaks of bones “put in a great pan … over a fire (giving off) a most horrible odour”. The “great pan” would be the large ceramic hotplate used for cooking beiju. The calcined remains, powdered in a mortar, were then mixed with manioc beer, and served to the participants at a rite of secondary burial, as in the Kubeo oyne described by Goldman (1979). Diakuru and Kisibi describe the first stages of this process in these words: “Na nossa tradição, não existe céu nem inferno depois da morte. Existe uma casa dos mortos […] onde o morto fica guardado dentro de uma grande bacia de tuiuca, tapada com uma balão, até mofar. Quando ele está mofado, é levado para o fogo de Transformação. Ele é então jogado no fogo, onde transforma-se num pássaro japu, arara, ou garça, etc.” (Diakuru and Kisibi 2006).

The “fire of transformation” that converts the deceased into birds that supply feathers for ornaments is presumably the fire that toasts the bones, one recalling the fire which killed Jurupary, converting his bones to flutes; which burns caraipe bark to produce temper; and which converts raw clay into the cooked clay pots that incarnate the spirit with no anus.

The processes described also make clear the links between the putrefaction of the corpse, the burning of bones, and the fermentation of beer, all of which produce potent odours. Manioc beer, especially beer made from fibrous beiju toasted on the hotplate till charred (~ɨhɨri, “burned stuff”), has a strong, acrid taste and smell. The deadly nature of this smell emerges clearly in the following commentary on the story of the spirit by ritual specialist Omero León: “Ceci est pour souffler, souffler la chicha, pour que la chose là-bas, qu’il enfonça, ne s’enfonce pas dans le corps quand on boit la chicha et tue. Pour que ce même bois pour remuer la cuisson (du carayurú) ne s’incorpore pas dans le corps, il souffle. Il souffle pour celui qui boit la chicha, il lave cette odeur qui sent comme la chair pourrie, comme l’argile. Il sort cette baguette qui blesse, qui sent les restes de chair, il la sort et il souffle. Toute cette histoire n’est que pour souffler, ainsi là-bas, où tout arrive” (Bidou n. d.).

As will already be clear, manioc beer causes flatulence. During our field research in the late 1960s, our hosts’ beer-feasts were often enlivened by farting tournaments. Modulating the noise with cupped hands, they vied to produce the best speech-like riffs while others competed to match amusing words to the sounds. A standard response was “Daughter, soon we’ll eat,” a joke drawing

18. The high fibre content of this burned beiju, and the identification of manioc fibre with bone (Hugh-Jones C. 1979, p. 189), suggests an even closer link between beer-making and the treatment of the dead.

19. Melissa Oliveira (pers. comm.) reports similar contests as upsetting Salesian missionaries in Brazil.
attention to the closeness of the smells, tastes, and sounds of cooking, food, and defecation to those of beer and fermentation, to the ambiguous taste of beer, and to the undervalued status of female children.

If Kubeo and Saliba ceramic trumpets are unquestionably associated with mortuary rites and treatment of the dead, the same would seem to hold for the spirit and his trumpets. I know of no Kubeo or Saliba story of a spirit with no anus that can be linked with their ceramic trumpets, nor do I have direct evidence that any form of ceramic trumpet was used at the masked mortuary rituals described by Pirá-Paraná elders. However, the coincidence between these descriptions and Goldman’s account of the Kubeo oyne, featuring the bark-fringed jaguar trumpet pot, makes it probable that the same instrument also featured in Pirá-Paraná rites.

The red and the black

Lévi-Strauss’ (2013, p. 248) comments on Gomez-Imbert’s (1990) Tatuyo version of the spirit story link the narrator’s account of pot-making with the figure of the rainbow serpent, the source of the coloured plumage of birds and teacher of the art of pottery-making, his patterned skin inspiring the designs that women paint on their pots. Lévi-Strauss’ suggestion certainly applies to the Baniwa, producers of beautifully painted pottery made from clay coming from the faeces of the anaconda-demiurge Omawali (Oliveira T. 2015, p. 326-328; 2017, p. 57). But his suggestion is more problematic as regards the Tatuyo for Tukanoan pots are typically a uniform black.

Nonetheless, Lévi-Strauss’ “error” still points in an interesting direction, alerting us to the role of colour in the story. Here people often specify not only what stick was used to pierce the spirit’s anus but also what wood was used to make this stick. Why should they do this? As with so many ethnographic puzzles, I wish I had asked at the time! All I can do now is offer a suggestion. The specified woods appear to suggest a play between red and black; between clay as flesh or as faeces; and between life and death. Let us begin with the stick.

To make carayurú [yrl], a red body paint, women boil leaves of a cultivated vine (Bignonia chica) to obtain a bright red sediment. Carayurú is explicitly associated with blood, and the pointed, red-stained stick used to stir the boiling liquid does indeed look as if it had been plunged into someone’s body and then withdrawn, still covered in blood. Correa’s Kawiyerí version of the story (1989, p. 37, 175) tells us that the stick is made from “ogre wood” used to make pottery, i.e. the caraipe whose bark is used to temper clay throughout Amazonia (Ribeiro 1988). Specifying this tree certainly adds density to a story about pottery, but we can take this further.

To seal the halved gourds used as containers for food and drink, sap from caraipe and/or carayurú leaves is painted on the cleaned interior. The upturned
shells are then placed over crushed manioc leaves, converting the red sap to a hard, black varnish. A similar red-to-black reduction is used for wooden stools. The smoothed surface is first painted with caraipe sap mixed with red carayurú. Designs of tipiti basketry-weave are then painted on this surface in liquid clay. This is then washed off to reveal the black patterns standing out against a red background (Figure 14). In the context of our story, caraipe would therefore signal not only pottery but also this transformation from red to black, the same transformation undergone by the spirit’s putrefied flesh and blood when it became clay. The proximity between the three substances is reflected in Barasana and Tatuyo, where ríi, “blood”, ríi, “flesh”, and ríi, “clay” are distinguished only by tone.20

Other versions of the story specify a different wood, this time wéebikiwi, “mature black-paint tree”.21 Wée, a black body paint, takes part in the same red-to-black transformation just described for carayurú, sap and clay. The body is first smeared with red carayurú. Wée is then painted in tipiti [yrl] patterns over the red on the soft body parts, as if to render them like porous basketry. By contrast,

20. Elsa Gomez-Imbert (pers. comm.).
21. Instead, Bidou (n.d.) specifies rikaë [tav] (rikabi [bsn]) whose bark tubes are used as piston whistles during dabucuri where raw, gathered animal foods are exchanged.
the bony joints and other hard parts are given a uniform black wash (Figure 15), preventing loss of life-force by rendering the bones (“flutes”) impermeable.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig15.jpg}
\caption{Paulina, with \textit{wée}-blackened hands, chin, and hairline, painting \textit{wée} onto red \textit{carayurú}}
\end{figure}

\begin{quote}
A reverse black-to-red transformation occurs at initiation. At the start of the rite, men paint initiates’ bodies from head to toe with \textit{wée}, its black colour associated with night and indicating a social death. During a period of seclusion, this black slowly fades. Women then paint the initiates with red \textit{carayurú}, associated with blood and life, and signalling the initiates’ rebirth and return to normal life (Hugh-Jones S. 1979, p. 96). In analogous manner, girls secluded at first menstruation have their bodies covered with black \textit{wée}. Thereafter, they wear red paint daily. In sum, the specification of the two woods appears to connotate flesh vs bone, openness vs closure, life vs death.

This play of red and black also applies to pottery. In contrast to the fine red-on-white pottery of their Arawakan Baniwa neighbours, most Tukanoan ceramics are black with no painted decoration. Once fired, care is taken to turn the reddish-coloured pots to a uniform black—as if to emphasize that the spirit is truly dead, that his blood no longer flows, and that the soft clay from his body is now fully cooked and transformed into a sturdy, watertight container.

The principal exception to this black, unpainted Tukanoan norm is the brightly painted yagé pot (Figure 16). In the story of Yagé, personification of the vines from which the hallucinogenic drink is prepared, music, song, design, and coloured birds all come from his mother’s birth blood, blood experienced by the men as the synaesthetic visual-auditory sensations produced by yagé

\textsuperscript{22} Flutes are made from bones and Jurupary’s bones are flutes.
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(Hugh-Jones 2017). Yagé is Jurupary’s twin brother and the colourful designs on his pot are visual counterparts of the harmonious musical sounds flowing from Jurupary flutes, instruments identified with birds and ornamented with sunbursts of yellow japú [yrl] feathers. With Jurupary identified with both large snakes and birds, it is here, in a special pot decorated by men rather than by women, that Lévi-Strauss’ polychrome designs, serpents, and birds most clearly coincide.

The shape of the yagé pot is much like that of a slightly smaller pot, with rattling seeds in its base, used by girls secluded during rites of first menstruation to tell their female guardians that they are hungry, thirsty, or wish to urinate or defecate. The interior of this otherwise typically black pot is painted with geometric designs in red (Figure 17, next page). In addition to their similar shape and unusual decoration, the similarity between these two painted pots extends to the rattling sounds they produce. When a shaman serves yagé at rituals, he hits the sides of the pot with his stirring stick to produce a loud rattling sound.

Both these rattling, patterned, painted pots are associated with female blood: the modestly decorated version with the incipient flow of menarche; the more exuberant, colourful version with the flow of fertility fully realized in the blood accompanying birth. The rattling sounds of these pots also recall the rattling jaguar pot of Kubeo funeral rites but, in other respects, they are opposed as life is to death, red to black, or blood to bone.
Cosmic ceramics

Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, p. 26) writes, “The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, complete unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world.”

The spirit with no anus is unfinished and incomplete in a double sense. He not only lacks an anus but is also perpetually midway between being and becoming for his existence is only possible through his own death, a violent opening-up that transforms his flesh into the clay from which he once was, and will again be, made. But if he is not yet a pot, how can he already be one? A clue to this paradox lies in his identity as ~wati gide ~bagi, “spirit with no anus”. ~Wati, the term I translate as “spirit” and others as “devil”, can also be glossed as “reflection”, “shadow”, “image”, or “ghost”, the trace of something once present, or hint of something yet to appear in full. A ~wati is like a shadow. One does not see him “in the flesh”, only in changes of light and shade and, above all in, strange sounds and smells. The spirit is not fully a pot for pots have hard, durable substance. He is more the idea or image of a pot, a pot-to-be that one day will realize his full potential.

The spirit is also like an unborn foetus, self-contained and with no flow through its body. At birth, as a baby suckles and breathes, its anus and mouth are opened, and life now flows through its body. Likewise, as pursed lips blow breath through the pot-spirit’s pierced embouchure, he comes to life and trumpets his signature cry. As a watertight pot, the spirit also has the qualities of a retentive, pregnant womb. As a woman’s hands mould formless, plastic, blood-derived clay into a solid, well-shaped pot, so, in gestation, her womb forms the body of a perfect infant out of formless blood and semen. And the pot-spirit’s death by piercing is another birth releasing the clay from which another pot will be formed.
It is here that a seemingly light-hearted, ribald tale accounting for the origin of clay takes on its more serious side for the story is also an account of the creation and birth of the universe and human life, with women potters as avatars of the great female creator deities of Northwest Amazonian mythology, ~Robi ~Kubu, “Woman Shaman” for the peoples of the Pirá, Ye’pá-Bikio, “Creator of the Earth” for the Tukano, and Ñamatu for the Yukuna and Tanimuka. The Kawiyeri identify the spirit with no anus with the sky in the form of an up-turned ceramic vessel, either a cooking pot or the flat, sloping-sided hotplate used to cook beiju (Figure 18). This translucid container-sky exactly covers its mirror-image, the earth, another hotplate supported on three pot-stands comprising the spirit’s legs and feet (Bourgue n. d.12; Correa 1989, p. 142). This flat, ceramic earth is the body of the spirit, its bare, treeless surface awaiting the hills, river valleys, flowing water, and forest cover that his children, the Ayawa, will later create. Like their pot-spirit father, these children are also incarnations of clay, this time in the form of tubes made by a natural potter, the nymph of the cicada Fidicina chlorogena (Béguin n. d.; Figure 19, next page).

The image of sky, earth, and underworld as ceramic hotplates, stacked one on top of the other with spaces in between, is used throughout much of Northwest Amazonia as a model of the cosmos, one that Lévi-Strauss compares to a residential building where “each apartment’s floor is the ceiling of the apartment
below, and reciprocally” (1988, p. 117). The model can accommodate any number of layers but is based upon only two terms, an earth-floor and sky-roof with a perspectival switch between them. This spatial switch is also one in time for, as day becomes night, the day-sky appears to move below earth and the night-sky to move above.23 By extension, this switch is also one between life and death. With respect to the inhabitants of earth, the sky above and underworld below are the domains of spirits and the dead. Dead stars, buried in the world above, fall to earth as living beings just as deceased humans, buried in this earth, fall below as living spirits. The switch between spirit and flesh, pot and clay, or container and contents, belongs to this set for it, too, is a switch between life and death.

The voracious, life-giving earth

The story of the spirit, a story of gestation, birth, and cosmogenesis, is also a story of the ending and destruction of life in death. In as much as the spirit’s flesh becomes subterranean clay, so also is this subterranean realm a manifestation of the spirit’s body. Pasico, the ritual expert from whom I learned much

23. See Hugh-Jones S. 1979, p. 263 (Barasana); Reichel 1999, p. 224 (Tanimuka, Yukuna).
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of my ethnography, explained that, from the perspective of this subterranean being, what we might see as a mere act of burial is a process whereby the earth actively consumes the dead—just as he once consumed his neighbour’s children.

But this process goes round and round. Dead people, buried in the earth, fall to the layer below, reborn, as living beings; cooked children are reborn as monkeys; and the flesh of dead pot-spirits becomes living clay. Like a serpentine ouroboros that eats its own tail in an endless cycle of life and death, the spirit with no anus is a perfect example of Lévi-Strauss’ (1985, p. 209 ff.) “mythes en bouteille de Klein”, a being whose outside is continuous with his inside, a container made from his own contents.

It is here that Northwest Amazonian funeral rites and treatment of the dead come back into play. With reference to the burning of the corpse that transforms it into the birds from whose feathers dance ornaments are made, Diakuru and Kisibi write, “Fazia-se isso para que os enfeites de penas usados nas danças, que foram durante certo tempo tirados do mundo da natureza, voltassem. Assim, os netos do difunto poderiam ter enfeites durante a sua vida. Enquanto isso, a alma do difunto fica aguardando no Universo para nascer de novo, isto é, para formar uma nova geração. Agora a gente não sabe mais o que está certo: a crença dos meus avós ou a crença dos cristãos?” (2006, p. 120).

This is the ubiquitous notion of death as a prelude to new life, here phrased in the Tukanoan idiom equating the soul with feather ornaments. Buried with the dead, these ornaments fall to the underworld. There they travel upstream along the underworld river to the source of life in the east, then continue upstream along terrestrial rivers to be reborn as the living.

Goldman’s characterization of the Kubeo oyne as “dramatic rituals, the purpose of which is to produce a state of mind in which the reality of death is faced and made to appear natural and tolerable” (1979, p. 221), could also be read as a triumph of life over death. With reference to the Saliba, Gumilla puts this same transformation of emotions as follows:

Empezaron à venir compañías forasteras do los Pueblos convidados; y yo no sé cómo puede ser, ni en donde trahian tan á mano las lágrimas; porque siendo así que venian alegres y con festiva algazára, al llegar á la puerta del duelo, soltaban un tierno llanto con verdaderas lágrimas. A éste respondía prontamente el llanto de los de adentro; y pasado aquella avenida melancólica, se ponían á beber y bailar alegrementes; y si en el fervor del baile llegaba otra visita de convidados, iban renovando el llanto dicho, y volvían á beber y bailar: lo qual prosiguió así, hasta que llegaron los últimos. (Gumilla 1745, p. 216-217)

24. See also Hugh-Jones 2018, p. 221.
Conclusion

The weight of attention devoted to palm-wood flutes and bark-wrapped trumpets known as “Jurupary” has overshadowed apparently less important pottery trumpets used in dabucuri. In much the same way, the prominence of Jurupary myths has eclipsed apparently less serious stories about a spirit with no anus. One aim of this paper has been to redress the balance, giving the story of the spirit the attention it deserves as both a part of Jurupary mythology and an important narrative in its own right concerning cosmogony, death, and rebirth. At the same time, I have been concerned to explore possible connections between the ceramic trumpets that feature in dabucuri and other pottery trumpets, used alongside bark Jurupary trumpets in Northwest Amazonian mortuary rituals. Here I have explored the complementary relation between the two kinds of trumpet, both personifications of deities, that is evident in mythology and ritual, and especially in their respective associations with flesh and bone.

In his comparative paper on Amazonian funeral customs, Chaumeil (1997) draws attention to the links between double funerals, remembering the dead, the conservation of bones, the possession of sacred flutes derived from the burned body of Jurupary and representing his bones, and a unilineal conception of society. He further suggests that burial in canoe or pottery urn containers, cremation, and the practice of endo-cannibalism where powdered bones are consumed with manioc beer all represent different ways of conserving durable bony remains.25 Now this is precisely the set of customs we have been concerned with above. But what we have added are the associations between Jurupary trumpets and trumpets made of pottery and the relations between bone and flesh that these suggest.

This brings me to a final point concerning the possible relevance of this material to Amazonian archaeology and anthropomorphic funerary urns. As Barreto and Oliveira (2016) note, over recent years, the dominance of ceramics as the major source of information on the pre-historic populations of Amazonia has been partially displaced by a newer focus on settlement form, size, and distribution, on landscape modifications such as mounds, ditches, and roads, and on the human management of vegetation and creation of terra preta soils. In response, they argue for a return to ceramic analysis. But instead of the older typological emphasis on traditions and phases, this new analysis should be informed by recent anthropological work on materiality and objects and seek to understand how past indigenous populations thought about, and related to, the production and use of ceramic objects, especially in the contexts of ritual and cosmology.

The material I have presented regarding the symbolic resonances of clay, pottery-making, and pottery objects amongst Northwest Amazonian peoples may prove of value to this endeavour. We have no direct access to the mythology and ritual of the peoples of archaeology, but Lévi-Strauss’ work on Amazonian mythology, in particular the mythology regarding pottery and pot-making, would suggest that, at least in general terms, what applies for Northwest Amazonia can provide significant clues for what applies elsewhere. This is especially so because the evidence available to me, including periodic discovery of ancient burial urns, sometimes in groups, suggests that urn burial was once a common, perhaps preferred, practice in the Tukanoan and Arawakan upper Rio Negro region.26

Like Tukanoan pots, funerary urns are also personifications, with the clay modelling of arms, legs, and other anatomical features found, for example, in Maracá anthropomorphic funerary urns (Guapindaia 2001), clearly intended to represent a fleshy counterpart to the bones the urns contain. Nonetheless, the story of the spirit with no anus may just give us a glimpse of the depth of the symbolism involved. More speculatively still, one wonders what light this story of perforation might shed on the perforations typically found in anthropomorphic funeral urns, especially the perforations in the backsides of urns from the Upper Purus region (Saunaluoma and Virtanen 2015, p. 30; Figure 20).

Fig. 20 – Anthropomorphic jar with perforated backside from Upper Purus (Saunaluoma and Virtanen 2015, p. 30, fig. 4)

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26. Besides the information in Chaumeil’s (1997) paper, my knowledge of urn burial in the upper Rio Negro region comes exclusively from indigenous statements and local gossip. I have not seen the urns concerned and would welcome references to relevant published sources.
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Appendix: ISO codes for languages

[bao] Bará
[bsn] Barasana
[bwi] Baniwa
[des] Desana
[ebb] Kawiyeri
[tav] Tatuyo
[tuo] Tukano
[yrl] Lingua geral

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