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## Cosmology and Practice in Amazonia: The Inspiring Career of Stephen Hugh-Jones

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### Cover Page Footnote:

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# Introduction to Special Issue. Cosmology and Practice in Amazonia: The Inspiring Career of Stephen Hugh-Jones

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## Introduction

In 2017, Stephen Hugh-Jones was invited by the Pirá-Paraná Indigenous Association (ACAIFI) to participate in a workshop about the uses and abuses of new technology; how to deal with waste, now that people own more stuff; and the risks attendant to the information age, now that mobile phones, computers and satellite internet can be found in Pirá-Paraná villages. On the same trip, to introduce *The Origin of Night*, an art installation at the National University in Bogotá inspired by the ethnographic work of Stephen and Christine Hugh-Jones, the couple gave a talk on the history of their work with the peoples of the Pirá-Paraná. Over two thousand members of the public attended the talk. The dual purpose of this recent trip illustrates a hallmark of Stephen Hugh-Jones's work, the coexistence of practical matters alongside metaphysical ones, and testifies to a continuous, exceptional engagement with the field. Developing his arguments by a recurrent intellectual ascension to the heavens and return to earth, like Amazon dwellers he builds his idealism on observation and empiricism, and grounds his stories in everyday experience. The title of this issue expresses the unity of these two features of Stephen's anthropology: cosmology and practice. The priestly and esoteric and the mundane, practical, and necessary are consistently held in balance. This has made Stephen a uniquely useful interlocutor for the peoples of the Pirá-Paraná, Vaupés, and upper Rio Negro over the last fifty years.



**Figure 1.** Pasico ~kubu, Stephen's main teacher, explaining a reference to milk in his newly-completed drawing (Photo by Brian Moser, 1971)

Stephen undertook his first research trip to the Pirá-Paraná River in Colombia's Amazon region in 1968, and his most recent in 2017. In the forty-nine intervening years Amazonia has gone from being a "last frontier" for professional anthropology to being at the center of debates about human diversity and unity and how we can parse it.



**Figure 2.** Stephen and Reinel (Photo by Wade Davis, 2009)

### **An Art of Anthropology**

Stephen Hugh-Jones's way of thinking and writing anthropology is at once classical and iconoclastic; he generally addresses a hotly debated topic, introduces and synthesizes ethnographic facts that challenge current interpretations, compares his data with other parts of Amazonia, and finally proposes a new kind of model. Yet he does it in a way that is often disconcerting:

When invited or moved to contribute something on this or that theoretical issue, SHJ's first step is to summon up, from his vast storehouse of ethnographic knowledge, a web of bits of local knowledge and practice that his informants have tended to connect in contexts of ethnographic elicitation. To the anthropological problem carefully argued in books' introductions, or simply in the background of ongoing theoretical debate, he thus opposes an intriguing blob of ethnographic material, the immediate effect of which is to blur the issue, to cloud it with intimations of an order that is going to put the problem as argued to the test. (Taylor 2016)

By questioning what seemed simple or clear-cut he shows that some issues remain to be solved, for instance in our understanding of human-animal relations, or of shamanism, political structures, and religious change. He then proceeds to explain and spell out the connections made by his informants, which joins all the elements he had introduced, and proposes an underlying logic. This logic or figure was already there, "lurking beneath its surface" (*ibid.*), and therefore seems to be generated by the ethnography.

And what is the model or figure he produces? Anne-Christine Taylor argues that it is "a kind of intermediate configuration between a full-blown structuralist model and an indigenous model: less abstracted or de-semanticized than the former, but more abstracted and de-particularized than the latter." Some examples include the tube, his original contribution to this volume, the house (1995a), and the opposition between vertical and horizontal shamanism

(1994a), to take two of the better-known concepts from Stephen's past publications. According to Taylor, this type of model has three main advantages: first, it "index[es] plural, alternative avenues of imagination, thereby making way for dissension and the individuation of knowledge, a major issue in the Amazonian world"; second, it "precisely locate[s] the area where history is constantly seeping into the local imaginary and vice versa"; and third, it can be taken "upwards" (toward abstraction), "downwards" (to make sense of ethnographic details), or "sideways" (as a tool for comparison).

Even when he leans toward the cosmological, the idealistic, or the esoteric, his "models" always retain the possibility of integrating change and historical transformations: the tube can perfectly digest a shotgun or even yet-unknown entities such as a railway tunnel, and the "house" can deal with museums or, as in Melissa Santana de Oliveira's paper in this issue, schools. Stephen's work avoids the sterile opposition of tradition and acculturation because he manages to highlight precisely a level of abstraction where change is already anticipated in the model. Yet it is even more explicit in papers that focus explicitly on historical transformations, as with his analysis of vertical and horizontal shamanism (1994a). He formalizes the contrast between two tendencies in the shamanism of lowland South America, one that is "priestly" and ancestral, the other individualistic and linked to hunting and warfare. At some level this distinction can serve to oppose whole groups (the Tukanoans with vertical shamanism and the Jivaroans with horizontal shamanism), and at another level complementary roles in a single society (the ~kubu-priest and the payé-shaman among the Barasana), but it is essentially a contrast between two ideal types (1994a:45).

As Stephen once pointed out, the distinction between these shamanisms is not merely a concern for anthropologists; a Barasana person may wonder about someone in particular—"Is he a ~kubu or a payé?" We see here how the models he builds remain close to native conceptualization. Moreover, because his models do not impose a rigid categorical opposition, Hugh-Jones can account for even radical innovations. Motivated by the era's economic and social conditions (and the desire for manufactured goods) millenarian cults of the late nineteenth century had their roots in the open and egalitarian features of horizontal shamans—who are, by definition, potential prophets. In the twentieth century, further changes in shamanic activity make sense in relation to the arrival of various types of Christian missionary—Catholics potentially took on roles as either vertical shamans (as among the Bororo) or horizontal shamans (as among the Barasana), while Evangelical pastors revived past millenarian expectations.

This simultaneous sensitivity to historical processes, to fluid and overlapping identities, and to the openness of esoteric law (which is not viewed as a bounded cannon or culture) is a constant in Stephen Hugh-Jones's work from the time of his first published piece, "Like Leaves on the Forest Floor" (1977) to "Thinking through Tubes" (this issue). Regarding shamanism and millenarian movements, for example, he stresses that prophets were men of considerable colonial experience (1994a:53), and regarding trade, he similarly argues that chains of indebtedness and exchange do "not suddenly stop at an ill-defined ethnic frontier. [They stretch] on to bind Indian to Indian, so that the morality of the market penetrates that of kinship and the morality of kinship may be extended to dealings with White people" (1992:51). The opposition between White people and Amerindians is therefore a bit like that between vertical and horizontal shamans, a contrast between two ideal types, which may be expressed as such, for instance, in mythology (see "The Gun and the Bow," 1988), but may also give way to continuous positions and relations: the Barasana talk about someone with whom they have frequent dealings as "my White man," as if the Amazonian owned or had domesticated the White man, and White traders often have native concubines and children. It is such very concrete relations that cause the morality of kinship to mingle with that of the market.

The analytic connections between trade and kinship, or between ritual, Christianity, and commodities, are here particularly convincing because Hugh-Jones has navigated them himself and has a deep and precise knowledge of both the Barasana's grand rituals and their efforts to obtain manufactured goods. This is the kind of pragmatism that comes of continuous fieldwork—fieldwork that balances interviews with specialists and practical engagement in Barasana life. The reluctance to build theoretical castles is also Hugh-Jones resisting becoming crystallized in the position of "expert" in favor of the creativity and dynamism that being a "neophyte"—a continuing apprentice to Barasana life—affords. It is also a refusal to reduce and simplify for the sake of an argument; instead, he strives to account for the irreducible

messiness of reality. This is evident in his treatment of historical change and, for instance, in the way he deals with attitudes toward animals: they are the subject of chants and myths but are also raised as pets, or killed and butchered for food.

One implication of this responsiveness to a multifaceted reality is that it is not easy to situate Stephen Hugh-Jones in a specific school of thought (beyond his very explicit admiration for Claude Lévi-Strauss). For example, he often refers to morality, yet, compared to the work of Joana Overing (2003), for instance, he is much less interested in articulating consistent systems of value than in foregrounding moral ambivalence and dilemma—the Barasana's desire for manufactured goods, which leads them “to do things against their better judgement” (1992:46) even though those goods also serve to satisfy the demands and expectations of kin; or that eating meat implies killing animals that are a bit like us, to give two examples. Notably, these are predicaments shared by both Amazonians and Europeans, and it is a feature of Hugh-Jones' work that he foregrounds such commonalities.

Even though Stephen has maintained a continuous intellectual dialogue with the proponents of a more ontological version of Amazonia, be it perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998) or animism (Descola 1992, 2005), his reluctance to exaggerate the alterity of Amazonians and his insistence on the pragmatic dimensions of existence also account for his disagreements with this line of thinking. Rather than favoring interpretations that maximize Amerindian alterity he offers minimizing ones: what if the Barasana word usually translated as “jaguar” actually means “predator” in the same way that “fish” means “food” (see “Good Reasons or Bad Conscience?” in this issue)? Similarly, whereas in perspectival interpretations the hairs and feathers of animals and the ornaments of humans have often been treated as a “skin,” Stephen suggests they are rather similar to a distinctive “coat of arms.” As such they are visible markers of identity and yet exist to be transformed or stolen without this implying the crossing of ontological boundaries. Hugh-Jones certainly argues that Amazonians interact with animals and plants in a highly specific way, but he has constantly challenged exoticizing reifications of those modes of interaction.

Hugh-Jones offered a telling response to Alan Macfarlane's 2007 interview question, “Do you feel the psychic unity of Man?” “I feel very much a unity . . . things become only too familiar,” he replied, from there expanding on his own reluctance to follow the tendency in much Amazonianist anthropology—and popular representations as well—to present Amerindians as the foil against which Europeans assess themselves. “Much of my work has been against this binary view,” he says and then gives us an example of his thinking: “British kids have a taxonomy of sweets, dinosaurs and cars; Amazonian kids have a taxonomy of botanical knowledge” (Macfarlane 2007). Stephen never tried to systematize his approach in a consistent project that would initiate a school (as is also demonstrated by the variety of topics and perspectives adopted by his students), and this eclecticism is also precisely why his work has inspired generations of students and readers.

Having characterized the style, argumentation, and philosophical convictions that unite a corpus of work, in the following section we look more closely at his career as it unfolded in dialogue with Amazonianist anthropology. Following a classical three-stage model, which should not diminish the consistency of his work, we stress shifting emphases to chart a life's journey.

## **Fifty Years as an Amazonianist Anthropologist**

### *The Ethnographic Phase (1968-88)*

Stephen always freely admits that “anthropology was largely a device to get [him] to Amazonia” (ibid.). He never thought he would become an academic anthropologist until, in 1972, he found himself in those shoes, with an assistant lectureship at the University of Cambridge, leading to a permanent post in 1977 and a fellowship at King's College. Stephen had grown up with his medic father's stories of the Waorani and the Xingu, and he had dreamed of the South American rain forest's flora, fauna, and peoples while living in Jamaica between the ages of seven and ten. When his parents realized he was fluent in Creole but illiterate in English, they sent him to an English preparatory school to be “civilized.” There, his biology teacher gave the young naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace's 1853 book *A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro*. Reading it consolidated Stephen's determination to go to Amazonia. In 1963, at eighteen and before beginning his undergraduate degree in archaeology and anthropology the

following year, he boarded a ship to Venezuela and made his way onto Bogotá. He spent nine months in Colombia, including an extended visit to the Vaupés with time spent amongst Maku and Cubeo peoples.



**Figure 3.** Stephen helping Paulino paint his maloca (Photo by Brian Moser, 1971)

He would return to the Vaupés in September 1968, when he and Christine began their PhD research together. They were part of a team that also included Peter Silverwood-Cope and Bernard Arcand, all sent to Colombia under Edmund Leach's supervision. In the 1960s the study of Africa dominated Cambridge's Department of Social Anthropology under the

tutelage of Meyer Fortes. Leach encouraged his students to be the antidote to the Africa-dominated teaching in the department. In addition to the Colombian group, Caroline Humphrey chose Siberia, and Johnny Parry chose India, while Stephen's old school friend Alfred Gell, who had moved to the London School of Economics, went off to New Guinea.

Stephen and Christine did twenty-two months of fieldwork with the Barasana, "going naked," as Stephen amusingly put it in his interview with composer Michael Berkeley for BBC Radio 3's *Private Passions* (14 August 2016). Even for an idealistic and experimental era, Stephen and Christine were exceptional in the degree to which they "took the mantra of 'participant observation' to heart," as Caroline Humphrey vividly described (Humphrey 2016):

They not only learned to hunt, fish, grow vegetables, cook, sing, dance and play instruments like a Barasana, go around dressed only in a G-string, etc., but also that all of that was not a temporary "experience" but a real viable way of life for them. I saw this in Cambridge, after we all returned from the field. The Hugh-Jones' house in the Gog Magog hills was like a kind of maloca, with a shifting population of graduate students. Traps and blow-pipes were used for hunting rabbits and pheasants in the surrounding woods; inside, there were hammocks, woven baskets and bags; pet snakes were kept; food was often cooked on open fires, and various substances smoked. Even the ducks on King's [College] back lawn were not safe from the blow-pipe, as I remember.

Stephen had to finish writing his thesis with frenetic speed, submitting in 1974, while Christine wrote at a more considered pace, finishing in 1977, by which time they had two children. Determined to integrate life and anthropology, they would return to the Pirá-Paraná in 1979 with eight-year-old Leo and five-year-old Tom, an experience that Christine wrote about in *Children in the Field* (C. Hugh-Jones 1987). Upon their return in 1980, Christine began her medical degree at the University of Cambridge, going on to pursue a career as a general practitioner.

Amazonian ethnology was Stephen's vocation from a tender age, but his work spans vast ground in thematic terms: it engaged with not only ritual, myth and cosmology but nutrition (1994b); botany (contributions to Schultes 1972); herpetology (Hugh-Jones and Hugh-Jones 2019); astronomy (1982, 2015a, 2015b); kinship (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Hugh-Jones 1995a); musicology (2017); material culture (2009, 2013b, 2017); education (1997); and history and literacy (2016). This is firstly because Stephen has made it his business to learn about things that are important to Barasana ~kubua, the shaman-priests in whose intellectual world he has steeped himself, and also because "he is by nature interested in same things the Amerindians are themselves interested in—animals, plants, natural processes, celestial configurations, architecture, things that are built or manufactured, etc"—and that makes him a worthy interlocutor (Taylor 2016).

Stephen's monograph is a testament to his commitment to at once "going naked" and allowing himself to be "intellectualized"—as he put it himself—by the Barasana. Philippe Descola described Stephen and Christine's paired monographs *The Palm and the Pleiades* (1979) and *From the Milk River* (1979), respectively, as "revolutionary" (2016) in offering, for the first time, an account of how an Amazonian people see themselves, and how they connect domains previously treated in isolation—parsed according to anthropological convention rather than indigenous abstraction. These two monographs are key texts in a collective flurry of publications in the 1970s and 80s that energized Amazonianist anthropology by applying structuralist methods to holistic ethnographic study. While Lévi-Strauss had used Amazonian exemplars in his comparative theorizations of kinship, social structure, mythology, and classification systems, in the Hugh-Jones's books the structuralist method becomes the art of discovering and representing the logical, aesthetic, and processual dimensions of the Barasana's own ways of connecting all of these "systems."

Stephen's book focuses on tracing complex linkages between myth, ritual, sexed bodies, and the natural world (astronomy, seasonality, plant life). One of its explicit theoretical contributions is its demonstration of the complexity of the relationship between myth and ritual: if an interlocutor explains a ritual episode or sacred object with reference to a myth, it won't do to stop there; each myth draws its full range of significances from all the others in the

corpus, and much can be gained, in terms of discerning the depth and polysemy of ritual acts, and their intended efficacy, from journeying down that rabbit hole. We are far from simple charter myths, and we are far also from the free play of signifiers in Lévi-Strauss's treatment of myth as a completely open, internally referential system. In *The Palm and the Pleiades*, ritual is practical mythology: mythology tethered to material efficacy, people manipulating things, and through them, time, life, and the world.

Beyond the relationship between ritual and myth, this book is a lesson in the oversimplifications of anthropological analysis. *He Wi*, the ritual that concerns Stephen's book, is the Barasana version of an aerial cult called *Yuruparí*, which previous scholars had summarily type-cast by ranging it on the shelf of flute cults and male initiations. Stephen shows that flutes and men are less than half the story. As predominantly male symbols, flutes make sense only in relation to gourds filled with beeswax (female symbols) and palms, which in turn point outwards into a universe laced with contradictions, chief among them that of human mortality and fecundity.

Christine's book emphasizes the common ordering principles of production, consumption, kinship, and the lifecycle. Abstract concepts of space-time lurk within mundane, domestic arts. In her own words, "In order to contact the ancestral past described in myth, people must transpose the system of the universe onto the systems which they are able to change through concrete action . . . ritual is essentially the art of the possible" (1979:280). Christine analyzes these systems as dynamic processes that effect transformation in the world through technical action. Besides being the finest processual symbolic analysis of the domestic rituals that reproduce life, the book is an exercise in re-scaling anthropological analysis to reveal the fractal nature of signification. Contrary to the assumption that domestic labor is just a tough slog that assures women's subjection, there's as much meaning in manioc processing as in initiation rites, and she devises ingenious diagrams to exemplify this (e.g., see *ibid.*:205, 238, 252). Christine's monograph is thus an early landmark in a flourishing symbolic anthropology that took off from structuralism's invitation for deeper imaginativeness in connecting heterogeneous data. No book better illustrates anthropology's "new reach in seeing abstract categories or principles in ethnographic particulars" (Stasch 2006:167–8).

Pushing Amazonianist anthropology in this direction, Christine and Stephen were among a set of scholars whose publications exerted a mutual influence on the field, including Anthony Seeger (1981); Christopher Crocker (1985); Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (1978); and Roberto Da Matta (1976). Beyond Amazonia, this work represents the ushering in of a new paradigm of anthropology that brought indigenous ways of ordering the world to the fore, as opposed to indigenous worlds compartmentalized according to anthropological categories. The Hugh-Joneses' monographs were therefore crucial in enabling Amazonia to make a decisive contribution to the development of symbolic and structuralist anthropology.

The two books also have another major innovation in common. Written before "gender" became common currency as a category of analysis in anthropology, they tacitly represent a turn toward male and female as a symbolic opposition, and away from "sex roles." This, despite their division of labor being classic enough—Christine did the manioc processing and Stephen the ritual. Nonetheless, Christine's book is not about women, and Stephen's is not about men. Both are about the gendered ordering principles of the cosmos as they are realized through action. This is something Stephen has taken forward since. While in his monograph there is a great deal of focus on the androgyny of He Wi symbolism, this tends to be appreciated statically: objects are revealed to have several potential significances and are described in their complex hybridity. Later, drawing on Marilyn Strathern's work, Stephen (2001) emphasizes the way that female or male aspects come to the fore as positional qualities in transactive contexts. However, the containment of female capacities in male bodies is a central concern in *The Palm and the Pleiades*, where it is never reduced to idioms of appropriation. He is wrong to chide himself for having previously considered gender as "straightforwardly 'about' men and women" (2001:250).

#### *The Anthropological Phase (Approx. 1988-2003)*

In a second phase of this career Stephen was forced to zoom out, to complement his initiate's interest in Barasana life and knowledge with a generalist's concern with how this can be brought to bear on anthropological inquiry. In a string of articles and edited books that appeared through the 1990s Stephen takes a pinch of the detail and complexity of his Barasana



data and uses it to answer anthropological questions in a new way. A good example is the classic *Barter, Exchange and Value* (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992) and Stephen's paper (1992), the first to take seriously Amazonian people's ambivalent desire for commodities. Here Stephen criticizes the assumption made by many economists and philosophers that man has, by nature, limited means and limitless wants, and he also rejects the idealized vision of Amerindian societies as being in equilibrium before disruption by external forces such as colonialism and capitalism. A few years later, *About the House* (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995) was published and included Stephen's influential paper on the androgynous Barasana house (1995a; see Hugh-Jones 1993 for a previous version). Two moves happened at once: the concept of the house, borrowed from Lévi-Strauss, enabled comparison with other areas that showed the relevance of thinking about material structures and social groups together. It also enabled Stephen to integrate Christine's and his own previous research, i.e., on female and male perspectives, as shown by Klaus Hamberger in his contribution to this issue: the Barasana long-house is both male and female, depending on whether it is seen from the outside or the inside, during ritual events or through everyday activities, when emerging from it or entering it.

Another feature of Stephen's work in this period is its collaborative nature, both within academic anthropology and outside. A cursory look at Stephen's publications reveal that only half are academic books, chapters, articles, or reviews written in English. There are twenty academic publications in French, Spanish and Portuguese, and more than twenty fall within other disciplines or are meant for an alternative audience: a children's book (1978); papers for the *Journal of Skyscape Archaeology* (2015a, 2015b); and pieces of a more biological-science bent on nutrition (1994b); drugs (1995b); and obscure fauna such as the red-footed sideneck turtle (Hugh-Jones and Hugh-Jones 2016). The same willingness to have his interests shaped by others ensured both that Stephen reached outside of anglophone academic anthropology and inclined him to respond to new political opportunities for indigenous people in Colombia.

In 1985 he began to participate in the development of indigenous ethno-education in the country when Jon Landaburu, a linguist friend in Bogotá, invited him to teach a new postgraduate ethnolinguistics course. His and Landaburu's idea was to "break the SIL [Summer Institute of Linguistics] stranglehold," as Stephen put it in a 2018 conversation. By training a cadre of Colombian, and especially indigenous Amerindian, linguists, the justification for the presence of North American missionary-linguists—namely, literacy—would no longer apply. Because of his continued fieldwork, his contacts with Martin von Hildebrand and others working for land rights and greater autonomy for indigenous peoples, and his friendship with Christian Gros, a French sociologist focusing on indigenous movements in Colombia, he was ready when the indigenous self-determination movement got off the ground.



Figure 4. Stephen (Photo by Titus Moser, 2016)

In 1996, ACAIPI (the Pirá-Paraná Indigenous Association) and the Fundación Gaia Amazonas invited him to a meeting about planning education; in 1997 the former asked him to

conduct the first training course for indigenous teachers and leaders. These invitations have kept coming. In his hybrid identity as knowledgeable elder, expert genealogist, and long-term collaborator, in 2016 Stephen was called upon to collaborate as consultant in two ACAIPI/Gaia workshops, one on kinship, the other on sacred sites. These workshops involved Bará, Barasana, Eduria, Makuna, Itana, Tatuayo, and Tuyuka representatives, who now work as anthropological researchers. All this collaborative work, initiated in the mid-80s, shows how anthropology can be a tool for decolonization. Papers in the second half of this special issue take this aspect of Stephen's work as inspiration, and include Stephen's landmark article on indigenous publishing.

*The Areal Phase (1996–Present)*

Seen from the Middle or the Northwest, Amazonia looks quite different.

—Hugh-Jones 2008:22

In the afterword to Irving Goldman's *Cubeo Hebénewa Religious Thought*, published in 2004, Stephen pens an overview of the direction that anthropological research in Northwest Amazonia has taken in the fifty years since Goldman's 1948 effort to write about the region. He sums up what he and others mean when they use the shorthand Northwest Amazonia to refer to a regional system made up of nineteen Tukanoan, five Maku, and several Arawakan groups:

The collectivity of Tukanoan communities makes up an open-ended system integrated by networks of exchange involving reciprocal visiting, trading, marriage and feasting. The system works through a dynamic interplay of similarity and difference, giving its component groups some measure of identity and allowing them to act according to common conventions regarding way of life, use of space, and use of language, dress, music, dancing, and so on, whilst preserving the differences that underpin and maintain interdependence between them . . . Anthropologists have usually emphasized the difference more than the similarities, taking an implicitly or explicitly tribal view by focusing on particular language groups. (2004:408–9, 411)

After retiring from departmental and college office in 2005, but not from anthropology, Stephen had more time to teach, collaborate, travel, and do fieldwork in Brazil and Colombia. His focus now centered on debates within Amazonianist anthropology, particularly those percolating in French and Brazilian circles, united by their common Lévi-Straussian ancestry. He combined this with growing engagement with Northwest Amazonian peoples' intellectual projects, their shamanism, plant and animal knowledge, teaching, research and publishing projects, and competitive claims to sacred sites and knowledge.

Stephen dates the start of his shift to thinking about Northwest Amazonia as an areal system to 1997–98, when Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, on the basis of Stephen's nomination, became his colleague at King's College and Simon Bolivar Visiting Professor at the Center for Latin American Studies. Stephen jokes that this was the start of his "Brazilianization," a transformation in the direction of his thinking that stemmed from reading of Brazilian anthropologists; his familiarization with the peoples living across the frontier in the Brazilian Uaupés and upper Rio Negro from 2002; and his immersion in a corpus of origin histories and other narratives written by Brazilian Tukanoan and Arawakan researchers.

Stephen had been reading Viveiros de Castro's work for some time, admiring his works of synthesis on Amazonian kinship systems, with their emphasis on affinal relations (e.g., Viveiros de Castro 1993). When Viveiros de Castro came to Cambridge in 1998, he presented his now well-known argument about perspectivism (see Viveiros de Castro 1996b, 1998, 2012). This synthesis was one factor in expanding Stephen's purview. What the societies of Northwest Amazonia had in common became sharper in light of their divergence from the Tupi-centric Amazonia that formed the basis for Eduardo's theory. Stephen had always been aware that Northwest Amazonia was the "odd one out," with its hierarchies, clans, priestly shamans, inherited wealth and names, and doctrinal approach to knowledge. In a string of publications (2006, 2009, 2013a, Andrello, Guerrero, and Hugh-Jones 2015) he argues the limitations of a universal predation-focused theory of Amazonia, presenting the Northwest

Amazonian exception. The Tupinamba and the Araweté, paradigmatically, had been shown to be in perpetual disequilibrium, always bent on obtaining from the outside the means of reproducing the self, often through violent means. Linking his own work to that of Descola and others, Viveiros de Castro (1996a) dubs this emphasis on hunting, warfare, and shamanism the “symbolic economy of alterity.” By contrast, Northwest Amazonian peoples may seem disappointingly familiar: transmission is more important than violent capture, and exchange is central. Yet this familiarity is also misleading, and in two papers (2001, 2013a) Stephen uses an explicit comparison with Melanesia, and especially with Marilyn Strathern’s (1988) *Gender of the Gift*, to introduce a kind of triangular comparison to highlight what makes Northwest Amazonia so distinctive within the continent, and yet so Amazonian.

When Eduardo invited Stephen to teach in Rio de Janeiro’s postgraduate anthropology program in 2002, he took the opportunity to visit São Gabriel da Cachoeira, where the indigenous associations of the Rio Negro are based. There he negotiated with the most prominent of these, Federação das Organizações Indígenas do Rio Negro (FOIRN), to travel up the Rio Negro and Uaupés to the Colombian frontier. A Desana man, Dorvalino Fernandes, accompanied him. Fernandes, together with his father Américo, had recently authored his clan’s version of Tukanoan origin mythology. It was on this trip that Stephen became aware of the book publishing “boom” among Tukanoan and Arawakan speakers and began an intensive reading of these books, engaging with both their mythic contents and their social life as agentive objects in local and international cultural politics. Reading these books as they emerged in series reinforced his conviction that Northwest Amazonian peoples belonged to a single cultural system founded on competing claims to knowledge of the same corpus.

Stephen’s articles in this special issue all evidence this engagement with Brazilian Northwest Amazonians over the last two decades and attention to understanding the Northwest Amazonians on the regional level. The article on animal predation and alimentary ethics provides an early glimpse of what is to come, especially in the passage comparing the priestly, ascetic “vegetarianism” of Northwest Amazonian peoples who belong to superordinate societies to the cannibal ethos of the hunting peoples of Amazonia. In the paper on Northwest Amazonian books, we have him reckoning with book publishing as a new twist on a politics of unequally held, esoteric knowledge that motivates and sustains both horizontal and vertical social differentiation in Northwest Amazonia. If these two articles still comment upon Northwest Amazonia, and compare from an outsider’s panoramic perspective, the papers on the tube and Origin of Night mythologies, bear the fruits of Stephen’s reading of the *Narradores Indígenas do Rio Negro* book series. Now he writes as a navigator journeying through a labyrinthine knowledge system taking the reader as a passenger along for the journey. This is a return to cosmological themes that were prominent in his first publications on the Barasana (1977, 1979), but he now approaches them with a much wider-angle lens, including both greater abstraction and acting as a more seasoned guide for the non-initiate in the ways these philosophical abstractions are rooted in natural symbolism and everyday experience.

Stephen’s constructive skepticism regarding dominant models, coupled with his unrivalled ethnographic understanding—both deep and wide—makes him a source of inspiration for anthropologists well beyond those studying Northwest Amazonia. We have chosen to organize the contributions to this special issue in two sections, each bringing together works by Stephen himself, comment pieces, and original papers by other anthropologists: the first focuses on cosmology and its (bodily) experience, the second on knowledge and its politics.

### **Between Model and Experience: The Form and Gender of the Universe in Northwest Amazonia**

Original articles by Stephen Hugh-Jones constitute the core of the first section of this special issue; they foreground the specificity of Northwest Amazonia, especially compared to other areas of lowland South America, and showcase the originality of Stephen’s approach, i.e., his way of navigating between esoteric lore and everyday practice, or between models and individual variations. In “Thinking through Tubes,” Hugh-Jones proposes two concepts that emerge from a dazzling mass of ethnographic data: the *tube*, which refers principally to bodies (e.g., the intestine or the body as a whole) and artifacts (e.g., blowpipes or flutes) and *h/air*, the tangible and intangible stuffs that flow through tubes (e.g., breath, hair, or blood). He

navigates through the ritual artifacts and mythology of Northwest Amazonia to expand radically on previous research, including that of Lévi-Strauss, and totally reworks and extends his 2017 essay in which he had used some of the same material. He demonstrates that most scholars have mistakenly reduced the tube to one of its instances, but in fact no fundamental metaphor, no literal meaning exists—it doesn't refer primarily to sex or to digestion, to the blowpipe or the palm tree; rather, it is a tool that “organizes life and allows reflection on it” (Hugh-Jones 2019a:41).

Yet anthropologists have also generally failed to discern this master trope that Hugh-Jones illuminates because they have been constrained by post-Enlightenment assumptions. It is not just the separation of nature and culture that took place at some point in the history of Europe but also of male and female sexes being seen as incommensurable (vs. a one-sex model), and of the senses as distinct (vs. synaesthesia). The suggestive comparisons that Hugh-Jones draws between Amazonia and pre-Enlightenment Europe lead him to articulate some implications of the two concepts he has developed. It is true that the tube has no particular meaning, but, precisely, a semiotic approach (in terms of meaning, code, communication, etc.) has its limitations in such a case, where notions such as fungibility, flow, and h/air take us back to the body and closer to an earlier understanding of sensations as material and immaterial flows through the body's orifices. In order to account for a world where “words are routinely eaten and incorporated into the body in the form of protective spells blown on food,” or “where the sounds of flutes and bursting fruit can penetrate and fertilize the bodies of women” (Hugh-Jones 2019a:42), we need an idiom that accommodates such processes: the *tube*.

In her comment on this paper, Françoise Barbira Freedman shows how it stems from Stephen Hugh-Jones's earlier work “The Gender of Some Amazonian Gifts” (2001), where he pursued a comparison with Melanesia and highlighted the fundamental androgyny of Northwest Amazonian mythical figures and ritual artifacts. She offers a complementary reading of the material Hugh-Jones presents through a Strathernian dialectic of “de-totalization” (the androgynous mythical beings have to be dismembered to allow for the emergence of human gender) and “re-totalization” (the performance of androgyny especially during rituals). It leads her to stress that men alone control the totalization enacted in Yuruparí rituals such that, in the end, gender asymmetry remains a very important feature in Northwest Amazonia.

This analysis of gender is expanded in a systematic way by Klaus Hamberger in an article based on the ethnography published by Stephen and Christine Hugh-Jones and grounded especially in Christine's *From the Milk River* (1979). Traditional structuralist analyses saw gender polarity projected onto space. As a self-evident, primitive dichotomy, gender itself did not require analysis. The work of Christine and Stephen Hugh-Jones inverted the traditional perspective and reoriented the question: How does gender look if we understand it to emerge from the structuration of space? By rigorously pursuing this line of questioning, opened by the Hugh-Joneses' work, which focalizes the alternative genderings of space in domestic and ceremonial contexts, Hamberger provides a theory of gender polarity that is at once non-deterministic and universalistic in scope. Hamberger proposes the “profoundly dynamic” distinction between container and content operations—a distinction that is partially homologous to that between growth and movement—as an alternative to dichotomies that have dogged the analysis of gender (active/passive, culture/nature, transcendent/immanent) because they have always presupposed the gender difference they seek to explain. If the gender values of space are liable to alter at different spatial scales and orientations, then the implication is that “spatial transformations can alter gender,” i.e., manipulating space is a way to make gender itself.

In his earlier work, Stephen Hugh-Jones devoted considerable attention to a particular tube or container: the longhouse (see Hugh-Jones 1993, 1995a). As he had shown, and as Klaus Hamberger also explores here, a key feature of the house is the reversal produced by movements of entry and exit. In “The Origin of Night and the Dance of Time,” a revised version of an article published in Portuguese in 2015 in *Revista de Sociologia e Antropologia*, Hugh-Jones (2019b) further complicates such processes by taking into consideration the nesting of containers within each other.

Hugh-Jones starts from small details of myths about the origin of night, which typically involve some hero(es) causing a disaster by not heeding instruction, in order to show that the feather box (where ritual ornaments are now kept, but in which night was originally given to the Creators), the longhouse, and the universe are a series of nested containers in inverted

relation to one another: when it is day in the universe, the interior of the maloca (longhouse) is dark as night, while the ornaments within the feather box are awake and dancing.

He adopts an explicitly Lévi-Straussian approach to mythology, stressing that a myth consists of all its variants that must be analyzed together, but he also adds his own personal touch, which is in fact a major analytical shift. Because the stories leave out so much, relying on implicitly shared knowledge, they can be really understood only by someone who has practical experience with the forest and the longhouse, with ritual dances and artifacts. He shows that the scalar logic of nested containers goes hand in hand with the materiality of ritual or natural things, which can only be grasped through first-hand knowledge, as he had already stressed in his earlier work on ritual objects (2009): house thatch and feather box, for instance, both made of palm leaves, age in inverted ways—the former darkening inside and the latter outside.

This is why the alternation of night and day is connected to the flow of time, which Northwest Amazonian peoples attempt to control in rituals where the sound of the lance rattle echoes that of (nocturnal) insects, and where ornaments worn by dancers replicate the colors and movements of (diurnal) birds. Structural analysis must always be sensory.

In a comment on this paper, Geraldo Andreello underlines one of its specificities: that the variants of the myth are not randomly distributed but are related to the coexistence of many “groups” who share a lore that is largely common to them all, and yet maintain distinctive identities (e.g., Barasana or Desana, or various Desana clans): “Groups here seem to gain existence through the development of their own narratives—group and narrative would be one and the same” (Andreello 2019:100). In a region where hierarchy is crucial, mastering the cosmological logic revealed by Hugh-Jones is also central to claiming status. This is the case insofar as people assert their claims to knowledge by telling stories but also, more specifically, because the origin of night, being the origin of time, also introduces the possibility of reversible change. Without time, hierarchies were immutable, but once a younger brother had saved his elder brother by remembering ritual instructions, they became reversible and humans could meddle with cosmic order.

The fourth article of this section also tackles some cosmological issues but from a very different perspective: “Good Reasons or Bad Conscience?,” originally published in French in *Terrain* in 1996, studies meat consumption and Amazonians’ ambivalence toward it as a way of analyzing the relations between humans and animals in Lowland South America. In this article Hugh-Jones makes an original and influential contribution to debates around human–animal relations raised by Descola (1992) and others, and it seemed important to make the text available to an English-speaking readership. Going against the “ontological” grain that tends to maximize the contrast between Amazonian and Western concepts and attitudes, Hugh-Jones compares Amazonian ethnography with detailed studies of butchering in France and the United Kingdom and argues that the ambivalence toward meat consumption is widespread because it stems from a very general tension between moral sensibilities (rooted in the proximity between men and animals) and material requirements (coming from the necessity of destroying other things in order to reproduce oneself).

Hugh-Jones brings a political, historical, and moral dimension to debates around hunting and eating animals, taking as his point of departure Descola’s argument about a homology between the way humans treat animals and the way they treat each other. Thus, that Northwest Amazonian peoples place less emphasis on predation compared, for example, to the Jivaroans is related to their forming “superordinate societies,” to the historical decline of the jaguar shaman, and to the ascetic emphasis on self-control and contempt for gluttony. Nonetheless, some people will be gluttons, and others will indulge in “taboo” food. With his characteristic reluctance toward over-systematized conceptual explanations, he introduces room for global changes as well as individual variations.

In this issue, the original 1996 text is followed by a new postscript where Stephen Hugh-Jones deals with subsequent engagements with the original article. One of his interlocutors is Florent Kohler (2016), who accuses him of giving too much importance to “conceptual animals” as portrayed in mythology as subjects or persons and ignoring the cruel treatment of “real animals.” Descola (1998), however, criticized Hugh-Jones for trying to explain collective patterns of behavior by means of individual moral concerns. Those two opposite assessments of his argument show that there were some misunderstandings: Hugh-Jones acknowledges that, instead of “bad conscience,” it would have been more accurate to talk of a “conceptual malaise” that has “intellectual, behavioral, emotional, and ethical consequences.” Yet he also

stresses that Tukanoans are not “pure animists” and that animism (viz. the statement that animals are subjects) doesn’t have context-free validity anyway: against the sharp distinction between mythology and everyday life drawn by Kohler, we have to be attentive to a whole range of possible relations with animals, which are not always best explained by tags such as “animism” or “naturalism.” In this pair of papers, Hugh-Jones therefore argues against the Amazonian doxa by stressing concurrently the specificity of Northwest Amazonia and the importance of individual and contextual variations.

### Politics of Knowledge

There has been a radical shift in the coordinates of identity and citizenship for Amazonian peoples over the last half century:

Under the old missionary regime with its emphasis on “civilization,” the strategic choice, especially for the young, was to deny knowledge of indigenous language and culture and to downplay or hide any visible signs of indigenous identity . . . Suddenly the terms were reversed. With missionaries influenced by liberation theology, with constitutional reforms granting new political and cultural rights to indigenous peoples, and with NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] linking ecological conservation with the conservation of indigenous cultures, the status of indigenous culture underwent a rapid change. (Hugh-Jones 2019c:135)

This rupture provides the backdrop to five articles based on recent research in Amazonian societies in Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador, and which together provide a multifaceted look at Amazonian people’s participation in new institutional contexts and genres of schoolbooks, lessons and curricula, and books, biographies, and research projects.

Hugh-Jones’s article, a revised version of a text published in French in *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* in 2010, examines a series of books authored by peoples of the upper Rio Negro region since 1980 and published thanks to the close alliance between the indigenous umbrella organization of the peoples of that region, FOIRN, and Brazil’s foremost environmental and social advocacy NGO, Instituto Socioambiental (ISA). He combines culturalist and historicist analyses to understand Northwest Amazonian book publishing as both a response to colonial processes of missionization and bureaucratization and as importantly continuous with these cultures’ emphasis on the ownership and control of esoteric knowledge. For example, these books are explicitly penned in response to the “moral decline” that resulted from the demonization of ritual activity and ancestral knowledge by Salesian missionaries. They are a way of appropriating the performative power of writing on paper that has been demonstrated again and again by outsiders wielding documents, whether they are land titles, notebooks, or bibles. At the same time Northwest Amazonians are uniquely suited to take up this challenge to publish their patrimony because these books, authored in senior-junior partnerships, are ideal vehicles for a culture that emphasizes the lineal inheritance of a set of narratives allied to sacred objects, claims to place, and to status.

If the book of origin narratives, understood as a powerful wealth object, is one new agent in Northwest Amazonia’s competitive but peaceful multicultural system, the indigenous school, understood as a house, is another. Melissa Santana de Oliveira’s paper about the foundation of a new “school-longhouse” on the Tiquié River fits like a glove with Hugh-Jones’s paper about the book-valuable. The maloca-escola becomes the site for epistemological experiments: How much is the acquisition of ancestral wisdom compatible with school work? What kind of persons may be formed in the new space of the indigenized school? Must they remain the disciplined individuals that the Salesians sought to shape in a former epoch, their identity defined by “wearing clothes, eating white food, reading, writing, manipulating notebooks, pencils, and pens”? Or can this new space form persons with bodies fit to access ancestral knowledge? These are the questions Tukano communities of the upper Rio Negro are asking as students conduct their own anthropological research and enlist elders to teach them, and as they organize graduation ceremonies, taking inspiration from ancestral ritual forms.

Oliveira takes us through people’s responses to the tension between “knowledge” and “study” as they are locally defined. The major revelation of her article is that plural

epistemologies entail plural embodiments, so that for the school-longhouse to form truly knowledgeable people it would need to host a process akin to initiation. Most Tukano find it difficult to see how this could be achieved nowadays—with initiation long abandoned in this region—and sometimes reluctantly, they accept a compromise: that knowledge and bodies be formed at a midpoint between the horizons of study and knowledge, teacher and shaman. Oliveira carefully reveals the creativity, as well as the compromises, involved in schooling, such as when the school-longhouse plays host to feasts, dances, and ritual exchanges on the event of graduation ceremonies, with elements of ancestral ritual condensed, transformed, and melded with bureaucratic and foreign elements.

The next three papers are less invested in questions about continuity and change in forms of cultural expression and more concerned with the contents of indigenous writings and pedagogy. The first pair of papers, written by Natalia Buitron and Grégory Deshoulliere, focus on two very different kinds of books authored by Shuar men: patrimonial books and autobiographies; in the third article, Aparecida Vilaça explores Wari' classroom interactions, educational curricula, and students' written work.

The two articles on the Shuar take off directly from Stephen Hugh-Jones's argument about the "fit . . . between indigenous categories and essentialist (Western) understandings of culture as patrimony" in this section's opening article (Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019:175). The authors note that Shuar lack most of the characteristics that predispose Tukano and Arawak peoples to book publishing: notably, vertical shamans, ancestors, and descent and property-ownership ideologies. Yet numerous such books exist. Why? In a first paper devoted to the "Shuar writing boom" and the creation of a "scholarly tradition," the authors answer this question by paying particular attention to Ecuador's plurinational citizenship regime and the special role it gives to Shuar teachers as promoters of "indigenous science." One notable feature of the patrimonial books that Shuar teachers publish is their selectivity. Ritual violence and other predatory elements of Shuar culture—precisely those elements most prominent in the ethnographic literature—are edited out. Another is how individual men become mouthpieces for a collectively owned culture for the first time in Shuar history. This is foreign to their pre-missionary personhood, which was concerned with producing "unique individual destinies."

Some other Shuar, however, are producing very different types of texts, which are the focus of a second article by Deshoulliere and Buitron. Published or unpublished autobiographical narratives that exalt their unique destinies, their life courses, their resistance to missionary humiliations, their visions, their battles—these are not the sorts of texts schoolteachers show their pupils in order to teach them "how to be Shuar." Indeed, one author, Shakaim, sees his narratives as the authentic antidote to such texts, which he dismisses as written by people who "have not seen." In another example, Ivan, a man who has not succeeded in becoming either schoolteacher, priest, or shaman (the three roles readily available in the Shuar knowledge economy) writes texts that express his medial position. These are updated vision quests in which he meets Catholic Saints as well as Shuar spirits. Such autobiographies are in line with a typical Shuar tendency to strive to achieve a singular destiny. In that sense, while very different from the type of books published by Northwest Amazonians, those autobiographical writings confirm Stephen Hugh-Jones's hypothesis of an affinity between recent written production and underlying sociocultural features. They are also emerging genres, and the Shuar's struggle for singularity also make it likely that new forms will appear in the future—defying definitive classification.

Vilaça also looks at bicultural education, but she is interested in the way a collectivized, standardized knowledge about Wari' life and the world is presented in school curricula and received and assimilated by Wari' pupils. What is actually happening as students look at maths exercises on the blackboard or get taught Newtonian physics, she asks? Vilaça suggests that, in the Wari' case, what they learn in school—even from Wari' teachers trained in an indigenous university—are the terms of an alternative ontology contained in concepts such as nature, society, culture, citizenship, and way of life that are inimical to Wari' categories as expressed in their indigenous language. Since pupils are frequently asked to formulate ideas in Wari' and then to write Portuguese translations of their compositions, a central element of their classwork is translation. Vilaça compares the Portuguese and Wari' versions and asks whether it is possible that Wari' students could be taught to be experimental and reflexive about the

ontological switching implied by this school task. The barrier to this is the elephant in the classroom: evangelical Christianity.

Given the close association of school and church by Wari', there is inevitably a hierarchy between the two systems of understanding. Monotheism and mononaturalism are the dominant frameworks, and schooling tends to fix oppositions that Wari' usually treat as relative and perspectival. Therefore, Wari' students learn to relate to nature and animals in a utilitarian or contemplative mode, reinforcing lessons they hear on church benches. All of these processes are underway alongside a renewed commitment to Christian worship in Wari' villages about which Vilaça has written extensively (see Vilaça 2016). The article presented here brings to this corpus an investigation of the imbrication of schooling and conversion at several levels, from the lived experience of the classroom to the history of indigenous education in Brazil, where she reveals that missionary organizations were central to the formulation and implementation of bicultural schooling policies.

We present this special issue as a tribute to Stephen Hugh-Jones's career as an anthropologist and an Amazonianist, and we think that the best way to show that his contributions remain startling in their originality is through Stephen's own work and younger scholars' (of various generations) continuous engagement with it. All in all, this work is influential not only because it sets the highest ethnographic and anthropological standards but also because Stephen has consistently worked against the grain, challenging others' generalizing claims with his Northwest Amazonian data. Although he has become a respected and knowledgeable elder, Stephen has also always valued egalitarian relations and unorthodox ideas: sometimes it is difficult to tell a ~kubu from a payé.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This special issue is based on a workshop held at King's College, Cambridge, held 19–20 September 2016. A central theme of the workshop was the development of Amazonianist anthropology in conjunction with process of knowledge transmission between Amazonian elders and youths—which echoed that taking place between various generations of anthropologists. It was the occasion to premier Titus Moser's film *Ignacio's Legacy*, which follows the Hugh-Joneses as they accompany pioneering ethnographic film maker Brian Moser when he returns to the Pirá-Paraná region, where he first visited in 1960. The workshop—a joint French École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS-PSL) and British (Cambridge) event—also served to celebrate the internationalism of Amazonianist anthropology, which is reflected in Stephen's being a man who learned French in Bogotá, and whose work has been published, celebrated, and cited in Lévi-Straussian Paris, Colombia, and Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> This section is inspired by Anne-Christine Taylor's brilliant characterization of Stephen's style—rather than his theory or epistemology—at the workshop held in Cambridge in 2016.

<sup>3</sup> On this point, see also Peter Riviere's (1980) excellent review article.

<sup>4</sup> A sense of this conversation can be had “live” from a reading of a review article published by Overing Kaplan in 1981, as well as from the sparkingly original essays collected in the 1977 proceedings from the Congress of Americanists (Overing Kaplan 1977).

<sup>5</sup> In recent years Stephen has extended this interest through collaborative research with the Tibetologist Hildegard Diemberger. Together they published on rare books stolen during the 1903–4 Younghusband “Mission” to Tibet (Diemberger and Hugh-Jones 2012) and on books as objects in general (Diemberger and Hugh-Jones 2013; Hugh-Jones and Diemberger 2012). This collaborative work also led to Stephen becoming Chair of the Management Committee of Cambridge's Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit at Cambridge.

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Cosmology and Practice in Amazonia

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