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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/actesbranly/669>

ISSN: 2105-2735

**Publisher**

Musée du quai Branly Jacques Chirac

**Electronic reference**

Rupert Stasch, « The iconicity and indexicality of “life” in Korowai sago grub feasts », *Les actes de colloques du musée du quai Branly Jacques Chirac* [Online], 6 | 2016, Online since 20 January 2016, connection on 08 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/actesbranly/669>

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- 1 My presentation will examine the dense imbrication between a living being and an artifact among Korowai people of West Papua, Indonesia, in the context of ritual feasting (Coupaye 2016; Pitrou 2016). The living being is the sago grub and the artifact is the longhouse that a clan builds for a feast.

Figure 1. *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* “sago palm weevil” or “red palm weevil”.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

Figure 2. Feast longhouse built on the land of the Dambol patriclan in 1997, several months after the feast was celebrated.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 2 I include within this relationship another entity, the felled sago logs in which sago grubs mainly develop. In many contexts of speech, Korowai do not lexically distinguish these sago palm trunks from beetle larva (*non*). For example, they say simply “fell grubs” (*non umo-*) to talk about the activity of felling palm trees that sets in motion grub development. There is a degree of conceptual merging of the larva itself with this larger trunk that it grows in.



Figure 3. Felled trunk of a sago palm, split open to facilitate grub development.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 3 Also co-implicated in the dense imbrication between sago grubs and grub trunks together, and this feast building, is the human body, and humans as a kind of living being. My presentation is about the triangle of grubs, building, and humans, and about how the imbrication between architectural artifact and grub as living being is motivated as an intervention into thinking about human life.
- 4 I will say more below about my theoretical goals, but let me start describing the feasts and their broader social context. Korowai are a group of 4000 people living across about 1500 square kilometers of lowland forest. They are in a geographically interstitial position that means that processes of engagement with market and state institutions have started very late for them, by comparison to people elsewhere in Papua. They have a very strong political ethos of autonomy (Stasch 2009). This value is reflected in their practice of living dispersed across the landscape in elevated houses, with just one or two houses in a single garden clearing separated from their nearest neighbors by a kilometer or more of forest.

Figure 4. House of Anom Baingatun in a new clearing, 2007.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

Figure 5. Aerial view of an elevated house in a streamside garden clearing, 1996.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 5 The overall forest landscape is a patchwork of owned forest territories, each a couple of square kilometers in size and owned by a named and demographically small patriclan. An average-size clan might have about ten or fifteen members. Korowai say that the

reason they have this landownership system is so that people can live far apart exploiting independent resource bases and raising their families without people bossing each other around or trying to take each other’s possessions or spouses.

- 6 Korowai make banana gardens, they raise pigs, and they exploit wild forest plants and animals. But the single biggest repositories of value on their land are groves of sago palms. Flour from these palms is Korowai people’s staple starch food, and the flour is produced by the same basic process that Roy Ellen describes in his contribution to this colloquium (see also Ellen 2004; Ellen 2006; on sago exploitation and biology generally, see Schuiling 2009). Sago stands have a different look and ecology than the surrounding hardwood forest.
- 7 Sago groves are partially anthropogenic. Korowai manage sago stands very actively, they plant young palms to expand existing stands or create entirely new ones, and they say that sago stands would shrink or disappear if humans did not intervene. So these large repositories of food on the landscape are themselves human artifacts.
- 8 Besides starch flour, another food Korowai produce from sago palms is the larvae of the red palm weevil or sago palm beetle. The beetle lays eggs in any palm that has been wounded or killed, such as by being felled, or by the palm heart being excavated out of an immature palm while it is still standing. Typically within about seven weeks of being felled or damaged, most parts of the palm will have mature grubs in them, and some larvae that are starting to pupate.

Figure 6. Larval stages of *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*.



Photo: Daniel Penn, reproduced by permission

- 9 Exploitation of this beetle larvae as a food is well-known to anthropologists and biologists who work in sago-focused regions, but there is not much literature about it.
- 10 The process of grub production is interesting because it does not fall very neatly within typologies of exploitation of wild versus humanly structured resources, nature versus



culture, or horticulture and gardening versus animal husbandry. Grub production has elements of all of these at the same time.

- 11 Korowai produce sago grubs as an aspect of their routine day-to-day exploitation of sago grubs, but they also make grubs the focal food of large-scale feast events. The larger region where Korowai live is the only area in the world that I know about where this is done. For Korowai, these sago grubs are the only non-starch food in their ecological repertoire that they exploit in a way that they can predictably produce in a large surplus. Korowai pig husbandry, for example, is not intensive enough to support feasting.
- 12 As I already mentioned, Korowai live far apart most of the time. But every five to ten years the members of a given patriclan and many of their close relatives from elsewhere will build their houses together in one place for purposes of a sago grub feasts. I earlier emphasized Korowai residential dispersion and a high political value on autonomy, but feasting enacts coexisting values of large-scale coordination of labor, and expansive social connectedness and hospitality across the wider landscape.
- 13 These feasts are a huge expenditure of resources. In a major feast, close to a thousand sago palms are expended.

Figure 7. Trunks of maturing sago palms.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

Figure 8. A decimated sago stand a few months after a feast. Unusually, some of the dried refuse of felled palms in this stand had also been burned, amidst drought conditions of the 1997 El Niño event.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 14 The periodicity of feasting is linked to the temporality of a clan’s sago groves recovering from prior feast events, and flourishing to the point of becoming an accumulated surplus of value in excess of its owners’ own food needs. This temporality is related to the twenty-year life span of sago palms themselves, and the palm’s rapid proliferation by parthenogenesis.
- 15 Korowai recognize the massive expenditure of palms for a feast as a positive technique of grove management. They say that it is better for the long-term health of groves that they be drastically thinned. But after a feast, the owners often live in conditions of hardship and deprivation due to what they have done to their groves.
- 16 This expenditure is not only a lot of work physically, but also politically and religiously. Bringing about such a big event is very difficult and controversial. The accumulation and expenditure that is involved is problematic to reconcile with egalitarian values, both at the level of the coordinated labor that accumulation requires, and at the level of the asymmetries of ownership and giving that the feast involves. At the same time that this big event of expenditure is difficult and controversial within egalitarianism, there is also a sense that the feast is an outstanding realization of the egalitarian value complex. The kinds of relatedness and consumption that take place in the feast are an ideal of life, if they can actually be accomplished.
- 17 Describing close relations between grubs, longhouse, and humans, I want to show that there is an imbrication of artifact and living being (see Pitrou 2015; 2016; Coupaye 2016). But I further want to ask *why* there is that imbrication, and what structures it. I suggest that what artifact and living being are united under here is a problem of the difficulty of appropriation and expenditure.
- 18 This difficulty is biological, political, moral, and religious all at once. The density of connections between living being and artifact is a response of reflexivity about what is troubled and uncertain about appropriation. Under this egalitarian ethos, impinging on



others and taking from the world is both what people want and value, and what is controversial and problematic. Creating a density of interconnections between living being and artifact is a reflexive mode of engaging with that controversy and ritually shaping it in desirable ways. The dense structure of connections that people focus on is a reflexive intervention into a felt dilemma of trying to authorize a huge act of ecological and social appropriation, in the face of all the ways that can go badly wrong.

- 19 The language of indexicality and iconicity in my title is part of my attempt to address this pattern of the density of semiotic interconnection that makes the elements of feasting efficacious. I use the word indexicality as a shorthand for any experienced connection of causality or spatiotemporal proximity, by which one thing is present in another thing. So the causal actions that led to the existence of an object are indexically signified by that object. And I use iconicity as a shorthand for an experienced connection of likeness. If you prefer metonymy and metaphor, that would also be a language for what I am talking about.
- 20 These very rough terms begin to open up that relations of signification or making present happen in different ways at the same time. Part of the density of a ritual object is not just the multiplicity of different things that it signifies at once, but also the multiplicity of different ways that it signifies even a *single* other thing, at the same time. Additionally part of the point about my use of the term “indexicality” is that it is important not to separate relations of felt causal connection or sequential occurrence in time from signification. The order of causality and symbolic order can be the same.
- 21 The sequence of labor steps for producing a feast unfolds across several months. Here is a schematization of this sequence:

Activity	Duration
Plant large gardens; build “palm heart houses”	2-16 months
Fell first palm for grub production; Precedent gives up water, etc.	1 day
Fell palms	20-40 days
Clear longhouse site	1 main day
Plant and brace longhouse posts	1 main day
Raise ridgepole segments	1 main day
Install rafters	1 main day
Install sidewall scantlings	1 main day
Hang split rattan for securing battens	1 main day
Install battens	1 main day
Stockpile sago leaflets for thatch	2-5 days

Install thatch	1 main day
Crack open and wrap palm trunks	10-20 days
Close roof ridge; install “prime post”	1 day
Panel sidewalls; Precedent panels “prime fence”	1 main day
Construct ground-level shacks for guests	as needed
Manufacture arrows; level longhouse floor, excavate stumps; expand clearing; collect torch fuel, other incidental provisions; clear paths	as needed
Bear stones	1 day
Break and stockpile firewood	1 day
Install sago storage rack	1 day
Process first sago starch (“sewn-leaf sago”)	1 day
Process “rack sago”	5-10 days
Process “spathe sago”; Precedent installs “middle wall”	1 day
Collect cooking leaves; install tympana	1 day
Extract and cook “flat-oven grubs”	1 day
Extract and cook “cylindrical-package grubs”; women cross middle wall	1-2 days
Guest processions arrive; prestations given; runway performances; burn sticker ball	1 day
Distribute raw cocoon grubs; barter; guests depart; owners rest	1 day
Withdraw “prime post”	1 day
Abandon longhouse; children shoot roof ridge; consume “dreg grubs”	2 months
Feast owners disperse to new residences	1-10 months

- 22 All across the technical process, every one of these steps is pointing forward toward the feast’s culmination in a final afternoon and night when hundreds of people from across the landscape congregate for a few hours at the feast site.
- 23 These elaborate steps leading up to the culmination include the felling of hundreds of sago palms to set in motion the development of grubs, a series of steps to build the frame of the feast longhouse, the wrapping of the upper parts of the felled grub trunks to try to prevent pigs from eating the grubs as the trunks soften, the thatching of the feast building, and a series of steps of provisioning the feast building with one or two

tons of sago starch, and a large supply of firewood, stones, and large leaves as cooking supplies.

Figure 9. Framework of a feast longhouse under construction on the land of patriclan Bafiga, 2007.



Photo: Rupert Stasch



Figure 10. A sago trunk wrapped to protect the developing grubs from being eaten by pigs.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

Figure 11. Firewood stockpiled in the feast building.



Photo: Rupert Stasch



- 24 The preparations then build to an extreme pitch as an even larger numbers of supporters converge on the feast site to help the owners with one to three days of breaking open the palm trunks to collect grubs in the daytime.

Figure 12. Peeling open the bark of a sago trunk to extract grubs at the time of the feast's culmination.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

Figure 13. Grubs thrown together in one place in the pith of a sago trunk.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 25 The owners cook sago and grubs at night to feed the workers and ultimately to prepare large prestations of cooked grubs and sago. These prestations are given to designated recipients from other places on the landscape who come to the feast event on the climactic day with large troupes of feast guests, who eat the food and perform songs and dances. To prepare these prestations, on the night before the feast peak, the feast owners take apart the hundreds of small packets of raw grubs that have been brought back to the feast building from the sago stands, and assemble them into large cylindrical packages (*lamon*) that are cooked with hot stones. There is an elaborate aesthetics to the quality and size of these cylindrical packages, which are a kind of temporary artifact made from a living being that is in the process of dying at about the time it is being put into the packages. There is also close attention to the size and quantity of these packages and of another kind of gift, the large flat pancakes of mixed sago flour and grubs termed *laxup*.



Figure 14. Selale Xawex and Umon Dambol preparing large cylinders of grubs for cooking, 2007.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

Figure 15. Complementary parts of a grub prestation.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 26 There are biological reasons for many aspects of this sequence of labor steps. For example, cooking leaves are gathered later than firewood and stones, because the leaves need to be pliable rather than dried out. And the grubs are gathered last of all, in

one huge burst of labor because they will rot if they are stored. The whole sequence of steps is strongly structured by the temporality of grub development, which is set in motion by the owners starting to fell palms. This importance is reflected in the pattern that the earlier-mentioned expression “fell grubs” is often used in speech as a way of saying that some group of people has started preparations for a feast: just that they are “felling grubs” is saying enough to know that they are preparing for a feast.

- 27 All of the further work of the feast needs to get done within the time before the grubs pupate and then fly away as mature beetles. Across the period of feast preparations, the owners do things like put their ears to the trunks of grubs to assess the progress of the grubs, and they slow down or speed up the other activities to try to match the grubs’ development. In the feast process, there is enormous reflexivity about *time*. The pace and teleology of grubs’ development is a kind of biological timepiece around which all the further human activities creating the feast are interwoven.
- 28 But the recipe of labor steps is also a social technology and the reflexivity about time is also about temporal coordination among humans. The political values of the society are in the recipe of steps, and the recipe of steps is in the political values of the society. In an egalitarian community without traditions of cardinal time-reckoning, it is extremely difficult to get people to coordinate their actions and do all of the feast work at the same time, or show up at the feast site on the right day with a procession of a hundred guests. What egalitarianism means here is people do what they want to do, when they want to do it. If someone tries to tell others what to do and when to do it, that is generally felt to be a big violation of autonomy and people reject it.
- 29 In this political context, a main way that people actually accomplish a feast event is by constantly reciting the accepted script of steps by which a feast is supposed to be carried out. There is a lot of conventional agreement among different people that a sequence of steps exists and that it is authoritative. By reciting this script over and over, Korowai work to coordinate what they are doing and communicate the timing of events across the landscape to other people.
- 30 Reciting the order of steps does not solve problems of some people wanting to speed up the process and others to slow it down, but it provides a way that people have to reassert their commitment to doing each step in coordination with each other, even if they are not happy about the pace and cannot boss others around into going more quickly or slowly. Recursive discourse about how the ritual should be performed is part of the political means by which the ritual is performed.
- 31 In this way, the sequence of labor steps is not just a procedure through which Korowai accomplish something else, but the procedure itself becomes objectified. It is telling that the sequence of labor steps for feasting has a status as a kind of prototypic status as a model of temporal process itself and the unfolding of events in sequence, in the sense that this recipe of feasting steps is often narrated in myths, as a kind of Homeric catalog of ships not related to rest of the story but having an aesthetic satisfaction in its own right.
- 32 Steps in the recipe, as well as the labor recipe as a whole, have a highly indexical quality, in my earlier sense. These events are linked to each other and to the overall goal of grub production by a sense of causality, and by a sense of “this event is here and now in time, in relation to other events in a larger sequence.” But I also suggest that a kind of object of regard and recitation, the sequence of labor steps becomes for people

an icon or felt *picture* of the goals and dilemmas of the feasting process. The script for feast production is an “indexical icon of risk and success”. It comes to give people a picture and a feeling of what can fail in feasting, and this object becomes a dense figure through which they work reflexively on the question of how valued results of coordination and appropriation might be possible.

- 33 Another “indexical icon of risk and success” is a priest figure closely related to this sequence of steps. There are a lot of different things that can fail in a feast. Reciting the sequence of technical steps only addresses some of them directly, but this priest joins together more directly a wider range of feasting problems.
- 34 One of the main things that can go wrong with feasts is that owners might not have felled and produce enough sago and grubs to actually feed the guests who come. Owners might be too slow with their preparations and the grubs could all turn into beetles and fly away, or the owners could be too fast and the grubs could not be adequately developed when the guests come. Or there could be a lot of rain, and the sago groves could flood and the grubs drown, because sago groves are located on slightly depressed areas of land. Or the owners could have trouble coordinating with each other, or recruiting enough supporting labor to carry out all the feast work in a satisfying way. Or other people could be unhappy with the owners because of feuds or bereavement, and they could try to sabotage the food production or furtively shoot arrows into the feast building. Or fights can break out among all the guests gathered at a feast. Or processions of guests can be too big, too small, or come on the wrong day. Or the food prestations that a specific owner gives to a designated guests can be poor in size by comparison to earlier prestations that were previously given at another feast in the other direction. Or people can die during or after the feast as a result of the anger of divinities on the owners’ landscape, who are offended by the expenditure of resources.
- 35 This priest figure is called by the temporary title “Precedent” or “Goes first” (*milon*). Part of his role is that he carries out the first token act of each step in the feast production process. He fells the first grub trunk, he carries out alone a token amount of each of the many different steps of longhouse building construction, and so on.
- 36 Connected to this role, he follows a difficult regime of practices of renunciation and separation. Most notably of all, he is not supposed to drink any water for the two months of main feast work, but only quenches his thirst by eating cucumbers or sugar cane. He cannot share food with other people, he cannot eat pork, he cannot touch his bows and arrows, and he observes many other restrictions.
- 37 Like the sequence of labor steps itself, this priest figure is an indexical icon of risk who personifies the deferral of issues of authority and social coordination into reified rules. Historically, Korowai had no named roles of political hierarchy or leadership. This priest figure is the closest thing there is to a named leadership role, but it is a temporary office. His quality of leadership is not one of telling others what to do, but of taking the temperature of different people’s feelings about the pace of feast preparations, and acting as a kind of metronome who draws into focus again the labor process of technical steps itself, and the drama of impingement, appropriation, and expenditure that is involved in these physical acts and their coordination across different people. He does this by his practice of performing a token amount of each technical step, before everyone else.
- 38 His status as a figure of collective coordination is based on a sacrificial logic by which the suspense about risk and possible success that everyone in the feast is facing is



displaced onto one person. He takes on the renunciations in order to authorize the bigger act of appropriation that everyone is involved in. He leads by example and by the example of his self-discipline and sacrifice, rather than leading by authority and rule.

- 39 This indexical and iconic merging of different areas of risk and possible success of the feast process into his person is where we see also some of the triangular identification of grubs, humans, and feast building. For example, the reason he gives up water is that if he did not do this then there would be heavy rainfall and the grub trunks would be flooded. He gives up eating pork because otherwise pigs would root in the trunks and eat the grubs before they are harvested. He eats sago and other food that is separate from the food of other people, and he always leaves his meals unfinished and eats them not too quickly, to keep the grubs from developing too quickly and flying away. The whole set of renunciations and practices of doing actions first that the priest carries out is thought to lead to greater proliferation of the grubs at the feast peak. His renunciations start with the felling of the first palm trunk for grub production, and end with the breaking open of the trunks to extract the grubs starting a couple days before the feast peak. So he is indexically connected to the grubs in time as well as his dehydrated body being a likeness of the grub trunks.
- 40 He also carries out renunciations like unstringing his bow and not touching weapons for several weeks, that are meant to cause the feast guests at the ultimate event to be calm rather than get into fights. In his temporal role of coordinating the progress of feast work, he embodies a problematic of the unity of the network of kin who put on the feast, but he also embodies a larger-scale social problematic of the unity and conviviality of the larger social world of the feast’s reception across the landscape.
- 41 So there is a strong bodily identification of this priest with the grub trunks and the biological process of grub development, as well as with the larger political and religious contentiousness of the feast event and the hopes that it will come off well. In his person are conflated the biological and social processes of the feast, or he embodies how those processes are not separated in the first place.
- 42 The final layer of description I will add is that mixed in with this relation between grubs, priest, and the human social field is the built artifact of the longhouse (Stasch 2003). This building is very central to the conceptualization of the entire feast event. There is no single word in Korowai for a feast as an event, the word for feast is simply “feast longhouse” (*gil*). The main way you say “hold a feast” is “build a feast longhouse” (*gil ali-*).
- 43 The broad theme I want to get across about this building parallels what I have already said about the man who acts as a priest. There are a lot of layers of surrounding context that are mediated and indexically and iconically represented by the building.

Figure 16. Installing battens around which sago leaflets will later be folded to thatch the longhouse's roof.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 44 The physical building very directly reflects the unity, coordination, and size or membership of the network of people who are the main feast owners. Different owners build different segments of the building, and nobody can go onto a next step until everyone else is going to start that step. This is a big point of political interest and aggravation for everyone.
- 45 But there are also a lot of indexical and iconic connections between the longhouse and sago resources or sago grubs. For example, the longhouse is connected to sago groves and the temporality of grove regeneration. People refer to a past feast building as the mother or grandmother of a current one, if the feast held in the current one is produced from the same groves as the earlier feast buildings.
- 46 After a feast is over, children shoot toy arrows into the underside of the roofridge of the feast building, which is said to model and bring about the proliferation of new sago palms in the groves that have been decimated for the current feast.

Figure 17. Toy arrows that boys have shot into the roofridge of a feast building.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 47 Also as part of the ritual process, there is a so-called “nest” of small thorny fibers that have been torn off of the outer edges of sago leaves that are used for the roof thatch, that are collected and hung in the gable of one end of the building’s roof for the remainder of the feast preparations. On the climactic night of the feast this “nest” is burned, while a song is sung about the regrowth of sago palms and the growth of human generations (see van Enk and de Vries 1997: 220).



Figure 18. “Nest” of thorny fibers torn off of sago leaflets during thatching of the roof.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

Figure 19. Burning the “nest” during the night of main celebrations.



Photo: Daniel Penn, reproduced with permission

- 48 The man who retrieves the “nest” from the ceiling is thought to be in particular danger of getting shot at by other guests at the feast who might be angry with the host clan about having performed this big expenditure of resources without resolving grievances

about death and bereavement. So the nest of residual fibers from the thatch job is a kind of accoutrement to the building, that in being burned seems to focalize the larger logic of controversial expenditure, and a cyclicity of expenditure and appropriation that hopefully turns later to regrowth and surplus.

- 49 There is also enormous indexical coordination of the feast building construction process with the process of grub production. These unfolding in parallel to each other in time. The grubs are developing as the longhouse is gradually being built, and then in the late stages of the feast the two technical processes converge, as the accumulation of grubs is brought into the longhouse and packaged and cooked there.
- 50 Across that process, there are various levels of iconic and indexical connection between the longhouse and grub trunks that Korowai establish, not necessarily in exegetically elaborated ways. As the grub trunks have a crack along their length, so the roof of the feast building is left for a long time incomplete, with the slopes fully thatched but a gap down the center along the roofridge.
- 51 The roof also has a hole that is called the “grub door” which is the same name as a notch people cut in the upper end of felled sago palms to give beetles better access to the sago pith for laying eggs.

Figure 20. The “grub door” cut into the upper end of a felled sago trunk.



Photo: Rupert Stasch

- 52 Then after the roofridge is closed the priest precedent is the first person to move into the feast building, and he maintains a fire and a complex ritual structure at the center of the building that is strongly identified with the developing sago grubs, as well as with other risks of the feast process such as the good behavior of the guests. For example, the point of the fire is said to be so that the feast building and the grub trunks



out in the sago groves will be warm and the grubs will "cook" well, meaning develop well in the warm trunks.

- 53 At the time of thatching the roof of the feast building, the main guests from elsewhere who have been designated to receive the grub prestations a month later at the feast peak converge on the feast site to help with the thatch work. The roofing of the building is itself a dress rehearsal for this problem of interlocal hospitality across social space, and the problems of political harmony and coordination at that broader spatial level.
- 54 There is a lot more detail to the ritual actions that go on in and around this building, that I will not take any further time to describe. The point of the sample of details I have given is the theoretical argument about semiotic *density* that I mentioned earlier. The complex of the feast building, the grubs and grub trunks, the priest, and the other actors involved in feasting is a big hall of mirrors. Everything is getting reflected back at everything else in this dense way. The imbrication and co-constitutiveness of living beings and artifacts in this hall of mirrors is taking place within a bigger unitary problematic of the edginess of appropriation, expenditure, and relation-making impingement, under conditions of volatile egalitarianism in relation to other people, in relation to divinities, and in relation to uncertain ecological processes.
- 55 I think the cultivation of this hall of mirrors of dense interconnections is an effort to make a kind of persuasive and sacrificially moral intervention into the uncertainties of such an expenditure.
- 56 As a coda, I want to ask what might be special about grubs as a semiotic medium.
- 57 One special quality is their relatively limited morphology and behavioral repertoire. They move, they grow, they have bodies, they proliferate, and they eat and excrete, but they don't have a lot of differentiation amidst that, they do all these features in very bare ways. And when they are collected together they have a quality of massness, that seems very abstract to me. So I wonder if grubs are close to a kind of life degree zero, as well as an image of fecundity or the generation of life on a big scale.
- 58 They are also very focally transient and metamorphic. They are on the way to something else. And this transformational, time-based character is strongly grounded in the rotting sago trunk. It's a life and food that emerges out of rotting.
- 59 I have not heard Korowai comment a lot in general reflective terms on these qualities of grubs that I'm mentioning, such as explosive proliferation. So I'm venturing into areas of cognitive experience that may be sub-discursive, which is epistemologically problematic.
- 60 But connections to rotting are an area where people are explicit. There are funerary contexts in which Korowai explicitly identify felled grub trunks with the rotting and disappearance of human bodies, and there are a lot of ways I haven't mentioned that feasts intersect with human death. There is also an explicit but avoided identification of sago grubs with earthworms. If you said "earthworm" around people eating grubs, it would cause them to vomit because worms is the "hidden identity" of grubs. "Worms" is a special expletive for cursing at grubs." Earthworms in turn are prototypic of disgusting inedibility are strongly identified with death, burial, and the zombie monsters that humans become after death.
- 61 In sum, grubs are highly available as a janus-faced sign. They embody an ambiguous lifting up of life and proliferation and appropriative expenditure out of these



alternatives of dying and rotting, through the sacrificial inscribing of an act of expenditure and appropriation in observances of restraint, caution, and reflexive wariness toward risk.

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## ABSTRACTS

This presentation examines the intertwining of technical, vital, and social processes in sago grub feasts held by Korowai of Indonesian Papua. Feasts are challenging intensifications of Korowai people's contradictory value commitments to autonomy and relatedness, and the biological processes of grub production are also full of hazards. Across different levels of the feast process, Korowai focus reflexively on what can go wrong. A recipe-like sequence of steps by which a feast

is carried out, a priest who mediates feast labor, and the longhouse built for the feast event are main signs by which Korowai enact stances of restraint and equality, in an effort to authorize a massive event of biological expenditure and the assertion of relatedness.

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Rupert Stasch has carried out fieldwork with Korowai of Papua since 1995, studying kinship, exchange, processes of representation, and primitivist tourism. He has taught at Reed College and University of California-San Diego, and is now a Lecturer in the Division of Social Anthropology at Cambridge University. He is the author of *Society of others: kinship and mourning in a West Papuan place* (University of California Press, 2009).

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