

**OWNERSHIP AND HIDDEN KNOWLEDGES IN INDIGENOUS SOUTH  
AMERICA AND BEYOND: HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN SOUNDS, IMAGES,  
AND BODIES**

CAS-E (FAU), 12-13.06.2025

This workshop will be dedicated to the comparative exploration of hidden knowledges and ritual practices in four dimensions of life among contemporary indigenous groups in South America (and some comparable areas beyond this region): those closely related to sounds (i.e., production of music and other sonic beings), images (i.e., iconography and chromatism), bodies (i.e., rituals and narratives linked to shamanism, healing, witchcraft, and sorcery), and subsistence practices (such as fishing, hunting, agriculture, and herding).

The aim of these comparisons is also four-fold:

1. Firstly, we seek to ethnographically explore hidden or not widely shared knowledges and ritual practices whose state-of-the-art research suggest similar patterns across vast indigenous areas (for instance, the use of certain musical instruments and lithic forms in healing practices).
2. Secondly, we would like to ethnographically test possible links that have been recently proposed between secrecy on the one hand, and forms of ownership and domination, on the other hand.<sup>1</sup>
3. In third place, through comparisons, the aim is to explore the possibilities of an ethnological model of hidden dimensions of life in contemporary indigenous societies –particularly those valid in contexts closely related to the dynamics of the so-called Anthropocene (exploring, for example, how the so-called ontological turn’s premises are transformed when facing settings saturated by extractivism).
4. Finally, our comparisons will create a reflective space to allow ethnographic facts to shape (and transform) current conceptual tools and categories that are predominant in the study of hidden practices around the globe (for instance, how the notion of

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<sup>1</sup> The relation between secrecy, ownership and authority as "structures of exclusion" has been highlighted in the following way by Graeber & Wengrow: "Even among those foragers groups, famous for their assertive egalitarianism, he [James Woodburn] notes, there was one striking exception to the rule... that individuals should not lay private claim to property. This exception came in the sphere of ritual... initiation... cults [which] form the basis of exclusive claims to ownership, usually of ritual privileges, that stand in absolute contrast to the minimization of exclusive property rights in everyday... life. These various forms of ritual and intellectual property... are generally protected by secrecy... It's not just relations of command that are strictly confined to sacred contexts... so too is absolute... "private"... property... there turns out to be a profound formal similarity between the notion of private property and the notion of the sacred. Both are, essentially, structures of exclusion". (2021: 158-159). Additionally, the relation between secrecy and domination is explicitly focused on Amerindian cases: "an important feature in much of the Americas is the relationship between esoteric and bureaucratic knowledge... Over the long term of pre-Columbian history, this particular sort of [esoteric] knowledge always seems to lie at the core of systems of domination" (Graeber & Wengrow 2021: 474-475).

“practitioner” could be influenced by a non-anthropocentric turn in the social sciences, or how Andean versions of cosmopolitanism expressed as "curiosity" could be integrated into a single continuum together with "secrecy").

The invited speakers are mainly ethnographically trained social anthropologists whose research would be based on their own long-term fieldwork on contemporary indigenous societies of South America and beyond this region.

Finally, in the mid-term, the outcomes of this workshop would be the publication of a collection of works comparing hidden practices and forms of ownership among indigenous societies (to be submitted to Brill publishing house as part of the series of CAS-E).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This is the third edition of a series of workshops dedicated to South American ethnography. The first took place in the Netherlands (old premises of NIAs in Wassenaar) and the second one at the College of Fellows (University of Tübingen, Germany) a few years ago.

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**  
**(alphabetic order)**

1. Valentina Bonifacio, University of Venecia (Italy).
2. Julieta Elízaga, Museo Nacional de Historia Natural (Chile). (online)
3. Iris Gareis, University of Frankfurt (Germany).
4. Sebastien Hachmeyer, University of Hildesheim (Germany). (online)
5. Ernst Halbmayer, University of Marburg (Germany).
6. Cecilie Ødegaard, University of Bergen (Norway).
7. Amy Penfield, University of Bristol (UK).
8. Anna Przytomska, Gdańsk University (Poland).
9. Juan Rivera, University of San Marcos (Peru).
10. Filip Rogalski, Gdańsk University (Poland).
11. Frédéric Saumade, University of Aix-Marseille (France).
12. Nils Haukeland Vedal, University of Bergen (Norway).

## PROGRAM

*Wednesday 11.06*

-Arrival and dinner in restaurant (tba).

*Thursday 12.06*

**-Morning session:** Visuality, language and ritual in South American lowlands

1. 9h15-9h30: Introduction
2. 9h30-10h30: Ernst Halbmayer: *How do to things with “graphs”? Inter-semiotic relations and attached writing in human and transhuman communication*
3. 10h35-11h35: Filip Rogalski: *Careless inquirers and lurking overhearers – the pragmatics of human-nonhuman boundaries maintenance*
  - 11h35: Pause with coffee and cookies
4. 12h-13h: Nils Haukeland Vedal: *Ritual as mythological déjà vu*

**-Lunch:** 13h15-14h30

**-Afternoon session:** Past and present Andean-Amazonian comparisons

5. 14h20-15h20: Amy Penfield: *Concealing abundance, engendering scarcity: The value of gold and social relations in South America*
6. 15h25-16h25: Anna Przytomska: *Hidden world of Quechua shamans: Body-flux and shared subjectivity in the ritual practices in the Peruvian Andes*
  - 16h25: Pause with coffee and cookies
7. 16h50-17h50: Iris Gareis: *Magic as idiom of transculturation and ownership in the colonial Andes*

**- Dinner:** 18h-19h

*Friday 13.06*

**-Morning session:** 9h30-13h. How to own non-humans? Theoretical perspectives and comparative cases regarding cattle

8. 9h30-10h30: Cecilie Ødegaard & Juan Rivera: *Owning Otherwise I: Instabilities in Indigenous Forms of Ownership. Ethnographies from South America*
9. 10h35-11h35: Frédéric Saumade: *Owning Otherwise II: Colonial Cattle, Native*

*Lanscapes and Cosmologies, Two Comparative Ethnographic Examples of Instability in Amerindian Forms of Ownership (first part)*

- 11h35: Pause with coffee and cookies
- 10. 12h-13h: Juan Rivera: *Owning Otherwise II: Colonial Cattle, Native Lanscapes and Cosmologies, Two Comparative Ethnographic Examples of Instability in Amerindian Forms of Ownership (second part)*

**-Lunch:** 13h15-14h15

**-Afternoon session:** 14h20-17h50. Non-humans: animals and artefacts in the Andes and Chaco

- 11. 14h20-15h20: Valentina Bonifacio: *Taming, knowing, owning, dominating. A reflection on practices of domination from the perspective of cattle-human relations in Paraguay and Argentina*
- 12. 15h25-16h25: Julieta Elízaga (online): *To see or not to see: scopic qualities of the sacred*
- 16h25: Pause with coffee and cookies
- 13. 16h50-17h50: Sebastien Hachmeyer (online): *The Dilemmas of Secrecy: Musical Bamboos and the Becoming of Hidden Ecological Knowledge in the Bolivian Andes*
- 14. 17h50-18h05: Final thoughts and comments.

**- Dinner:** 18h05-19h

*Saturday 14.06*

**-Breakfast at hotel and departure.**

## TITLES AND ABSTRACTS

### **Magic as idiom of transculturation and ownership in the colonial Andes**

*Iris Gareis*

Magic has played a major role in the encounter of cultural traditions throughout human history and became even more prominent in the age of European expansion to the Americas. Following the Spanish conquest of the Inca empire in 1532, in the emerging colonial cities Andean peoples, Spaniards and Africans lived together in close neighbourhood. Subsequently, interactions with the local population added new beliefs in magic and witchcraft to the early modern European magical knowledge. At the same time, Andean people and Africans adopted some ideas and rituals from the Spaniards. The shared belief that magic was effective and that it could be used to harm or to cure people provided the common ground of cross-cultural encounters and rituals through which magical knowledge and practices were further transmitted and negotiated. Transculturation did, however, not produce a unique standardized version of magic. Colonial urban magicians rather developed their own individual rituals and spells in competition with other practitioners.

While for learned people and Spanish theologians magic was not real and a mere superstition, the majority of the colonial population conceived magical knowledge as necessary to counteract the effects of witchcraft, which was considered to be the cause of all kinds of misfortune. Although the early modern European elaborate witchcraft model was linked to the devil, a figure completely unknown to Pre-Columbian Andean thought, the fact that witchcraft was regarded as the source of illnesses and misfortune also by the indigenous and African people, made cross-cultural communication possible and eventually transformed Peruvian north coast shamanism to present-day shamanic healing, especially with regard to the personal relationship between shamans and their auxiliary spirits.

### **Owning Otherwise I: Instabilities in Indigenous Forms of Ownership. Ethnographies from South America**

*Cecilie Ødegaard*

How are things appropriated? How do inhabitants in indigenous areas conceive and experience ownership? How do people own something (or someone), for how long and how is ownership established, legitimized, defended, and lost? What type of human/non-human relations could native notions of ownership in South American contexts bring to the fore? And what do we learn about the ways indigenous peoples of South America relate with those "natural" and "artificial" elements of their environment they try to own—or those that they desire, create, and use?

Our examples will probably reveal quite obviously our interest in “alternative” forms of ownership, instead of those conceptualizations that could be applied to more familiar, hegemonic, or easily recognizable actions of appropriation taking place in the Americas. Indeed, our explorations are not primarily concerned with the always important economic, legal, and political dimensions of ownership. Rather, we will focus our attention mainly on those aspects of ownership concerning that which is in the world, its composition, and the distribution of beings in it: that is, in more “fashionable” terms, its ontological dimensions. This could be the case of, for example, those processes usually discussed within the frame of “colonialism” or “coloniality” which include contexts of rupture of native ownership relations. These ruptures could be described as caused either by currently intensifying effects of extractivism, but they certainly have in common the long persistence of classic European formulations of ownership (and its opposite, *terra nullius*).

By discussing and comparing fieldwork-based ethnographies, we hope to open up other forms of understandings of the relationship between humans and non-humans. An expansion of how we ask questions about historically specific Euro-American developments of ownership may facilitate an incorporation of a wider range of claims, obligations, and entitlements, such as care, nurture, predation, and instability.

After testing the model of familiarizing predation also beyond Amazonian ethnographies, we will highlight two features of the sharing of ownership between humans and nonhuman masters in indigenous societies: deferral and fractality. The first concerns the relation between the owner and what is owned: that is, the system known as spirit owners in the ethnographic literature. The second feature, fractality, relates more to the entity who owns something and the instability of ownership. Prominent scholars have already pointed out the fractality of ownership describing how the relation between a human and a thing is so to speak contaminated by that which relates that person to other humans and persons. These two main features, fractality and deferral, may allow us to grasp the main characteristic of those indigenous forms of ownership operating on a model of familiarizing predation: its intrinsic instability.

## **Owning Otherwise II: Colonial Cattle, Native Landscapes and Cosmologies, Two Comparative Ethnographic Examples of Instability in Amerindian Forms of Ownership (2 sessions)**

*Juan Rivera and Frédéric Saumade*

How do Amerindian peoples conceive and experience ownership, starting from their conception of human/non-human relations? This question could be the umpteenth among the countless others of the same type that anthropologists of Amerindian studies usually ask, unless we propose to relate it directly to what colonization has introduced into these indigenous conceptions through the practice of raising large livestock. Considering, in a comparative perspective, certain Amerindian practices of cattle ranching through ritualized celebrations that highlight the complex relationship between domestic animals, humans, the ecological environment (the landscape and the living beings) and, further, the cosmology, this paper suggests an alternative way of considering ownership and ontologies. First, we shall analyze the impact of the colonial practice of animal branding – that is, the historical basis of ownership and capital – by discussing an original fieldwork-based ethnography of

the *rodeo* among the Quechua peasants of the Chancay valley (Central Peru). We will highlight two features of ownership of cattle: its sharing between humans and nonhuman masters and its permanent instability. The first concerns a conflictive relation between the owner and what is owned in a landscape of contrasting spaces: where the human community and wild animals and spirits dangerously surround the stray cattle (that humans have to gather in order to brand it). The second feature, instability, relates more to the main leitmotiv of ritual. Prominent scholars have already pointed out the fractality of ownership describing how the relation between a human and a thing is so to speak contaminated by that which relates that person to other humans and persons. But at the same time, instability has to be understood in the market economy in which Quechua cattle owners are involved as they have to sell their products, which is part of their identity, outside the community.

These two main features, conflictive sharing and instability as leitmotiv, may allow us to grasp the main characteristic of those indigenous forms of ownership operating on a model of “familiarizing predation” (which might have been developed by the adoption of cattle ranching from the colonial times onwards). Another original fieldwork experience, among the Mexican Huichol, shows the way this Amerindian group has adopted cattle as a structural counterpart of the deer, their founding ancestor, in a cosmology that is determined by the polarity of the landscape (east/west), the seasonality (dry/wet), the ages and sexes of humans (childhood/adulthood, man/woman). Ritual hunting and sacrifice are the technical methods to realize this dialectical relationship between pre-Hispanic and Hispanic animals. At the same time, Christian figures and festivals (Easter week and Patron Saint Day), as well as money, market economy and the sense of capitalistic ownership, have been absorbed in the native predatory ontology. Here, personal enrichment, related to the number of head of cattle one can afford to own, and the new “soft power” of commercialized shamanism, means a social obligation of conspicuous spending in sacrifices, offerings and political/ritual responsibilities.

Our project of comparative ethnography intends to pave the way for further case studies within the framework of a book project, which might integrate other atypical cases, such as the Amazonian Kadiweu and their practice of cattle and horse branding, or the Californian Yokut cattle and horse breeders, and further, back to Spain, the land of the origins of the American continent colonization, the paradoxical “raising of the wild” by the traditional *toro bravo* ranching activity, associated with that of the Iberian pig, who provide the market of bullfighting and that of the most famous ham in the world. Finally, by analyzing the complexity of the gathered ethnography, we shall relativize the commonplace popularized phrase from Philippe Descola’s proposal of the “great divide” between “naturalist” Western societies and other societies driven by alternative ontologies.

This presentation will last two sessions in which, alternatively, the authors will follow an exposition that will start with some theoretical statements on the relationship between cattle and ownership, continue with a detailed ethnographic illustration of its complexities in an Andean case and also other cases from Mesoamerica and North America, to finish with some suggestions on the topic in Amerindian areas where the authors have no first-hand fieldwork experience.

**Concealing abundance, engendering scarcity: The value of gold and social relations in South America**



*Amy Penfield*

This paper explores concepts of individualised ownership as a source of conflict and anxiety among small-scale gold miners in South America (Sanema people of Venezuelan Amazonia and Quechua-speaking Andean migrants in Peru). It explores gold and its guardian spirits as a form of wealth with immense potentials but that is often elusive, out of reach and concealed, particularly in a subterranean realm where evil spirits also reside. Nevertheless, its obscure location adds to its value and appeal, both locally and globally. What gold wealth produces - or promises to produce - is surplus beyond the mere survival of social reproduction among Indigenous populations in South America, but surplus has the spillover effect of generating amplified sentiments of envy. As such, social dynamics associated with post-extraction gold wealth also centre on concealment, because in egalitarian societies with an ethos of demand sharing, wealth must be hidden to avoid envy and sorcery attacks. In this way, hidden knowledges are not solely associated with material and ritual cultures, but strategies for maximising social cohesion and managing economies of surplus arriving from elsewhere.

**Taming, knowing, owning, dominating. A reflection on practices of domination from the perspective of cattle-human relations in Paraguay and Argentina**

*Valentina Bonifacio*

In my presentation I will discuss ideas and practices of domination based on how different (human) social groups describe their relations to cattle. In particular, I will highlight differences in farming practices between indigenous and non-indigenous people, power relations between shamans and their companion spirits, and reactions to feral cattle on the part of cattle farmers, local inhabitant and geneticists in the Paraguayan Chaco and in the Argentinean part of Patagonia; my aim is to understand how bovines are «thought» and «known» in different ways across different social contexts, and how ownership and domestication can be related to one another in these contexts in often complex ways.

**Hidden world of Quechua shamans: Body-flux and shared subjectivity in the ritual practices in the Peruvian Andes**

*Anna Przytomska*

In my lecture, I aim to develop the concept of “*body-flux*” as an analytical tool for examining the shamanic practices of the Quechua people in the central Peruvian Andes. Central to this discussion is the exploration of *hidden knowledge* that is accessible only to shamans (*paqokuna*), distinguishing their ritual practices and experiences from ordinary individuals.

Body-flux captures the dynamic and transformative nature of embodiment in ritual practices, where the boundaries between human and non-human, material and spiritual, are fluid and open to manipulation. This fluidity is analyzed through two key

concepts: *borrowed subjectivity* and *embedded subjectivity*, which define distinct relationships between humans and ritual objects.

*Borrowed subjectivity* refers to the temporary transference of a person's essence into ritual objects, such as stones, coca leaves, or eggs, which serve as "temporary bodies" for the patient, enabling diagnosis and healing. In contrast, *embedded subjectivity* pertains to the enduring agency of objects, such as power stones (*illas/qhuyas*), which are perceived as "living" entities that embody both physical and spiritual aspects in a lasting way.

Body-flux also includes phenomena related to shamans' (*paqokuna*) unique manipulation of their own embodiment, utilizing their specialized knowledge and skills to transform their corporeality. This involves processes such as dehumanization, temporary bodily transformations, shamanic journeys to non-human realms, and the phenomenon of "flying heads," where elements of the body are detached and act independently.

By highlighting the shamanic understanding of embodiment as dynamic and relational, the concept of body-flux underscores how Quechua rituals treat the body not as a closed entity but as a fluid structure capable of transformation for healing, spiritual protection, and connection with non-human beings.

While body-flux may be a universal potential of human embodiment, the ability to consciously control and manipulate it is reserved for those who have mastered hidden knowledge. Shamans' expertise in body-flux enables them to transcend ordinary human experience, serving as mediators between human and non-human worlds. This lecture explores the intersection of the universality of body-flux with its specialized application by shamans, revealing how access to and mastery of *hidden knowledge* shapes and defines the boundaries of this transformative practice in Andean ontology.

### **To see or not to see: scopic qualities of the sacred**

*Julieta Elizaga*

In this work, I aim to explore the relationship between secrecy and sight. Specifically, I would like to address instances and objects of the marking of herds ritual, *señalakuy*. In most cases, both the materiality and the space-time conjunctions involved in these practices are linked to a broad field of significance that we could call 'transformation'. This concept encompasses the process of turning a substance into something else—whether a new being, a new relationship, or a new state for the body and/or soul in terms of health or illness.

For the analysis, I will consider data collected from animal-marking ceremonies in the locality of Macusani, Peru, as well as ethnographic and ethnohistorical references. Among these, and across a variety of cases and examples, it is striking how frequently transformations occur 'in the dark', 'out of sight', or 'only by the intermediation of certain individuals.'

My question centres on the scopic quality of the sacred. I believe that in the Andean region, practices that involve generation and regeneration, require a state of blurred or deprived sight. This state, which is intentionally induced, is also restricted and conditioned by a set of relational factors. I would like to explore both the prohibitions on sight and the circumstances under which these restrictions might be lifted.

Finally, I would like to explore concepts related to secrecy in ritual, particularly those linked to words such as beliefs, trust and care.

## **Careless inquirers and lurking overhearers – the pragmatics of human-nonhuman boundaries maintenance**

*Filip Rogalski*

In recent decades human-nonhuman relationships in indigenous Amazonia have been the subject of intense study in regional ethnology. It is now common knowledge that Amazonian peoples recognise the elements of their human and nonhuman environment as personified participants of the same socio-cosmos (in contrast to the Western naturalistic ontology that treats the environment as a mere background and material basis for human action). Furthermore, a number of studies go beyond the description of indigenous cosmologies and focus on specific contexts in which the anthropomorphisation of nonhumans takes place – how it is learned in ritual contexts and how it is enacted through specific pragmatic means. In my paper – based on material collected during fieldwork among the Arabela (Peruvian Amazon) and examples drawn from other Amazonian ethnographies – I will reflect on the relatively unexplored dimension of Amazonian animist regimes of knowledge and perception. I will argue that, while nonhuman personhood may be an important aspect of indigenous worlds, animist knowledge practices and culture-specific perceptual training also involve a blocking of anthropomorphic (or culturomorphic) perceptions and inferences. I will show how some Amazonian myths – commonly regarded as foundational to animist/perspectivist cosmologies – also comment on the pragmatics of human-nonhuman encounters. As such, they seem not only to provide their audiences with insights into personified existence of nonhumans, but also to teach them how one should avoid a direct experience of it. In the second part of my paper, I will look at conversational joking interactions of the Arabela and show how they re-enact the pragmatics of unwanted human-nonhuman contact in everyday life.

## **The Dilemmas of Secrecy: Musical Bamboos and the Becoming of Hidden Ecological Knowledge in the Bolivian Andes**

*Sebastian Hachmeyer*

In the Bolivian Andes, highland flute makers from the specialized Aymara flute-making community of Walata Grande craft a variety of highland wind instruments from native woody bamboos growing in their natural habitats in mountain cloud forests and Andean-Amazonian foothills. Walateño flute makers, especially the rural elderly generation, are not only known as specialists in shaping bamboos, but they are also ritualists who tune new bamboo-made instrument consorts with the help of powerful and dangerous spirit-beings. While Andean ethnomusicologists have reported extensively on these practices, this paper will focus on the ecological and environmental knowledge related to musical bamboos that has become hidden and secretive for various reasons. In part, this secrecy—such as information about sourcing sites and specific musical bamboo localities—is historically linked to resource dilemmas and a lack of collective organization in sourcing a vital and common pool resource. However, to a large degree, it is also a response to flute makers' concerns about outsiders wanting to know too much about musical bamboos. This raises ethical questions about ethnographies of hidden knowledge and the dilemmas of secrecy for

applied ecomusicological research concerning the musical bamboos of the Bolivian Andes.

### **Ritual as mythological déjà vu**

*Nils Haukeland Vedal*

This presentation concerns the Awajún people of northern Peruvian high jungle. The Awajún, also known as the *Aguaruna* in the anthropological literature, belongs to the language family Aénts Chicham (“people of the world”).

The world of the Awajún is continuously being produced. The imagery, metaphors, and general symbolic economy of their ritual songs, called *ánen*, draws explicitly on human and nonhuman protagonists from their mythological corpus, called *duik muun augbatbau* (“talk of the great ancestors”). These mythic heroes, such as the granter of cultivated plants, *Nugkui nuwa*, or the masculine archetype and uncontested hunter by the name of *Etsa* (also known as *Shakaim*), are the source of that which becomes the “cultural makeup” of the Chicham peoples. These beings’ various appearances in myth give narration to their epistemological contributions to that which becomes the lifeworld of humans.

However, this very process of world-making has yet to reach its conclusion as communication between these mythic beings and humans still describes contemporary state of affairs. To this day people call out for their guidance in the language of *ánen*, identifying themselves with these beings so to harness their productive powers. By harnessing the epistemological productivity of mythology, the ritual language of the Chicham creates a milieu that allows the one that sings to intersect between the present state of affairs and those myths said task at hand beacons an engagement with. As such, the words of these songs vibrate on the most fundamental level of the Chicham world.

As my presentation will make apparent, the intersection between mythology and ritual is articulated by corporal synergies that communicate a relational, moral, and epistemological order that blends humans and animals together and directs them against the same goal. The very epistemological and moral fabric of Chicham society is produced and maintained by keeping the boundaries of one’s human body open to that which is located beyond its borders. In achieving this, the ritual language of the Awajún “shakes up” the contours of their human body by merging it with the corporal forms of nonhumans, drawing out the latter’s affordances, their way of acting in the world, and that which this acting produces.

### **How do to things with “graphs”? Inter-semiotic relations and attached writing in human and transhuman communication**

*Ernst Halbmayer*

The origins of graphic patterns and notions of “writing” have been discussed from an Amazonian perspective at least since Karl von den Steinen (1894) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955). Recent scholarship (e.g. Lagrou 2007, 2013, 2023; Franchetto 2021, Gow 1996; Santos-Granero 1998) has emphasized their relational, inter-semiotic, transformative and partly non-representational character. In my lecture I will focus on the inter-semiotic dimension of graphic units and their different forms of attachment to language, songs, ritual performances and landscape among selected regions of northern South America (Tukano -

Hugh-Jones 2016, Wayuú - Gusinde 1961, Kuna - Nordenskiöld 1928; Severi 1997, Yekuana - Guss 1989, Aparai-Wayana - van Velthem 2003) building on Carlo Severi's notion of transmutation (2014) and Pierre Déléage's conception of writing attached to speech (Déléage 2013). What relationships with different human and non-human beings are thereby expressed? What role do ownership and domination play in these relationships? What happens when graphic communication establishes political arenas exclusively among living people, as was the case with tiot-tio communication, based on painted messages, among the Yukpa (Lhermillier und Lhermillier 1982; Halbmayer in print)? The aim of this paper is to use the perspective of graphic units and indigenous notions of writing in northern South America to rethink the relationship between hidden or restricted knowledge, ritual practices and domination, and the emergence of bureaucratic knowledge.

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