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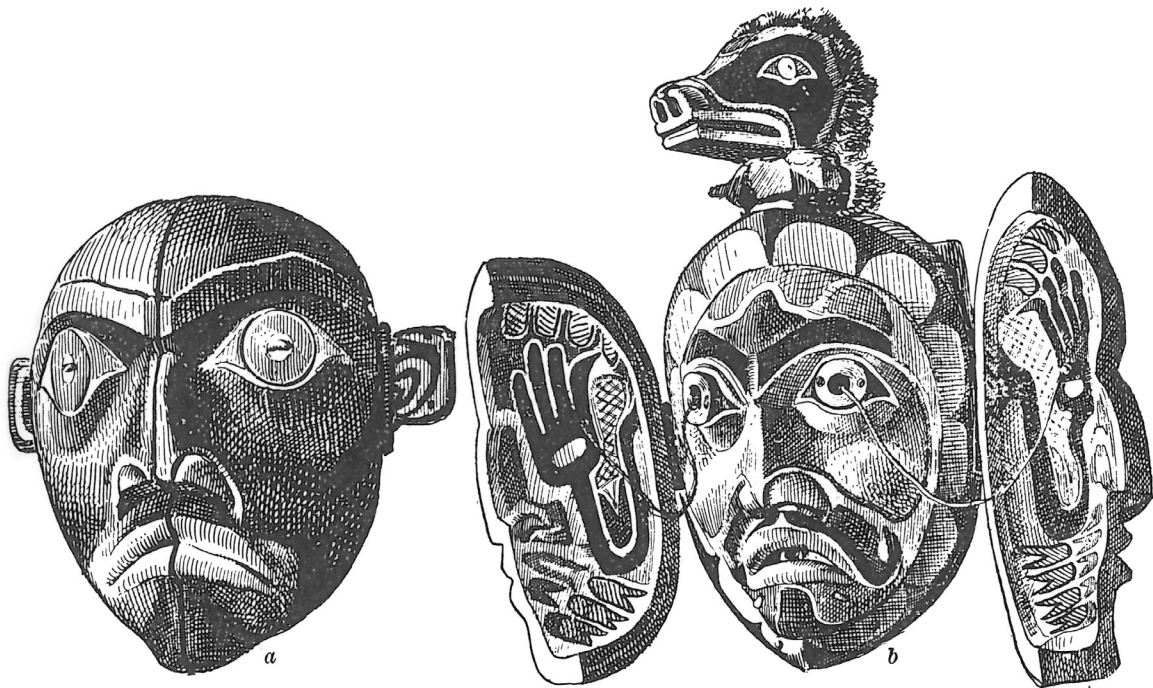
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## Hunter into Prey

Trying to Make Sense of the »Media Revolution« at Göbekli Tepe

Erhard Schüttpelz *Universität Siegen*



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The transformation mask on the title page is from Franz Boas (1966): Kwakiutl ethnography. University of Chicago Press, pp. 99, fig. 24.

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## Hunter into Prey Trying to Make Sense of the »Media Revolution« at Göbekli Tepe

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**Abstract** The essay tries to make sense of the iconography and monumentalism of Göbekli Tepe by way of a comparison with recent ›hunting ideologies‹ in forager situations of abundance or ›super-abundance‹. The article refers to two North American situations of super-abundance (North-West Coast societies based on seasonal aquafaunal abundance; and the seasonal congregations of large-scale Bison hunting groups on the Plains) to demonstrate how foragers coping with a situation of seasonal super-abundance are still able to ritually perform the reversibility of prey and predator inherent in hunting ideologies. The radical iconography of predators at Göbekli Tepe may likewise point to the ritual function of turning ›hunter into prey‹, and the monumentalism of Göbekli Tepe may be interpreted as a ritual setting celebrating the unity of a hunting congregation quite foreign to – and even deliberately pitted against – later regional developments.

**Keywords** Göbekli Tepe, hunting ideology, iconography, affluence, Neolithisation.

(I.)

Imagine a story by Jorge Luis Borges or one of his doubles:

Archeologists excavated a hill somewhere in the hilly flanks of the Fertile Crescent. After years of documenting and interpreting the evidence, they were able to reconstruct a sequence of events, each step taking a millenium or more:

First, there must have been a seasonal abundance of food, and seasonal communal feasting at a very large scale. The ›body mass‹ of animals, of meat, of food, of people and of remains must have been enormous, if not monumental: the demographic concentration, the abundance of food being eaten, the piling up of skeletons, but also the sheer number of mass slaughter leading to the feasting, the opportunities for killing and harvesting.

But this double ›body mass‹ of humans and animals was organized and controlled by hunting groups; and the feasting was organized and disciplined by a ritual congregation. The communal feasting pacified the groups at a critical time in the annual cycle, af-

ter killing and harvesting, by reorganising them in ritual groups differing from the hunting groups. The organisation in charge of hunting the animals each year gave way to an organizing committee in charge of the feast, with spectacular performances and a temporary architecture dismantled each year after the celebrations.

After centuries of feasting, the organizing committee discussed the endless work of erecting and dismantling the ritual ›plaza‹, and decided to make it permanent. The committee organized the communal labour of building a monumental temple city imitating the temporary architecture with its circular lodges, benches, entrances and passages. The ›city‹ or ›temple‹ was built only for the purpose of feasting and, because the builders had the original model in mind, it was erected in one continuous process. It was being partly rebuilt and partly filled, over a very long period of time, to continue the seasonal feasting, and depending on the development of the different groups involved.

In a very literal and material sense the monumental weight of building this temple city was a ›counterweight‹ thrown into the scales, to keep the body mass

or biomass of animals and of feasting humans and non-human beings in balance, and to keep them ›in place‹. A monumental experience of death and reproduction, turned into a monument of death and reproduction. Building the permanent architecture was an extra measure: to make the feasting organisation durable, and especially to consolidate the peaceful – and egalitarian – relationships of the hunters, by annually dissolving the communal hunting groups into cross-cutting ›fraternities‹ and initiation groups.

For a long time, this was a quite successful endeavour not only to ›freeze‹ the transient conditions of seasonal relationships, but to assert the dominance of ritual reproduction and ritual regeneration, over and against group constitution before and after the feasting. There were at least three forms of social organisation involved: smaller groups dispersed all over the surrounding territory in winter times; the ›police organisation‹ of mass hunting in the period of game concentration near the city; and the organisation of the feasting itself (with some ritual preparations before the mass hunting period as well). Not only the groups, but the forms of their social organisation were seasonally assembled and re-assembled; and the temple city had to be consecrated and abandoned each year. When the ›body mass‹ of animals consumed during the feasting changed drastically, from big gazelles to smaller gazelles, the style of the monuments changed as well: towards a more modest style.

Finally, after one millenium, the temple city was deliberately buried, i. e. filled with the remains of the animal body mass consumed and scattered all around the city, and with pieces of broken rocks and stones. The social organisation of territorial groups all around the temple had changed; and especially in the later period, the feasting community could no longer assert the dominance and centrality of their ritual cycle. The ritual season itself had slowly turned into being only a seasonal complement of emerging political organisations dominating the territory during the rest of the year, and of their alternative forms of subsistence. But the ritual guardians of the fraternities still had the power to close the place and to leave a clean slate. The weight and the counterweight of the temple city were now joined to seal the site and abandon its rituals, in order to dissolve the old congregational unity. Corporations also die, as they say. But the skeleton of the city was left intact, like an animal waiting for its resurrection. (... or like a city prepared for future archeologists.) And because the end of the city was an act of deliberate burial, unburying it seemed like the call for restituting a last will – but deciphering the script made for enigmatic reading.

(2.)

Mixing fact, fiction and conjecture in this *quasi una fantasia* mode of writing is obviously much easier to do than to argue with all and only the evidence being provided by the excavations, and meticulously separating already established propositions from mere conjectures. F. i., my sentences about the ecological and seasonal abundance of flora and fauna around Göbekli Tepe are at the moment quite uncontroversial (Benz 2010; Gebel 2013); the ideas about feasting and rituals in Göbekli Tepe have been proposed by many archeologists and the one archeologist who excavated the site (Schmidt 2006; 2010), challenged by some (Banning 2011), but supported by strong evidence (Dietrich *et al.* 2012); the end of G. T. has been categorized as a deliberate act from the start (Schmidt 2006); the shift from big gazelles and monuments to smaller gazelles and monuments has been documented (Lang *et al.* 2013); but my sentences about the principles of social organisation are bound to appear like one arbitrary conjecture amongst many others.

›How do I know‹ and ›how does anybody know‹ that the social organisation of the people of Göbekli Tepe was divided into (at least) three forms? Providing all the evidence for this conjecture would take much space and time, and result in a patchwork of anthropological literature. The shortest version runs like this:

- Hunter-gatherer societies are characterised by seasonal variations (Wengrow and Graeber 2015);
- if there is a period of seasonal abundance and ›group harvesting‹ of flora and fauna, the social organisation is rebuilt for this purpose, and quite radically in cases and seasons of superabundance, and the rest of the year is spent in relative dispersal, in smaller ›bands‹ scattered all over the territory and following their game animals;
- but also in communal feasting, the organisation is transformed according to the changed objectives;
- hunting leadership and ritual leadership in hunter-gatherer societies normally don't go hand in hand; even in very small societies, they evolve into dualisms of ›chieftainship‹ and ›shaman's business‹ (Lévi-Strauss 1967);
- and if the communal hunting and communal feasting were really organised by the same persons and organisations for each hunting and feasting group all year round, it would be difficult to contain and subdue the antagonisms of these groups and their shifting political alliances over the course of many years, or even within one single year;

- especially during the course of building and visiting a jointly used site, which in this case seems to have been a non-competitive and peaceful enterprise.

Thus, there are arguments, and maybe some good arguments for my conjectures, but there is one fundamental conceptual caveat, the ›Göbekli Tepe caveat‹: The excavation came as a big surprise for archeologists and anthropologists, one of the most surprising historical and archeological discoveries in the last decades. All the arguments we employ to interpret Göbekli Tepe follow the bias of making it less of a surprise, otherwise we couldn't convince anybody else of our reasoning. But the unique appearance of Göbekli Tepe in the archeological record was first of all an occasion to doubt and to refute common assumptions about, f. i. the origins of sedentarism and cities, of monumental architecture, standardized iconography and naturalistic sculpture (cf. Renfrew 2007). Against the grain of scientific reasoning, considering the initial building period of Göbekli Tepe we probably should look for more refutations to come, for more uniqueness, and not for the emergence of later historical regularities (the topic of Morenz 2014).

(3.)

The excavation of Göbekli Tepe and surrounding sites has been welcomed as evidence of a true »media revolution« and as evidence of the first »fully symbolic culture« (Watkins 2006b: 2) or even, in evolutionistic terms, as the jump into »a fully symbolic stage of culture« (Watkins 2006b: 5), with capacities of »external symbolic storage« (Watkins 2006b: 7) unknown before – and even remaining unaccomplished some time after, which gives rise to the idea of a transient »medial optimum« (Gebel 2013: 40) achieved in Göbekli Tepe, and only much later to be achieved again.

To a media studies person like myself, this is exciting news, but not without evoking scepticism. Media scholars and media studies people certainly had their own share of »media revolutions«, and always have the next one knocking on the door. »Media revolutions« have been proclaimed for the invention or rather, the distinct inventions of writing, for early modern print, and of course for modern media innovations, the latest being the digital age of networks and mobile platforms. And the terminology of »media revolutions« has indeed been based time and again on the idea of an »external symbolic storage«, in negative terms referring to Plato's remarks on writing and memory, and in positive terms as well: writing and print as dispositions to enable more and better knowledge, or even history itself.

Nevertheless, during the last decades hypotheses arguing on the basis of a newly-found or newly invented »external storage« in the archeological record or in media history have met with increasing scepticism. There are strong arguments, especially from linguistic anthropology (Goodwin 2000) and the anthropology of skills (Ingold 2001), to question the identification of a »fully symbolic stage« with the emergence of an »external symbolic storage« that had the good fortune – or the technically necessary permanence – to survive into our times:

- First, verbal language and multimodal interaction can be as »fully symbolic« and »external« as any external storage, after all, they are stored in other people, and not only in their minds, but in their bodily and linguistic interaction chains (Goodwin 2000).
- Second, external storage depends on »embodied skills« like any other use or production of artefacts; and whenever there is something »external« about symbols or media, it has to be »internalized« in »embodied skills« as well. For instance, algorithms and computer programming are not »external« to »embodied skills«, not even by running automatically; in fact, computer programmers need embodied skills in order to know what the algorithms and programming are all about and what to do next or how to repair them (Knuth 1974). The same applies to »external« or »externalized« architecture and sculpture and its production or reception (as in erecting and interpreting Göbekli Tepe).
- And third, external storage is not bound to the permanence of built environments, it may also be anchored in transient designs, perishable materials, short display periods at a ritual and immediate destruction afterwards, or in natural landscape configurations like rocks, trees or caves (Kramer 2014).

Myself, I find it hard to believe that the architecture and sculptures of Göbekli Tepe were the invention of an »external storage« that hadn't been possible before (and simultaneously) in more perishable materials (f. i. in lodges made of skins, or in sculptures made of wood). Of course, an external storage in stone is different from one in wood or skin, and there are convincing comparisons of monumental and less monumental material cultures (Wengrow 2003). But there is no reason to believe that external storage itself is bound to an optimum of permanence. Many cultures without writing actively negate the permanent presence of ritual objects, by destroying them after the ritual, by letting them rot or by storing them in a secret place and »renewing« them for each ritual. In these cultures, the idea of ritual repetition and the possibilities of aesthetic variation go hand in hand. Thus, if the argument is about the new »per-

manence« of »external storage« in stone sculpture, it makes sense to expect that the »storage capacities« of the »symbolic repertoire« were not only extended or enhanced, but also restricted and standardised at G. T. – but it will be hard to tell from the surviving non-perishable evidence.

Besides these open questions of an increase or decrease in »external storage«, the very idea of a »media revolution« too has recently been criticized as being ambiguous. Does the revolutionary change of media result from media innovation as an early »push« or from its being the late sequel of a non-media »pull«? F. i. the media innovations of the 19th and 20th century can best be understood as consequences of industrialisation and its new material possibilities on the one hand, and the escalation of administrative demands in the wake of industrial products on the other, in their combination leading to the byproduct of nearly all the media innovations we know best (Yates 1989). The invention of writing has been framed in similar terms by C. Lévi-Strauss and followers of his »administrative hypothesis« (Lévi-Strauss 1955), and though this idea remains controversial, it certainly does relativize the idea of an autonomous media revolution, and makes the historian look for other »prime movers« than media. Because the archeological literature stresses the ecological and climatic conditions of the Fertile Crescent and its changing human-animal relationships, there seems to be no necessity to opt for an autonomous »media revolution« in this case, anyway; and Jacques Cauvin's idealistic »birth of the gods« (Cauvin 1997) has now been partly »materialized« and convincingly contextualized (Benz 2010).

A last possible revision concerns the very idea of a »revolution«. The French revolution was a genuine revolution indeed, but as historians have shown (Furet 1988), it took 100 years to create this revolution through re-interpreting an event that was originally emerging in the framework of the Ancien Régime, and – like the Reformation – started as an attempt to accomplish the restitution of an »ancient constitution« (Pocock 1957) and its privileges and liberties. My general impression is, that many archeologists and other scholars have been overwhelmed by the novelty and the unique antiquity of Göbekli Tepe, and been a bit rash to conclude that the inventions (and media inventions) of G. T. were innovations for the future, being adopted by surrounding groups and sites, and thus opening the path towards our culture of monumental buildings, stone sculptures, sanctuaries or even symbolic notations and writing proper. Trevor Watkins made this assumption more than explicit: they were »the first people to be substantially like ourselves« (Watkins 2006b:2).

I am inclined to proceed from the opposite angle. Maybe these people were the *last* people of the Fertile Crescent to be radically different from everything

that happened afterwards, and Göbekli Tepe was not meant to be a starting point for symbolic innovation (in spite of the fact that its accomplishments were indeed used as such a starting point by other groups and their sculptors), but – as in my literary sketch above – stemmed from a conservative or even »reactionary« social movement. If this was a »revolution« and a »media revolution«, it may well have been – like so many revolutionary moments in history – first of all a »counter-revolution«, an apparently quite successful attempt to »freeze« the transient conditions of seasonal relationships, possibly even more or less replicating the size and style of already existing transitory congregational lodges and rituals, and keeping them open for necessary modifications. What's the evidence for this perspective of a »counter-revolution«?

(4.)

Interpreting the media and arts of G. T., there are two ways of building a case: to assemble a (necessarily incomplete) corpus of images, sculptures and artefacts and compare this corpus with other (and necessarily with many historically later) images, sculptures and symbols; or to try to fit the media and architecture of G. T. into a hypothetical process of ritual mediation (Benz/Bauer 2015). Though this latter method is bound to remain as speculative as the first and seems less philological, I will follow this procedure, and try to derive the »media« of G. T. from their possible ritual »mediation«.

We just have to imagine what this would mean for our own temples and ritual centers and their events, to know how difficult and even outright impossible this operation is. But we don't have much of a choice: the architecture and sculptures of Göbekli Tepe are the most important evidence of the rituals of Göbekli Tepe people we will probably ever get; and later evidence is bound to remain misleading.

In the remainder of the paper, I will focus on just one of the vexing questions of interpreting the evidence – and the media – of Göbekli Tepe, and probably the most spectacular and speculative of them all:

The iconography of Göbekli Tepe is not about prey animals (or only in a few cases of enigmatic animal combinations), but mostly about superior animals: predators, and especially animals that can be harmful to humans (snakes and other poisonous species; but also felines and other fierce animals, bears, aurochs), and animals that transcend human capacities by their motion or their cunning (birds and foxes). The details of this iconography and the height of the pillars, the multi-perspectival, but realistic views, all this combines to create a sense of animal superiority, or of man-animal agonistics – meet the predators,

meet your poisonous enemies, meet the tricksters, i. e. meet the tricks that you can't do (flying and cunning).

We can at least try to reconstruct some conditions of this puzzling iconography by referring to the historical and anthropological evidence concerning ›super-affluent hunter-gatherers‹, and the best way would be in three steps:

- concerning hunter-gatherers in general
- concerning the ritual (or religious) activities of hunter-gatherers
- concerning super-affluent hunter-gatherers, i. e. how do hunter-gatherers cope with situations of super-abundance, ritually, socially, ecologically?

Concerning topics one and two, I shall be as brief as possible. After decades of discussions about hunter-gatherer cosmologies and new debates concerning ›animism‹ and ›perspectivism‹, only one common denominator remains to characterize forager world views or ›ontologies‹ or ›ideologies‹, and it is a common denominator that was already well known in the anthropological literature of the 1930s and 1940s. Hunter-gatherers are deeply concerned with, or even obsessed with, the reversibility of predator and prey, or, in their own case, hunter and prey. A recent summary by Roberte Hamayon:

»L'espèce humaine est partie prenante dans la ›chaîne alimentaire‹ qui, selon l'idéologie de la chasse, relie les diverses espèces vivant au sein d'un même milieu. De même que les humains se nourrissent de gibier, de même les esprits des animaux sauvages (incluant rapaces et carnassiers dans des positions intermédiaires) sont censés se nourrir de la force vitale qu'ils sucent dans la chair et le sang des humains.« (Hamayon 2003: 42, Fn.27)

This nagging concern with a reversibility of hunter and prey and of ›food chains‹ in general, seems to be pervasive in all ›hunting ideologies‹, and it becomes aggravated in situations of mass slaughter, especially in collective big-game hunting situations. As far as we can tell from the ethnographic evidence, super-affluent hunter-gatherers are not relieved from the troubling questions of a necessary reversibility or reciprocity between hunter and prey, or between the human predator and other species. On the contrary, they are driven to acknowledge some form of reciprocity by special, and sometimes quite radical ritualistic and personalized means.

There are some pertinent ethnographic reports about situations of super-affluent hunter-gatherers, many of them from North America, especially two groups of documents:

- the very rich and detailed ethnographies of the Northwest Coast and their partly permanent (or seasonally recurring) situations of super-abundance in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Goldman 1975; Walens 1981);

- and the annual bison (or ›buffalo‹) hunting by large groups of hunters in the 18th and 19th centuries, and their rituals before and after the communal hunt (Weltfish 1965; Lawrence 1993).

Of course, North America is a special case with innumerable special cases, and so is everything related to hunter-gatherers – people who very often want to be as different from each other as they can get. And of course, there is no chance to capture the ›spirit‹ or the ›spirits‹ of Göbekli Tepe in North America, because the social and historical situations are totally unlike the PPNA. But we may be able to compare some of the most important traits of the ›hunting ideologies‹ of super-affluent hunter-gatherers with each other, and try to distil some general options from their rituals and iconographies, as long as we account for their social and ecological divergences. Super-Abundance may or may not have been a rare phenomenon amongst hunter-gatherers historically, in modern times it certainly was, because most hunter-gatherers lived in the marginal zones of empires and postcolonial states, and under precarious ecological and political conditions. Even so, some of the exceptions to this rule provide well-documented evidence how hunter-gatherers could cope with situations of super-abundance:

Ritually, each group or ›society‹ of hunter-gatherers depends on the seasonal vegetation cycle, and it acknowledges the necessity to care for the source of material abundance, and especially for the source or the sources of its regeneration. The rituals of caring for, or taking the responsibility for making regeneration possible, vary a lot, from purifying a ›mistress of animals‹ or killing and symbolically resuscitating a ›master of animals‹, to personifying the common ancestors of both specific groups of humans and specific animals to multiply or ›reincarnate‹ them anew, or re-affirming a marriage alliance with one most important animal species. It doesn't make sense to homogenize these rituals, and it is misleading to treat their paradigmatic cases as ›prototypes‹ – all they have in common is, that they make the regeneration of their fauna and especially of their prey animals ritually possible, and in doing so, that they acknowledge the possible reversals of ›food chains‹ or of ›being hunted‹.

In comparing the rituals of hunter-gatherers under conditions of super-abundance, it remains striking, that there seems to be one possible shift of emphasis in these rituals: from prey to predator, i. e. from the ›Master/Mistress of prey animals‹ to figures of Master Predators, and the ambivalence between a ›bad conscience of regeneration‹ and an ›agonistic regeneration fight‹, or even forms of spiritual warfare. Of course, the techniques and specialists of spiritual warfare are not missing in non-affluent hunter-gatherer societies, and ›masters of animals‹ can be predators elsewhere, f. i. in the bear-complex of the

Northern hemisphere (Hallowell 1926). But spiritual warfare is usually confined to one or more prominent persons in charge of that war, i. e. ›doctors‹ or ›shamans‹; and usually, the role of predators being ›master of animals‹ is confined to one privileged animal species only.

At least in North America, in different settings of super-abundance, we observe a confluence of ›spiritual warfare‹ (or ›shamanism‹) and public rituals of regeneration (sometimes in a ›totemistic‹ form), and a multiplication of predators or even the making of new ›super-predators‹. In both cases of hunter-gatherer super-abundance, as a seasonal ritual of bison hunting, and as a stable ecological situation and ranking society in the North-West, there seems to arise a prominent link between the agonistics (or religious competition) of ritual groups and individuals, and the agonistics between human and non-human beings, the latter being symbolical representatives of their animal species or super-human species (Goldman 1975; Weltfish 1965).

One possible conjecture for Göbekli Tepe would be, that the iconography of G. T. points in the same direction: an ›agonistic regeneration fight‹ with the Master Predators (and other superior powers). And, if we assume that kind of ritual, we should also expect a kindred agonistics between ritual groups, but an agonistics that pacifies and civilizes the groups and individuals involved, and that puts them to ritual purposes and endeavours of ritual redistribution. My conjecture is, that this is as close as we can get to the general thrust of Göbekli Tepe iconography: not a cult of the dead, no ancestor cult (as in later monumental architecture), but an agonistic situation between ritual groups (dedicated to ritual labour in preparing and sustaining their rituals, including the building of the architecture), and between human and non-human beings.

(5.)

Why is the situation of super-affluent hunter-gatherers an agonistics of some sort? Or why does it become agonistic? Foragers coping with abundance may be characterized by several paradoxes:

An abundance of flora and fauna offers the possibility that there is enough for all members of a forager society to eat and to share. But in seasonal harvesting, access has to be regulated to maximize success for all, and to make sure that each party and each individual can get their respective share. I. e. access has to be organized and even policed, with para-military discipline (MacLeod 1937) and heavy sanctions for trespassers during seasonal abundance (Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941: 112–118); or, as on the Northwest Coast, access to food resources – and in-

creasingly to all other resources – is controlled by a totally new form of organisation, i. e. in this case: by ranking (Goldman 1975).

The consequence of this organisational challenge and its self-imposed seasonal discipline is a first paradox: Because of (seasonal and/or stored) super-abundance, access becomes a ›scarce resource‹: not only for some people, but for each and everybody. This is a sea-change compared with small groups of hunter-gatherers roaming through their territory: access for them is not a scarce resource, but abundance there isn't, or only in the sense that their wants are few, and may be easily satisfied.

In the case of the bison hunt and the NW coast - and possibly G. T. -, there was an ›embarras de richesse‹ entailing a necessary scarcity of access rights to quantities of meat and other food that exceeded each individual's wants. That means, all groups (hunting groups, storing groups, ritual groups in charge of dealing with the seasonal cycle) find themselves in a situation of having to justify their ›access rights‹, either to counter-balance inequalities or to live with them.

The categorization of equal or unequal access to legitimate resources of abundance gives rise to the question of equal or unequal access to the means of accumulating value or reputation – the situation becomes either competitive, or competition has to be diverted and ›channelled‹ by new measures of distributing access, value and reputation. One way of regulating these measures would be to go through a whole series of ritual re-distributions, in a cycle of invitations and counter-invitations, until the resources of feasting are spent and each and every ritual group has gone through all the necessary reversals of relationships – there is no reason to assume that permanent inequalities of rank and status are necessary corollaries of hunter-gatherer abundance or of their ritual congregations (as demonstrated on the Plains of North America) (Lowie 1954). And even for the Northwest Coast, it has been demonstrated that potlatching had the effect of maximizing the redistribution of food within the territory.

But the easiest way to control the political factionalism of hunting parties would be to organise the necessary steps of ritual re-distribution via a completely different principle, and this is what happened before and after the bison hunt in many locations of North America (and may well be what made Göbekli Tepe emerge in the first place). The period of feasting would then transform the hunting groups into cross-cutting ritual ›fraternities‹ that are pooling food, labour and knowledge for and during the event, and thus isolating the order of the ritual organisation from the territorial organisations before and after the event. This contrast would not be confined to the ritual center; in fact, there would be preparatory rituals to confirm the pre-eminence of the



ritual organisation, and groups participating in the ritual organisation would be allowed or even obliged to make themselves accountable by symbolic media circulating across the congregational network (f. i. by forms of ›money‹ or rather ›shares‹ that materialise their rights of access, in stylistic miniatures of some monumental motifs).

The second consequence concerns the transformation of the ›hunting ideology‹ summarised by Roberte Hamayon. A situation of Super-Affluence that exceeds all capacities of consumption for more than some months, for most hunter-gatherers is a topsy-turvy world, and to reconstitute a forager sense of realism, there has to be a ritual reversal that sets things straight: to prove that hunter and prey are still on reciprocal terms. And there do not seem to be many options of re-installing a convincing reciprocity of hunter and prey after a mass killing that proves the chilling superiority of the hunting party.

- One option we find in the North American Plains, in the legitimation of bison hunting, would be to stress the ›voluntary‹ character of being killed, f.i. by referring to a mythological marriage alliance (Harrod 1987).
- A quite different option we find on the North West coast consists in counter-acting the asymmetrical hunting (or rather fishing) situation, by escalating the superiority of animals as hunters or killers of humans. The animals that one encounters in rituals of seasonal regeneration are then no longer peaceful ›masters of animals‹ or benevolent predators, but become dangerous super-predators, or at least deadly superior to humans by any terms. The ritual quest for regeneration turns into horror and terror - the horror that becomes necessary to re-dress the precarious balance between foragers and the animal world (Goldman 1975; Walens 1981).

In North America at least, this leads to a new and quite paradoxical attitude: to be able to deal with such powerful beings that regenerate and sustain such an overwhelming super-abundance, you have to be strong, cunning and confident indeed, but also modest (like a good hunter), peaceful and even submissive at the same time. Possible ritual sequences for acting out this contradictory attitude are:

- transforming humans into the prey of superior symbolical predators (representing their species), and then turning the initiated humans into personifications of these predators (or into allies of them), to be pacified and civilized by the ritual group (Walens 1981);
- (as in some cases of bison hunting and their harvesting ritual sequels) making a ritual war on the powers-that-be outside, within a ritual precinct (Weltfish 1965: 260–265);
- staging spectacular shows of ›spiritual warfare‹ and animal mimicry by ritual specialists, and

visiting each other in their respective lodges (Weltfish 1965: 276–280).

A slightly fuzzy shorthand expression for these three ritual situations would be the expression that the collective situation turns out to be ›shamanistic‹, but that all performances involved have to be representative not only for curers and their patients, but for corporate groups of hunters. The enhancement of an imaginary reversal of prey/predator relationships remains in focus, especially in some of the impressive anthropological discussions of Kwakiutl ritual and iconography. The aesthetic escalation and media virtuosity of the Kwakiutl resulted in rituals full of illusionistic tricks and mimicry: becoming ›one of them‹, initiates behaved like super-predators only to be pacified and civilized by their companions and to behave with perfect etiquette ever after.<sup>1</sup>

(6.)

If this is one of the possible roads of super-affluent hunter-gatherers and their ritual accomplishments of prey/predator-reversals, could this strange road have any relevance for Göbekli Tepe?

We would have to find not only similar designs and images, but a society of super-affluent hunter-gatherers suffering from a similar obligation to consolidate their reproduction (but with quite different social consequences). And though at first glance it seems more than unlikely, the Northwest Coast of North America is a good territory to compare with Göbekli Tepe, exactly because it is so unlike the Fertile Crescent: a dominantly aquatic culture, designing sculptures of wood instead of stone, but also building per-

**1** But even the most extreme forms of Kwakiutl ritualism do not deviate from the general framework of hunter-gatherer mimetic drama. Cf. Hamayon's summary concerning mimetic play, the entertainment of non-humans, and the objectives of regeneration: »Les participants ordinaires ›jouent‹ comme les animaux, mais ils ›jouent‹ entre eux. Leurs ›jeux‹ respectent des conventions communes, comme tout ce qui se passe entre humains. ... Leurs danses sont un modèle humanisé d'ébats animaux, leurs luttes, de combats animaux. ... C'est une sorte d'assurance mutuelle que la participation de chacun donne à tous. Elle s'accompagne d'une sorte de garantie symbolique fournie par l'image que les jeux des humains sont censés renvoyer aux animaux et à leurs esprits, image en miroir qui, dit-on, leur ›plaît‹, les ›jéjouit‹ car elle stimule aussi dans leur monde la perpétuation. Les esprits animaux ne sont pas, en effet, que des spectateurs à divertir, ils sont surtout, implicitement, les protagonistes indispensables des jeux humains. Là est la raison latente du devoir fait aux humains de ›jouer‹ pour assurer le renouveau saisonnier du milieu naturel dont ils se nourrissent.« (Hamayon 2003: 43)

manent sites and ›points of access‹ in their landscape (weirs and dams, especially), and developing a quite monumental and illusionistic ritual style, especially developing standardized animal motifs that were repeated, varied, miniaturized, blown-up and recursively incorporated into each other.

It remains striking that both in Göbekli Tepe and the ritual network of Göbekli Tepe, at least the most important of these traits were also developed:

- standardized motifs,
- miniaturization (and mobility) of motifs,
- and even some forms of recursive incorporation, even with the superficial resemblance between one G. T. ›totem pole‹ and NW ›totem poles‹ (which I shall not go into) (Schmidt 2006: 77–80).

The most striking trait for a stylistic comparison is the standardization and elegant simplification of animal motifs. And there is one more trait that could be relevant for a comparison: on the North West coast, one of the most puzzling visual traits is the symmetrical arrangement of surfaces and the strange trait of ›x-ray views‹ into the interior of an animal. There is a strong and pervasive manipulation of spatial dimensions in looking at visual artefacts, and thus, these motifs are able to endlessly play on possibilities of visual, metaphoric and corporate ›incorporation‹, of food-chains being turned into corporate power relationships, and organic incorporations split open in X-ray fashion for the bewildered gaze (Walens 1981).

In Göbekli Tepe, of course, we don't find this ›x-ray incorporation‹ aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> But we do find a pervasive and quite irritating playing with the spatial perspectives built into the pillars and their sculpted animals. They are monumentalized by spectators looking up to them, but they are also sometimes miniaturized and shown as if from above or sideways; they emerge from the walls, often in a menacing posture and with protruding fangs or teeth; and though all of the animals are stylized, they demonstrate a surprising variety of possible views and angles. Going from one animal sculpture to the next – which may or may not have been the case in Göbekli Tepe for visitors or insiders – the sense of realism remains the same, but the sense of perspective changes all the time, from one animal to the next, which is no big deal for modern museum visitors like us after cubist art, but may have been a quite disturbing – or indeed, in more than one sense a ›perspectivist‹ experience – for ritual participants. Thus, comparing North-West coast art and Göbekli Tepe art, it may be

<sup>2</sup> But there are some animals depicted with protruding ribs, i. e. showing what's inside the body on the outside (Schmidt 2013).

fair to say that both combine stylistic standardization and spatial (i. e. perspectival) irritation in a most elegant manner. North-West coast art dwells on the recursive incorporation of body outlines as exteriors and interiors; while the Göbekli Tepe combination of realism and changing perspectives makes each animal ›jump‹ into view and at the spectator. These characteristics may in both cases have been part of the agonistic (and cunning) character of visual displays, and of a self-confident illusionism. After all, on the North West coast at least, not only monumental architecture, but also monumental rituals were meant to address large groups and their representatives, and non-human beings were represented in the rituals by masked performers, seducing and persuading the non-human beings in order to make them acknowledge the equality or even superiority of their human hosts (Walens 1981).

For Göbekli Tepe, we can only assume that the feasting and especially the iconography and sculptures were linked to such kinds of agonistic situations. But guessing from the animal personnel manifested in the sculptures – predators, poisonous animals, dangerous species, cunning foxes and sovereign masters of flying – and the irritating shifts of perspectives – from above, from below, sideways, miniaturized, blown-up – the ritual encounter with these animals in all probability was not an act of modesty or veneration, but an act of courage and bravery (cf. Benz / Bauer 2013).

Not only in North America, moreover, but in all hunter-gatherer societies and their initiation ceremonies (and especially in shamanism), we can expect ritual inversions of technical hunting sequences, turning hunters into divine prey, making initiates ›fall prey‹ to divine forces and super-human animals or even super-human beings transcending the distinction between men and animals. If hunting operations (Widlok 2015) can be categorized by sequences of:

prey needed – weapons needed – tracking down prey – approaching prey – shooting prey – killing prey – breaking open the corpse – dismembering prey – transport – cooking – consumption of meat

...ritual sequences of initiation, or of turning hunter into prey and into ›super-hunter‹ (Bloch 1992) may well use parts of these sequences to let non-human beings (symbolically)

- track,
- approach,
- shoot,
- kill,
- break open,
- dismember,
- transport,

- cook and/or
- consume humans (initiates).

On the North-West coast, as in shamanistic initiations, this certainly was the case: ritual sequences of ›being hunted‹ or ›becoming prey‹ were the basis for the ritual sequences of initiation, and the ritual encounters were filled with figures of predators (bears, killer whales *etc.*) or even with imaginary ›super-human/super-animal predators‹ (f. i. the ›Cannibal of the North‹ and other North West Coast creatures of horror, splatter and gore). Indeed, on the North West Coast, the ›super-human/super-animal predators‹ ranked higher than their companion animal predators; only by ritually falling prey to them and mimetically becoming ›one of them‹ initiates could attain the highest ranks in the ritual and social organisations (Walens 1981; Wolf 1999).<sup>3</sup>

And it seems that bison hunting on the North American Plains too, was both mediated through ritual activities of ›acting like a bison‹ and with a torturous way of ›falling prey‹ to the forces of seasonal regeneration and bison regeneration – at least this seems to be one possible interpretation of the ritual Sun Dance in the context of its seasonal position and in the historical context of early 18th century's bison hunt (though always mixed with expectations of warfare and revenge in the 19th century) (Lawrence 1993: 33–34).

Of course, we will never know what the poisonous, deadly and terrifying animals of Göbekli Tepe – its ›horror picture show‹ or ›pandaemonium‹ or ›inferno‹ – meant for the ritual participants. But from

**3** A short summary of the cosmological foundation: «The Kwakiutl world is one where countless varieties of animals all kill and destroy to satisfy their hunger, united in a common bond of becoming food for each other, all active participants in an intricately interdependent system of resurrection. It is a world filled with the gaping maws of killer whales, the fearsome teeth of wolves, bears, seals, and spawning salmon, the tearing beaks of eagles, ravens, owls, and hawks, and the unending voraciousness of rodents, lizards, frogs, and snakes. It is a world filled with images of mouths, and of the death they bring to the creatures of the world. ... Mythical extensions of animals ... are always carnivorous. ... The Kwakiutl stands in a special relationship to one class of animal in particular, the predator, especially those predators who, in some way, feast off either humans or salmon. ... In point of fact, most crest animals actually do eat humans, either live humans (killer whales, wolves, and bears) or dead humans (eagles and ravens). Thus, because these animals are all direct links in the cycle of resurrection for both humans and salmon, they are themselves by definition humans. Like all animals, they are considered to be humans who have donned magical masks and blankets (skins), which transform them into the animals seen in daily life.” (Walens 1981: 100–101)

the zoological details (Peters and Schmidt 2004) we can generalize that humans living around Göbekli Tepe did indeed live with the imminent danger of falling prey to the animals depicted, and that hunters sometimes turned into prey encountering them, and avoided this reversal of roles by practically acknowledging their partial inferiority. It remains striking that modern visitors (and virtual visitors) of Göbekli Tepe find the experience menacing and uncanny too, after so many years. And indeed, the mediascape of Göbekli Tepe is a ›viewing machine‹ as good as any cinema or video installation, carefully directed as a ›mise-en-scène‹ of animal depictions ›jumping‹ at the spectator from many angles, or of turning spectators into the potential prey of animals. My proposal is to take this common denominator seriously: that the animal iconography of Göbekli Tepe was part of a ritual sequence of turning ›hunter into prey‹ (Bloch 1992), in order to re-balance the cosmic ›food chain‹; and in order to pacify and civilize a congregation of diverse hunting groups, being ceremonially re-shuffled after weeks of mass-slaughter and in the midst of feasting and re-distributing food. To turn the meeting-place of the congregational site into stone, to make it partly unalterable, was but one additional way of ›hammering home‹ the superiority of the ritual organisation, and the superiority of the non-human beings that were able to redress the cosmic balance of a persistent ›hunting ideology‹ in full bloom.

(7.)

Even if this speculation helps to elucidate some of the most striking features of Göbekli Tepe, other aspects are bound to remain as puzzling as before. I can only address two of them, the ›realism‹ or ›naturalism‹ of animal representation, and its apparent contrast with the T-shaped pillars in their midst.

It seems that at least some groups living on historical and archeological sites of abundance or ›super-abundance‹ – and no others? – have created ›viewing installations‹ that were explicitly geared for the surprising effects of life-likeness and illusionistic sleight-of-hand (as in naturalistic cave painting; or in full-blown dramas with ›special effects‹ for a ritual stage, f. i. with the Kwakiutl; in Nature Morte painting; and, of course, in modern cinema and chronofotography). Leaving aside all other forms of naturalism, it seems that a close link between material super-affluence and hyper-realistic art is consistent with what we know about hunter-gatherers.

First, naturalistic art may have been used as a ›lingua franca‹ for quite diverse social and linguistic groups meeting at a seasonal cross-roads of abun-

dance, an artistic idiom that ignored differences of culture, ancestry and social status and focused on the retinal and faunal ›world in common‹.

Secondly, in hunter-gatherer art, artistic reasoning may be directed towards the urge to lure and seduce the non-humans by erecting a pleasing but ambiguous ›mirror image‹ (cf. Walens 1981). To re-quote R. Hamayon (2003: 43): »les jeux des humains sont censés renvoyer aux animaux et à leurs esprits, image en miroir qui, dit-on, leur ›plaît‹, les ›jéjouit‹ car elle stimule aussi dans leur monde la perpétuation. Les esprits animaux ne sont pas, en effet, que des spectateurs à divertir, ils sont surtout, implicitement, les protagonistes indispensables des jeux humains.« In historical times and spaces of Super-Affluence the task of pleasing the non-human guardians responsible for the well-being of humans and non-humans may escalate into specialized art forms; and rendering the exceptional state of faunal abundance via illusionistic ›mirror images‹ of faunal abundance and faunal realism may be one way to please and seduce human and non-human beings alike. After all, in situations of abundance, human and non-human groups of predators have the same seasonal objectives or ›congruency of relevances‹ and even a certain ›interchangeability of standpoints‹. F. i., on the NW Coast, bears and humans prepare for months in advance to be in time for the salmon arriving on the coast and up the rivers; a similar rhythmic interweaving of human and non-human predators preparing for gazelle and other game must have been characteristic for the region around Göbekli Tepe – which may have made it necessary to ritually honor, invite and incorporate their spirits before and after the harvesting season.

Of course, any comparison of recent hunter-gatherer cultures and Göbekli Tepe is bound to remain oblique at best, and offers only a ›diagonal‹ perspective across very different and even diametrically unlike social organisations. Judging from the archeological evidence, I do recommend the ›horror and terror‹ comparison with the North American NW Coast (and especially Kwakiutl iconography and ritualism), but I remain unconvinced of looking for a similar social organisation, i. e. ranking and all that it implied on the NW Coast. Instead, a democratic Plains and Prairies organisation entailing a strict ›hunting police‹ and disciplined seasonal feasting (before and after the hunt) seems a possible candidate for explaining the congregational organisation.

And even in iconographical terms, my interpretation is bound to remain incomplete, because I do hesitate to include the most important element of Göbekli Tepe architecture and sculpture in the ›horror and terror‹ realm, i. e. the anthropomorphic T-shaped pillars. After all, these anthropomorphic figures – and in spite of their abstraction they are characterized by anthropomorphic features and clothing – don't show any mouths, i. e. they seem to be exempt from

surrounding prey-predator-relationships. Whatever their status – are they abstracted super-humans? are they the true ›masters of animals‹ ruling the animal and predator realms? are they the true, i. e. human appearances of the predator animals when ›being amongst themselves‹, turned into humans and only appearing to be animals to humans? –, whatever their unknown status is, I would argue that this ›absence of orality‹ is their most striking feature, and may be in one sense or another their ›function‹. The ritual precinct is dominated by figures that are ›beyond predation‹, because they are ›beyond orality‹. There seem to be three realms of beings: outside, the mass killing and ritual feasting on prey animals; inside, initiation procedures centering on being turned into the prey of predators (with no zoological overlap between the prey animals outside and the predator animals inside); and ruling these initiation procedures and their multi-perspectival iconographies, strictly vertical beings ›beyond orality‹, beings that ›do not show their mouths‹ (differing from the prey-predator world around them drastically showing teeth, fangs and ribs).

And to follow the lure of comparisons, one more time... ›Not to show one's mouth while eating‹ is one of the central tenets of Kwakiutl etiquette (Walens 1981: Ch. II), i. e. within a culture and iconography obsessed with oral greed and eating, etiquette consisted in accomplishing the symbolical negation of eating and especially the avoidance of any sign of oral greed. The representation of oral greed and aggression was ubiquitous, but corporate persons, individuals included, were supposed not to succumb to any kind of greed and to perform aggression artfully to have it ritually tamed. In Göbekli Tepe, the representation of oral greed and aggression is ubiquitous too, and this may point to a quite similar split between the representation of oral greed and a ritually sanctioned corporate morality. Maybe the T-shaped beings epitomize this split? Obviously, at the moment this question is bound to remain a matter of speculation.

(8.)

Being an amateur, writing this essay has been quite a challenge for me, feeling compelled - against my best intentions - to follow the idiosyncratic options of super-affluent hunter-gatherers I didn't find in the archeological literature, but that I was familiar with from anthropology. Following this lure, I had to go against the grain of traditional »media revolution« assumptions too, and stress the priority of ritual mediation, and of transient ritual practice – in spite of the uncomfortable fact that at least some of the ritual media of Göbekli Tepe are well-documented

and seem to have been crucial historical inventions leading to all sorts of media innovations indeed, and that their initial rituals are bound to remain obscure. Because this line of reasoning led me to write a media anthropological *tour de force* and transformed all my arguments into the *quasi una fantasia* mode I initially wanted to avoid, all I can do is to return to the ›Göbekli Tepe caveat‹ spelled out above.

The world-wide centers of initial domestication have recently been identified with affluent or rather, super-affluent hunter-gatherer formations (Zeder 2015), though this new development repeats old ideas about ›harvesting people‹ (›Erntevölker‹) as the intermediate step between foraging and domestication. The historical road now does not seem to have led from scarcity to initial domestication, but from affluent to super-affluent hunter-gatherers or ›harvesting cultures‹ to initial domestication, with or without a bottleneck of diminishing returns in between, with or without the sequels of full-blown domestication and farming. The area around Göbekli Tepe seems to have been one of these centers of initial domestication, and one of the most important for later Eurasian and world history. But in Göbekli Tepe itself, up to now at least, there are no traces of domestication – and thus, there is no possibility to conclude anything from later developments of domestication concerning the foundations of Göbekli Tepe – and the other way round as well, because the radical predator iconography of Göbekli Tepe doesn't seem to give much of a clue for the development of initial domestication in the Fertile Crescent. (After all, we wouldn't expect much of a clue concerning domestication from old North West Coast ritualism, though, of course, we could learn a lot about cultivating a landscape for seasonal abundance by studying the context of those rituals.)

In this sense, I do agree with H. G. Gebel's strong argument against a »Göbeklisation« of Neolithic research« (Gebel 2013:39), and, if I understand him correctly, against a normalised ›Neolithisation« of Göbekli Tepe in return. The initial constitution of Göbekli Tepe was probably not a Big Bang of things to come, but gives us a monumental glimpse into an exuberant past, and if thousands of years can be but one wink of the eye: provides us with a monumental ›freeze frame‹ and ›jump cut‹ (between the different layers of Göbekli Tepe) reaching back into a transitory past or even a *Longue Durée* of ›hunting ideologies‹ before any emergence of domestication. And it seems that the monumental architecture of G. T. was meant to ›freeze‹ and to pacify the ritual relationships of human, animal and non-human beings, before these relationships finally broke apart and G. T. was deliberately ›buried‹ and made unusable. Of course, Göbekli Tepe can be read both ways, pointing towards a future, ›our future‹, and hinting at an unknown past. But in the last resort, because

theirs was the first step to initiate so many unforeseeable things to come, what we are dealing with is a crucial moment - and apparently, a quite deliberate denial - that could not have shared our understandings of animals, social reproduction or monumental media. – – –

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