

Beyond dress, protection, and disguise: Re-inserting animals into the deep history of human clothing

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Zusammenfassung

Jenseits von Mode, Schutz und Verkleidung: Ein Plädoyer für die Neuverortung von Tieren in der Geschichte früher menschlicher Kleidungspraktiken

Kleidung wird routinemäßig als ein wesentlicher Bestandteil dessen gewertet, was uns zu Menschen macht. Es wird daher immer wieder behauptet, dass das Nachzeichnen der Ursprünge und Entwicklung von Kleidung von entscheidender Bedeutung für das Verständnis der menschlichen Geschichte ist. Es überrascht daher nicht, dass auch Archäologen damit begonnen haben, dieses Problem neu zu überdenken. Der vorliegende Beitrag trägt zu dieser Debatte bei, indem er die Aufmerksamkeit auf konzeptionelle Architektur archäologischer Ansätze lenkt, die sich zum Ziel gemacht haben, die frühe Geschichte der Kleidung in der menschlichen Abstammungslinie aufzudecken, insbesondere ihre vielen unerkannten Einschreibungen, Bindungen und Zwänge. Der Beitrag hebt dabei einen merkwürdigen, aber hartnäckigen blinden Fleck dieser tiefenzeitlichen Forschung hervor: ihre fast ausschließliche Fokussierung auf menschliche (Arten-)Inseln, die entweder von äußeren Naturkräften wie dem Klima beeinflusst werden oder sich selbst (und nur sich selbst) von innen heraus beeinflussen. Der Autor argumentiert, dass dies paradoxerweise dazu geführt hat, dass die vielfältigen Beziehungen zwischen Menschen und Nicht-Menschen – die möglicherweise in frühe Bekleidungspraktiken eingeschrieben sind und durch diese ausgehandelt werden – von der Forschung weitgehend ausgeklammert worden sind, und das, obwohl die frühesten Beispiele menschlicher Kleidung oft stark auf tierische Materialien rekurrieren. Im ersten Schritt der Analyse werden zunächst die Hauptstränge der tiefenzeitlichen Erforschung der Kleidung nachgezeichnet und gezeigt, dass deren Logik auf dem Gegensatz von Kleidung und Nacktheit mit Wurzeln im Europa des 19. Jhs. beruht, welcher nicht nur von einem unaufgelösten Anthropatriarchat durchdrungen ist, sondern auch von kolonialen Tropen der Minimalbekleidung, Animalität, Klimasensibilität und Naturtranszendenz durchsetzt ist. Im zweiten Teil des Beitrags werden die konzeptionellen Abkömmlinge dieser Forschungslogik – die Thermoregulationstheorie, die Polarität von Bedeckung und Mode sowie die Dichotomisierung von (Jagd-)Verkleidung und Ritual – kulturübergreifenden und Indigenen Belegen für ein Interesse an der Übernahme von nicht-menschlichen Körpern und Körperteilen gegenübergestellt. Dies soll die empirischen Möglichkeiten veranschaulichen, die sich aus der Auflösung vorherrschender, aber zunehmend problematischer Vorannahmen in der Archäologie der Kleidung ergeben.

Schlagwörter Human evolution, Nacktheit, Animalität, Mensch-Tier-Beziehung, Epistemologie

Summary

Clothing is routinely portrayed as a key ingredient of what makes us human. Tracing its origins and evolution is therefore argued to be of critical importance for understanding the human story, and archaeologists have unsurprisingly started to reconsider this problem. This paper joins the debate by drawing attention to the conceptual architecture of archaeological approaches dedicated to uncovering the deep history of clothing in the human lineage, notably its many unrecognized binds and constrictions. It highlights a curious yet persistent blind spot of such deep-time research: its near-exclusive preoccupation with human (species) islands, which are either affected by external natural forces such as climate or affect themselves (and only themselves) from within. I argue that, paradoxically, this has put diverse human-nonhuman relations – possibly inscribed in and negotiated by early clothing practices – outside the brackets of research, and this even though the earliest examples of human clothing often rely heavily on animal materials. I first offer a conceptual analysis of the main strands of deep-time clothing research, showing that its logic hinges on the 19th-century European opposition between clothing and nakedness not only infused with much-unresolved anthropatriarchy but also obsessed with colonial tropes of minimum clothing, animality, climate sensibility and nature transcendence. In the second part of the paper, I then contrast the conceptual offspring of this research logic – the thermoregulation hypothesis, the cover-dress and the (hunting) disguise-ritual polarities – with cross-cultural and Indigenous evidence for a fundamental concern to take on other-than-human bodies and body parts to illustrate the empirical opportunities that emerge from dissolving these long-standing but increasingly problematic presuppositions in the archaeology of clothing.

Keywords Human evolution, nakedness, animality, human-animal relations, epistemology

Heracles, Neanderthals and The Evolution of Human Clothing

Clothing is often positioned as a human-exclusive practice, even though charismatic megafauna such as orcas and elephants regularly receive social media attention for ostensibly arranging other animal- or plant-based headgear¹. Still, humans are regarded as the only animals who consistently wear clothes, purposefully alter, modify or redress their bodies, and have integrated such behaviours into their varied societies and cultures across history²; clothing is viewed as an evolved, species-level characteristic of *Homo sapiens* and often treated as part and parcel of its ›extended phenotype‹ (*sensu* Dawkins 2016 [1982]). Yet clothing is also and has always been a key ingredient of what may be termed the Western ›prehistoric imagination‹³. As such, it is deeply entangled with 19th-century European ideas and preoccupations shaped by the nascent modern period (modernity in historical terms), nation states, imperialism, colonialism, and the rise of science as a counter-project to Indigenous knowledge⁴.

Narratives and concepts relating to the evolution of clothing are firmly inscribed into human-animal boundary policing⁵ and remain interwoven with the complex legacy of D. Morris' (1994 [1967]) influential ›The Naked Ape‹ and allied renderings of a functional co-evolution of human nakedness and clothing. D. Morris' perspective is not only ripe with anthropatriarchy (*sensu* Narayanan 2019) as it ›leaked erotic fantasy‹ and uncritically (and deliberately so) ›established the heterosexual couple as the end [and goal] of evolutionary history‹ (Geroulanos 2024, 354)⁶; it also excessively indulged C. Darwin's (2023 [1871]) obsession with sexual selection as the principal mechanism of human evolution⁷. Clothing, along with other allegedly ›aestheticized‹ practices such as music or song (cf. Menninghaus 2011), was therefore quickly exiled to the realms of self-domestication and courtship, with clothing unavoidably becoming one of the stereotypes of human ›extra-somatic adaptation‹⁸ and reproductive ›costly signalling‹ (Kuhn 2014) – in the wake of anthropologists such as N. Chagnon (1983 [1968]) stained with irredeemable competition, violence and (male) antagonism⁹.

Clothing in this broader context emerged as an important designator of the human epic: to escape the shackles of the natural world and to overpower human biological limitations by cultural technology. Potent 19th and 20th-century philosophical ideas of the ›indeterminate‹ or ›incomplete‹ animal

with influences from F. Nietzsche to A. Gehlen (1988 [1940]) fuelled these ideas from early on as the human-characteristic ›gap‹ in adaptive fit between biology and environment could be chiefly closed by developing a ›second skin‹ to shield against adverse externalities – the thermoregulation hypothesis for the origin of clothing was born¹⁰. Moreover, after the 1950 publication of K. Oakley's ›Man the Tool-Maker‹ (1976 [1950]), scholarship increasingly identified technology that helped to compensate for the biological insufficiencies of early humans as interceding somewhere *between* nature and culture (Geroulanos 2024, 335). This opened the gates to explicitly frame clothing – just as stone tools had been – as an evolutionary stepping-stone to unfolding human cultural diversity: the foundational idea that clothing developed as a biological necessity and then provided some of the key resources for elevated rates of cultural evolution. As I write this, the latest research on the deep-time trajectory of clothing practices across Africa and Eurasia confidently reproduces this broader narrative framing, identifying ›complex‹ clothing – i.e. multi-part and multi-layered garments and costumes – as the landmark development at the juncture between human nature and culture, from signifying merely extended biological bodies to enshrining fully developed cultural bodies (Gilligan et al. 2024). Thus, the distinction between ›cover‹ and ›dress‹ is born (Gilligan 2023), risking not only the reification of Western nature-culture binaries and attendant fantasies of heroic nature subjugation as universal when they are historical products themselves (Descola 2005; Palsson 2017), but also viewing clothing's cultural significance in human evolution through the anachronistic lens of fashion culture and *haute couture* – both distinctive phenomena of European modernity.

Returning to the imagination of prehistory, ›nakedness‹ was both a trope in early illustrations of Pleistocene hominins, especially after Darwin in the early 20th century (Moser 1998; Coste 2015), and the portrayal of Indigenous people (e.g. Dransart 2013; cf. Geroulanos 2024, Chapter 8) – and this is no mere coincidence. Nakedness was associated with ›incompleteness‹ (in terms of evolutionary stage and development) and thus readily taken as evidence for animal proximity, wildness and primitivism. A powerful expression of the early renderings of such people as ›ape-human‹ is the loincloth, which is often the only body cover shown in early hominin illustrations; it stands exemplary for the diagnosed *minimum* of clothing¹¹, placing its wearers somewhere between nature and culture and hence as not-fully-human-yet.

1 Orcas have been observed balancing dead salmon on their heads (e.g. <<https://www.livescience.com/animals/orcas/orcas-start-wearing-dead-salmon-hats-again-after-ditching-the-trend-for-37-years>> [24.03.2025]) and African elephants are reported to cover themselves with grass hats/mats (e.g. <https://www.reddit.com/r/AnimalsBeingDerps/comments/s5o0fd/baby_elephant_gives_himself_a_grass_hat/?rdt=49014> [24.03.2025]).

2 See esp. Gilligan 2019; Davies 2020; Nowell/Cook 2021; d'Errico 2024.

3 See Stavriniaki 2022; Geroulanos 2024 for a

careful dissection of some of the more salient tropes.

4 Ironically strongly supported, and not undermined, by the missionary agendas of state-powered Christianity operating *inter alia* in the ›New World‹.

5 The obsession to establish differentia specifica: see esp. R. Corbey 2005 for the broader context of this debate.

6 Cf. esp. E. Illouz 2012 for a sociological account for why this view is a capitalist anachronism.

7 See S. Geroulanos 2024, Chapter 5 for the entanglement of this view with 19th-century

notions of human exceptionalism as well as infusions of theology.

8 Binford 1962, 218; cf. Kelly 2019 for the continued centrality of this notion.

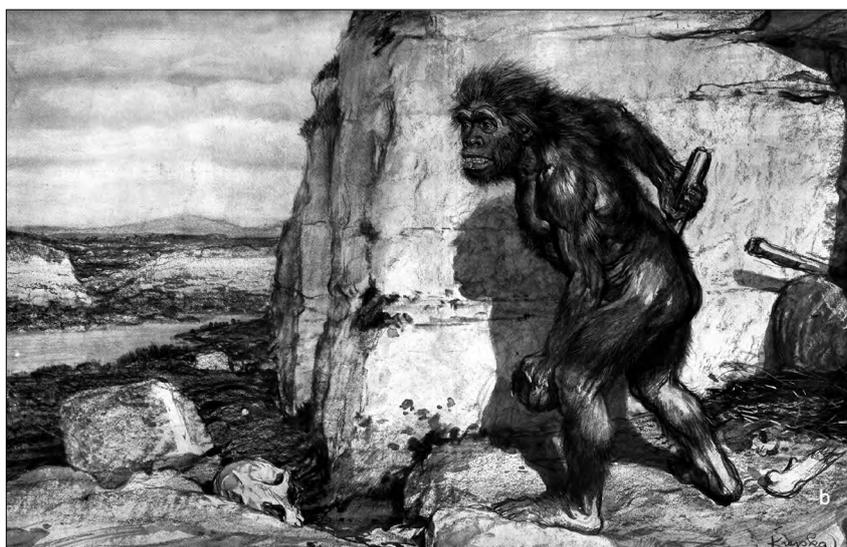
9 This view is still current and lives on in some of the most recent accounts, see e.g. Gilligan 2024.

10 See e.g. Gilligan 2007; Gilligan 2010; Gilligan 2019; Wales 2012 for notable contemporary examples.

11 For many ironically reinforcing the sexual selection hypothesis and the Christian theological idea of ›shame‹ as an ur-motif of the same.

Fig. 1a–b Two contrasting visions of Neanderthal clothing at the turn of the century. a Anonymous Neanderthal reconstruction from an 1873 issue of ›Harper's Weekly‹, a political journal obsessed with ideas of civilisation, showing the prototypical Neanderthal as savage with romantic undertones. b La Chapelle-aux-Saints Neanderthal reconstruction created by primitivist painter František Kupka and published in the ›Illustrated London News‹ in 1909. Note that the latter was heavily influenced by French palaeoanthropologist Marcel Boule's notion of Neanderthals as ›subhuman‹ and ›extirpated‹ by superior *Homo sapiens* populations, associated with Darwinian readings of their backwardness as apish (closer to ape than human) reflected in their posture and hair cover.

Abb. 1a–b Zwei gegensätzliche Visionen von Neandertaler-Kleidung zur Jahrhundertwende. a Anonyme Neandertaler-Rekonstruktion aus einer Ausgabe von ›Harper's Weekly‹ von 1873, einer politischen Zeitschrift, die von zivilisatorischen Ideen durchsetzt war und den prototypischen Neandertaler als Wilden mit romantischen Untertönen zeigt. b Die Neandertaler-Rekonstruktion von La Chapelle-aux-Saints des primitivistischen Malers František Kupka, veröffentlicht in der ›Illustrated London News‹ im Jahr 1909. Bei dieser Rekonstruktion ist zu beachten, dass diese stark von der Auffassung des französischen Paläoanthropologen Marcel Boule beeinflusst war, der die Neandertaler als ›untermenschlich‹ einstufte und postulierte, dass diese von den überlegenen *Homo sapiens*-Populationen ›ausgerottet‹ wurden, was mit der darwinistischen Lesart ihrer Rückständigkeit als affenartig (näher am Affen als am Menschen) zusammenhängt, die sich in der Haltung und Haarpracht der Neandertaler widerspiegelt.



It is noteworthy that hominin illustrations pre-dating C. Darwin's (2023 [1871]) ›Descent of Man‹ and thus devised under the impression of European romanticism (peaking from c. 1800 to 1850) often differ notably from post-Darwinian representations: they more eagerly depict early hominins as partially clothed, while early 20th century illustrations typically juxtapose pronounced hairiness with minimal clothing (especially pre-*Sapiens* hominins), either combined or as polar opposites (Fig. 1; Geroulanos 2024, 137–151). Clothing – understood literally as the concealment or domestication of the ›animal-within‹ – here figures as a potent image of the ›thin veneer‹, a civilisatory trope of the time. According to veneer theorists, human beastly nature could only be conquered momentarily (and never completely) by the outer shell provided by civilisation – its practices, mores and technologies (see esp. Geroulanos 2024, Chapter 9). However, colonial logic also inspired ›scientific‹ inquiry into the potential bodily insensibilities of so-called ›primi-

tive‹ people as it was reasoned that they might withstand severe climates more easily than ›civilised Man [sic!]; for example, the late 19th-century P. Hyades conducted experiments (using a device called the Weber compass) in the Southern Hemisphere at Tierra del Fuego (Argentina) to establish whether the local Yaghan people exhibited a ›greater threshold of sensibility than Europeans‹ (Dransart 2013, 191; cf. Dias 2007).

These experiments were motivated by what was judged ›minimal‹ body coverage, yet the discourses in which they were embedded also showcase, as P. Dransart (2013) has proficiently exposed, a fundamental misunderstanding of Indigenous clothing, which often included practices such as coating one's body with seal and whale oil (offering notable environmental protection), which European observers did not take into account, mainly because they employed European clothing standards. The gradual replacement of traditional clothing systems centred on the zoomaterial-

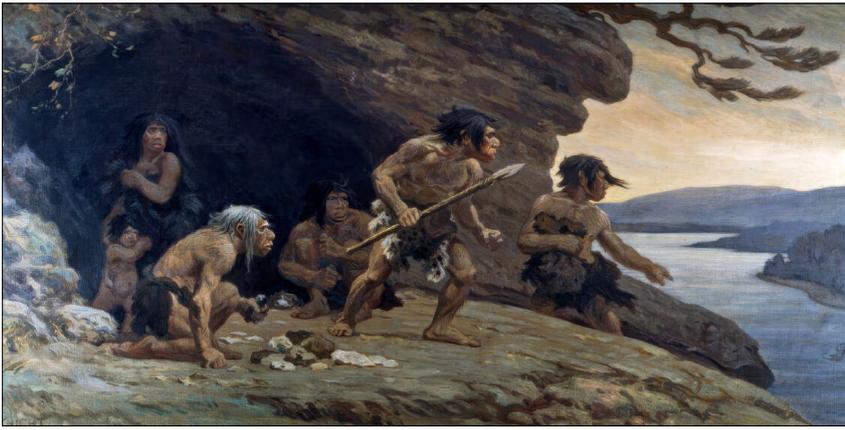


Fig. 2 Charles R. Knight, ›Neanderthal Flintworkers‹, Le Moustier cavern, Dép. Dordogne (France; 1920). Mural of a Neanderthal family overlooking a Pleistocene river valley with the central figure wearing a conspicuous loincloth, displayed in the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, stair hall, Section 2A.

Abb. 2 Charles R. Knight, »Neanderthal Flintworkers«, Le Moustier cavern, Dép. Dordogne (Frankreich; 1920). Wandgemälde einer Neanderthalerfamilie, die ein pleistozänes Flusstal überblickt. Die zentrale Figur trägt einen auffälligen Lendenschurz, ausgestellt im American Museum of Natural History Museum, New York City, Treppenhalle, Abteilung 2A.

ity of key animal others in the environment with European-style clothing may even have been causally implicated in the post-contact demographic decline of Indigenous people in the region (Dransart 2013). Even so, contemporary scholarship has uncritically retained the proposition of reduced climate sensibility, asserting that the Tierra del Fuego people ›were able to withstand inclement weather and tolerate significant changes in the temperature without being significantly discomfited‹ and are consequently less reliant on clothing (Delaney 2017, 297). The difficulty of avoiding racial stereotypes while recognizing the possibility of varied consequences of biocultural coevolution (including perceptions of warmth) continues to haunt modern archaeology: for example, R. Hosfield (2017), in response to I. Gilligan's (2017, 534–535) injunction of ›safe naked limits‹, rightly insists that ›we must be cautious in applying modern human tolerances to Lower Palaeolithic hominins, given the possibility of physiological differences such as body hair coverage or other adaptations‹.

Another interesting detail concerns the kind of pelt cover associated with the ›strategic half-naked[ness]‹ of early hominins, of which American palaeoartist C. R. Knight's ›Neanderthal Flintworkers‹ (1920) is a lucid example (Fig. 2; Geroulanos 2024, 142). The drawing's central figure – a Neanderthal of southwestern France – is placed against the background of a rock shelter and Ice Age elements, holds only some (ostensibly basic, ›primitive‹) tools, notably a spear and a crude stone, and wears a ›bundled leopard rag‹ (Geroulanos 2024, 142). Why the leopard¹²? The archaeological evidence from Le Moustier that the Neanderthal visualization is supposedly referencing is clearly not the source of the inspiration (there were no leopards there) – instead, it is the Hellenistic story of Heracles.

To understand the invocation of the leopard, we need to briefly consider Knight's well-researched entanglement with H. F. Osborn, the first curator of the vertebrate palaeontology department of the American Museum of Natural

History in New York – a man of eugenic leanings and with a racial politics agenda centred on the belief that the deep past would help to identify the origins of contemporary human ›races‹ (Sommer 2016, Chapter 3), and, in Osborn's own words, to characterise their ›race plasms‹ as well as their ›racial lines‹ (Sommer 2010, 474). H. F. Osborn had recruited Knight to paint various murals for his new ›Hall of the Age of Man‹, through which his prehistoric agenda was to be promoted and popularised. He was obsessed with the idea that ›Cro-Magnon man‹ was gracile, artistic and ultimately of Caucasian affinity, while Neanderthals were savage brutes of non-Western pedigree. H. F. Osborn also greatly admired ›cats (of prey)‹ (Sommer 2010, 475). C. R. Knight specifically consulted H. Breuil – the great French prehistorian of his time – about the nature of prehistoric clothing; although H. Breuil symptomatically reasoned that Ice Age people likely wore no clothes at all, H. F. Osborn insisted some clothing to be presented for the sake of modesty (Clary 2022, 50). The ›bundled leopard rag‹ portrayed in ›Neanderthal Flintworkers‹ is thereby likely a tacit reflection of the same implicit Orientalism which had entered European art from the 18th century on and which regularly promoted Eastern racial stereotypes by means of people clothed in leopard skins (e.g. see Moberly 2020). This is consistent not only with H. F. Osborn's idea of Neanderthal Asian origins, which C. R. Knight accepted (Clary 2022, 57), but also supported by C. R. Knight's recurrent portrayal of Neanderthals as contesting with large predators, for example in a painting of a Neanderthal man defending his family against wolves, non-coincidentally wearing a conspicuously similar (leopard) rag¹³, and other artwork in which Neanderthals are stalked or overwhelmed by large cats, driving home H. F. Osborn's and C. R. Knight's shared understanding of Neanderthals as not (yet) freed from the shackles of natural predation and warfare¹⁴. As such, the leopard reference appears to be deeply embedded in the cultural imagination of its time, loaded with Eurocentrism and

12 I thank O. Jöris, LEIZA, for alerting me to the general possibility of the rag being a hyena hide rather than that of a large feline. As far as I can see, however, there is no historical evidence or indication that C. R. Knight or H. F. Osborn paid any attention to, were concerned with, or interested in hyenas or

hominin-hyena relations – on the contrary. All evidence, in line with broader themes and preoccupations of their contemporaries, suggests they were captivated by large exotic cats including leopards and jaguars (see next paragraph for some elaboration).

13 <<http://www.charlesrknight.com/Prehistoric.htm>> (25.03.2025).

14 For the role of the concept of ›natural warfare‹ in discussions on the supposed state of nature, see notably S. Geroulanos 2024, Chapter 3.



Fig. 3 Peter Paul Rubens, ›Heracles and the Nemea Lion‹ (between 1600 and 1640). Heracles, standing over a defeated leopard, fights the Nemean Lion. The ›struggle‹ is symmetrical and occurs in the ›wild‹ (a cave), far outside the walls of the civilised city. Oil painting, National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest.

Abb. 3 Peter Paul Rubens, »Herkules und der Nemeische Löwe« (zwischen 1600 und 1640). Herkules, über einem besiegten Leoparden stehend, kämpft gegen den Nemeischen Löwen. Der »Kampf« ist symmetrisch und findet in der »Wildnis« (einer Höhle) statt, weit außerhalb der Mauern der zivilisierten Stadt. Ölgemälde, Nationales Museum für Kunst in Rumänien, Bukarest.

much explicit racism; it illustrates how paintings such as ›Neanderthal Flintworkers‹ were shaped by the intellectual and political preoccupations of their era.

The image of the leopard is multi-layered and rich in Western symbology and allegory: in the classical world of the ancient Greeks, the animal was associated with ›the wild cult of the sensuous deity Dionysus‹, the god of ›wine and drunkenness, of chaotic sexual pleasure, of lavish partying and ecstasy‹ (Morris 2014, 25). Dionysus was not only frequently depicted as wearing leopard skin himself, but he was also sometimes shown as riding a leopard. This enmeshment of Dionysus and the leopard is no accident. Dionysus embodies ›savage nature‹ and the ›primal forces that lie outside of the restraints of civilised city, and his companions the leopards [and their ›wild carnality‹] epitomise this‹ (Morris 2014, 26). This general logic also dominates Roman imaginaries in which Dionysus became Bacchus, often depicted as a drunken, naked child riding a leopard or feeding leopards. Within the blood-soaked spectacle of the Colosseum, leopards and other felines brought the brutality of undomesticated nature into the heart of the civilised world and helped to reproduce this world through the agency of gladiators and captives alike as part of the

great ordeal of civilisation. Here, the leopard effectively functions as a nonhuman mediator between nature and culture: a feline staircase of sorts that facilitates the transition from ›savage‹ to ›civilised‹. Again, the juxtaposition of naked and minimally clothed (in feline skin) is a key trope.

The basic topos also governs the Heracles narration, whom J. Dunn (2004) symptomatically qualifies as an ›uncivilised civiliser‹ – a duality not only echoing Heracles' hybrid human-god origin but also resonating in his deeds to secure civilization's triumph over savage nature. In particular, this is revealed in relation to his quest to overcome the Nemean Lion, whose pelt he wears as a cloak and whose jaws he fashions into a helmet to impersonate the accomplishment (cf. Rodríguez 2010, 256). Importantly, though, Heracles neither truly *belongs* to the beastly or human realms nor to the noble, godly realms; his deeds merely grant him salvation from his irreducible in-betweenness, which is simultaneously a curse and boon. This is the rapprochement between Heracles and the Neanderthals of south-western France that C. R. Knight's illustration accentuates.

The Heracles story also illustrates another preoccupation of Eurasian axial thought¹⁵: The idea that to contain and prevail in the face of savage nature and the uncivilised

15 The culmination of the Axial Age, see esp. Jaspers 2017 [1950]; Assmann 2018.



Fig. 4 Screenshot of Alexander the Great on his horse Bucephalus amid the Battle of Gaugamela (331 BC), confronting the great Persian army under the leadership of King Darius III. near modern-day Erbil, northeastern Iraq. From the motion picture ›Alexander‹ (2004) directed by Oliver Stone. Note the leopard skin draped over Bucephalus' saddle. In the movie, Alexander styles himself as the ›son of the gods‹ and explicitly places himself in the great lineage of Heracles, the maker of civilisation. Again, the leopard represents the tremendous civilisatory ordeal (of the Greeks) to overcome the (savage) foes from the steppes (the Persians), ultimately giving birth to the superior Hellenistic world.

Abb. 4 Screenshot von Alexander dem Großen auf seinem Pferd Bucephalus inmitten der Schlacht von Gaugamela (331 v. Chr.), als er dem großen persischen Heer unter der Führung von König Darius III. in der Nähe des heutigen Erbil im Nordosten des Irak gegenübersteht. Aus dem Film »Alexander« (2004) unter der Regie von Oliver Stone. Zu beachten ist das Leopardenfell, das über Bucephalus' Sattel drapiert ist. Im Film bezeichnet sich Alexander als »Sohn der Götter« und stellt sich ausdrücklich in eine Linie mit Herakles, dem Erschaffer der Zivilisation. Auch hier steht der Leopard für die große zivilisatorische Anstrengung (der Griechen), die (wilden) Feinde aus der Steppe (die Perser) zu besiegen und schließlich die überlegene hellenistische Welt zu schaffen.

world writ large, civilisation needs to release and cultivate its own beasts to match those of nature (Fig. 3). This is sometimes explicitly styled as a quasi-eternal contest of the civilised against the rest. The basic idea is already a key feature of the Assyrian and Egyptian royal lion hunt: rulers styled themselves as ›raging lions‹ and ritually confronted and killed other wild lions as part of their royal duty (Fig. 4; see, e.g. Wagner-Durand 2019, 245). As G. Selz (2001) has shown, the capable ruler asserted himself as the procreative and ideal protector from the wild, the war hero and the archetypal cosmopoeitic hunter. The lion hunt thereby exemplifies and legitimises an ideology of violence and war to repel enemies and the need to emerge victorious from the ongoing struggle of nature and culture. The royal hunter enacts the hero required to protect ›civilization against the wilds of the steppe‹ (Wagner-Durand 2019, 245), for which the equally ›royal‹ feline others are surrogates.

C. R. Knight's ›Neanderthal Flintworkers‹, in the end, are just that: half-naked beings caught-in-between wild, savage nature and civilisation, properly belonging to neither. They are the tragic Heracleian heroes of the human story, heralding human ascension to civilisation but never truly reach-

ing (or fully possessing) it. Here again, clothing is depicted as a technology of hominisation (the process of becoming a ›complete‹ human) and a representational device to belabour the predicated nature-culture strife and the premised imperative of nature transcendence. In the second part of this contribution, I argue that it need be neither of the two and archaeological discourse would be well-advised to critically plough through this all-too-powerful axial bind.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, Anglo-European discourse as, exemplified by some of the snippets invoked above, firmly rests on the presupposition that clothing is not only a largely human-exclusive practice – as a part of the package of *Sapiens*-making behaviours – it is also exclusively *for* and *about* humans. There are various ways of specifying this implicit claim, and different scholars have certainly taken varying views, but we may broadly say that the cultural agency of clothing has mainly been understood as an intra-human affair, thought to be all about the participation of clothing in human-dedicated processes such as style, ritual, warfare and the pantheon of human symbols and beliefs and/or how humans come to relate to other humans (e.g. identity, social status, gender, dis-

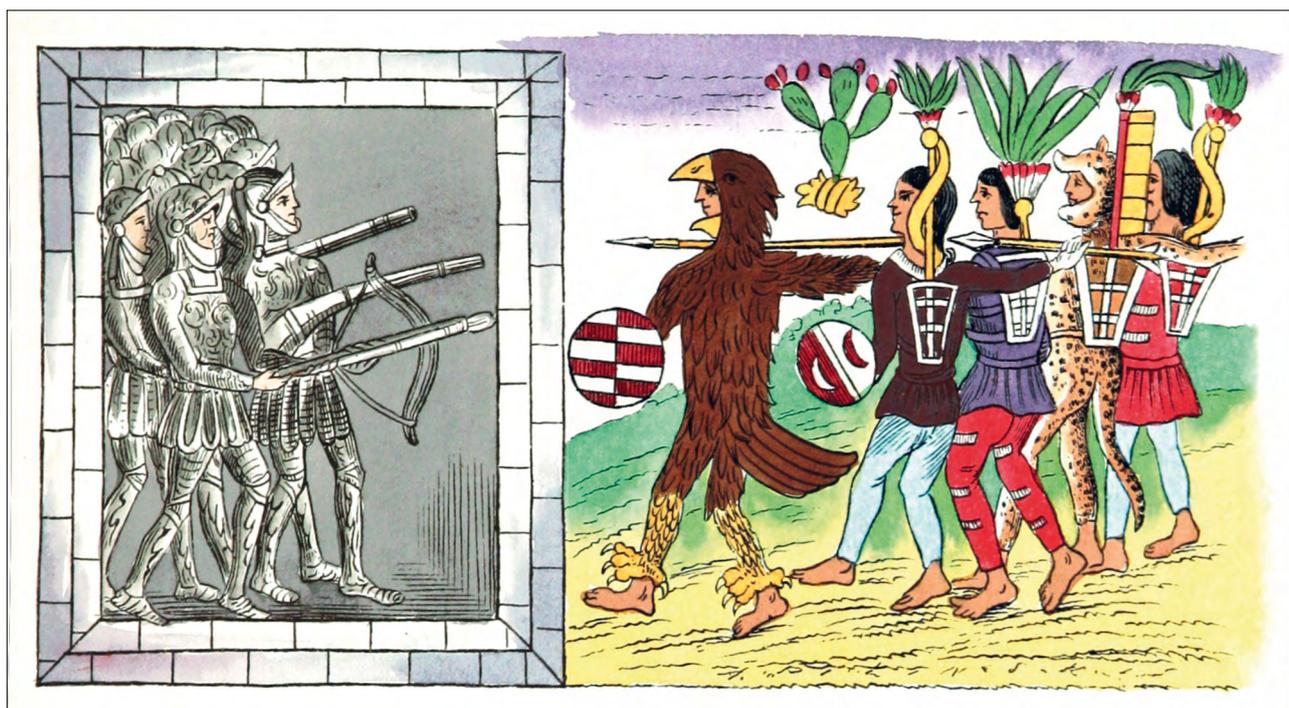


Fig. 5 Diego Durán, Codex Duran (*Códice Durán* or *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme*; probably 2nd half of the 16th century). The painted scene shows the company of Pedro de Alvarado, companion-at-arms of Hernando Cortes, besieged by Aztec warriors. Note especially the portrayal of eagle and jaguar ›second skin‹ as utilized in Aztec warfare. National Library of Madrid.

Abb. 5 Diego Durán, Codex Duran (*Códice Durán* oder *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme*; wahrscheinlich 2. Hälfte des 16. Jhs.). Die gemalte Szene zeigt die Gesellschaft von Pedro de Alvarado, dem Waffengeführten von Hernando Cortes, die von aztekischen Kriegern belagert wird. Zu beachten ist insbesondere die Darstellung der »zweiten Haut« von Adler und Jaguar, wie sie in der aztekischen Kriegsführung verwendet wurden. Nationalbibliothek von Madrid.

play, etc.). This construal not only overlooks that it is not uncommon for people in non-Western societies to explicitly ›dress up‹ for diverse nonhuman, often supernatural, beings and that the production and deployment of clothing sometimes deliberately targets other-than-human beings including animals, but it also reproduces the problematic yet widespread stereotype of ›species islands‹ as the relevant (or at least most relevant) contexts of clothing behaviour. In sharp contrast, Offering Cache 125 associated with the Tlaltecuhli monolith unearthed from the main temple complex of the ancient Mesoamerican city of Tenochtitlan yielded not only a ›richly dressed canid‹ surrounded by a group of large ›sacrificial‹ flint knives themselves dressed in costumes and divine insignia, but also, found in the depositional layer immediately below them, two large golden eagles – male and female – clothed in ›ornate attire‹ (López Luján et al. 2015; cf. Bassett 2018, 7). Contemporary pet cultures equally do not shy away from mobilizing elaborate and functionally overdetermined clothes for animals, and the work these animal dresses do clearly transcends the function-representation binary. Modern pet dress of such type often aims to draw pet and owner closer together, tampering with the bodily presence of the respective pets in the hope of *anthropomorphising* them. In the following section, I develop a cross-culturally informed framework to shed new light on the origins of human clothing, strategically inflecting modernity's cultural obsessions and suggesting that clothing may have frequently been concerned with *zoomorphising* the human.

Clothing as Multispecies World-Making: Wearing and Being Animals

Classical and Post-Classical Mesoamerican societies entertained dashing and multiple clothing traditions that immediately drew the attention of European colonisers, who especially noted the animal-vestedness of Mesoamerican dress cultures and marvelled at ›Jaguar‹, ›Eagle‹, and ›Coyote warriors‹ dressed as the respective animals (Fig. 5; e.g. see Carrasco 1995; García-Des Lauriers 2017; Valesey 2021). In the Anglo-European imagination, these animal garments – perceived concomitantly as more akin to extravagant armaments than ordinary attire and as more symbolic than functional instances of human clothing – were readily cast as ›regalia of sacred war‹ (García-Des Lauriers 2017) and were made sense of, above all, in relation to European categories of militarism, notably as expressions of a noble warrior caste reminiscent of Medieval-style European knightly orders (*Ritterorden*). This association is not innocent (nor is it merely descriptive): although the attribution recognised Aztec and Maya ›warriors‹ as respectable foes on the battlefield with a reputable military ethos and moral code, it also pictured them in light of an age – the ›age of chivalry‹ (c. 12th to mid-15th century) – which the Spanish Conquistadors believed to have left behind as they saw themselves as the heralds of the ›age of discovery‹ and subsequently the ›age of sail‹, and thus ultimately as foreshadowing the dawning of the early modern period (c. 1500–1800 AD; all of these terms are Eurocentric of course); in addition, from

a European vantage point communities of such warriors styled as ›knights‹ appeared to primarily fulfil ideational, spiritual and eleemosynary roles (cf. e.g. Rodríguez Velasco 2010) and their costumes – even though battle-fit – were seen as just another instance of European heraldry tied to different ›coats of arms‹. The emblematic use of animals in this context became especially widespread in Europe during the 15th and early 16th century¹⁶; in particular, it was a practice indulged in by European nobility, aristocracy and monarchy.

The resulting European construction of the Mesoamerican Other lives on in modern popular culture, for example, in the acclaimed video game ›Age of Empires II: The Conquerors‹, whose manual specifically underlines the analogy between European knights and Aztec Jaguar (*ōcēlōtl*) and Eagle warriors (*cuāutli*): ›[a]nother rank of Aztec fighter was the Jaguar Warrior, who was more heavily armed and armoured than the Eagle Warrior. Their role was probably to be the heavy infantry of the army and to engage the enemy's main body. They likely had the advantage in combat against lighter troops that were caught off-guard or foolish enough to engage the heavier Jaguar Warrior. These warriors wore jaguar headpieces and clothing that represented jaguar fur. The jaguar was chosen as the totem for warriors because it was the fiercest predator in the Central American jungles.‹ The significance of the jaguar itself is reduced here to a mere symbolic feat, and the confusion, equalisation, and amalgamation of totemism and animal heraldry are diagnostic. As C. Valesey (2021) has recently suggested based on the critical comparison of Spanish and Indigenous Nahuatl sources, Jaguar and Eagle ›warriors‹ as imagined by these accounts probably never existed; becoming jaguar and/or eagle was certainly not an exclusive concern of the elites, but rather a society-wide imperative transcending status and gender, and the reading of their significance as merely ›emblematic‹ is problematic on many levels.

Part of the issue is that eagle and jaguar – both in language and in visual rendering – rarely appear in isolation in Nahuatl contexts, instead denoting a structural coupling or complementary principle – what C. Valesey (2021, 979) captures with the notion *difrasismo*¹⁷. Moreover, even though the point of deploying these terms as a pair is often pervasively metonymical¹⁸, there is also a degree of ambivalence in what the words eagle and jaguar reference (and hence ›do‹). In the broader context of clothing, notably, referring to eagles and jaguars can, in this way, even explicitly refer to the clothes themselves (cf. León-Portilla 2011, 437). These terms, in other words, may not always pertain to individual people but also to nonhuman entities such as costumes, such that the respective costume itself is addressed as *jaguar* and/or *eagle* (Valesey 2021, 991). The implication is far-reaching: the costume may literally *be* (or act as) a jaguar; it may facilitate literally *becoming* a jaguar or help cultivate the *qualities* jaguars embody and enact. The kind of

›jaguar functionalities‹ lent in this manner by such clothing cannot be understood by invoking the cover-dress binary, nor do they reflect the sort of project implicit in P. Wiessner's (1983, 257) ›emblematic style‹ which remains so central to Anglophone theory-building on the subject: as a ›formal variation of material culture that has a distinct referent and transmits a clear message to a defined target population about conscious affiliation or identity‹. As C. Valesey (2021, 985) puts it, invoking jaguars and eagles in the context of objects such as the Aztec throne or specific (zoo-)material devices attachable to the human body allows ›jaguar and eagle bodies [to] *animate* the objects with the perceived essences of those animals‹ (emphasis added).

Whether the talk of ›essences‹ makes sense in the Nahuatl context remains to be seen, but what matters greatly here is the need to pay more serious attention to clothing as a *transformative practice of the self* and the fact that the integration of animal materiality cannot be reduced to matters of external ›protection‹ or inter-human ›communication‹. In other words, we need to be more heedful of the question of what precisely *happens* when human and animal bodies (or parts thereof) meet and tangle up. That human bodies primarily become protected or that they can serve as a medium of interpersonal communication is just one of the many possible outcomes of interspecies body gatherings. For example, the Yanomami of the north-eastern Amazon at the border of Venezuela and Brazil paint their bodies with dark dots and ovals to mimic the appearance of the outer coats and skins of animals bearing such salient or unusual markings; as P. Descola (2021, 162)¹⁹ notes, a specific goal (or function if you will) of these ›second skins‹ is to enable other animals to see people as a part of their extended collective. He explicitly speaks of ›ontological costuming‹, even if such participation in the target animal collectives can only be temporary. Clothing, just as body painting, is frequently understood not simply as an addition to the body as inert *res extensa* but as part and parcel of the living body – clothing literally *repositions* the body in the world: altering what it can do and what perspectives it can acquire. This is because, for many Indigenous people, there is no distinction between skin and clothing; clothing *is* skin and the other way around, while both are mere envelopes of initially concealed (but often ancestrally shared) interiorities. This is why, in articulating his arguments for a broader Amerindian perspectivism as a sort of inversion of Western Cartesianism, Brazilian anthropologist E. Viveiros de Castro (1998, 470–471) points out: ›[...] animals are people, or see themselves as persons. Such a notion is virtually always associated with the idea that the manifest form of each is a mere envelope (a ›clothing‹) which conceals an internal human form [...]. This internal form is the ›soul‹ or ›spirit‹ of the animal: an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness, materialisable, let us say, in a human bodily schema concealed behind an

16 And thus precisely when Europeans first encountered Mesoamerican dress cultures, see, e.g. Hiltmann 2011.

17 A common grammatical construction in Mesoamerican languages to convey relation-

nal signification: see also Purcell 2023, Part I.

18 Words can variously substitute each other and so refer to complex, non-figurative webs of meaning.

19 All pages following the German 2023 translation of the French original.

animal mask«. Invoking the idea of the ›mask« is not coincidental here, as clothing is regularly viewed as yet another way of masking oneself as Other, and just like masking, one purpose is to enact the *agency* of this Other.

Anthropologist P. Descola (2021, 164–165) similarly argues that what in the globalized West is typically rendered as ›dress«, in many Indigenous contexts merely constitutes a ›physical cover [mantle or shroud] taking the form of a bird, fish, vessel, tree or musical instrument« (my translation) and is indistinguishable from the referenced form as people only know their surroundings through engaging with that which ›covers«. In other words, all other observable entities *are* such covers (Descola 2021, 165). Therefore, varying body types point to the manifold possibilities of becoming, as the diversity of life is primarily a *diversity of bodily form* (interiorities are more similar than the exteriorities given in perception); diversity is about the diversity of being-in-the-world through manifest corporeality and what such corporeality enables one to do, see and know. As such, the body fundamentally intercedes with who people *are*, and changing their bodily cover thus *changes their selves*, even if only temporarily. This is not a question of ›identity« as Western scholarly commentators have long maintained, but a question of *being*. The cover-dress binary thus not only grossly misconstrues what may actually be put at stake by different

ways of clothing, it also makes it impossible to empirically investigate the relationship between the human body, clothing, zoomateriality and human-animal cohabitation. As P. Descola (2021, 147–174) explores in detail and illuminates with many examples, body types and body parts can be ›loaned« and culturally enacted to tap into and temper with the capacities of diverse animal others, to communicate with them, and to generally multiply the human standpoint to navigate the more-than-human world more confidently. This is why fur clothing, for example, often simulates the original anatomy of the mobilised animal body, why, from a Cartesian point of view, dysfunctional body parts such as ears are often retained in such clothing contexts, and why animal body parts such as claws are often used in contexts in which human gestures are thought to be amplified or diversified given what these body parts can do (and human analogies typically cannot do).

To conclude, it is worth recalling C. Conneller's (2004) sharp yet often forgotten arguments for critically reconsidering the ›hunting aids« interpretation of the red deer frontlets from early Mesolithic Star Carr, originally advocated by G. Clark. In particular, Conneller takes aim at the underlying recognition of these ›masks« as technologies of ›disguise« rather than of ›revelation« or ›affordance«. As she rightly points out, narrowing the debate in terms of yet

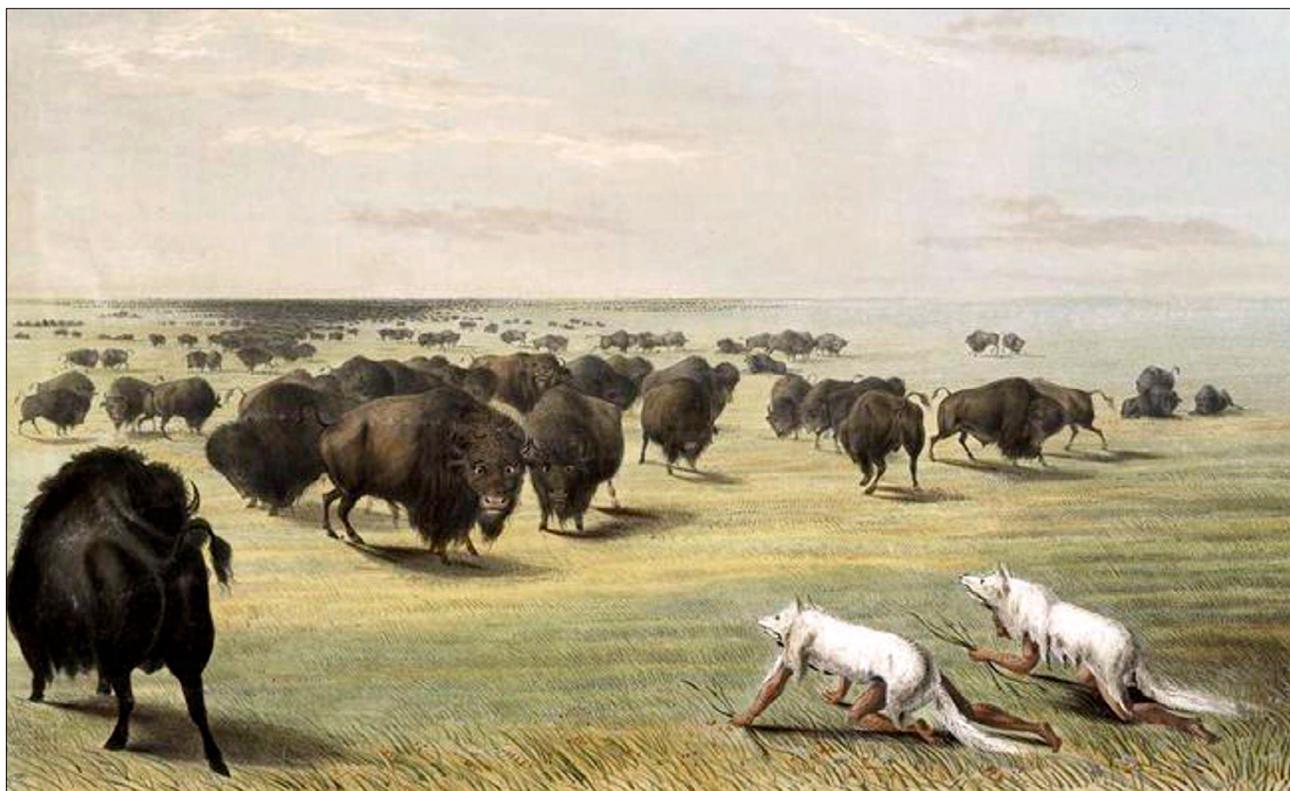


Fig. 6 Mary Evans, ›Native American Indian Buffalo hunt under the White Wolf Skin. An Indian stratagem on the level prairies« (c. 1858). Note the emphasis on ›stratagem« (trickery, stealth, deceit), behavioural features regularly deduced from the supposed need of the primitive to survive in open landscapes (such as the Savannah and Prairie) and hence aligning Indigenous North Americans with early hominins. Note also that in these 19th-century discourses, the prairies were cast as an ›uncivilised« country, unproductive and resisting the call of civilisation. Museum of the City of New York.

Abb. 6 Mary Evans, »Native American Indian Buffalo hunt under the White Wolf Skin. An Indian stratagem on the level prairies« (um 1858). Beachten Sie die Betonung von ›stratagem« (List, Heimlichkeit, Täuschung), Verhaltensmerkmale, die regelmäßig aus dem angeblichen Bedürfnis der Primitiven abgeleitet werden, in offenen Landschaften (wie der Savanne und Prärie) zu überleben, und die somit Indigene Nordamerikaner mit frühen Homininen gleichsetzen. Die Prärie wurde in diesen Diskursen des 19. Jhs. als »unzivilisiertes« Land dargestellt, das unproduktiv ist und sich dem Ruf der Zivilisation widersetzt. Museum of the City of New York.

another binary²⁰ greatly inhibits the ability of archaeologists to understand the ›types of [human] body produced from the taking on of objects made from animal remains‹ (Conneller 2004, 37). We simply need to be aware that the boundaries of the body – what a human body even is, how it can be changed and to what effect – is itself a part of the empirical problem posed by archaeological clothing studies, and that many of our assumptions continue to be cloaked in stereotypes of relatively simple hunter-gatherer people (all of these terms are problematic), whose proximity to animals and ambitions towards them reflect their evolutionary closeness to animality.

Late 19th century portrayals of Indigenous North American people covering themselves in wolfskin intended to showcase the inclination of these people to fall back into the animal state in the hopes of increasing their hunting success²¹ arguably played an important role in forging this pre-

historic imagination of the origins of clothing as disguise (Fig. 6). Yet again, what appears ›self-evident‹ to the contemporary European observer may be fundamentally misleading. In their critical investigation of Indigenous oral history, R. Pierotti and B. R. Fogg (2017) have shown that the early collaborative hunting of humans and wolves is not only a theoretical possibility, but was likely integral to past bison systems. With R. L. Barsh and C. Marlor (2003, 585), we may then suggest that Blackfoot and other Native people ›performed wolves‹ not only to harness their predatory prowess but also to re-enact the multispecies bison-wolf relationship into which they had ›inserted‹ themselves. Clothing makes and breaks specific historically-grown human-animal relationships (it *is* world-making), and as part of such much broader cosmogenic concerns, *zoomorphising* the human body is frequently vital.

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20 ›Disguise‹ vs ›ritual‹, see, e.g. Wild et al. 2020 for the continued obsession with this polarity.

21 The conceptual proximity to colonial readings of purported ›hunting magic‹ in non-Western societies is not accidental.

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