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# The wild at home and the magic of contact. Stories about wild animals and spirits from Amudisy Evenki hunters and reindeer herders

*Le sauvage à domicile et la magie du contact. Histoires à propos d'animaux sauvages et d'esprits chez les chasseurs et les éleveurs de rennes évenks de Amudisy*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**Map of the repartition of the Evenki in Russia and China**

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**Positions of the case studies in the present volume**

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## Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> In this paper, I ask why Evenki hunters need to bring wild animals into human places? What does this practice mean for them? Through examining narratives and by observing the contexts within which these narratives were gathered, I argue that bringing wild animals to taiga camps is a local experiment of interaction with the world of the wild. This interaction has two dimensions: the practice of taking wild animals home<sup>1</sup> to reindeer herders' camps or log cabins and watching wild animals in dreams as human spirits or souls that walk ahead or behind (Ru. *perednik*) a person. I suggest that, through their perception of wild animals as intellectual beings (Ru. *soobrazhaet* – a capability of

imagination) that have souls and vanguard spirits, Evenki hunters and reindeer herders create an indivisible forest world where the “natures of people” (Ru. *chelovecheskaia priroda*<sup>2</sup>) and animals share certain similarities and have strong relationships with the spiritual world.

- 2 “Attempts to tame” (Ru. *priruchenie*) animals among the Evenki are very hard to observe and document. Remarkable stories about wild animals brought into human worlds from the boreal forest (taiga) are one potential source, especially since they are shared as bright and emotional experiences among local Evenki. The reason why I place stories about wild animals in the context of animistic beliefs is rooted in the local perception of a correspondence between the role of wild animals and spirits in the human world. Understanding this role can shed light on these relationships.
- 3 This paper is based upon the stories I had the opportunity to hear during my month-long expedition to the Zabaikal Evenki in Kalar district in 2013. I also documented the context in which stories of this kind were told. Although stories about spying spirits or those spirits which travel ahead of a person and those about taming wild animals might look as if they belong to separate realms, in reality they do not. Both wild animals and human beings share the single reality of a spying spirit, locally known as a “vanguard spirit” or “the one walking ahead” (Ru. *perednik*). This fact is the core of the ethnographical and anthropological analysis given here. Thus, a *perednik* and a wild animal taken by Evenki hunters into their camps share the same characteristics: in local views, a *perednik* is always a wild animal. Together, they constitute a network of relations that has been left secret by local peoples. This network is an object of eternal curiosity for the Evenki and a rich source of knowledge about the neighbourhood and the ecology of animals, spirits, and humans.
- 4 We can recollect numerous contexts where wild creatures remain within so-called human spaces: the zoo, for example, or the contemporary trend in Russian cities of keeping foxes or owls as pets. Yet, I do not discuss this type of human-animal interactions deeper. However, I would like to point out here that indigenous worlds have a different dimension in relation to captured wild animals: they are not actually pets. They are part of taiga diplomacy, an element in the relationship with uncontrolled beings that possess their own logic. I shall also discuss here the meaning of those spirits known in local beliefs as *perednik*. The Russian word *perednik* means “vanguard” or “the one who arrived first<sup>3</sup>”.
- 5 The category of “wild” is relative within the taiga context (Brightman *et al.* 2006, Willerslev 2009). For example, Evenki reindeer herders can call those domestic reindeer which are hard to govern “wild”, and their behaviour is interpreted as more or less independent (Ru. *chto hotiat to i delaiut*) in comparison to the rest of the herd. Like the Evenki, I employ “wild” (Ru. *dikie*) when speaking about taiga animals, and my ethnography relates only to examples showing how the contact between taiga people, wild animals, and spirits named *perednik* emerges and develops in the field of cultural interpretations. *Priruchenie* is distinct from domestication. Bringing an individual animal home implies love and curiosity. I have to clarify that “love” does not mean seduction (as studied by Willerslev 2007: a hunter seduces spirits in dreams and gets kills in the real world; see also Kristensen 2007); in my case, “love” is more closely connected with parenthood: a wild animal in a human space enjoys being taken care of. Furthermore, bringing a wild animal home correlates with a certain expectation of him or her to

express sympathy to people. Wildness also implies a certain sense of independence (for the captured animals) in my work.

- 6 Although at some points I employ the term ‘personhood’ to describe the quality of human-animal interactions, I follow Lavrillier’s discussion of the difference between “individual” and “person” in her analysis of the spirit-charge phenomenon among the Evenki of Yakutia (Lavrillier [2012] 2014, p. 114). She states thus: “I prefer ‘person’ concerning animals only when they are given a proper name by humans” (*ibid.*). She bases her conceptual choice on the assumption that the terms “person” and “personhood” have much to do with a “mask” or “social role”: it is difficult to disagree with her standpoint. Indeed, there is a connection between a person and their mask or social role, as noted in Mead’s symbolic interactionism and Goffman’s dramaturge sociology (Mead 2009, Goffman 1959). Yet, my ethnography demonstrates that being wild at home is not a social role, but a space for displaying personality and making a network of relationships with people.

## Methods

- 7 The process of bringing an animal in from the forest does not occur every day; therefore, it is almost impossible for an anthropologist to observe and participate in this practice as is normally demanded by disciplinary conventions. Indeed, relationships between people and wild animals are very hard to approach via participant observation, since it is very unlikely that a researcher can capture the moment when a wild animal is taken into a reindeer camp or a village: luck is very much required. Thus, anthropologists are dependent on sharing stories and memories with people who have had experience of having wild animals to hand. This specificity influenced my methodical strategies.
- 8 So, although I employed the core anthropological method known as “participant observation” with the Amudisy reindeer herders in the Zabaikal region, I cannot claim that this paper is based on the “authentic” version of this method as derived from Malinowski; therefore, I have to clarify the nature of my method.
- 9 Firstly, I encountered narratives of bringing wild animals home in the Holodnaia Evenki village in North Baikal, where I conducted fieldwork for my doctoral thesis. I became very curious about these stories from the beginning, but they were not numerous enough for me to approach them anthropologically: it was difficult to consider them as a distinct theme and a cultural reality. I will however use these narratives as a comparative element for the analysis of stories I gathered among Evenki hunters and reindeer herders in the Amudisy area in Kalar District in June 2013.
- 10 This article is based on the ethnographical data I gathered within the expedition supported by the Arctic Domus Project, which was led by Prof. David G. Anderson. This small expedition consisted of three participants: Prof. David G. Anderson (University of Aberdeen, UK), Dr Vladimir N. Davydov (Kunstkamera Museum, St Petersburg, Russia) and myself. We had the principal tasks of documenting human-reindeer relations, the history of Evenki camp sites, and the daily activities of the reindeer herders.
- 11 A wild animal does not remain long in the human world. According to the narratives of my informants, wild animals encounter accidental deaths or they leave people after a short while to go back to their habitats. Stories about local experiences of dealing with wild animals are accompanied by other practices, such as domestic chores, cooking,

making rooms in a tent, working with reindeer, washing the dishes, and taking care of the camp surroundings. In this regard, participant observation is mainly a way to gather data rather than a “methodology” in the strict sense of the term. Thus, I kept a diary and made audio recordings to document the narratives of reindeer herders both in the village of Chapo-Ologo and in a herd in the mountainous taiga in Amudisy belonging to the Gevan “clan community” (Ru. *rodovaia obshchina*).

## Argument

- 12 Rane Willerslev describes human-wild animal relations as something similar to a mimetic transfer between a hunter and an animal, which can occur either in dreams or reality (Willerslev 2007). The border between the two thus disappears: people imitate animals, while the latter appear in dreams like human beings who are willing to give themselves to a hunter. Although this argument triggered my research, there is almost no relationship between the two. Bringing wild animals into a camp has little to do with the idea of hunting in Siberian indigenous contexts and therefore cannot be considered as being close to the idea of mimesis in hunting. The former practice is extraordinary and experimental: through it, both people and animals learn about each other in the course of daily contact. People also learn about themselves and the spiritual world they inhabit.
- 13 A wild animal in a human world is an “inside-out Mowgli”, something of the wilderness put into a world ruled by unknown beings, humans. In the famous novel by Kipling, Mowgli, an Indian boy, is left in the jungle and manages to survive, grow up, and finally return home to the “right” space for a human being: this is a happy ending. “An inside-out Mowgli” in the Siberian context also changes space at the conclusion of its journey; however, the ultimate fate of a wild animal living in a human world is typically tragic.
- 14 The wild animal at home can therefore be viewed not as a mimetic strategy but as contagious magic, according to Frazer’s classification of magic as a social institution and following from Taussig’s discussion on mimesis as a sympathetic magic which is based on the principle of similarity (Frazer [1922] 1993, Taussig 1993). In short, sympathetic magic is about imitation and transformation. Contagious magic, in brief, is a perception of a mystical character where a part is substituted for the whole (Taussig 1993). Thus, a wild animal substitutes its species, giving an idea not only of communication with an individual animal, but also with the entire species. The vanguard spirit here serves as a magical bridge linking the human, animal, and spiritual realms. As I will show later, the vanguard spirit of people is believed to be a wild animal.
- 15 Human engagement with wild animals is not limited to hunting: bringing separate individuals into the human world also plays an important role in acquiring knowledge about animal species in general. However, even if taking a wild animal home is a matter of entertainment, the practice is not limited by this attitude. I shall show that keeping “the wild at home” is a magical act of maintaining contacts with the world of the wild and obtaining knowledge about human nature at the same time. I shall look at this idea through the lenses of my fieldwork and the theories of mimesis in Siberia convincingly provided by Taussig.
- 16 Finally, I shall discuss how the link between the *perednik* and “the wild at home”, a taiga animal brought into a human camp, can be considered as contagious magic inside out. Thus, the classical concept of contagious magic is inverted by replacing the “whole” with the “part”. My research shows that the magic of contact is based on a vice-versa principle

that switches the “part” with the “whole”. I imply here that a wild animal brought into a camp represents a part of a world of wild animals and that people conceptualise their knowledge about wild animals and design their perception of a taiga life with the help of one individual animal.

## Fieldwork site

- 17 Kalar district is very rich in minerals, including iron, uranium, and gold. This set of resources makes the region attractive for industrial activities. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it became the focus of state interest during the Soviet period. As a result, the geological settlement of Chena was founded in the mountains, which allowed for large-scale geological exploration.
- 18 The research route started in the village of Chapa-Ologo in Kalar district. The name of the village translates from Yakut as “squirrel nest”. The Evenki of the Zabaikal region have strong links with the Evenki of Yakutia: some of the local reindeer herders can speak three languages (Evenki, Russian, and Yakut) fluently. The legend behind the village’s name tells of a rich Yakut merchant whose name was “squirrel” (Evk. *chapa*): he established (Ya. *ologho*) his business in this area and therefore it inherited his name<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 1. Amudisy



© Vladimir N. Davydov, Amudisy, June 2013

- 19 Amudisy translates from the Evenki language as “constellation of lakes” or a “bunch of lakes”. It is located amidst the larch taiga, although one can also encounter other types of trees, such as elfin wood, spruce, or pine. Before we moved to Amudisy, we stayed in the house of Spiridon Nikolaevich Gabyshev, the head of the “Rainbow (Evk. *gievan*) reindeer” clan community. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he did not give up traditional reindeer herding and tried to restore reindeer breeding in the local mountainous taiga. He organised a reindeer herding clan community where there are now around 800 reindeer belonging to the Gabyshevs. Spiridon runs two herds and is currently considering whether to create another for his younger son. The two brigades consist of 10-12 members altogether. We worked with herd number one, which is located approximately 100 km from Novaia Chara, a town-like settlement (Ru. *posëlok gorodskogo tipa*).

## How prey becomes a companion

- 20 One may assume that a hunter is expected to view his or her prey as a potential kill and not bring a wild animal home. However, this expectation cannot be attached to Evenki clan communities alone, and it will be contextualised and interpreted according to

different localities and communities. Here I will examine some ethnographic accounts, which testify to the experimental character of the Evenki people not only as hunters but also as observers. I shall show how prey may change its role in hunting contexts and become a companion.

21 I encountered this for the first time in North Baikal among the Kindigir Evenki in Holodnaia village. The fact that some wild animals received names alerted my curiosity, and I started to concentrate more on this. Hunters appreciate it if an animal displays curiosity and interest in the human world and welcome such relationships. Although similar animals may be brought in as prey, an animal that demonstrates an intention to interact with people is approached as an exception. This animal might be granted a name. Social relationships with wild animals in North Baikal are relevant only for small animals, such as muskrats, ermine, and chipmunks; however, in Amudisy, reindeer herders experience interactions with hares, deer, and moose<sup>5</sup>. These particular interactions will be addressed in the next paragraph.

22 The tradition of taming wild animals is occasionally documented in Russian ethnographic accounts. For example, in their description of the Selkups, Levin and Potapov provided a picture of a Selkup man feeding a tamed eagle (Levin & Potapov 1956, p. 671). This illustrated some broader ethnographic examples of how and why the Selkups tamed wild animals:

The Selkups bred the puppies of Arctic foxes. They took them in the spring time, kept them in special cages, and fed them during the summer. In late autumn, right before the hunting season, they slaughtered them. According to the narratives of some elderly Selkups, earlier people had tamed bear cubs as hunting bears. These cubs were kept in *chum* [cages] and had the name *man iamy* – my son. Other names made these bears disobedient and angry. Bears that grew up in such conditions became good hunters for the wild of their own kind and had much better chances of winning battles with them. Wild geese and ducks were also kept in *chum*. Geese were very easy to tame. Even if they flew away for water, they always came back home. In the autumn, people slaughtered them, too. Nutcrackers and cuckoos were also among tamed birds. The roots of the desire to tame these types of birds are probably in totemistic beliefs, since the nutcracker is believed to be a founder of the Kossyl'-tamdyr clan and the cuckoo has a reputation as a shaman-bird. (*ibid.*, p. 669)

23 We find similar examples in Zelenin's work or that of Kreinovich (Zelenin 1936, Kreinovich 1973<sup>6</sup>). Shirokogoroff gives us an interesting approach to indigenous relations with wild animals (and animals in general) in his famous book, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*. He gives us a detailed description of the Tungus as excellent observers, generalisers, and experimenters (Shirokogoroff 1935, pp. 76-86). The Tungus, as the scholar wrote, possess much greater knowledge about animals than Europeans. The Tungus observe wild animals in their natural habitat and study them anatomically, doing both without any particular aim. The Tungus always make hypotheses and are happy to spend a great deal of time observing and experimenting with animals. This is especially relevant for wild animals taken to human places: "the experiments in the domestication of wild animals are very clearly connected with these experiments" (*ibid.*, p. 76).

24 During my field research in Amudisy Lake in Kalar district, I documented a similar attitude to bringing a wild animal home. However, I have to emphasise the difference in attitude when it comes to taming either small or large animals. Taming small animals demands less concentration and happens spontaneously; in most cases, it happens on the initiative of the animals themselves. Taming large animals, such as moose, is another type

of process. The Evenki consider it a serious enterprise undertaken on the initiative of people. In both cases, however, principles of reciprocity are central. There are expectations of mutual benefits, such as knowledge or practical outcomes relevant for forest life. In this paragraph, I focus on the first type of relationship: I will consider the other variant shortly.

- 25 In the winter of 2008, I was sitting with two reindeer herders in a hunting cabin (Ru. *zimov'e*) and asked something really obscure about forest life. After a short pause, one of the herders started vaguely recollecting: "We lived in a *zimov'e* and started to note that an ermine was visiting us regularly. He got used to us and we domesticated (Ru. *priruchili*) him. He even took food from our hands. He was jumping from shelf to shelf and we shared food with him from one plate. We enjoyed his company, he deserved his meal. He was a good hunter. He ended all the mice in our *zimov'e*. You know, mice are very dangerous in the forest: they might bring serious diseases, but we did not have a single one!" I stared at him impatiently, waiting for him to go on. I was taken aback by this unexpected and fantastic story.
- 26 Another herder was listening to his comrade very carefully. Once the talk ended, he took the conversation forward: "This is a common thing! We also had an ermine, well, even two. They liked eating boiled fish. We fed them and they took it with pleasure. We also fed them with the flesh (Ru. *tushkami*) of muskrats. I remember how we gave them the whole body of a muskrat, but our ermines could not gnaw at it normally. So we cut it into pieces for them, for them to finish the meal in comfort. We named them Pet'ka and Vas'ka. Wild animals get accustomed to people very quickly. I have heard that other hunters do the same thing with minks and chipmunks. Our ermines learned to understand when people came. After the winter had set in, they hibernated".

Figure 2. Displaying kills



© private archive of Lubov' Malafeeva, Holodnaia, 1980s

Figure 3. Tonia and Lësha calling for chipmunk companions



© Veronika V. Simonova, Holodnaia, 2008

- 27 An analogous case happened in Holodnaia village when local teenagers brought a muskrat to the “green corner” of the local kindergarten. Evenki teenagers not only learn to hunt

within the school curriculum, but also actively engage in the practice. They hunt squirrels, chipmunks, and muskrats. Thus, they consider muskrats as a prey; however, Sasha Ganiugin, a local teenager, talked about a “tamed” muskrat. He discussed this animal in the way urban teenagers usually reserve for their beloved cats. He explained how much the pupils cared for him: they changed his water, fed him, and tried to get rid of his fleas. They did more than their best to keep him comfortable. When I asked Sasha why he was so emotionally attached to an animal which he normally hunts, Sasha replied: “Do not compare [them], he was smart, he understood everything”.

- 28 In Amudisy, it was also the practice to bring chipmunks and ermines into the human world. According to Gennadii, chipmunks emerge when people imitate their sounds by whistling: they are even capable of recognising their names. Gennadii had a chipmunk named Vasia, but dogs killed him. Gennadii Kuz'min also remembered that ermines visit people quite often in log cabins (Ru. *zimov'e*) or tents in the forest. They eat meat and hunt mice:

Ermines are cheeky. Once you fall asleep, they start running around, paying zero respect to people. They sometimes live in villages; I remember that one used to live in a closet when I was a child.

- 29 Volodia, a reindeer herder, remembers that he had a duck and a sable that lived in a cage when he was a child. His father brought them for him from the forest. The sable lived for around a half year; when it became ill, Volodia's father killed it. Volodia also had a raven. The raven could imitate people's voices and she knew her name: Karkusha. She lived in the village during the summer and flew away in the autumn.
- 30 The pragmatic goals of wild animals might be irritating for people. Every time my interlocutors told me about animals that visited their log cabins just to steal food (showing zero interest in humans), it evoked negative emotions and attitudes. This kind of interaction is classified as total disrespect by Evenki hunters. In such cases, an animal exhibiting its interests and personality in a manner that is too explicit is in danger. For example, Gennadii Kuz'min remembered:

Once I was hunting in Kabikan spring. I got (Ru. *dobyl*) a musk deer (Ru. *kabarga*). I left meat outside near [some] logs. That night it was snowing lightly (Ru. *poroshka*), and when I went out and stayed near the logs, I realised that something was missing. In a minute I understood that my meat was gone and there were no traces of it around. I got scared. I thought that it was a spirit of the *zimov'e* (Ru. *domovoi*) which took my musk deer. These thoughts made me feel really uncomfortable. I went for water and suddenly saw that something was being dragged away, I looked more carefully and realised that the spirit appeared to be a sable. And the sable stole my musk deer, my meat, and filched it into the forest. I was very upset. The sable was so cheeky, it was not afraid of humans at all and it badly scared me. I trapped it the day after.

- 31 The last case demonstrates that companionship is distinguished from parasitism. Not only do ermine use human spaces, but they also contribute to the household: they hunt mice. Chipmunks are treated like pets as they entertain people. Thus, “economic” or “emotional” mutual benefits are required. Sables only use people and thus produce a kind of negative reciprocity; therefore, they are not companions in the taiga. An animal taken by people to their places, which I call “wild at home”, should open its personality in a positive manner readable for people.
- 32 Thus, the *perednik* and the “wild at home” share the same nature, which becomes evident through the contacts that take place between taiga peoples, wild animals, and spirits.

Together, they constitute a network of relations that has been left secret by local peoples. This network is an object of eternal curiosity for the Evenki and a rich source of knowledge about the neighbourhood and ecology of animals, spirits, and humans.

## Legèi

33 Gennadii and I were sitting in a tent preparing dough for bread. Gennadii is a 63 year-old reindeer herder and has been living in Amudisy for a long time. He used to live in Tiania, Yakutia, and gladly shared stories with me over the course of my stay in Amudisy. His main duty in the camp was to cook and look after the tent. As he pointed out: “I am a tent worker here” (Ru. *chum rabotnik*). I helped him with his duties: this was the first time I had ever baked bread. Gennadii was teaching me. He watched every single action very carefully and supervised every step of the process. Suddenly, he laughed and said:

—What an anecdote! A Evenki man is teaching a Russian woman to bake bread! Why did your grandmother not teach you?

—Well, she tried. She said that this kind of knowledge had to come by itself and the only thing I could do was to observe the way she baked. I was not talented, really.

—So, this is the first time you have baked bread yourself. Well, we will see what the flour says. It knows humans (Ru. *muka cheloveka znaet*).

—What do you mean?, I asked, not without surprise.

—The flour tells what kind of road to expect in the future. When somebody is baking bread for the first time, he or she should watch the dough. If it rises quickly, a person’s road will be good. If it comes up slowly – bad. I wonder what the flour will tell you, we will see it very soon.

I asked about what kind of road Gennadii was referring to, and he said surprisingly:

—Everybody has a road, life is a road and the flour speaks with people about it. I do not know if this conversation is reliable, our elders used to believe it, at least.

—Interesting, but I was about to ask you about wild animals. I have heard that the Evenki tried to tame some of them, like you spoke about an ermine yesterday. Any more stories about that?

Gennadii looked left and upwards, as he usually did when he wanted to remember something; after a short pause, he took his cigarette and continued:

—Yes, I think I know a story you will really like. This story is my present to you. This happened in Tiania (Yakutia), near the Torgo River in Bagaev’s camp (Ru. *fazenda Bagaeva*). A wild animal gets accustomed to people very quickly. Once we found a moose calf (Ru. *sohatënka*). We killed his mother and saw that the calf was little: we decided to take him to our camp. He got used to people very quickly. He became like a dog, although he only lived a month with us. He had a really good appetite. When we fed our dogs, he stole their food, but the dogs did not object. He was big and strong. We named him Legèi<sup>9</sup>. Legèi in Yakut means somebody who eats a lot (Ru. *obzhora*). He really did! This moose was a clever animal; he learned to recognise his name. I remember how we used to scream “Legèi! Legèi!” and he ran to us immediately, and we petted him or gave him some food. We allowed him to move freely, but he preferred staying and walking close to us. We planned to ride him when he grew up, to teach him to be a riding moose like a normal riding reindeer. We planned that when he became an adult, we would allow him to go out to the forest in the autumn to find a girlfriend, and we were sure he would come back to us. So we expected him to be free and hoped he would chose to stay with us and enjoy living a free life at the same time. We thought of finding a horse saddle for him, a reindeer one would not fit, too small, but it never happened. We thought it would be good for Legèi to become more independent. We took him on a boat and sailed to an islet. We covered him with a jacket, saying, “Legèi, be quiet and behave”. On the way to the islet, the police (Ru. *militsiia*) stopped us for an inspection. We got scared, we had meat, our clothes were covered with blood, and

we had Legèi at the bottom of the boat. A policeman started asking questions, but he did not seem to check our boat in the usual way, just questions. We said that the blood on our clothes was from the past. At that moment, Legèi stood up and began moving backwards and forwards. The policeman asked in surprise why the jacket was moving. We just shrugged our shoulders, saying nothing in reply. Luckily, he was not very prying and thought maybe that it was a dog or an item that moved due to the water tossing about. He did not stop us. So we reached the islet and left Legèi there. We did not tie him up, we wanted him to feel free and eat the grass and bushes. In the evening, we came to the islet to take Legèi back but he was absent. We started seeking him and finally found him dead in the water. We forgot that he was not wild anymore! And that was our fatal error. Once he stayed alone, he got scared and followed us but we did not hear his swimming. He would have survived if he had not reached the steepest part of the river bank, and he was not smart enough to swim back to the islet and wait for us there. He died trying to get out of the water. We felt so sorry for him; we could not predict such an accident. He was a very good moose... Why are you writing all the time? Look at your dough, it is waiting!

## Gennadii is talking

- 34 The story about Legèi is touching, tragic, and seems absolutely unique. However, similar stories emerge from time to time in the narratives of hunters and reindeer herders from Evenki societies. Taking moose or Manchurian deer into the human world is an actual practice that is very hard to classify and approach. Before attempting to interpret the story about Legèi and the phenomenon of wild animals at home, I would like to give some ethnographic details regarding similar incidents that I learned about in Amudisy and Chapo-Ologo.
- 35 Gennadii also remembered that a moose calf named Kuzia lived in the herd in Yakutia. He drank milk from a bottle like a baby. The wife of the head of the reindeer farm fed Kuzia, but he refused to migrate with the reindeer herd and stayed in the forest. Another version about Kuzia's decision suggests that it was hard to train Kuzia to move according to human needs, unlike Legèi; thus, the reindeer herders decided to abandon him in the forest, hoping that he would survive by himself.
- 36 The history of this practice is very hard to trace. According to the image below, taken by Vahrusheva (2011) under the supervision of Ivshina, people brought wild moose home in the 1930s. Vahrusheva was a student at school number 47, Ozernoe village, Yeniseisk region, Krasnoïarskii region (Ru. *krai*). The photo was prepared for a competition between regional schools. The work, entitled "Sym station: the territory of life?", is devoted to local reindeer herding. This picture was taken as evidence of the presence of reindeer in Sym in 1930, and is accompanied by the comment: "People had quite a lot of reindeer in their households in the 1930s. However, anthropologists and other specialists working with cultures of reindeer herding in Siberia may easily recognise a moose calf instead of a reindeer calf in the image below".

Figure. 4. A little “Mowgli-moose” from the 1930s



Found in Vahrusheva's work.

© Vahrusheva

- 37 In Sul'ban, Maksim Poliakov took a Manchurian deer calf (Ru. *iziubrënok*). She knew her name, but she recognised it only if Poliakov's sister called her. She moved in and out of the pen freely when her master was calling her name. She had a female name, but Gennadii could not remember which one.
- 38 Gennadii Kuz'min from Chapa-Ologo used to work for many years in Amudisy. He told me that around 1965 they stayed near the Unkur River. A moose passed by with two calves: one was a year old while the other had just been born. Dogs stopped them. Gennadii's uncle got (Ru. *dobył*) the year-old calf and the moose ran away, leaving the newly born calf. The dogs surrounded the calf and barked at him. The hunter took the calf to his camp, where it lived among the reindeer. However, Gennadii's uncle knew that, according to the law, keeping a wild animal in a domestic herd was illegal and he was afraid of being punished. The children, however, loved the wild calf and wanted him to stay for good; nonetheless, Gennadii's uncle decided to get rid of the calf and killed him while the children were sleeping.
- 39 Hence, we learn from Legèi's story and others that bringing wild animals home constitutes a flexible and delicate boundary between two realms: wild animals and humans. This boundary is a risk for both but, at the same time, has a magical temptation and attracts people and wild animals to experience being in each other's lives.
- 40 Gennadii Kuz'min told another story about a family of Astrahantsevy whose occupation was game management. The family lived in Old Chara village (Ru. *Staraia Chara*): in 1967, they took a Manchurian deer calf from the forest. They kept it like a dog and named it “Baby boy” (Ru. *malysh*). Malysh could move freely. It walked into the forest to feed itself and came back home in the evening, like a cow. The people of Staraia Chara got used to it and allowed it to wander around the centre of the village. People loved it, petted it, and fed it. Malysh became a local pet and never tried to escape. It recognised its name and ran to everyone calling it. It had a reindeer bell but was never marked (Ru. *zakleimën*).

Initially, the people in Staraia Chara were very curious and excited by Malysh and its habits, but they later became accustomed to it. For them, it was undoubtedly a domestic animal, similar to a cow. It spent one year in the village; after that, his masters decided to move it away to the zoo in Chita because they were kindly asked to do so. Malysh was totally “domestic” (Ru. *ruchnoi*) and communicative; it loved people.

- 41 I also learned a legendary story from Gennadii Kuz'min. He said that somewhere down by the Chara River, nearby Southern Yakutia, an old man kept a moose and used him for riding. He heard about this only briefly, but believed that it was possible and that maybe the old man is still keeping the animal. This was the only mention of a successful long-term engagement between a wild animal, a wild animal-person, and a human-person.
- 42 Thus, I argue that the attempt to surpass the delicate and risky boundary between two realms is similar to getting in touch with a legend. The stories of short-term interactions with wild animals sound as if people are challenging themselves to try and act as communicators. Stories of success are scarce, and nobody granted me a clear picture of where and how I can find people who managed with their wild animals very well.

## *Perednik*, or when spirits come first

Figure 5. Gennadii talking



© Veronika V. Simonova, Amudisy, June 2013

—Come and see our fridge, what are you going to cook today? I think pea soup would be a good solution. We need reindeer bones. Guess where the fridge is.

Gennadii liked to make me guess about household stuff as a prank. I saw nothing at all among the larch trees and bushy taiga grasses and finally gave up. Gennadii laughed and pointed out a fallen larch tree. The fridge appeared to be an icy place under the larch roots. We took meat and sat on the tree for a couple of minutes because Gennadii wanted to smoke. I always took every opportunity to ask questions and this was a good chance for a new conversation:

—Gennadii, I was wondering, what does the scar on the tree behind the fence mean?

The last time you spoke about trees made me very interested, can you please tell me little bit more about them?

—Trees are like people, they have their own spirits, *avacho*<sup>10</sup> and *perednik*, like animals. What else can I tell you about trees?"

43 I remembered that from the very beginning my companions spoke about the *perednik*, a soul-vanguard-spirit that arrives before a person appears at a camp. Olga Ulturgasheva investigated a similar phenomenon among the Eveny people and approached it as a local metaphor for how young Eveny people understand the future (Ulturgasheva 2012, 2016). She investigated the belief in a forerunner spirit which, in the local language, sounds like *djuluchen*: she argued that a forerunner spirit helps to control one's life by giving information about the distant future<sup>11</sup>.

44 A *perednik* in Amudisy, however, is considered to be an energetic human soul: it is similar to a guardian angel, which has the duty of warning its human master about dangers in the very near future. A *perednik* is not an angel, it is part of human nature: a person holds a *perednik* within themselves. So, the person does the work of a guardian angel by him or herself. We spoke about *peredniki* a day before my interlocutors demonstrated how this might work. The next day, dogs were barking on the empty road near the camp and my companions expected visitors: they said "the builders<sup>12</sup> will come soon", which they indeed did. Once I remembered the comments about *peredniki*, I forgot about trees and used Gennadii's good mood to speak about this subject.

—Gennadii, how come the trees have *peredniki* like people and animals do, are they the same?

—They all are the same. They have their own evil spirits, *avacho*, that harm them, and *peredniki*. If we want to slaughter (Ru. *zabit'*) a reindeer and he has a *perednik*, he will try to escape, so it will be hard for us to get him. Wild animals have the same. And people have *peredniki*, which are wild animals. If I see in my dream a bear, that means that Spiridon will come very soon. I wish you had a *perednik*, you would not get ill. Maybe yours is lazy and walks behind...

45 The *perednik* is a local philosophy of communication that removes the boundaries existing between people, wild animals, and spirits. The *perednik* appears in dreams as a wild animal and never as domestic reindeer or dogs (or at least as far as I learned from other interlocutors in Amudisy and Chapa-Ologo). Gennadii Kuz'min, whom I met in Chapa Ologo before we moved up into the mountains, told me that once he saw a wild boar in his dream that was aggressively chasing him: the day after, his friend visited his camp. Gennadii laughed and said to him: "You were chasing me all night long! Your *perednik* visited me last night, now I know you are a wild boar (Ru. *kaban*)".

46 The *perednik* also corresponds to the ability of animals to stay linked with each other, signal one another, and make people aware about the power of their solidarity. Gennadii told me a story about the way this linkage can work within human-animal interactions. Prokopii Nikolaev, the head of a reindeer community in Tiania, Yakutia, received a free ticket to a resort in Bulgaria from the sovkhos. He took that opportunity to rest on the beach<sup>13</sup>. As a part of the holiday programme, he visited a local zoo. Upon approaching the bear cage, the animal started roaring aggressively. The workers in the zoo were surprised: the bear had never behaved in this way before. Moreover, the bear was interested only in Prokopii and paid zero attention to the other spectators. Prokopii interpreted this from the prospect of success in hunting. He is a good hunter who had caught a lot of bears; therefore, all bears know of him through their spiritual linkage, since they immediately signal each other when a good bear hunter (Ru. *medvezhatnik*)

approaches them. These relationships are thus relevant not only in the taiga, but also around the globe.

- 47 Gennadii told me this story as an illustration of how a bear *perednik* might work. A day before, I joined the brigade together with David Anderson and Vladimir Davydov to fix a bear trap. I was a passive observer in the process, as it was a male-only occupation. I did not object at all. Volodia, a reindeer herder, asked politely whether I was bored of watching them. In reply, I stated a common proverb that there are three things one can watch and never get bored of: fire, water, and how others work. Volodia laughed. When they managed to uncover the trap, a bear skeleton emerged. I wanted to have its teeth as a souvenir and Volodia kindly undertook the “work of a dentist”. Right after Gennadii finished the story about Prokopii’s adventure in Bulgaria, he remembered that I had recently harvested bear teeth: “You can make a locket out of those teeth, beautiful. No, better not. You see, bears are connected through a spirit we know nothing about; we can just observe and learn from people who encountered it, like Prokopii. On the one hand, bear fangs and teeth serve as a guardian amulet; on the other, they may attract bears’ anger. Let Indians wear them and boast. Bears might chase you everywhere they exist, even in the zoo”.
- 48 Not only bears have “the spirits of the species”: wolves also have a similar natural-spiritual connection. They know when people speak about them badly or boast about how many wolves they have killed. In these cases, wolves will take revenge: they will chase people or destroy a herd of reindeer. Wolves are vindictive. As Gennadii said, if dogs kill a wolf puppy, the wolves will take revenge and kill dogs. When people encounter problems with wolves, this may be interpreted as an offence triggered by people and their impolite narratives. Wolves can be dangerous for people and reindeer in many other situations as well (for example, when their packs grow large). In both cases, rituals should be performed to restore the peaceful neighbourhood of people, reindeer, and wolves.
- 49 I learned that from Oleg Pavlovich, a Russian dweller in Ikabia village (a neighbouring settlement to Chapa-Ologo where Spiridon Nikolaevich lives with his family) who works as a truck driver. Oleg Pavlovich has been living in the area for 30 years. He came from the Altai region and stayed permanently. He said that he learned a lot from the Evenki. Many of them became his mentors, friends, and hunting companions. While Oleg Pavlovich was driving us to Amudisy, I learned many stories from him. In particular, he told us that he visited a Evenki camp in Yakutia in the 1990s. He saw how his hosts took an animal skin (he did not remember which particular animal) and left from the camp straightaway. In a couple of hours, they returned, declaring that everything was all right and the wolves would not harm their herd. Oleg Pavlovich added expressively: “They did a ritual that should have been kept hidden from outside eyes. Imagine, a lair of wolves was located almost in the middle of the reindeer pastures but the wolves never touched the reindeer! Marvellous!”
- 50 Animals (especially wild ones) are naturally more advanced than people in sensory terms: they hear, run, and smell much better than people; however, their visual capabilities may vary. According to local narratives, wild animals are more advanced in spiritual communication, too. Not only do they have *peredniki*, but they also possess a sort of “spirit of species solidarity” which controls the connection between individual animals around the world. People cannot boast of having a similar “clan or social *perednik*” which warns them about important things relevant for the whole species. So-called human *peredniki* are constituted by an individual’s ability to accommodate the spirit of an animal

that typically manifests itself in the dreams of other people. A person who has a *perednik* may not be aware of that ability, but is “lucky”. This “luck”, however, is very hard to trace with a common logic. Having a *perednik* facilitates a person’s life choices. As a result of its presence, people can make the right choices and avoid serious problems. Thus a *perednik* works hard to analyse the future while its master (or human-body-rational part) is sleeping: it provides the correct solution to a problem in the morning.

- 51 *Perednik* activity in the human world is not limited to the realm of dreams, but can expand into the sphere of real life. Its appearance becomes evident through the reaction of dogs, which can recognise the movements of spirits along empty roads. They can do the same for evil spirits (Evk. *avacho*), devils (Evk., Ya. *ichi*), or when people hear some sounds typical of a person when nobody is present.
- 52 Uncle Sania, a reindeer herder, told me that it is hard to know whether it is a *perednik* or an *ichi* that is visiting the camp. He told me about how his friend encountered a taiga devil, *ichi*, instead of a *perednik*: “A friend of mine heard his dogs barking very loudly and he saw a man riding two white reindeer. He screamed but the unexpected visitor did not react at all and my friend understood that he was an *ichi*. He took his rifle and put a piece of coal in instead of a bullet, as people should do in such situations, and shot the *ichi*: the *ichi* disappeared”.
- 53 A *perednik* is occupied with espionage. It must spy out the future and bring knowledge back to its master. It usually walks ahead of a person, but can also walk behind. This latter possibility means that people or dogs can continue to hear the sounds of someone’s presence when they have already left the camp. In this case, a *perednik* is a kind of trace doing its job in a different or even incorrect manner.
- 54 Travin, who worked among the Evenki of Yakutia as an ethnographer from 1925-30, made a note in his diary that speaks eloquently about the tradition of *peredniki* in Evenki societies: although he did not employ the term *perednik*, he gave an example of its agency in his notes (Travin 1927, p. 99). It testifies that the Evenki used to have a system of communication in the forest that could be interpreted as mystical (a logically impossible cause-effect situation for a representative of another society in a Evenki cultural context) by an outsider. Moreover, according to my observations, people in the forest very creatively combine taiga signs (Simonova 2012, 2013), dreams, and established consensuses on travelling in the forest. Thus, when they met someone in the taiga, all these skills come together to enrich and enforce each other: the ability to predict someone’s arrival in the forest is the result of mutual work by human and non-human skills and targets. Travin’s notes relate the successful results of such predictions as documented by a scholar of the beginning of the twentieth century: “An old Tungus man emerged [...] the Tungus men who had stayed here before somehow knew perfectly precisely the day of his arrival and waited for him on this particular day” (Travin 1927, p. 99).
- 55 A *perednik* is always a wild animal belonging to or accommodating itself within a part of human nature (*chelovecheskaia priroda*), as my interlocutors told me. Thus, an understanding of the qualities of wild animals is embedded into human personalities; moreover, these qualities condition the road taken by humans, a metaphor for life and destiny. Gennadii felt sorry that my *perednik* was not active enough, although he also mentioned that only one person in our team had an active *perednik* – Vladimir. Gennadii told me that, the day before our arrival, he had a dream about a fox. When Vladimir

appeared with his red beard and orange sweater, Gennadii concluded that the fox from his dream belonged to him: “He has a *perednik*, it is a fox or he is a fox himself”.

## Conclusions

- 56 The ethnography of bringing wild animals home along with the ethnography of vanguard spirits, which are always wild animals, together constitute a realm which is hard to explain. In Siberian ethnography, especially as represented by Willerslev’s works, relationships between wild animals and people in indigenous hunting societies are typically approached as predator-prey relations and placed into perspectivism theory. It is important here to distinguish “perspectivism” from “*the* perspectivism”, as Humphrey suggests in her paper devoted to perspectivism of shaman’s mirrors in Mongolia (Humphrey 2007, p. 174): “I do not suggest that the shamans mirror reveals *the* perspectivism of the Mongols along the lines of the integrated mythical cosmological system as described by Viveiros de Castro (1992) for Amazonia [...] What I discuss here is, rather, a specifically shamanic perspectivism, which coexists with several others”.
- 57 This distinction seems to be relevant terminological apparatus. Perspectivism is a broad philosophical view drawing from Plato (1986), Leibniz ([1714] 2017), and Nietzsche (1966), who argued that all evaluations of reality take place from a particular perspective. Many conceptual schemes can be employed to understand a reality, which does not exist as a thing-in-itself. So-called reality is dependent on the qualities of the individual who tries to understand it and creates a certain viewpoint.
- 58 In the theory of art, for example, “*the* perspectivist movement rejected the homogeneity of space and it made the radical assertion that there are as many realities as points of view...a perspective which is perfected by the multiplication of its viewpoints” may be intuitively intelligible to many anthropologists. If they add the adjective “cultural” to the term “perspective”, the arguments of aesthetic perspectivism will appear to be close to the principles of cultural pluralism or relativism (Kwon 2012, p. 61). Furthermore, Kwon (*ibid.*, pp. 62-63) gives us a brilliant excursion on classical anthropologists (among the Pleiades of great philosophers of the last century) who employed perspectivism as a dynamic interaction between contrasting principles of social order: Evans-Pritchard (1940), Leach (1954), Mauss (1975), Strathern (1988), and Bourdieu (1990). Viveiros de Castro is discussed by Kwon as a specific figure who introduced his own perspectivism for hunting societies: “Here, the Amerindian world comprises in multiple realities populated by various separate groups of vital subjects (animals and humans; the living and the dead) and has a pronounced notion of ‘trans-substantiation’ [sic] or metamorphosis across different subjectivities”. In his earlier work, Viveiros de Castro described how the Arawete warriors of the Brazilian rainforest can transform into and “become” enemies who they had slain in the past through singing for the latter (Viveiros de Castro 1992, pp. 238-251). For the Arawete, by this account, being a subject means having a particular point of view, and all important social activities such as marriage, hunting, and warfare involve the risk of transubstantiation; that is, becoming the other. As a result, what is apparently potential prey to a hunter may turn out to be a spirit and be identified as such ritually.
- 59 Hence, we observe that perspectivism exported to circumpolar and sub-Arctic hunting societies becomes *the* perspectivism – a theory describing multiplicity of points of view in

culturally formulated predator-prey relations and contexts. Therefore, *the* perspectivism, along with mimesis, are the theories best suited to describing such relations.

- 60 Nevertheless, ethnography from Kalar district and Lake Baikal obviously adds supplementary discussion to human-animal relations in Evenki societies since it discovers a realm of network between wild animals, taiga spirits, and what my informants think of as human nature (*chelovecheskaia priroda*). Here it is important to distinguish the relations between the Evenki and the “wild-at-home”, as reflected in *perednik* beliefs, from the concept of “grateful prey”, well developed by Brightman from Cree ethnography (Brightman 1995). His argument (*ibid.*, Tanner 1997) that Cree representations of human-animal relations are chaotic, arbitrary, and unsystematic, being displayed in the ambivalent areas of cooperation and competition, is not identical to what is relevant for Evenki hunters. The “wild at home”, which is in contact with people, does not create a predator or prey game, but emerges as a representative of a world of wildness expected to become closer to people than others of his or her kind. Furthermore, as a part of humanity, a guardian vanguard spirit is believed to share the quality of that alien-person. Thus, *perednik* beliefs systematise human-animal relations in a principle, which cannot be fully discovered by perspectivist and mimetic theoretical lenses. Below, I try to suggest a theory of a contagious magic, instead of *the* perspectivism and sympathetic magic (mimesis), as a possible framework to describe these complex and delicate relationships between human people, wild animal people, and spirits.
- 61 The main question of this paper is why the Evenki hunters need to bring wild animals into their camps. Why are they so interested in observing the ways in which a wild animal exposes its wildness? These questions bring new ethnographic material to anthropology and also places certain theoretical assumptions devoted to human-animal relations on different foundation. Why are human and animal “characteristics” (e.g. in Russian *priroda*, as my informants stated) similar in local spiritual beliefs, as represented by the concept of *perednik*?
- 62 My attempt to answer these questions takes its initiative from Taussig’s interpretation of mimesis as a sympathetic magic (Taussig 1993). Although the practice of bringing wild animals home has certain similarities with the mimetic strategies initially analysed in Amerindian anthropology by Taussig and later adapted to Siberian anthropology by Willerslev (2007, 2009), it should be approached from a slightly different angle. Mimesis is a sympathetic magic, an argument brilliantly unfolded in Taussig’s (1993) theory of mimesis in Latin American colonial contexts. Magic is thus the play between object and subject, the self and the other; it is protection and control made possible by imitating the object of danger or desire. We may accept, after all, that magic is no doubt both a sense and a way of thinking. This sense-thinking is based on two great laws we know from James Frazer’s ([1922] 1993) classic work: the law of similarity and the law of contact or contagion. Taussig draws on the idea that the magic of mimesis consists in copying (Taussig 1993, pp. 47-48): this is the belief that imitation has transformative powers and that, in the process of imitating, the subject acquires both the qualities of what is being imitated and the ability to control it.
- 63 I propose that, for Amudisy reindeer herders and Evenki hunters in North Baikal, the practice of bringing a wild animal into the home has logical links with another magical law which focuses on contagion: the idea of eternal contact between a “part” and the “whole”. This is perfectly illustrated by the story about Legèi: learning one animal-individual enriches human knowledge about the entire species, moose in this case.

- 64 Contagious magic is basically “infection” by definition, as we learn from Frazer ([1922] 1993). It is an eternal link between separated parts or between objects that have never experienced contact with one another before. Having a wild animal at home allows this magical law to act: a part of the wilderness once placed into a human camp resurrects the whole network of taiga interactions, including humans. *Perednik* here is wild animal-spirit constituting a part of human nature (*chelovecheskaia priroda*) and a corridor to the world of the wilderness. Thus, contagious magic is sense-thinking about an eternal contact that happens once and for all: the experience of an encounter with an animal individual becomes a story shared among communities.
- 65 Willerslev has fruitfully appropriated the concept of mimesis to explain human-animal relations in hunting among the Yukaghir (Willerslev 2004, 2007, 2009). However, I do not think that employing either mimesis or perspectivism would give us a perfect explanation about why people bring wild animals home or about the beliefs related to *peredniki* in the Amudisy area. The reason behind my doubt is that, at their core, these theories are externally oriented: mimicry and perspectivism are about either copying or taking as a model something outside the subject’s nature. The *perednik*, however, shows that human persons can allow a space for animal persons. Human nature (*chelovecheskaia priroda*) is believed to be, in part, a wild animal acting akin to a “guardian angel”, but it is not a guardian angel in the image we are accustomed to in Euro-Christian or Orthodox tradition, since the latter is an external being taking care of its *protégé(e)* but not a part of him or her. Therefore, I suggest that both mimesis and perspectivism may be applied to Siberian ethnographies only to a limited extent: none of these approaches explains the complexity of the *perednik* and the “wild animal at home”; however, they do provide an explanation of the predator-prey dimension in human-animal relations.
- 66 Mimesis does not explain the heart of human-wild animal relations outside the hunting agencies still relevant for the Evenki hunters in Amudisy and North Baikal. The *perednik* and the “wild animal at home” are part of hunting culture but not hunting itself, a key practice in the taiga. The “wild animal at home” is not prey; the *perednik* is not a predator. I employ “contagious magic” instead of “mimicry” to understand the practice of bringing some individual animals to human places in the taiga. Contagious magic is a theory of contact, not imitation. Below, I argue why mimicry is not relevant for the Amudisy Evenki hunters in their relations with wild animals taken into their camps.
- 67 Mimesis is a method of deceiving prey by imitating its sounds or appearance and seducing its spirit in dreams: this persuades the prey to sacrifice its animal-body for the sake of human needs and prosperity. Mimesis is a lie that is shared as part of a game by all actors and has no negative connotations in cultures where it is practised. Sympathetic magic is a set of rituals that makes this lie obvious and manifest. For example, we can consider a dream where hunters take the identity of an animal-person in order to seduce animals and take their bodies in real life (take them as kills). Animals also take the identities of people, so the border between humans and animals in mimetic dreams is obscure. However, the purpose of hunters is clear: to get the spirit unavoidably implies getting the animal. Animal-spirits follow the hunters imitating them, allowing the latter to both seduce them in dreams and kill them in reality (Willerslev 2009).
- 68 If the core principle of sympathetic magic is falsehood, the core principle of a contagious magic is contact (Frazer [1922] 1993, Taussig 1993). In this regard, the *perednik* belongs to or unifies two natures: wild animal and human. Here, it is impossible to avoid a discussion about the theory of perspectivism, which gained popularity among some anthropologists

interested in human-animal relations in indigenous contexts. The perspectivist approach shows us the so-called prey perspective from animals to spirits: people see animals as prey (although predators see people as prey) and spirits see people as prey, so spirits reach the top of the hierarchy and appear as top predators. Those humans who see other people as prey may either be cannibals (Evenki folklore stories<sup>14</sup>) or shamans (human soul-cannibals) (Stépanoff 2009). If we set aside the analysis of the ethnocentric and animistic conditions of the perspectivist approach offered by Viveiros de Castro (1998), this theory explains game relationships where only two basic statements are really true: the perspectives of predators or prey.

- 69 However, the practice of bringing wild animals home is not about predator-prey perspectives. Animals do not see people as predators, but “accept invitations” to stay as guests/captives in a human place. People do not see these wild animals as prey but as a chance to establish relationships uncommon between prey and hunters. People expect the wild animals to open up their characters and individuality to humans and domestic animals: the humans, in turn, recognise that their subjectivity is different from that of domestic animals.
- 70 Here I have to turn back to some of the ethnographic examples I gave in the body of this paper and explain their “magical theoretical links” in order to show why mimesis and perspectivism cannot be fully employed for understanding the practice of taking wild animals home or the *perednik* beliefs. Mimesis is, after all, the “magic of becoming and transformation”. Perspectivism is the “rationality of personhood”. Both are about the transformative capabilities belonging to human and non-human actors. The wild animal at home is a practice that involves contacting the world of the wild through constantly learning about and recognising an animal-individual, and this is a completely different thing.
- 71 The story about Legèi clearly shows how people bestowed upon a moose the status of a person, complete with a full assortment of human rights: free movement, free competition, and freedom of choice. At the same time, people assigned this wild animal intellect, intuition, and the ability to learn about the human world and become accustomed to human spaces. The idea of using him as a riding animal was never a pragmatic one. It was an intellectual effort and a hope for the possibility of establishing more intimate contact with a wild animal-person. If the enterprise had been successful, it would have become a token of potential long-term contact with the world of the wild for taiga people.
- 72 And this type of contact is the desired result: a wild animal constitutes a part of the human soul, known as a *perednik*. Hence, the *perednik* is not an external spirit, but an internal quality of human nature (*chelovecheskaia priroda*), a sort of super-sense that might be compared with the Euro-Russian version of “intuition”. This super ability that allows people to spy upon the future is a link with a spiritual world manifested as a wild animal. *Chelovecheskaia priroda* is, therefore, partially wild. Thus, the contact between a wild-animal-person and a wild-human-person in this context does not require any mimicry or shifting predator-prey perspectives, but certain compromises that are comfortable and pleasant for both sides: as my interlocutors believe, the wild-individual also enjoys staying in a human world. Finally, the magic of contact is contained within an experiential understanding of the world of the wild: it is the lens through which a wild individual and the secrets of the human ability to see the future are comprehended.

## Post Scriptum

- 73 Gennadii stopped smoking, which signalled we had to return with the meat and cook. I tried to avoid dispelling the conversation or making Gennadii tired of my questions. However, I could not resist the temptation to ask: “Gennadii, if animals and trees have *peredniki*, how might the latter look?” He seemed to become bored of the topic, but replied politely: “Who knows? Maybe they see us in their dreams”.

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## NOTES

1. I approach “home” not only as a dwelling place (Ingold 2000), but also as a physical and culturally cultivated taiga. Just as with Brandišauskas’ notion of the “life place” (Brandišauskas 2017) or camp (Evk. *bikit*), my approach to home in the taiga is not limited to the architecture of dwellings and necessary household buildings. Indeed, home in the taiga is a sense and experience at the intersection of signs, interrelations with animals, and movements: it is charged with spiritual meanings. “Home” also relates to dreams that accommodate a certain imagined space in which different actors such as spirits might interfere or be invited.
2. I employ *chelovecheskaia priroda* (e.g. “human nature”), an emic expression belonging to my informants, without any relation to the theoretical discussions in philosophy and anthropology. My informants used this expression in common dialogical situations to explain how wild animals, human beings, and their abilities to see the future are connected and act together in the taiga.
3. Unfortunately, my interlocutors did not use an Evenki name for the vanguard spirit.
4. Probably from *chape*, which means “a squirrel hollow” (Vasilevich 1958, p. 515), and Ya. *olohtoo* (“squirrel nest”).
5. I never heard any stories, similar to those about other animals, about bringing wolves or bears into human worlds. However, I have to share one observation I made on Sakhalin Island (the Russian Far East, 2013) among one Nivkh family, indigenous fishermen and hunters. A bear started wandering close to a family house, which they accepted as a sign of its intention to interact with people. Thus, they regularly left rotten fish for him; if they forgot to do so, the bear “became very upset and started roaring and digging at the place where the fish usually were” (Ru. *psihovat' nachinal*). As was explained to me, giving food is a sort of diplomacy with any animal that wishes to become acquainted with humans. Thus, it is possible to hypothesise that the principles of establishing relationships with wild animals through invitations into human spaces may be found throughout indigenous communities in Siberia; however, detailed research is needed. It is also well known that the Nivkh have a special relationship with the bear, as mentioned in the footnote below.
6. Kreinovich described bringing of a bear cub among the Nivkh people on Sakhalin Island for ritual reasons. A bear was kept in a special cabin for two years to be ritually killed at the feast of the bears (Ru. *medvezhii prazdnik*).
7. The “green corner” (Ru. *zelënyi ugolok*) is a place in schools or kindergarten where different plants and decorative animals (aquarium fish, little birds, turtles, and the like) are placed for entertainment and education.

8. It is a historically recognised fact that, at the time of the first contacts between the Evenki and Russians, the latter brought the idea of bread into Evenki society and culture. Kuftin, who headed an expedition to the North Baikal Evenki in 1927, documented in his diary a name given to Russians: those “who always keep bread in their mouths”. Thus, for Gennadii, it was abnormal to know a Russian woman who had no idea about how to bake bread.

9. The names granted to both people and domestic animals in Evenki culture have numerous meanings, from the social and pragmatic to the sacral (see, for example, Shirokogoroff 1935, Sirina 2012, Vasilevich 1969). Unfortunately, the practice of giving names to wild animals in everyday life (apart from the bear “clan” name, Evk. *Amako*, *Amikan* meaning “grandfather”, which is related to the belief that calling a bear by its original name will bring bad luck and the anger of a powerful animal) was not documented in earlier ethnographic accounts. Along with the name, the latter receives a position in and an affiliation with the human world, as well as recognition of their subjectivity and personality.

10. *Avacho* in Evenki is an evil spirit living in the forest. In North Baikal, it is sometimes described as a female with a bird’s beak instead of nose.

11. A *djuluchen* can belong to both people and animals according to Ulturgasheva’s research. However, there is a significant difference between a *djuluchen* and a *perednik*. A *djuluchen* does its work under the control of its human or non-human masters. Someone can send a *djuluchen* and get a picture of the distant future in their minds. This is clearly described by Ulturgasheva, especially in her informants’ narratives (Ulturgasheva 2016). She gives us a definition of the term *djuluchen*: “A *djuluchen* is an inherent component of human and animal personhood, whose literal translation reads ‘a shadow that falls or runs ahead of a person’. It is a nomadic concept signifying a partible component of human personhood (referred to by some locals as one’s ‘traveling spirit’), which departs ahead of its owner and arrives at the destination prior to the owner’s actual appearance” (*ibid.*, p. 57). The same definition can be employed in the analysis of the term *perednik*. However, a *perednik* is not consciously controlled by its master. By way of contrast, it leads its master through various emotional states, helping them to avoid the wrong decisions that might be made in the near future. A *perednik* walks without any orders ahead of a person or an animal while they are dreaming. It might walk ahead while its master is awake, but the latter will unlikely be aware of his or her *perednik*. The nature of the *djuluchen* is reminiscent of a person’s shadow and may bear his or her features and movements: this is a significant contrast with a *perednik*, which is always a wild animal.

12. “The builders” is the nickname of Vladimir Nemerov, son-in-law of Spiridon Gabyshev, and his friend Roman from the Ural region. Their summer task was to build a hunting cabin and sauna (Ru. *bania*) in Amudisy, 5 km from the reindeer herders’ camp.

13. This practice was typical of Soviet social policy. All citizens had the right to receive either free or discounted travel ticket to resorts across the Soviet Union and other Soviet-bloc countries.

14. Stories about taiga cannibals are present in Evenki oral literature (Varlamova 1996, Pinegina 1950-1960, see also Brandisauskas this volume). Cannibal historical-folklore groups are called Evk. *diptygir* or Evk. *Chanyt*, a clan name. During my fieldwork in the Zabaikal region, Uncle Gena and other Evenki interlocutors told me numerous folk stories about cannibals who lived in the past and came from the north. According to them, cannibals ceased to exist at the beginning of the last century.

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## ABSTRACTS

This paper is about human-animal spiritual relations among Amudisy Evenki hunters and reindeer herders of Kalar district (Zabaikal region) in Siberia. Based on narratives describing the practice of bringing wild animals into human places, this anthropological study examines the network of relations between human and non-human actors in an attempt to answer the following questions: why do Evenki hunters bring wild animals into their camps? Why are they so interested in observing the ways in which animals expose themselves and become a part of a human world? Why do “human nature” (*chelovecheskaia priroda*) (as it is called by our informants) and wild animals share certain similarities in local spiritual beliefs? By creating a dialogue between ethnographic examples and the theories of mimesis and perspectivism, this paper shows that this complex subject should be approached in terms of a “magic of contact”. This is also true of local *perednik* beliefs, where the human and animal worlds coincide: in such beliefs, human nature (*chelovecheskaia priroda*) is held to be partially constituted by an animal spirit. The analysis of data as well as writing up was sponsored by RSF grant 14-18-02785.

Cet article porte sur les relations spirituelles entre humains et animaux chez les Évenks chasseurs et éleveurs de rennes d’Amudisy, dans le district de Kalar (région de Zaïbaïkal) en Sibérie. Basé sur l’ethnographie de récits et de souvenirs recueillis auprès des éleveurs de rennes de cette région, présentant comment des animaux sauvages ont été rapportés sur les lieux d’habitation des humains, cet article examine un réseau de relations entre des acteurs humains et non-humains, et tente de répondre aux questions suivantes : Pourquoi les chasseurs évenks ont-ils besoin de rapporter un animal sauvage sur leurs campements ? Pourquoi sont-ils tant enclins à observer la façon dont un animal sauvage se dévoile et devient une partie du monde humain ? Pourquoi, ce que les informateurs appellent « la nature des humains » (*chelovecheskaia priroda*) et les animaux partagent-ils des similarités dans les représentations locales ? En proposant un dialogue entre des exemples ethnographiques, la théorie de la mimesis et le perspectivisme, cet article montre que cette complexité doit être appréhendée comme une « magie du contact ». C’est également le cas des représentations locales concernant le *perednik*, où monde des humains et monde des animaux coïncident : dans ces conceptions, la « nature des humains » est tenue comme étant en partie constituée par un esprit animal.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Évenk, Russie, élevage du renne, chasse, animaux, sauvage, récit, relations humains-animaux

**Keywords:** Evenki, Russia, reindeer herding, hunting, wild, animals, narrative, human-animal interactions

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