Multiplicity Without Myth: Theorising Darhad Perspectivism

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ABSTRACT

What would an animist ontology look like if there were no mythology to prop it up? Based partly on the Darhad hunting lore about *badagshin* or 'half-people', this article argues that myth is not a precondition for perspectivism. It is possible to conceive of an animist cosmos that is thoroughly multiple, but at the same time amythological. Thus the Darhads do not entertain ideas of an original state of undifferentiation, in the sense of a truer form of existence that people (such as shamans) aspire to become a part of. Instead, they operate with a different concept of virtuality, namely the great nomadic void that constitutes a background potentiality, which plays the role of an ontological trampoline making possible the ongoing jumping between different realms, which Darhad social life amounts to. In that sense, the Darhad perspectivist cosmos comprises not one unified whole containing all there is, but many parallel worlds, each containing the totality of relations enacted through a given point of view.

Keywords: Darhad Mongols, perspectivism, animism, myth, multiplicity, hunting, half-people.

INTRODUCTION

What would an animist cosmology look like if there were no mythology to prop it up? And what kind of perspectivist effects might pertain to a cosmos that is irreducibly multiple but leaves little room for metamorphosis? Clearly, if such a cosmos were to exist, it would differ profoundly from the Amazonian ontologies discussed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998, this volume). For, as Viveiros de Castro has formulated it, in Amerindian perspectivism there is a 'vanishing point':

> where the differences between points of view are at the same time annulled and exacerbated … In myth, every species of being appears to others as it appears to itself (as human), while acting as if already showing its distinctive and definitive

> nature (as animal or plant or spirit) … Myth speaks of a state of being where
> bodies and names, souls and affects, the I and the Other interpenetrate, submerged
> in the same pre-subjective and pre-objective milieu – a milieu whose end is
> precisely what the mythology sets out to tell (1998: 483–4).

Drawing on fieldwork among the Darhad Mongols, as well as some more general
literature on Inner Asian religion (Heissig 1980; Humphrey 1996), my aim in this
article is to examine the cosmological implications of people *not* having an
'absolute past' (Viveiros de Castro this volume). For, surprisingly as it may seem
to the seasoned Amazonianist, many Darhads do not entertain ideas of an original
state of undifferentiation from whence everything was created, a state which may
only be intimated in the recitation of myth or in the performance of rites under the
guidance of religious specialists. In fact, I would go as far as to say that, in
Darhad animism, there simply *is no pre-cosmological concept*, and therefore
there is no ontological fall either, if by the latter term one understands the notion
of an original (truer and more real) form of existence, of which people, or some
people at least (such as shamans), aspire to become a part.

In pre-socialist Daur Mongolian society, observes Caroline Humphrey, there
were 'no all-explanatory and widely accepted creation myths that might have
related the various parts of a cosmology to one another' (Humphrey 1996: 76).
Very much the same goes for the Darhad Mongols, whose cosmology is no less
disjunctive – or, as I called it in an earlier work, 'totemic' (Pedersen 2001) – in
nature.[1] Rather than instigating any further discussion about the proper name for
this 'mode of identification' (see Descola 2005: 504–14), I here want to explore
in more detail one of several kinds of multiplicity, and, therefore, one of several
kinds of perspectivism, which seem to exist simultaneously in the Mongolian
cultural zone (see the Editorial Introduction to this volume). For, while the
Darhad cosmos is 'multi-naturalist', and while its different perspectives are inter-
changed according to a 'perspectival deixis' (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1998), it
seems to differ in important ways from the cosmologies one finds in the Amazon.

While I am in possession of an extensive body of data on Darhad perspec-
tivism, in particular the 'inter-human' variety which appears to be dominant in the
Inner Asian region (as this volume testifies), what follows is not a comprehensive
analysis of contemporary religion among this group. It is, first and foremost, an
attempt at theorising a novel strand of Inner Asian perspectivism, based on a
sample of data that I have not been able to incorporate into my other writings about
Darhad shamanism (2007a, 2007b; Willerslev & Pedersen forthcoming). As
Viveiros de Castro has accomplished so well with respect to a wide body of
Amazonian material, my first ambition in what follows is to make certain theoret-
ical stipulations about the concept of multiplicity in Inner Asian cosmologies
based on various sources, only some of which are my own. Then, in the second half
of the paper, I shall describe the Darhad lore about *badagshin* ('half-people'). As
we shall see, the *badagshin* are the vehicles of a genuine perspectivist imaginary in
Viveiros de Castro's sense of the term, as the popular narratives about *badagshin*
are full of accounts of humans who turn into animals, as well as animals that turn

into humans. What makes this perspectivism unusual in the Mongolian context is its supremely ahierarchical character. Situated outside the pantheon of Buddhist deities, but also outside the ancestral rankings of shamanic spirits, the *badagshin* instantiates a series of parallel universes, which seems to defy any attempt to account for Inner Asian perspectivism in terms of horizontality vs. verticality, or, for that matter, immanence vs. transcendence.

TWO KINDS OF MULTIPLICITY

Unlike the animist world of the Amerindians, whose transient and flux-like nature has been thoroughly theorised by Viveiros de Castro, the animist world of the Darhads has always been there, and its different perspectives are seen to remain discrete and unchanging over time. To paraphrase Humphrey (this volume), it is as if the Darhads 'are playing with a pack of cards of existence … and arranging them into many complex but recognisable forms or states'. And while these cosmological building blocks may certainly be arranged into a great variety of combinations, there are still only a certain number of variations. In that sense, the Darhads (or, at least, my account of them) seem to be characterised by the same 'finitary, combinatory and discretising outlook', which Viveiros de Castro writes off as a rather unhelpful aspect of the 'structuralist logos' in his contribution to this volume. Yet, this 'closed world' does not seem to be a limitation for the Darhads or for our analysis of their cosmology. On the contrary, my claim is that the amythological cosmos of the Darhads, which will described in detail below, is in a sense more multiple – or, at least, is *differently multiple* – than the mythological cosmos of the Amerindians.

In order to establish this point, we first need to take a closer look at the ontology of 'intensive virtual multiplicity', which, according to Viveiros de Castro (this volume), characterises Amerindian cosmologies. This (Deleuzian) formulation very precisely captures the occult state, which the Amerindians know as a mythical time of 'originary transparency' – a condition where 'the differences between species were "still" to be actualised' – and a condition where 'transformation is anterior to form, relation is superior to terms, and interval is interior to being'. It follows that, instead of a deep past of undifferentiation, which at some point in the past was crystallised into the 'molar' and 'extensive' differences that exist between the beings of the present day, myth bespeaks an invisible and yet omnipresent state of 'molecular' and 'intensive' virtuality, which is the very 'condition of the visible' (Viveiros de Castro this volume). As Holbraad and Willerslev observe in their afterword to this volume, it is essentially this virtual state of latent transformation, which makes Amerindian perspectivism possible: 'Each being has the potential to transform into every other because all beings … contain each other's perspectives immanently. Beings can "become-other" … because in a crucial sense they already "are other": they are constituted as beings by their very potential to become something else. '

Yet, the cosmological discourse of the Yanomami thinker Kopenawa, on which Viveiros de Castro's article in the present volume relies, seems to revolve around two different concepts of multiplicity, namely what I call the ontology of luminous flux and the ontology of discrete perspectives respectively. On the one hand, we are faced with an 'intensive imaginary of sparkling and luminous reflection' and the 'indefinite divisibility-multiplication of spirits', but, on the other hand, we also have a notion of 'perspectivism as a process of discrete switching of points of view between different forms of agency populating the cosmos' (Viveiros de Castro this volume). At first glance, these cosmological themes seem mutually contradictory. For how is it possible to retain the concept of 'discrete points of view', if everything exists in a state of 'intensive multiplication'?

The answer can be found in the writings of Gilles Deleuze (whose influence on Viveiros de Castro was always clear, but is made very explicit in his contribution to this volume). In the Amerindian ontology of luminous flux one thus clearly recognises the Deleuzian concept of the becoming, on which the world is a 'single cosmic domain of transductivity, a basal animic field within which … are only so many different intensive vibrations or modulations' (Viveiros de Castro this volume). In light of the strong influence of Bergson's writings on Deleuze, it is here interesting to recall Levi-Strauss's comparison in *Totemism* between Bergson's concept of duration and the Sioux notion of time:

> For the anthropologist, Bergson's philosophy recalls irresistibly that of the Sioux, and he himself could have remarked the similarity since he had read and pondered *Les Formes élémentaires de le vie religieuse*. Durkheim reproduces in this book a reflection by a Dakota wise man which formulates, in a language close to that of *L'Évolution créatrice*, a metaphysical philosophy, common to all the Sioux, from the Osage in the south to the Dakota in the north, according to which things and beings are nothing but materialised forms of creative continuity … [Bergson and the Sioux] agree so exactly that it may seem less risky … to claim that Bergson was unable to understand what lay behind totemism because his own thought, unbeknownst to him, was in sympathy with that of the totemic peoples. What is it, then, that they have in common? It seems that the relationship results from one and the same desire to apprehend in a total fashion the two aspects of reality which the philosopher terms continuous and discontinuous; from the same refusal to choose between the two; and from the same effort to see them as complementary perspectives giving on to the same truth (1962: 97–8).

It is tempting to draw a similar analogy between native Amazonian thinking and Viveiros de Castro's writings on perspectivism, as long as it is remembered that Viveiros de Castro *is* 'able to understand' what lies behind Amerindian animism precisely because his writings reflect a *deliberate* attempt to be 'in sympathy with' their thought. Both seem to represent attempts at coming to terms with the relationship between what Levi-Strauss calls continuity and discontinuity through a 'refusal to choose between the two', for is that not what the above cosmological versions together represent? If the ontology of luminous flux

constitutes one attempt at capturing the radically immanent nature of the Amerindian cosmos, the ontology of discrete perspectives is a 'complementary perspectiv[e] giving on to the same truth'. Both capture the truth of the animist cosmos, but whereas the former ontology accounts for how one entity/perspective continually can become another entity/perspective (by containing all other entities/perspectives virtually), the latter ontology accounts for how these entities/perspectives at a given moment constitute discrete beings in 'radical objective diversity' (1998: 478) with one another (by being endowed with specific deictic attributes in the discontinuous realm of the actual).

We now understand how it is possible to conceive of distinct points of view (deictic perspectivism) in a world of pure immanent becoming. For while the ontology of luminous flux and the ontology of discrete perspectives are logically complementary versions of the Amerindian cosmos (the latter version accounting for precisely those – in Levi-Straussian terms discontinuous – aspects, which the former 'continuous' version does not, and vice versa), they are not symmetrical. Just as the virtual is a precondition of the actual in Deleuze's philosophy, myth is a precondition of perspectivism in Amerindian cosmology: each being is a visible shadow of the invisible (i.e. supremely visible) flux of becoming, which sparkles 'not too far below the surface' (Viveiros de Castro this volume).

But what would happen if the terms of this asymmetry were reversed? What would happen, that is, if the discrete perspectives of being, and not the luminous flux of becoming, went all the way in? After all, there is no rule dictating that mythology is a logical precondition for perspectivism. It is, in principle at least, entirely possible to conceive of an animist cosmos that is comprised of multiple points of view, but which is at the same time amythological. As we are about to see, the Darhad cosmos is a case in point.

THE NOMADIC VOID

When John of Plano Carpini, a papal envoy to medieval Mongolia, observed that 'they believe in one god, of whom they believe that he is the creator of all visible and invisible things' (cited in Heissig 1980: 48), he was perhaps not exactly wrong, but nonetheless profoundly mistaken. For while it is true that practically all Mongolians believe in 'the presence of a heavenly power to which all powers of and above the earth are subject' (Heissig 1980: 47), and while this power is in principle credited for having 'created all things' (1980: 48), it also a fact that this 'heavenly power' – i.e. what is known as Tenger ('the Sky') – is not that impor-tant in people's lives, relegated as it often seems to be to a role similar to the Christian God of early Enlightenment, who was credited for having made the universe and defined its mechanisms of operation, but that was also about it.[2]

Unlike the Yanomami, many (non-Buddhist) Mongols are uninterested in the creation of the world as a whole. Among the Daur Mongols, for example, it was widely assumed:

that human beings, like everything else, had always been there. Therefore most tales on human origin were not really foundational and were often almost incidental, the chimera of 'human origin' being a good point on which to hang a moral. These origin stories were extraordinarily different from one another, as one might predict given the disjunctive nature of Daur cosmology. (Humphrey 1996: 293–4)

As previously mentioned, is it my clear impression that, for many Darhad Mongolians too, the world is also assumed to be just there. This is not to say that questions of origin do not play any role; on the contrary, people are extremely interested in the coming into being of particular places and life forms within the shamanic cosmos. But, unlike their fellow animists in the Amazon, they conceive of most of this cosmos as an unmarked territory, at particular junctures, or rather along specific paths (*güidel*) or tracks (*zam*) of which the social life of human and nonhumans occur. This unmarked territory, or void, whose residually defined 'shape' may be likened to a sort of everted Swiss cheese due to its perforation by multiple (w)holes (Pedersen 2001), serves the role of the ground in relation to which a series of discrete perspectives (or worlds) constitute the figure. In that sense, the Darhad animist cosmos comprises not one unified whole containing all there is, but many *parallel worlds*, each containing the totality of relations enacted through a given point of view.

Before considering some concrete aspects and implications of this, as revealed in shamanic discourse and hunters' narratives, allow me to first make some further reflections concerning the nature of the above void, for it is here, I believe, that we find the source of the irreducible gap or lack, which, as I suggested above, is characteristic of the amythological animist cosmos. As argued by Caroline Humphrey (1995) and myself (Pedersen in press), we may thus speak of a given Mongolian nomadic landscape as organised according to the constellation of centres that exist within it. Some of these centres – such as the nomadic households (*ail*) – are moving, whereas others – such as the sacred stone cairns (*ovoo*) found on top of mountain passes – remain fixed. Either kind of centre, however, performs the role of a so-called co-ordinate singularity, which Humphrey's defines semi-deictically as a place 'which appears singular when a co-ordinate system has been chosen in a specific way' (1995: 143). In that sense, a given nomadic household forms part of a sort of planetary system, whose individual and collective movements during the nomadic migration cycle are determined by the mutual positioning of each nomadic singularity as well as by certain gravitation points, such as the *ovoos*.

The rest of the nomadic landscape is to all intents and purposes void, for it comprises the chunks of space which exist outside the above grid of planets and gravitation points; and it is upon these disparate chunks of unmarked and unqualified space that the nomads' livestock are put to grass, and across which they themselves must move when visiting one other, and when migrating (Pedersen in press). Deleuze & Guattari, in their celebrated essay on Nomadology (2001: 351–423), reach a similar conclusion:

> If the nomad can be called the Deterritorialised *par excellence*, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialisation afterward as with the migrant, or upon something else as with the sedentary … With the nomad, on the contrary, it is deterritorialisation that constitutes the relation to the earth, to such a degree that the nomad reterritorialises on deterritorialisation itself (1999: 382–3; emphases omitted)

Leaving aside the empirical objections that can be raised against Deleuze and Guattari's somewhat biased account of Mongolian nomadism and its relationship to various Inner Asian polities (Pedersen 2006; Sneath 2006), the above passage contains a crucial theoretical insight. Not unlike the manner in which, on the Yanomami ontology of discrete perspectives tentatively identified above, there had to be a virtual space of myth for there to be different points of view, so also, in the Darhad landscape, there has to be a 'deterritorialised' void for there to be a 'reterritorialised' grid across which the different nomadic units (persons, house-holds) are moving, or rather jumping, from one point to the next. Indeed, as Humphrey has demonstrated, nomadic migration in Mongolia is perceived as 'a spatial liminality, into and out of the otherness of "travelling that is not travel-ling" – paradoxically on otherness which serves to reassert the nomadic way of life – thereby negating movement in the everyday world' (1995: 142–3). People are in one sense moving and yet they are in another sense not moving at all, for the whole point about nomadic migration is for the world to repeat itself: one moves to be the same (Pedersen 2006).

This, then, is one where Deleuze & Guattari had it wrong: nomadism is not necessarily about *becoming different*, but is also – as in the Darhad context – a matter of *being indifferent* (see also Højer this volume). Thus, much like Polynesian ship navigators (Mondragon in press), the Darhad nomads are not really interested in the 'smooth space' (Deleuze & Guattari 2001: 353) which exists inside (or outside) the nomadic grid; indeed, the Darhads take an interest in this deterritorialised void only because of its capacity to bring them from one point to another, if not necessarily in a straight line, then at least along the well-tried path, which best ensures that, upon arrival, everything remains exactly the same as before (see Pedersen in press). For that is what nomadism is: a sort of intervalic leaping, where, instead of making the wind catch the sail to gradually glide from one position to the next (as in sailing), the trick is to catch the move-ment itself (*nüüdel*) in order to be abruptly 'jolted' from one singularity to another within the great nomadic void (as a trampolinist).

What seems to emerge, then, is a characteristically nomadic concept of virtu-ality. Unlike Deleuze's concept of virtuality, which has so far been imported by anthropologists mostly in order to come to terms with non-Western conceptions of invisible and/or mythological realms (Holbraad 2007; Viveiros de Castro this volume), the virtual plane which is comprised by the great nomadic void is supremely visible, but, due to the fact that people are making an effort towards avoiding or at least being indifferent towards it, it nevertheless serves as a latent background potentiality, which, like a sort of topographical myth, contains every nomadic movement that may ever be undertaken.

THE SKY AND THE SKIES

The above observations about the nomadic void bring us back to the Sky (Tenger), which, according to Heissig and other Mongolists (see e.g. Even 1991), is seen as a transcendental state of oneness from whence every being in the cosmos originates, as if they were all involved in a collective rite of hierarchical encompassment. This assumption is made very clear in the literature about *tenger* ('the skies') – a widely used term in callings for the shamanic spirits (*ongod*) when they are about to possess shamans:

> Over and over again in the folk-religious prayers and the shamans' songs of conju-
> ration it is stated that there is a total number of ninety-nine *tngri* (heavenly
> beings). They say 'Above are the ninety-nine *tngri* … below the seventy-seven
> levels of Mother Earth.' *Their chief is Köke Möngke Tngri, 'Eternal Blue Heaven'*
> … The attributes and iconography of the various *tngri* … makes it appear that the
> *tngri*, the gods or heavenly beings, have primarily a protective function … They
> are…not simply concerned with the protection and increase of the herds in
> general; certain among them, rather, each have a favourable influence on specific
> kinds of animal and specific aspects of Mongolian animal-raising (Heissig 1980:
> 49–55; emphasis added).

The question that is never posed in discussions of the above kind is whether the concept of *tenger* (*tngri*) really *is* a plural version of the concept of Tenger (Tngri); whether, that is to say, the many skies *can* in principle be internally reduced to – i.e. be hierarchically encompassed by – the one Sky? My claim, which goes against the grain of what seems to be an unquestioned dogma among many Mongolists, is that this is just not the case. The ninety-nine skies cannot be subsumed by Tenger, for while the latter being clearly occupies a higher and a more central position in the Darhad shamanic cosmos, it is at the same time imbued with less spiritual agency, at least from a layman's perspective, as I shall now show.

It is true that, in her book on Mongolian performance and art (2001), Carole Pegg paraphrases a female Darhad shaman saying that, when invoking the spirits, she 'feels that she leaves the earth and travels to the sky' (2001: 133). However, this translation of the *udgan's* words may need to be clarified, for, to the best of my knowledge, Darhad shamans never conceive of themselves as travelling to the Sky (*Tenger*) in the singular and Buddhist sense of a 'blissful centre point' existing beyond the chimera of human illusions (Snellgrove 1987; see also Da Col this volume); rather, they imagine the skies (*tenger*) as the first stop in a series of still more multiple dimensions, which shamans pass through during prayer and possession. Thus, while the term *tenger* figures prominently in shamans' invocations (*tamlaga*), the subsequent 'words uttered' (*heldeg üg*) by the possessed shaman contain little reference to the concept of skies. Indeed, during possession, the *ongod* are supposed to be right here, so it would be quite illogical to speak of – and *to* – them as if they were somewhere else, as 'up in' (*deed*) the skies.

The shamanic spirits, then, are not in any simple sense of the word 'above' the humans in the Darhad cosmos – and, judging from Humphrey's descriptions (1996), nor is this the case in the Daur cosmos.[3] Rather, a 'vertical' discourse of human ancestors ('fathers', 'mothers', etc.) seems to co-exist alongside a 'horizontal' discourse about zoomorphic spirits (bears, wolves, owls, etc.). The discourse about the skies can be said to constitute a conceptual technology through which the shamans are able to interpolate a transcendental dimension into the otherwise immanent realm of the shamanic spirits, as seen by the laymen (who, it should be noted, do not really care about the dimension of the skies – what matters for them is the moment of possession and not the process of prayers preceding it). Rather than reflecting different 'social ontologies' (cf. Pedersen 2001), the horizontal realm and the vertical realm thus seem to play the role of perspectivist positions, or deictic markers, themselves. Paraphrasing Viveiros de Castro (1998: 477–8), the laymen 'see things *as* [shamans] do. But the things *that* they see are different': what shamans see as an all-encompassing hierarchy of anthropomorphic ancestors, is to the laymen a dispersed multitude of zoomorphic spirits suspended in a void.

Another aspect of the Mongolian shamanic cosmos that is often presented as a clear-cut case of a spiritual ranking order is the fact that all shamanic spirits are said to belong to either the fifty-five 'western' or 'white skies', or the forty-four 'eastern' or 'black skies' respectively (for details, see Dulam 1992; Pürev 1999). In Darhad shamanism this is revealed, not only in the design of shamans' paraphernalia (Badamhatan 1986: 158–61, 190–91), but also in the invocations (see e.g. Even 1988–9: 101–75), where it is understood to offer vital clues about the personalities of the shamanic spirits (the more 'black' an *ongon* is, the more edgy and unpredictable it is believed to be). While it would be over-simplistic to view these ideas as the result of Buddhist influences alone, the division between the fifty-five white skies and the forty-four black skies closely resembles the Mongolian contrast between the 'yellow religion' (Buddhism), which is divine and pure, and the 'black religion' (shamanism), which is demonic and impure. But, again, this does not mean that the individuality of the spirits is eclipsed by this dualism, let alone the ninety-nine skies. On the contrary, one gets the impression that *the less* '*optimal*' (cf. Holbraad & Willerslev this volume) the rank of a spirit is within the hierarchy espoused by the shamans, *the more agency* it is imbued with from the point of view of the laymen. The 'big' (*tom*) spirits, on the other hand, while invariably referred to with devotion and respect, are not invested with very much concrete power to influence ordinary people's lives.

We are here reminded about Mark Mosko's (1992) comparison between Strathern's influential theory of Melanesian personhood and Sahlin's equally influential theory of Polynesian chieftainship. Mosko demonstrates that, while Strathern and Sahlins are both inspired by Dumont's work, their concepts of agency could not be more different:

> For Strathern, the (Melanesian) 'person' is not a unitary 'individual' but a
> 'dividual', multiply or plurally constituted of the earlier contributions and relations

of other persons. In acting, the person externalises [his or her] internal parts or contributions, and agency consists in a process of personal decomposition. It should be added that this view of sociality does not depend on there being any hierarchical arrangement among the detachable parts. For Sahlins, however, the 'person' is epitomised in the divine king or chief whose heroic capacities and actions summarise, unify, encompass and thus expansively internalise the relations of society's members as a whole … Persons of this magnitude personify their respective societies almost literally, that is, as 'heroic societies' … From these and other indications, it would appear that the efficacy of the Polynesian hero lies precisely in his (or her) hierarchical 'supercomposition' (1992: 698–9; emphases omitted).

In his subsequent ethnographic analysis, Mosko deploys this general contrast to account for the seemingly anomalous fact that, among the Mekeo people of Papua New Guinea, one finds examples of hereditary chieftainship that 'may provisionally be viewed as embodying the sort of hierarchical capacities' that Sahlins (and many others) associate with Polynesia (1992: 700). Yet, he argues, these chiefs should not be understood as occupying, Sahlins-style, a higher and more complete position than ordinary people. On the contrary, 'Mekeo chiefs … are heroically empowered towards the members of their groups, not by summarily or expansively encompassing those other persons within their own, but *by subtracting and externalising some parts or relations of their own identities on an even greater scale* as compared with non-heroic commoners' (1992: 701; emphasis added).

I suggest that precisely the same argument can be applied to the Darhad shamanic cosmos. Also here, we have something that at first glance looks as if it is a clear-cut case of hierarchical encompassment, namely the organisation by the shamans of their spirits into ancestralised and verticalised 'skies'. But also here, closer inspection reveals that no 'supercomposition' of all *ongod* (and their own multiple differentiations) is actually understood to take place. Rather, each shamanic spirit is imagined to be an ontological singularity, which cannot be internally reduced any further (and therefore cannot be fully subsumed by any 'higher' entity either). Some *ongod*, however, are able to 'subtract and externalise' parts or aspects of themselves 'on a greater scale' than others, namely the 'high' (*deed*), 'big' (*tom*) and 'white' skies. Yet, if we follow Mosko's Strathernian logic, with this increasing status these 'white' spirits also come to pay a significant price in terms of a corresponding reduction in their ('black') capacity to interfere in people's lives. Paradoxically, then, *the less* optimal the position of a spirit is within the logic of hierarchical encompassment followed by Sahlins and the shamans, *the more* agency it has.

What, then, about the spiritual entity which is occupying the highest position of all, namely the singular and unified Sky (Tenger), and to which, according to Heissig, 'all powers of and above the earth are subject'? Well, if one accepts the above line of reasoning, it seems to follow that this must be the spiritual being that is endowed with the least agency of all! This, however, is not to say Tenger

does not rule over anything at all, it is only to say that it does not have any proper subjects, if by the latter term we understand any human or nonhuman being that is able to entertain a point of view (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1998). After all, as demonstrated in the previous section, beyond the reach of the many shamanic spirits, their even more numerous metamorphoses (*huvilgaan*) as well as the many other kinds of spiritual entities, there is a vast residual space – the great nomadic void – which is not subject to any kind of spiritual influence (*nölöö*) whatsoever. For is not this empty space what the Sky – that seemingly omnipotent creator-God to whom everyone and everything in Mongolia is supposedly subordinated – is mainly – in fact, *only* – hierarchically encompassing? Certainly, this would account for why it is that so many Mongols (including my Darhad informants) are so curiously uninterested in Tenger compared with the 'lower' spirits of which there are so uncountable many, and between which the 'skies' represents a sort of ontological compromise.

THE *BADAGSHIN*

We can now turn our attention to the lore about 'half people', which is found among the Darhads as well as the neighbouring Duha people (see Kristensen this volume).[4] As we are about to see, these nonhuman beings fit perfectly into the 'layman cosmology' outlined above. It certainly is telling that the stories I gathered about *badagshin* were told by hunters, their wives, or their relatives – and never by shamans.[5] As such, the *badagshin* figure represents a distinct form of Inner Asian perspectivism, which not only differs from the asymmetrical or 'Mongolian' perspectivism discussed by Katherine Swancutt in this volume, but also from the horizontal or 'shamanic' perspectivism (Humphrey this volume), which was the focus of my own earlier studies of Mongolian animism.

While there is some inconsistency as to what a *badagshin* is, people generally say that it is a tiny life form (*jijig am'tan*), which may be encountered while hunting alongside other spiritual entities, such as game animals 'with masters' (*ezentei an),* land owners (*gazryn ezed*) and, not to be forgotten, the aforementioned shamanic spirits (*ongod*) in various zoomorphic guises. The other thing that everyone seems to agree about is that *badagshin* have 'half bodies' (*tal biyetei*). As an old hunter explained:

> *Badagshin* are people of the wilderness (*heeriin hün*). Their minds are like humans, but their bodies are half. They are small as dwarfs, only the size of an elbow. Sometimes, when hunters rest in the taiga, the *badagshin* come to scavenge the food that has been thrown away. They are a form of vegetation (*urgamal mayagyn yum),* I think – masters (*ezed*) for sure. In spite of their small size, they are extremely strong. They can pull as hard as a horse. Once, a *badagshin* caught a wild reindeer and twisted its antlers. No human being could do that. *Badagshin* are covered in yellow hair, especially during winter, when a bushy growth from their noses covers their faces. Tears are always running from their eyes, which

freeze them to the ground. In the summer, they are moving all the time, leaving
tiny footprints in the mud. If you try hard, you can spot them in the moonlight,
roaming around like children, naked.

Like other occult forest beings, the *badagshin* may be benevolent or harmful
towards man, depending on whether hunters' dealings with them – or rather, with
the particular animals, places or artefacts, which these beings are 'masters' of – is
adequately respectful. The following tale, for example, conveys an unmistakable
message about the advantages of taking good care (*iveeh*) of the different animals
in the *taiga*, wild or domestic:

> Let me tell you a story about the half persons (*hagas hün*). Once, there was a Duha
> shaman called Nyav Zairan, who owned only very few reindeer. But then one
> morning, he placed them on the sunny side of a mountain, from where they had
> disappeared when he returned in the evening. Some days later, they turned up
> again, healthy-looking and with beautiful and rare flowers on their antlers. The
> *badagshin* had taken Nyav Zairan's reindeer and decorated them. After that, his
> stock of reindeer shot up and he became a rich man.

In this and other accounts[6] of hunters' interactions with the tiny and yet mighty
half-people, one recognises various themes from Siberian hunting animism, as
described by Roberte Hamayon (1990) as well as, more recently, Piers Vitebsky
(2005) and Rane Willerslev (2007). There is, however, one important difference.
Whereas, among for instance the Yukaghir people of northeast Siberia, the hunter
is seeking to attain 'a "double perspective" whereby he can assume the animal's
point of view but still remain a human hunter' (Willerslev 2004: 648), then the
perspectivist transformation of the Darhad hunter, which is sometimes brought
about by meeting the *badagshin*, seems to be very different. Consider, for
instance, the following tale, which was recounted to me by a retired truck driver:

> *Badagshin* are rare. Still, if you are meant to meet them, then you will (*taardag
> hündee taardag*). Once, this happened to me. One cold winter night Dashnyam
> and I were hunting at Bosgot Ulaan Maraa. We were resting when a male deer
> appeared to drink from the salty bog. As the deer turned around in the moonlight, I
> realised that it was all half (*bugyn öröösön tal*). It only had one antler and just half
> the legs (*tal höltei*). Terrified, I woke Dashnyam up, and asked, 'what *is* this
> strange thing?'. 'It is something from the South', he said, 'We must go from here
> immediately'. So, we left without killing it. After we had galloped for a long time,
> Dashnyam stopped and asked me what I saw. 'I saw a half deer', I said. I felt a cold
> chill as he replied, 'Oh, I saw an old one-legged woman with a stick!' A few weeks
> later, Dashnyam died.

It is instructive to compare tales like this with similar narratives from the Siberian
context. Here, Rane Willerslev in his important analysis of Yukaghir hunting
practices argues:

> The aim of the hunter is not to become an animal and adopt its point of view in any
> absolute sense. Rather, he uses acts of mimesis to achieve what I [call] a 'double

perspective', which allows him to assume the point of view of his prey, while still remaining a human person with the intention of killing it. Thus, perspectivism among Yukaghirs is not really about moving from one point of view to another. Rather, it is about not surrendering to a single point of view. It is concerned with action in-between identities, in that double-negative field which I [characterise] as 'not animal, not *not*-animal'' (2004: 648–9)

There is little doubt that, for Inner Asian hunters too, adopting 'the "point of view" of a nonhuman person in any absolute sense' is something that 'should be avoided at all costs' (2004: 638). Certainly, among the Darhads, the only person who is capable of undergoing such metamorphosis and return unharmed afterwards is the shaman, and even for her it is considered to be a risky business, which requires much preparation and special equipment (see Pedersen 2007a). Indeed, the above tale conveys a crystal clear message about the dangers for hunters of turning into their prey, for is that not what the poor Dashnyam did, and ended up paying for with his life? After all, in seeing the *badagshin*, not in the form of a deer as did the narrator of the above tale, but in the form of a human being, it seems to follow that he *had already passed over* to the nonhuman side (during his sleep, perhaps?), in what turned out to be an irreversible and fatal change in perspective.

Nevertheless, the Darhad case seems to be fundamentally different from the Yukaghir one. For precisely where are the 'mimesis', the 'double perspective', and the 'in-between identities' to be found in the above narrative? Where, that is to say, is the Deleuzian 'logic of becoming' (Zizek 2004: 20),[7] which appears to be so important in Siberian cosmologies? In the variation of Inner Asian perspec-tivism at hand, it is not the hunter that comprises two perspectives, but the cosmos itself. How else are we to understand that, according to the narrator of the tale, 'the two of us saw two different things. I saw a male deer, he saw a lame woman. There are two ways of seeing; a good way and a bad way (*tiim yum hünd haragdval muu talaar haragddag, esvel sain talaar haragddag hoyor uchirtai*).' The *badagshin*, it seems, provide further evidence about the irreducible multi-plicity of the Darhad cosmos, for, by being seen only in the form of halves*,* they reveal – in the form of their virtual, invisible halves – an occult 'vicinity between the human and the nonhuman, … which rather than passing through the redun-dancy between them (their "community"), passes through their "disparity" (their "incommunity")' (Viveiros de Castro this volume).

Unlike in Siberia, where hunting perspectivism seems to amount to a gradual, or could we say incremental, process where one slowly (but, as Willerslev demonstrates, seldom completely) becomes something else, then, among Darhad hunters (as well, possibly, as other Inner Asian hunters too), perspectival exchanges are essentially abrupt, or could we say intervallic, as one here leaps from one discrete form of being to another, equally discrete form of being, not unlike the manner in which the nomadic journey involves jolting between a finite number of stopping points, which are distributed, grid-like, across an empty void of deterritorialised space, thereby avoiding 'at all cost' the movement, which, in the final analysis, makes this nomadic flickering possible.

Certainly, this would seem to explain why, in every narrative I have collected about the *badagshin* (including the different Duha variations), this being never figures as half human/half animal, as known for instance in the old Western image of the centaur. Instead, the *badagshin* are purely half – or, could we say, they are *wholly half* – in the sense that all one ever sees of them are half bodies (a reindeer with two legs, an old woman with one leg, etc.). *Badagshin*, that is, are not halfway people (or, for that sake, halfway animals), but precisely – as the retired truck driver also stressed himself – half people: beings whose internal heterogeneity can only be apprehended by piecing together (as opposed to merging into one hybrid mixture) two radically different points of view.

CONCLUSION

In his comparison between Badiou's and Deleuze's concept of the event, Keith Ansell Pearson writes that 'for Badiou, we need a different thinking of the event, in which the "excess" of the event does not emerge from the "inexhaustible full-ness of the world" but from its not being part of the world or attached to it; it is separated from it and it interrupts it' (2001: 150; see also Da Col this volume). Whilst I do not necessarily agree with Badiou's critique of Deleuze (let alone claim to fully understand it!, see Badiou 2000), this formulation seems to capture a core feature of the Darhad cosmos. As I have tried to show, there is a profound sense to which the world of my informants is not 'full', and never has been. It is not only that the Darhads do not operate with a concept of origin (a mythical state of chaotic fullness); it is also that, for many hunters and pastoralists, most of the cosmos amounts to a fundamentally negative space, in the grid between which a multiplicity of worlds are defined by constituting the points of view of different human or nonhuman bodies in their ongoing flickering across the great nomadic void. For, as we have learned above, what is this void other than the virtual nega-tivity of being, which makes the actualisation of discrete beings possible?

In that sense, the Darhads may indeed be described as structuralists, if by this term we understand not a universal model for making sense of cultural data, but a local ontology, which celebrates the 'finitary, combinatory and discretising' minutiae of ordinary life at the expense of the 'infinitesimal, intensive, disjunc-tive and virtual' (Viveiros de Castro this volume) expanse of the great nomadic void. While, in some parts of the world, 'classifications may be of service mainly to the extent that they are overcome, functioning more or less as trampolines for action and creation' (Goldman 2004: 8; cited in Holbraad 2007: 212), it thus seems to be the other way around for the Darhad Mongols. Here, it is the nomadic void which, by virtue of its emptiness, plays the role of a trampoline making possible the quantum-like jumping and jolting between finite worlds, which pastoralism – as well as hunting – amounts to. No less multiple than the Yanomami cosmos, where all entities are imbued with a capacity for 'trans-forming themselves horizontally into what they are not' (Holbraad 2007: 217),

the multitude of the Darhad cosmos is nevertheless differently constituted, for, unlike (say) the *xapiripë* spirits, the *badagshin* allow for a concept of 'visible virtuality' (the nomadic void), which renders superfluous the concept of an originary plane of existence in the form of myth.

Acknowledgements

NOTES

[1]For Humphrey, only certain aspects of the landscape (lone trees, rivers, etc.) constitute 'islands of attention' (my term) in the Daur shamanic cosmos (1996: 76–106). As we shall see below, also the Darhad shamanic landscape seems to comprise a disjunctive grid of disparate entities, which are suspended in a void. Unlike Humphrey, however, I do not consider this to be an effect of a relative distribution of knowledge about (attention towards) different aspects of the landscape. Rather, the void is *constitutive* of the Darhad cosmos: it is the very condition under which multiple things exist.

[2]It needs to be acknowledged, though, that things may have been quite different in the middle Ages, when John of Plano Carpini visited Mongolia. After all, this was a time when the Mongols were in the process of establishing a great empire, and when the shamans as well as the concept of the Sky were explicitly used to legitimise this new nomadic polity.

[3]Urgunge Onon, a Daur Mongolian scholar, told Humphrey that the shamanic spirits (*barkan*) 'were not "higher" than human beings, just different'. As he put it, "if you ask me whether *barkans* were higher than human beings that's almost like asking if a horse is higher than a cow, or a cow higher than a horse; they are just entirely different' (1996, 191).

[4]Among the Duha people, these entities are known as *avlin*. Unlike the Darhads, the Duha conceive of them as purely benevolent spirits, which may assume different zoomorphic forms, but always only in the form of 'halves' (see Pedersen 2003).

[5]The Darhad pastoralists and villagers tend to avoid the taiga, either because they are afraid of its ceaselessly roaming spirits, or because they simply do not take any interest in these marginal lands (*zahyn gazar*). In fact, the *badagshin*, the hunters and (scaling-up) the Darhads as a whole occupy similarly marginal positions in the Mongolian shamanic imagination, relegated as they are to the periphery of different centres (the pastoral steppe zone, the Darhad villages, and, on a larger scale, the nation-state). In that sense, the *badagshin* emerge as *hyper-hunters* (and, on a larger scale, as *hyper-Darhads*), playing the role of magical mirrors (cf. Humphrey this volume) that make visible to the Darhad hunters (and, on a larger scale, the Darhads as a whole) what they look like in the eyes of others (see also Pedersen 2007).

[6]A very similar version of this story has been told to me by Duha hunters (see Pedersen in press).

[7]According to Slavoj Zizek (2004), two different logics can be identified in Deleuze's work. First, there is the 'logic of sense', which is expressed mainly in his earlier works. Here, the proper object of philosophy is 'not the virtual space as such, but, rather, the very passage from it to constituted reality, the collapse of the multitude and its oscillations into one reality'. The 'logic of becoming', conversely, is represented by Deleuze's writings with Guattari. Here, holds Zizek, one finds a more 'traditional opposition between produc-tion and representation. The virtual field is (re)interpreted as that of generative, productive forces, opposed to the space of representations' (2004: 20–21). In effect, the aim becomes 'to liberate the immanent force of Becoming from its self-enslavement to the order or Being' (2004: 28). However, like Badiou's reading (2000), this remains a controversial rendition of Deleuze's work. It could, for instance, be retorted that, for Deleuze, becoming is not a matter of any ongoing generation, which 'requires "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells it in advance"' (Deleuze citing Bergson in Pearson 2001: 151), but instead involves a radical rupture between events, whose mutual relationship may thus be called 'heterogenetical' (I borrow the last term from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro personal communication).

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