

“THE SOUL OF THE SOUL IS THE BODY”

Rethinking the Concept of Soul through North Asian Ethnography

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The lexicon of fuzziness—including terms like *hybridity*,¹ *liminality*,² and *montage*³—is now in common use to describe what individual selves and collective bodies are supposedly undergoing in our age of globalization. Some theorists, for instance the feminist philosopher Donna Haraway, have singled out the “cyborg”—presumably the most fuzzy of beings—as an emblem for our time.⁴ The quintessential (post)modern body, she argues, is not a natural, biological organism, but rather a fuzzy hybrid of organic and inorganic, human and non-

The authors wish it known that they have contributed equally to this article.

1. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Uradyn E. Bulag, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–81.

2. Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

3. Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer’s Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Rane Willerslev and Olga Ulturgasheva, “The Sable Frontier: The Siberian Fur Trade as Montage,” *Cambridge Anthropology* 26.2 (2007): 79–100.

4. Haraway, “Cyborg Manifesto.”

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1 human, male and female components. These generalizations are assumed to
 2 apply globally (they concern globalization), but at least some anthropologists,
 3 specialists on non-Western cultures, have hesitated to join this consensus. For,
 4 as Marilyn Strathern has argued, “behind the democratizing concepts of impure
 5 cultures and hybrid networks lie [several implicit] asymmetries,” most notably the
 6 assumption that “we” (Euro-Americans) have longer (more “global”) networks
 7 than “they” (most non-Westerners) have.⁵ Bruno Latour may hold, for example,
 8 that all identities and cultures are hybrid, but he apparently thinks that some are
 9 more hybrid than others—and this continuum (or hierarchy) of hybridity seems
 10 to be organized according to old anthropological and sociological distinctions
 11 between “cold” and “hot” societies, or between “tradition” and “modernity.”⁶
 12 The weakness of this assumption, from the perspective of ethnographic research,
 13 is that, in the “animist” concept of “soul,” we find the same fuzzy boundaries
 14 between self and other, human and inhuman, inner and outer, that are said to
 15 characterize postmodernity in the advanced and sophisticated, globalizing West.
 16 Indeed, the fuzziness of self-identity is, and always has been, a key feature of
 17 human life in the hinterlands of North Asia and the Amazon.

18 E. B. Tylor launched the anthropological study of animism by defining it as
 19 a doctrine of the soul. The reflections of animists on such experiences as death,
 20 trances, visions, and, above all, dreams led Tylor to the conviction that these are
 21 all to be accounted for by belief in an immaterial entity, the “soul,” that forms the
 22 “groundwork” of all religions, “from that of savages up to that of civilized men.”⁷
 23 Tylor’s theory of animism (along with its Victorian twin, the concept of “totem-
 24 ism”) has been much criticized by later anthropologists; and his evolutionistic
 25 perspective, with its agenda to uncover the origin of religion, ceased long ago to
 26 interest and guide mainstream anthropology.⁸ Tylor’s concept of the soul, how-
 27 ever, is still alive and widely used by contemporary anthropologists writing on
 28 aspects of indigenous cosmology.⁹

30 5. Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance, and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (London: Athlone, 1999).

32 6. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

34 7. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, vol. 1. (1871; London: John Murray, 1958), 426, 428.

36 8. For criticism, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. K. E. Fields (1912; New York: Free Press, 1995), 53; R. H. Lowie, *Primitive Religion* (London: George Routledge, 1936), 99–135; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 25; Nurit Bird-David,

30 “Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology,” *Current Anthropology* 40 supplement (1999): 67–91; Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 15–16.

32 9. See, for example, Tim Ingold, “Hunting, Sacrifice, and the Domestication of Animals,” in *The Appropriation of Nature: Essays on Human Ecology and Social Relations*, ed. Ingold (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 1986), 243–77; Eduardo Viveiros De Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s., 4 (1998): 469–88; Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst, 2005), 135–38.

But what exactly is meant by “soul”? M. D. Stringer notes that Tylor was “notoriously vague on [this subject] . . . and while he talks at times of ‘phantoms’, at other times of ‘spirits,’ of souls that are ‘vaporous and immaterial’ and so on, he never actually offers one master definition.”¹⁰ Actually, Tylor did define the concept of soul, in his book *Primitive Culture*:

[The] conception of the personal soul or spirit among the lower races, [can] be defined as follows: It is a thin unsubstantial human image, in its nature a sort of vapour, film, or shadow; the cause of life and thought in the individual it animates; independently possessing the personal consciousness and volition of its corporal owner, past or present; capable of leaving the body far behind, to flash swiftly from place to place; mostly impalpable and invisible, yet also manifesting physical power, and especially appearing to men waking or asleep as a phantasm separate from the body of which it bears the likeness; continuing to exist and appear to men after the death of that body; able to enter into, possess, and act in the bodies of other men, of animals, and even of things.¹¹

One reason why so few have taken notice of this definition is its daunting wordiness; indeed several of Tylor’s critics have responded with definitions both more succinct and less vague. R. H. Lowie, for example, used a straightforward dictionary definition of *spirit* (“any supernatural being, good or bad”) to clarify what he meant by “spiritual beings.”¹² Émile Durkheim defined *soul* as “none other than the totemic [collective] principle incarnated in the individual . . . that represents society in us.”¹³ Tylor, on the other hand, described the soul differently with each reference, to cover everything from a shadow image to the highest ancestor spirits. Hence the question that Stringer and other critics have raised: of what analytical value is the concept of the soul “if [it] can mean whatever Tylor wants [it] to mean at any particular time.”¹⁴

Still, there is something about the ways in which indigenous peoples conceive of the interplay between visibility and invisibility, or materiality and spirituality, that makes it useful, even necessary, to define *soul* flexibly. Treating it, as Durkheim and Lowie did, as a technical term with a fixed referent is less instructive and helpful than Tylor’s vagueness of terminology, given the inherently fuzzy ontological status of the phenomena involved. Even a cursory glance at the vast literature on the topic offers evidence that indigenous conceptions of the soul tend to be vague, paradoxical, slippery, elusive, and apparently self-contradictory. George Devereux, for example, who studied the Mohave Indians, omitted refer-

10. M. D. Stringer, “Rethinking Animism: Thoughts from the Infancy of Our Discipline,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s., 5 (1999): 541–55, at 545.

11. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 429.

12. Lowie, *Primitive Religion*, 99.

13. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 268–71, 251, 274.

14. Stringer, “Rethinking Animism,” 545.

ences to other tribes in his work “because the data on the Mohave [conceptions of soul] are contradictory enough to make comparisons with other tribes undesirable.”¹⁵ Waldemar Bogoras, who lived among the Siberian Chukchi for many years and collected much detailed information about their religious ideas and practices, wrote that “very little . . . is said about it [the soul], and its name even is mentioned in only a few incarnations.”¹⁶ More recently, this paucity of discourse about the soul has also been pointed out by Laura Rival in relation to the Huaorani of the Amazon: “More targeted fieldwork may bring new evidence [about their idea of soul], or may not, as the Huaorani are extremely elusive when it comes to esoteric matters.”¹⁷ It is for reasons of this kind that Tylor’s vague, elastic, and therefore much-criticized definition of *soul* seems to us optimal. In many animist societies, people do not operate with a single concept of the soul, though this is not to say that these concepts belong to that domain of “counterintuitive ideas” that cognitivist anthropologists, like Pascal Boyer and Maurice Bloch, suggest are the basis of all religion.¹⁸ Rather, the animist soul is an inherently relative or deictic phenomenon, whose form depends on who perceives it and from where.

As various ethnographers have noted, a key problem for our understanding of animist concepts of the soul is that the soul in Judeo-Christian discourse is part and parcel of an ontological opposition of “inner” and “outer,” “spirit” and “matter.”¹⁹ Its substance is *spiritus*, “breath”—“what is most invisible in the visible, most immaterial in the material.”²⁰ The physical body and the immaterial soul are seen as two radically distinct substances.²¹ We find an early expression of this dualistic thinking in Plato, for whom, as Eric Alliez and Michel Feher write, “The body and soul are different by nature and . . . the immortal soul’s residence

15. George Devereux, “Mohave Soul Concepts,” *American Anthropologist* 39.3 (1937): 417–22, at 417.

16. Waldemar Bogoras, *The Chukchee*, ed. Franz Boas (Leiden: Brill, 1904–9), 332.

17. Laura Rival, “The Attachment of the Soul to the Body among the Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador,” *Ethnos* 70.3 (2005): 285–310, at 306.

18. Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Maurice Bloch, *How We Think They Think: Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory, and Literacy* (Oxford: Westview, 1998).

19. Åke Hultkrantz, *Conceptions of the Soul among North American Indians* (Stockholm: Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, 1953), 38; Valerio Valeri, *The Forest of Taboos: Morality, Hunting, and Identity among the Huaulu of the Moluccas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 24; Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, 57.

20. Valeri, *Forest of Taboos*, 24.

21. Still, within the “Western” tradition, there appears to be an undercurrent of animist reversibility and ontological fuzziness. Wittgenstein, for one, maintained that “the body is the best image we may have of the soul” (A. C. Taylor, “The Soul’s Body and its States: An Amazonian Perspective on the Nature of Being Human,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s., 2 (1996): 206). In Oscar Wilde’s “The Fisherman and His Soul,” a witch says to the fisherman: “What men call the shadow of the body is not the shadow of the body, but is the body of the soul” (see S. Nassaar Christopher, “Andersen’s ‘The Shadow’ and Wilde’s ‘The Fisherman and His Soul’: A Case of Influence,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.2 [1995]: 217–24, at 219). And, in Andersen’s fairy tale “The Shadow,” a learned man’s shadow is reversed, so that the man becomes the shadow of his own shadow (see Thorsten Sadovsky, “Of Shadows, Doppelgänger, and Caves,” in *Shadow Play*, ed. Martin Hochleitner, Dirk Luckow, and Karsten Ohrt [Heidelberg: Kehler, 2005], 25–30).

within the corruptible body is an exile.”²² Plato’s followers within the Christian tradition have emphasized ever since that, as a soul, one is never really at home in a corruptible body and must make an effort to extricate oneself.²³ H. H. Price, the Christian Platonist philosopher, went so far as to imagine the condition of disembodied human souls in the next world.²⁴ They would be aware, he wrote, of each other’s presence by entertaining purely mental images, communicating with each other telepathically, and having dreamlike (as opposed to bodily) perceptions of the world.

Among animist peoples around the world, there are few (if any) examples to be found of belief in an altogether immaterial soul.²⁵ Certainly, none can be found among the two North Asian groups that will be our focus here: the Siberian Chukchi and the Darhad Mongols. Indeed, the Chukchi term *uvi’rit*, which is usually translated as “soul,” has a linguistic root *uvi’k*, meaning, literally, “body.”²⁶ In an important sense, Chukchi souls are bodies. The Chukchi, for example, carve wooden amulets of people’s *uvi’rit*, which they feed with fat and blood from sacrificed animals. Owing to its quasi-physical nature, the *uvi’rit* is believed to have material needs: it not only eats and drinks, it can be hunted and eaten by other creatures. Similarly, the Mongolian term *süms* is commonly translated as “soul,” and yet there are many situations—particularly in shamanic contexts—where it denotes an ephemeral or fuzzy presence always hovering on the threshold of the visible world. Even so, the soul in these cultures is not understood to be as grossly, solidly, obviously material as the bodies of ordinary physical objects. Many Mongolians conceive the *süms* to be “the exact . . . image or shadow of the body.”²⁷ For the same reason, it is “thought to go on living after death, which is only the loss of the envelope, i. e. the flesh.”²⁸ The Chukchi likewise believe that the *uvi’rit* reincarnates itself in the bodies of infants, who are therefore considered to be returned deceased relatives. Tylor seems to have been alert to this ambiguous combination of matter and spirit when he described the soul of animist peoples as “a thin unsubstantial image, in its nature a sort of vapour, film, or shadow . . . mostly impalpable and invisible, yet also manifesting physical power.”²⁹

22. Eric Alliez, and Michel Feher, “Reflections of a Soul,” in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, part 2, ed. Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone, 1989), 47–84, at 51.

23. Alliez and Feher, “Reflections of a Soul,” 51.

24. H. H. Price, “The Soul Survives and Functions after Death,” in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger (1953; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 447–57.

25. See, for example, Lowie, *Primitive Religion*, 99; Hultkrantz, *Conceptions of the Soul*, 387; Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis,” 481.

26. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 332; for a comparable notion in the Amazonian context, see Taylor, “Soul’s Body and its States,” 201–15.

27. M. D. Even, “The Shamanism of the Mongols,” in *Mongolia Today*, ed. Shirin Akiner (London: Kegan Paul, 1991), 183–205, 184.

28. Even, “Shamanism of the Mongols,” 185.

29. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 429.

1 But what is the nature and the logic of these soul-concepts that combine
 2 the material with the immaterial and swim in and out of focus, and how are they
 3 connected to indigenous concepts of the body? Tylor left such questions hanging
 4 in the air. A more helpful point of departure (as each of us has explained else-
 5 where) is Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's theory of perspectivism,³⁰ which, though
 6 his applications of it are to Amerindian contexts, may be fruitfully extended and
 7 adapted to the North Asian context as well.³¹ Indeed, much has already been pub-
 8 lished on the theory, in which the soul plays a key part, both within and beyond
 9 the context of Amazonian cosmology.³² The Chukchi people of northern Kam-
 10 chatka and the Darhad peoples of northwestern Mongolia share, among other
 11 things, a perspectivist ontology (despite obvious differences in their economy
 12 and geography: the Chukchi live on Siberia's tundra and subsist on a combination
 13 of reindeer herding and hunting; the Darhads occupy the border between for-
 14 est and steppe on the Mongolian-Russian border, where they depend on animal
 15 husbandry and subsistence hunting for their livelihoods).

16 What Viveiros de Castro writes of the body-soul binary among the per-
 17 spectivists he has studied in Amazonia has relevance for the animist peoples of
 18 North Asia:

19 In Amerindian cosmologies, the spiritual or "invisible" dimension of
 20 reality is often referred to as "the other side." Such idiom, at first sight
 21 identical to our "the beyond," may actually mean something else. The
 22 other side of the other side is *this* side: the invisible dimension of the
 23 invisible dimension is the visible one; the soul of the soul is the body,
 24 and so on. I suspect that traditional "Platonic" reading of indigenous

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 26 30. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis";
 27 "GUT Feelings about Amazonia: Potential Affinity
 28 and the Construction of Sociality," in *Beyond the Visible
 29 and the Material: The Amerindianization of Society in the
 30 Work of Peter Rivière*, ed. Laura Rival and N. L. White-
 31 head (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19–43;
 32 "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of
 33 Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," *Com-
 34 mon Knowledge* 10.3 (2004): 463–84; "The Crystal For-
 35 est," *Inner Asia* 9.2 (2007): 153–72; "Zeno and the Art of
 Anthropology: Of Lies, Beliefs, Paradoxes, and Other
 Truths," trans. Antonia Walford, *Common Knowledge* 17.1
 (2011): 128–45.

36 31. Morten Axel Pedersen, "Totemism, Animism, and
 37 North Asian Indigenous Ontologies," *Journal of the Royal
 38 Anthropological Institute* 7.3 (2001): 411–27; "Talismans
 39 of Thought: Shamanist Ontology and Situated Cogni-
 40 tion in Northern Mongolia," in *Thinking Through Things:
 41 Theorizing Artefacts Ethnographically*, ed. Amiria Henare,
 Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell (London: University
 College Press, 2007), 141–66; *Not Quite Shamans: Spirit*

Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia (Ithaca,
 NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Rane Willerslev,
 "Not Animal Not Not-Animal: Hunting, Imitation, and
 Empathetic Knowledge among the Siberian Yukaghirs,"
Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 10 (2004):
 629–52; *Soul Hunters*; Rane Willerslev and Morten Axel
 Pedersen, "Proportional Holism: Joking the Cosmos
 into the Right Shape in Northern Asia," in *Experiments
 in Holism*, ed. Nils Bubandt and Ton Otto (Malden, MA:
 Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

32. Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Walnut Creek,
 CA: Altamira, 2004); Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell,
Thinking through Things; Morten Axel Pedersen, Rebecca
 Empson, and Caroline Humphrey, eds., "Inner Asian Per-
 spectivisms," *Inner Asia* 9.2 (2007); Bruno Latour, *War of
 the Worlds: What about Peace?* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm
 Press, 2002); "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics?
 Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck," *Common
 Knowledge* 10.3 (2004): 450–62.

body/soul dualities, which understands them to be synonymous with our “appearance/essence” distinction, is entirely wrong. It should be replaced with an interpretation of these two dimensions as constituting reciprocally the *figure* and the *ground* of each other, that is, a relation totally different from that between appearance and essence.³³

The Amerindian cosmos “is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human or non-human, who apprehend reality from distinct points of view.”³⁴ Jaguars, for instance, perceive the world as humans do and behave just like them, though from their own perspective; that is, jaguars understand themselves as people inhabiting villages and hunting the animals of the forest.

In the perspectivist cultures of Amerindia, as Viveiros de Castro describes them, humans and animals are regarded as imbued with the same capacity to see. This capacity he refers to as a “soul”:

To say . . . that animals and spirits are people is to say that they are persons, and to attribute to non-humans the capacities of conscious intentionality and agency which define the position of the subject. . . . Whatever possesses a soul is a subject, and whatever has a soul is capable of having a point of view. Amerindian souls, be they human or animal, are thus indexical categories. . . . Such deictic “attributes” are immanent to the viewpoint, and move with it . . . salmon are to (see) salmon as humans are to (see) humans, namely (as) human.³⁵

In Amerindian perspectivism, then, the concept of the soul is intrinsically relational or deictic. The soul is not conceived of as a distinct substance (whether material or immaterial) but as a particular formal attribute pertaining to certain relationships between humans and nonhumans (“the soul” as the “I” pointing indexically to a multitude of potential bodies that take the form of “you” or “it”). Thus, the concept of the soul emerges as an immaterial singularity that allows for the conception of multiple physical worlds, each of which is tied to unique capacities of bodily assemblage: “the spirit or soul (here not an immaterial substance but rather a reflexive form) integrates, while body (not a material organism but a system of active affects) differentiates.”³⁶

The Soul as Another Body

A number of anthropologists working in Amazonia have adopted Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivist model and have discussed its ethnographic and theoretical implications. Aparecida Vilaca’s study of “chronically unstable bodies” among

33. Viveiros de Castro, “GUT Feelings about Amazonia,” 42; emphasis in the original.

34. Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis,” 469.

35. Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis,” 476–77.

36. Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis,” 479.

1 the Amazonian Wari' is particularly useful for our present purposes, because it
 2 explores the reversibility between concepts of the soul and concepts of the body.
 3 Like Viveiros de Castro, Vilaca starts by emphasizing that, in the Amazonian
 4 context, one "cannot speak of the body without speaking of the soul."³⁷ How-
 5 ever, and crucially, "the reason, at least among the Wari' with whom I have been
 6 working, seems to be not that the soul gives the body feelings, thoughts, and
 7 consciousness, but that it gives it *instability*." More precisely, Vilaca explains, the
 8 Wari' consider all actual and potential human beings (that is, animals and spirits)
 9 to be imbued with *jamu*, a soul-like concept that "indicates a capacity to change
 10 affection and to adopt other habits, thus enabling the person to be perceived as
 11 similar by other beings."³⁸

12 This concept of the soul is inherently perspectival or deictic, in that *Jamu*
 13 is unevenly distributed in terms of visibility. A given person (human) cannot see
 14 his or her own *jamu*, while other persons (animals, spirits) can do so. They will
 15 see, however, a body other than the one that the human in question sees him- or
 16 herself to be in possession of:

17
 18 From ego's point of view, her own soul—invisible to herself—is also
 19 conceived as a quality that, in contrast to the body, identifies it with
 20 all other subjects. This quality is connected to a specific property of
 21 bodily transformation—namely the capacity to adopt new appearances
 22 as a means of acting within new relationships. From the point of view
 23 of others, however, the person's soul is an actualization of a body which
 24 these other people see in a specific manner, radically distinct (if they are
 25 another kind of people) from the way in which the person sees herself.³⁹

26 Clearly, soul and body are not conceived here in terms of a finite or fixed onto-
 27 logical opposition between spirit and matter, as they are in the Platonic and
 28 Judeo-Christian traditions. Instead, the one constitutes the "flip side" of the
 29 other, implying that each may take the place of the other: the soul becoming
 30 the body and the body becoming the soul. We can just as well say that the body
 31 is what is on the inside and the soul is what is on the outside, because the two
 32 belong together as "reversibles"—which, "unlike other expressions of counter-
 33 points—for example, contraries, antithesis, or polarities . . . are opposites that
 34 self-contain themselves."⁴⁰

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 36 37. Aparecida Vilaca, "Chronically Unstable Bodies: Reflections on Amazonian Corporalities," *Journal of*
 37 *Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s., 11.3 (September 2005):
 38 445–64.

39 38. Vilaca, "Chronically Unstable Bodies," 452.

40 39. Vilaca, "Chronically Unstable Bodies," 455.

41 40. Alberto Corsín Jiménez and Rane Willerslev, "An
 Anthropological Concept of the Concept: Reversibil-

ity among the Siberian Yukaghirs," *Journal of the Royal*
Anthropological Institute, n.s., 13.3 (2007): 527–43, at 538;
 see also Marilyn Strathern, "Out of Context: The Per-
 28.3 (1987): 251–81; S. F. Green, *Notes from the Balkans:*
Locating Marginality and Ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian
Border (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005),
 128–59; Pedersen, *Not Quite Shamans*.

The notion that the soul of the soul is the body might leave the impression that we are dealing with a straightforward duality between the two (not a Western, Cartesian dualism, to be sure, but a duality all the same). Yet, as Vilaca's ethnography illustrates, among the Wari' "the soul's relationship to the body is at once symmetric and asymmetric. Considered as a capacity, that is, the potential to adopt an indefinite number of body forms, the soul's relationship to the body is equivalent to the relation between the single and the multiple—hence asymmetric. However, since this capacity is always, from an outsider's perspective, actualized as a specific body, we can also state that the soul is symmetrical to the body."⁴¹ A comparable point is made by Carlos Fausto in his attempt to characterize Amerindian animism in terms of the predator/prey distinction:

In Amazonia, there seems to be a constitutive tension between the provisory unity of the person and its fragmentation into two different modes of plurality, the dual and the multiple. The dual may indeed emerge as a distinction between an interior essence ("soul," "mind") and an exterior envelope ("body," "skin"). . . . Most of the time, however, duality is much more complex because of its fractal structure and its scaling mechanism. Moreover, such duality coexists with the idea of a continuous accretion of potency throughout life, which is better conveyed by the notion of supplementation and is linked to a person's biography.⁴²

Among many Amerindian peoples, then, the soul is conceived of as simultaneously single and multiple, visible and invisible, as well as (adopting some Deleuzian terms) "actual" and "virtual" (or "extensive" and "intensive"). Apart from constituting the single, physical, actual, and extensive body by which a given person's soul appears in the eyes of others, it is also all the multiple, invisible, virtual, and intensive *other bodies* that this person might assume.

Accordingly, as Vilaca puts it, "if the soul is another body, or a body seen from the perspective of the Other, it is also a capacity (or an adjective) in opposition to the body as a realization (or a substantive)." Thus understood, the soul is not simply one body that ego cannot presently see (the soul as "symmetric substantive," in Vilaca's terms); it is all the potential bodies that ego might take at some future point (the soul as "asymmetric adjective"). Insofar, then, as the body can be described as the soul of the soul in Amerindian animism, a proviso needs to be added; namely, that this reversed body is not necessarily the same body as the one it is a (re)version of. What Vilaca's analysis adds to that of Viveiros de Castro is that the soul of the soul is *another* body—or, more precisely, *all the other bodies that a body could be*. This principle, scarcely thinkable in a Western rational-

41. Vilaca, "Chronically Unstable Bodies," 453.

42. Carlos Fausto, "Feasting on People: Eating Animals and Humans in Amazonia," *Current Anthropology* 48.4 (August 2007), 497–530, at 512.

1 ist and Judeo-Christian context, is applicable in animist contexts as far from the
2 Amazon as northwestern Mongolia and the Siberian tundra.

5 **First Case Study: The Chukchi Economy of Souls**

6 For the Chukchi, the world is a forest of traps, a dangerous place to be. Every-
7 where in the landscape, from the crevices in the rocks to the cracks along the
8 river banks, dwell cannibal spirits who attack the lonesome traveler, or cling to
9 him invisibly, so as to be carried to his encampment where they can find human
10 victims aplenty. As a Chukchi shaman explained to Bogoras: “We are surrounded
11 by enemies. ‘Spirits’ always walk about invisibly with gaping mouths.”⁴³ Much
12 of what goes on in the world of the Chukchi is expressed in this idiom of eating
13 and being eaten. Here Bogoras describes the much-feared evil spirits, the *ke’let*
14 (plural of *ke’IE*):

15 [They] go hunting and fishing, and the old men sit at home and try to
16 read the future by the aid of divining-stones. The object of their hunts
17 is exclusively man, whom they usually call “a little seal.” Their divining-
18 stone is a human skull, while men often use for this purpose the skull
19 of some animal. . . . After catching a soul, they chop it into pieces, cook
20 it in a kettle, and feed their children with it. . . . [However,] the *ke’let*
21 are not exempt from the attacks of shamans, who can deal with them
22 in the same way as they deal with men. The *ke’let*, on their part, call
23 shamans *ke’let*.⁴⁴

24 In the perspectivist ontology of the Chukchi, as in that of the Amazonians whom
25 Viveiros de Castro and Vilaca have studied, the difference between viewpoints
26 lies not in the souls of those concerned but in the specificities of their bodies, each
27 with its distinctive dispositions for action and perception.

28 Thus, while the *ke’let* go hunting for prey in the same way as human beings
29 do, what each class of beings sees as prey differs as their distinctive kinds of bod-
30 ies differ. To the Chukchi hunter, with his particular embodied perspective, a seal
31 is prey, whereas he himself, or rather his soul, is a “seal” from the bodily perspec-
32 tive of a *ke’IE*.⁴⁵ This type of interspecies transformation—where shamans and
33

34 43. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 295.

35 44. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 294–95.

36 45. Many examples of perspectivism are found in Chuk-
37 chi storytelling, in which it is often a theme of amuse-
38 ment. For example, in one story, a human hunter visits the
39 land of polar bears and start competing with them about
40 who is the best hunter (see Alexander B. Dolitsky, *Fairy
41 Tales and Myths of the Bering Strait Chukchi*, trans. H. N.
Michael [Juneau: Alaska-Siberia Research Center, 1997],

22). At some point, all the bears run to their houses fright-
ened by what they take to be the intrusion of a polar bear
into their encampment. However, what the polar bears see
as a polar bear is to the human hunter a small rat, and he
crushes it under his feet. Highly impressed by the courage
and strength of the human hunter, the polar bears let him
return unharmed to his own land.

hunters seek to take on an animal's embodied point of view by covering themselves in fur clothing that resembles the outward form of their game—is found in many places in North Asia.⁴⁶ However, we find yet another type of perspectival transformation among the Chukchi (and among Darhad Mongols as well). It is an exchange from one bodily form to another but with no indication that one's physical appearance has been changed with that of another being. People turn themselves inside out, in that “inner substance” and “outward form” cross over, each becoming the other, so that it becomes impossible to specify which is their body and which their soul. The soul is, as it were, the “flip side” of the body and vice versa. Before showing how, we need first to describe the workings of a type of amulet used by the Chukchi and their Koryak neighbors.

The *Ka'mak-lu'u*

Groups of Chukchi moved south into Koryak territory in the early 1800s,⁴⁷ and now many locals in northern Kamchatka, where Willerslev carried out his fieldwork, speak a dialect of the Koryak language (Chavchoven Koryak), although they consider themselves to be Chukchi.⁴⁸ Thus, the following names used for the amulet were given alternately in the Chukchi and Koryak languages: “watchkeeper” (Chuk. *GinrIre'tIIIIn*), “guardian” (Chuk. *inendu'llIn*), “assistant” (Chuk. *vinre'tIIIn*), “assisting companion” (Chuk. *vinre't-tu'mgIn*), “wooden spirit” (Chuk. *ok-ká-mak*), and “wooden face” (Kory. *ka'mak-lu'u*). The most common name for the amulet, however, is *uyi'cit*, which V. I. Jochelson simply translated as “soul” in his classic monograph on the Koryak.⁴⁹ None of Willerslev's informants could add anything about the meaning of the word but simply confirmed that it was the same as the Russian *dusba*, meaning “soul.” However, given that the Chukchi word for soul, *uvi'rit*, literally means “body”⁵⁰ and that the Chukchi and Koryak languages are “but branches of one linguistic family,”⁵¹ it is more than likely that *uyi'cit* means “body” as well as “soul.”⁵² In any case, “body” was the implied meaning of the word when used in conversations with Willerslev.

46. See, for example, Valerie Chaussonnet, “Needles and Animals: Women's Magic,” in *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*, ed. W. W. Fitzhugh and Aron Crowell (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1988), 209–27; Pedersen, “Totemism”; Willerslev, *Soul Hunters*, 89–90.

47. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 15

48. According to Patrick Plattet, who did fieldwork in the same community in Kamchatka as Willerslev, the term *uyi'cit* (or *uzizit* as he spells it) might be linked to a series of others indigenous terms such as *uzizik* (“to [re]heat,” by cooking or playing), *uzizichvet* (“[ritual] game”), and *uzizichvetik* (“to play”). Patrick Plattet, “Landscapes in

Motion: Opening Pathways in Kamchatka Hunting and Herding Rituals,” in *Landscape and Culture in the Siberian North*, ed. Peter Jordan (London: University College Press, 2008).

49. Vladimir Ilich Jochelson, *The Koryak*, ed. Franz Boas (Leiden: Brill, 1908), 101.

50. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 332.

51. Jochelson, *Koryak*, 428.

52. As with many other circumpolar peoples, the Chukchi believe that the name is firmly attached to the soul. Indeed, receiving the name of a particular ancestor also

1 The amulet itself, roughly cut from a tree branch, takes the form of a small
 2 human figure. The amulet is forked at one end to represent legs, and sometimes
 3 another branch indicates one arm with a two- or three-fingered hand. There may
 4 also be the mere suggestion of a head with a simple line representing the mouth,
 5 which its owner smears with tallow or bone marrow to “feed” it. Still, there is
 6 nothing about the little figure that resembles a realistic portrait of a human being.
 7 At best, it is an imperfect, at times even monstrous, depiction of a human body.
 8 This feature puzzled Jochelson: “Since the Koryak have attained quite a high
 9 degree of skill in carving figures true to nature, and in endowing them with
 10 motion and life, we cannot help being surprised at the crudeness of the outlines
 11 of their wooden representations of the ‘guardians.’”⁵³

12 As for the amulet’s use and function, it is fastened in the armpit of the
 13 wearer’s outer clothing or to the back of his leather belt and is believed to pro-
 14 tect him against attacks by the *ke’let*. As an elderly Chukchi woman explained to
 15 Willerslev:

16
 17 One time I had a bad dream. I saw my son riding on a reindeer sledge,
 18 which fell apart and he was dragged over the hard tundra. When I woke
 19 up, I knew that he was falling ill. So, I went out and found an alder tree
 20 with two branches making a fork. I placed some *Enelwit* [a mixture of
 21 rabbit fur and reindeer fat, which is said to be food for the spirits] in
 22 between the branches. Then I said to the bush: “Now I’ll take you with
 23 me,” and I pulled the branch toward me, so it broke off. At home, I
 24 carved a *ka’mak-lu’u* [small wooden figure] that I attached to my son’s
 25 belt. We call the figure *ka’mak-lu’u*, but it is also called *uyi’cit*. The per-
 26 son who wears it becomes altogether different. Not that my son became
 27 different, he was the same as always, but to the *kalau* [the Koryak name
 28 for the Chukchi *ke’let*, here understood as a disease] he is different. They
 29 take him for one of their own and leave him alone. . . . In addition, a
 30 *ka’mak-lu’u* will help the person to whom it is attached in various ways.
 31 At night time, when my son is asleep, his *ka’mak-lu’u* stands up and goes
 32 out to protect his reindeer against wolves. Early in the morning, when
 33 he wakes up, it is back hanging in his belt. . . . But a *ka’mak-lu’u* is also
 34 dangerous. You need to feed it or it can turn against you and suddenly
 35 kill you.

36 This passage provides important details about the relationship between human
 37 beings and *ke’let*, and it offers insight into the interplay between one’s body and
 38 *uyi’cit*. As it transpired, these two aspects mutually articulate each other.

39 implies receiving his or her soul. In this respect, it is
 40 interesting to note that traditional Chukchi names usu-
 41 ally have ugly or repulsive meanings, such as “Farting”
 (Chuk. *Toktkä*), “Shit” (Chuk. *Póka*), and “Fox’s Ass”
 (Chuk. *Kiyalltä*). The idea is that these names, which are

supposed to have a pleasant ring in the ears of the *ke’let* will
 trick them into believing that the human person is one of
 their own, in much the same way as does the *ka’mak-lu’u*.

53. Jochelson, *Koryak*, 115.

Ka'mak-lu'u is said to provide its human owner with *another body*—not just any kind of body but one that makes the *ke'let* take him for one of their own, thereby preventing them from preying upon him. This new, additional body can only be the body of a *ke'IE*, which, following the recursive logic of perspectivism, implies that the *ke'let* will see the owner of the *ka'mak-lu'u* as a fellow human being, rather than as animal prey. This consideration may explain why the *ka'mak-lu'u* is made in such crude, incomplete, and sometimes monstrous fashion, since, while the *ke'let* “see themselves anatomically and culturally as *humans*,” from the human bodily perspective the *ke'let* (when not invisible) appear to have exactly such hideous features.⁵⁴ As Bogoras writes, “The Chukchi agree that they [the *ke'let*] . . . have faces which are ‘of different sort’ [*a'lvam-va'llit*], not resembling anything else on earth. . . . Some of them have half-bodies, a detail which is also met with among artificial objects designed to work a spell.”⁵⁵ Another solvable puzzle is that the *ka'mak-lu'u*, which means “body,” is also called *uyi'cit*, a word usually translated as “soul.” The contradiction is only apparent, given the peculiar ontological implications of perspectivist thinking. For if the *ka'mak-lu'u* provides its human owner with another body, which the *ke'let* recognize as such from their perspective, then it follows quite logically that, from the viewpoint of this “spirit body,” the person’s *own* human body constitutes a soul that must be protected against predation from the *ke'let*. For the Chukchi of North Asia, as for Amerindians of the Amazon, “the soul of the soul is the body.”⁵⁶ Thus, the Chukchi and Koryak words, *uvi'rit* and *uyi'cit*, usually translated as “soul,” also mean “body”—and, though the *ke'let* are said to be soul eaters, the human person under attack experiences this predation as his physical body being wrecked (as, for example, by disease).⁵⁷ For the Chukchi and Koryak, body and soul serve alternately as “figure” and “ground” to one another, because each contains the other within.

The fixed Western distinctions between appearance and essence, outer and inner, have no purchase in this perspectivist logic of reversibility between body and soul. The Chukchi do distinguish body from soul, appearance from essence, and outer from inner, but each term in these binaries is fundamentally encompassed within its other.⁵⁸ On this recursive logic, the “exterior” lies at the heart of the “interior,” so that the body is present within the soul and vice versa; hence the two are mutually reversible. A peculiar consequence appears to follow: from the viewpoint of one’s ordinary human body, one’s soul is a *ke'IE*. As the elderly

54. Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis,” 477.

55. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 293, 294.

56. Viveiros de Castro, “GUT Feelings about Amazonia,” 42.

57. Jochelson, *Koryak*, 294; Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 295; Dolitsky, *Fairy Tales*, 57.

58. Cf. Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Corsín-Jiménez and Willerslev, “Anthropological Concept,” 527–43.

1 Chukchi woman told Willerslev about the *ka'mak-lu'u*, it is a trickster that might
 2 kill its owner. To understand fully the implications of this statement, we need to
 3 place it in the context of the great soul exchange between the living and the dead,
 4 which defines the Chukchi cosmos.

7 The Circulation of Souls

8 The principle of reversibility is a pervasive trait of Chukchi cosmology, repeated
 9 across different scales. In much the same way as soul and body are reversible, so
 10 the world of the deceased is conceived as a perspectival inversion of that of the
 11 living. The deceased inhabit *irangas* (tents) with their families, just as the liv-
 12 ing do, and keep herds of domesticated reindeer; when it is night here, it is day
 13 there, and the same goes for winter and summer. The bodies of the deceased are
 14 turned the “wrong” way around, so that they have the color of raw meat, and
 15 their heads and feet bend backward. Moreover, the deceased have plenty of rein-
 16 deer when they are scarce among the living (and vice versa). To speak, though, of
 17 the “deceased” and the “living” is not quite ethnographically accurate, because,
 18 from the viewpoint of each category of beings, *they* are the living while the *oth-*
 19 *ers* are the dead—a point important to bear in mind when considering the great
 20 exchange of souls that binds the two worlds together.⁵⁹

21 When a person in one world dies or an animal is sacrificed, their souls go to
 22 the other world, where they are reclothed with flesh. Every newcomer joins his or
 23 her own relatives, just as each reindeer killed joins its family herd. The deceased,
 24 the Chukchi say, are always eager to receive a soul from the other world, because
 25 they experience it as the physical return of a long-deceased relative. As soon as
 26 a child is born, its family members will ask “what relative has come back” and
 27 seek to discover the child’s true identity by use of a divining stone. The child is
 28 given the name of the deceased person he or she is believed to be, then takes his
 29 or her place within the wider network of kin. “The system,” as Lee Guemple
 30 describes it, “is regarded as a closed ‘circle’: no new spiritual components can
 31 enter, and none are ever lost.”⁶⁰ We are dealing, at least in principle, with a fixed
 32 pool of souls, from which it follows that death is an integral and necessary part
 33 of the creative circle of cosmic renewal. Indeed, not only do the living depend on
 34 the deceased for their supply of souls, but the deceased depend on the living to
 35 perform the acts of sacrifice that ensure the reproduction of their herds. Thus,

37 59. Roberte Hamayon has described more generally this
 38 life-exchange of souls in Siberian hunting communi-
 39 ties. We take much inspiration from her account: R. N.
 40 Hamayon, *La chasse à l'ame: Esquisse d'une théorie du cha-*
 41 *manisme sibérien* (Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie, 1990).

60. Guemple is writing with regard to the Inuit, but this
 summary also holds true for the Chukchi and Koryak.
 Lee Guemple, “The Inuit Cycle of Spirits,” in *Amerin-*
dian Rebirth: Reincarnation Belief among North American
Indians and Inuit, ed. Antonia Mills and Richard Slobodin
 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 107–22, at
 118.

during the yearly ritual of commemoration of the dead, domesticated reindeer are sacrificed in large numbers so the deceased can increase their reindeer herds.

From this commitment to reciprocate springs also the tradition of “voluntary death,” which, if not a frequent occurrence, is still practiced among the Chukchi of northern Kamchatka.⁶¹ It involves death inflicted by one’s relatives (through strangulation, stabbing, or shooting) at the request of the person who wants to die. This type of death is conceived as analogous to the ritual blood sacrifice of a reindeer for the benefit of the ancestors, and a person who wishes to die in this way sometimes declares, “Treat me like game” or “Give me a mortal stroke, since I have become for you like a game-animal.”⁶² It is not surprising, therefore, that to die “voluntarily” is praised by the Chukchi as the ideal death, because it signifies a person’s direct and unmediated reciprocation with the ancestors.⁶³ However, in general, people seek to postpone the moment of death as long as possible by making use of various kinds of sacrificial substitutes (reindeer, dogs, and models of animals). The exchange logic operating between the two worlds makes the status of the deceased ambiguous: on the one hand, they are conceived as associates in giving life; on the other, and perhaps even more so, they are seen as enemies in demanding it back. Bogoras points to exactly this paradox when he writes: “One line of native thought is inclined to consider the deceased as benevolent protectors of their descendants. . . . According to another belief, spread much more widely among the Chukchee, the deceased become, after death, a kind of ke’let hostile to man.”⁶⁴

“Scaling down” again to the relationship of body and soul, it is interesting to recall that not only does the *ka’mak-lu’u* represent the body of a *ke’IE*; it is also considered to be a “soul.” This soul can only be that of one’s previous incarnation—the deceased ancestor one is believed to be—which means that the *ka’mak-lu’u* is not only body and soul at once, it is also both ancestor and *ke’IE*, which is to say both the “guardian” and cannibalizing “enemy” of its possessor. Remember

61. Rane Willerslev, “The Optimal Sacrifice: A Study of Involuntary Death among the Siberian Chukchi,” *American Ethnologist* 36.4 (2009): 693–704. While Willerslev was in the field, an elderly man killed himself. A few days before his death, he had requested that his relatives kill him. According to their statements, they had all refused because they feared being charged with homicide by the Russian authorities. Still, the old man’s asking for assistance suggests that “voluntary death” is still practiced, if only in secret (Willerslev, “Optimal Sacrifice”). Moreover, Willerslev recorded several stories about voluntary deaths that took place as late as the 1960s and 1970s; see also E. P. Batianova, “Ritual Violence among the Peoples of Northeastern Siberia,” in *Hunters and Gatherers in the Modern World*, ed. P. P. Schweitzer, Megan Biesele, and

R. K. Hitchcock (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 150–63, at 155. The commonest motives for voluntary death are old age, long-term illness, and “bad luck” in domestic matters (e.g., childlessness) or in reindeer herding. Voluntary death is to be distinguished from the so-called youth suicides that are committed in great numbers, especially by males between 16 and 30 years of age. These young people do not sacrifice themselves to the ancestors, but kill themselves to “worry their kin”—that is, to harm the feelings of a lover or of close relatives.

62. See Batianova, “Ritual Violence,” 152, and Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 562.

63. Willerslev, “Optimal Sacrifice.”

64. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 336–37.

1 what the old Chukchi woman said: the *ka'mak-lu'u* is essentially a trickster, who
 2 may not only assist its possessor but also kill him—though, we might add, in
 3 doing both the *ka'mak-lu'u* is feeding the great circle of soul exchange.

6 **Second Case Study: The Many Darhad Souls**

7 The Darhad, clustered around the Hövsgöl province of northwestern Mongolia,
 8 evidence a shamanic conception of the person, along with concepts of *wi'rit*,
 9 *ka'mak-lu'u*, and *ke'IE*, that are found as well among the Chukchi more than 3,000
 10 kilometers away. As with the Chukchi, the Darhad may be described as onto-
 11 logical perspectivists⁶⁵ in the sense that they think that human and nonhuman
 12 bodies serve as the visible containers of invisible subjectivities that, under special
 13 occult circumstances, can travel between different bodies and therefore between
 14 different perspectives.⁶⁶ The Darhad term most commonly translated as “soul”
 15 (*süms*) emerges as irreducibly ambiguous with respect to fundamental questions
 16 of Western philosophy and theology. The problem is not only that it remains
 17 unclear whether *süms* denotes something material or spiritual but also that we are
 18 confronted with “various and contradictory accounts of the concept of the soul.”⁶⁷
 19 Indeed, Mongolians use a battery of terms to describe “metaphysical aspects of
 20 the person,” of which *süms* is only one, but it may be useful to consider attempts by
 21 other scholars to pin down the concept of *süms* (alternative transliterations: *suns*,
 22 *sunus*) before looking into these other concepts and their relationships.⁶⁸ Doing
 23 so will serve to introduce components of the shamanic cosmos necessary to know
 24 about when in pursuit of the Darhad soul.

25 Much energy has been spent exploring how Inner Asian perspectivism
 26 differ from their Amazonian and Siberian counterparts.⁶⁹ Less attention has
 27 been paid, however, to the subject of perspectivist transformation in Mongolian
 28 shamanism—to the question of which aspect of human and nonhuman persons
 29 it is that takes on the perspective of other persons. That aspect is clearly the
 30 soul, according to the French historian of religion Marie Dominique Even. She
 31 is able convincingly to tie the Mongolian concept of *süms* to the Darhad shamanic
 32 cosmos, in which people, animals, and spirits take each other's points of view in
 33 an inherently violent and dangerous process described in a vocabulary otherwise
 34 associated with hunting, sorcery, and corruption:⁷⁰

35
 36
 37 65. See Pedersen, “Totemism” and *Not Quite Shamans*.

38 66. Pedersen, *Not Quite Shamans*.

39 67. Even, “Shamanism of the Mongols,” 185.

40 68. Caroline Humphrey, with Urgunge Onon, *Shamans*
 41 *and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the*
Daur Mongols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 213.

69. Pedersen, Empson, and Humphrey, “Inner Asian Per-
 spectivisms.”

70. A person who is forced to pay bribes is said “to be
 eaten” (*idüüleb*), an expression that is also used for some-
 one who is cursed. See Harry G. West, *Kupilikula: Gov-
 ernance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago:
 University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Mongols see the young child's soul as especially mobile and vulnerable. . . . The adult's soul keeps mobility and ability to leave the body momentarily, as in dreaming or when under shock, and to take another form (for example, that of a small insect, a bee, etc.). . . . If the soul does not return to the owner, through ritual calling of the soul or curative séance by the shaman, it can lead to the death of the owner. Hence the interpretation of illness as the loss of one's soul, or its ill-treatment by some evil spirit; in fact, the shaman's interventions are mostly based on the manipulation of souls. As for the shaman's soul, which is of dual nature, it is able to travel in the other world to meet the spirits, to adopt different (zoomorphic) aspects, to "eat"—or to be eaten by—the soul of an adverse shaman.⁷¹

As her account suggests, Even assumes that *siins* can be translated as "soul" through a transparent mapping of meaning between the semantic spaces of terms from vastly different languages and cultures. She also seems to work from the assumption that the meaning of *siins* is transparent and satisfactory to the Mongols themselves, its semantic space representing all the different metamorphoses through which the invisible aspect of a person reveals itself. In her mentioning "zoomorphic aspects" of the shaman's soul, though, Even does suggest that *siins* is not the only term by which Mongols refer to metaphysical states embraced by the Western concept of the soul.

Among shamanic groups inhabiting the forest zone between Mongolia, Russia, and China, one finds indeed an extraordinary variety of terms that may be translated, more or less directly, as "soul." So, while *siins* is a prominent concept in all these contexts, one often gets the impression that it is not able to stand alone—people need recourse to other metaphysical concepts of the person in order to describe their different affective states and components. Among the Daur Mongols, for example,

the word *sumus* could refer to an immortal consciousness that after death would become an ancestor, or to a consciousness that was normally extinguished in sleep (but could leave the body in dreams), or to an entity that separated from the body at death, "changed appearance," and returned to the world in some other form. There were also ideas of a life-energy (*ami* [breath]) and an inherent might (*sul'd* or *suli*) both of which were different from the *sumus*, according to Urgunge. Although the literature on shamanism has called any of these "souls" . . . Urgunge said that living creatures have only one soul (*sumus*), and furthermore that it made no sense to talk of this in relation to someone who was alive and healthy. One talked of *sumus* when people were suffering, dreaming, at death's door, or indeed dead. *Sumus* was thus an overarching concept that implied a human existence both in and beyond the confines of the body.⁷²

71. Even, "Shamanism of the Mongols," 186.

72. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 213.

1 This account of Caroline Humphrey's conversations with the Daur intellectual
 2 Urgunge Onon on the Daur concept of the soul captures the sense of vague-
 3 ness, ambivalence, and fuzziness characteristic of such discussions with Mongols,
 4 including the Darhad.⁷³ Pedersen has often asked his Darhad friends and inter-
 5 locutors, How can the *süins* both constitute an inalienable aspect of a person (it
 6 is generally held that, if you lose your *süins*, then you will die) and simultaneously
 7 be a detachable part of the same person, which can temporarily travel beyond
 8 the confines of his physical body (as in dreaming)? And why is it stressed that
 9 a person can have only one *süins*, which is singular and indivisible, and yet often
 10 deploy a host of heterogeneous metaphysical concepts of the person, such as *ami*,
 11 *suli* and *hiimor*?

12 Once again, our solution to these conundrums is not to posit (in the posi-
 13 tivist tradition of Durkheim or Lowie) a clearer definition of the Darhad soul.
 14 Rather, as in the Chukchi case, the Darhad shamanic cosmos seems based on a
 15 fuzzy logic, where what is considered to be the soul varies according to the point
 16 of view from which it is seen. Indeed, Darhad souls are not immaterial inversions
 17 of Darhad bodies but rather eversions that become visible only as different bodies
 18 are reversed or turned inside out.

21 The Hunting *Ongon*

22 Many Darhad individuals and households are in possession of shamanic para-
 23 phernalia that serve as physical containers, receptacles, or vessels for shamanic
 24 spirits. As elsewhere in the Mongolian cultural zone, these are called *ongod*
 25 (singular *ongon*).⁷⁴ As with the Chukchi word *ka'mak-lu'u* (and indeed with the
 26 famous Polynesian concept of *mana*), *ongod* refers to both the spirits in their invis-
 27 ible form and to their visible manifestations in sacred places in the landscape,
 28 in various wild animals (bears, foxes, deer), and—above all—in spirit talismans
 29 (sometimes known as *ongon shüüiten*). During the late 1990s, many (though by
 30 no means all) Darhad individuals and households were in possession of lineage
 31 talismans (*yasgüür ongod*) or household talismans (*geriin ongod*), which served
 32 as both containers of and receptacles or vessels for different kinds of shamanic
 33 spirits. In this light, the word *vessel* is a particularly apt translation of *ongon*, given
 34 that the latter is etymologically related to the Mongolian *ongots*, meaning “vessel,
 35 receptacle, and boat.”⁷⁵

37
 38 73. For an account of the urban economy of souls in Mon-
 39 golia's capital Ulaanbaatar (and the many difficulties and
 40 problems but also hopes and opportunities that it pre-
 41 sents), see Morten Axel Pedersen and Lars Højer, “Lost
 in Transition: Fuzzy Property and Leaky Selves in Ulaan-
 baatar,” *Ethnos* 73.1 (2008): 73–96.

74. Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia* (London:
 Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Even, “Shamanism of
 the Mongols.”

75. Caroline Humphrey, *Marx Went Away—But Karl
 Stayed Behind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press,
 1998), 427.

While anyone may be involved in *ongod* worship, it is shamans, hunters, and others (such as blacksmiths) imbued with extraordinary and thus potentially occult abilities who are in possession of the most elaborate vessels. Unlike the vessels kept by households in their yurt, which tend to consist of nonfigurative bundles made up of cotton ribbons, silk scarves (*hadag*), leather strings, as well as animal fur, teeth, claws, and beaks, the hunting talismans (*anchny ongon*), which hunters may keep inside or outside their homes, have more recognizable zoomorphic designs.⁷⁶ And, unlike the former, which ideally are consecrated by shamans, the hunter has the sole responsibility for designing, making, consecrating, and interacting with his hunting vessel. Most of the hunting vessels that Pedersen saw during fieldwork had a very simple (Tylor might have said “archaic”) design, consisting of a small figurine made of fur, skin, or wool from the game animal in question. Like their Chukchi counterparts, the Darhad hunters are not trying particularly hard to make naturalistic representations of the animals depicted on their vessels; indeed, the design of these artifacts appears to reflect quite different concerns and strategies. What matters, Pedersen was told, is that the hunter is gifted (*mergen*), for such a person “will automatically know how to make the *ongon* from his hunting.”

Still, there is a more general sense in which the design and use of hunting talismans resemble the Chukchi engagement with *uyi'cit* or *ka'mak-lu'u* amulets. As a prominent Darhad hunter explained to Pedersen:

Good hunters have many different *ongod*. It is important to wake [*sergeb*] each of them in the right manner, to feed them with milk and other *idee* [milk products], and so on. It is common to make a hunting vessel before going hunting for a new species of animal, but it is also possible to do it after returning, if the hunter has been in contact with a master [*ezen*] of the game. The point is to not be hit by the *siins* of the animals. Take me, for instance. Because I hunt a lot of marmot, it is inevitable that I will sometimes return with some marmot things [*yum*]. Upon my return, my marmot vessel will absorb [these] and I will be fine.

We see here that hunting vessels are powerful and, for the same reason, indispensable protectors. Like occult lightning rods, they shield hunters from the dangerous gaze of shamanic spirits (*ongod*) when, during their fleeting manifestations in the bodies of game, they take the form of “animal souls” (*angiin siins*) and “land masters” (*gazryn ezed*).⁷⁷

76. For more details, see Pedersen, *Not Quite Shamans*.

77. As implied in the citation from the hunter, there are two kinds of game. On the one hand, there are the ordinary wild animals, which, at the moment of the hunt, are not imbued with any spirit master and for the same reason do not pose any particular danger (apart from some of them being predators that may attack you). On the other hand,

there are those wild animals that are potentially lethal to hunt because their bodies happen to be inhabited by the *ongon siins* of a dead shaman when the hunter encounters them (the majority of Darhads' *ongod* originate from the souls of dead shamans, which are released from their bodies years after they have been buried in the forest).

1 These talismans, however, are not just defensive technologies (as a shield
2 or a set of armor is) that enable the hunter to return safely from his hunt. They
3 are also aggressive weapons that, like lassos or traps, allow hunters to allure and
4 capture the bodies and the *süins* of their game:

5 As containers of souls [*süinsnii sav*], hunting vessels bring the game to
6 hunters. A hunter with a marmot vessel will become like a marmot. For
7 this reason, the marmot will not be scared. It will think of him as [one
8 of its own] people, as a person [*büin*]. It will not recognize the hunter,
9 for he has become a marmot. A hunter with a marmot vessel acquires
10 a marmot *süins*; a hunter with a wolf vessel acquires a wolf *süins*. So, the
11 wolf doesn't know [that the hunter is human], nor does the marmot.

12 This explanation, from Pedersen's Darhad interlocutor, is instructive on several
13 accounts. First, it offers a model case of ontological perspectivism: because the
14 hunter has a marmot vessel, the marmot does not see him as a dangerous predator
15 hunting for marmot prey, but rather as a "person" belonging to its own "people."
16 In much the same way, Pedersen has found, the Darhad shaman is considered to
17 have two bodies (*boyor biyetei*), one being his or her ordinary human body and
18 the other being the extraordinary spiritual body, or rather bodies, with which
19 the shaman becomes endowed from the moment he or she dons the shamanic
20 gown (also known as the shaman's "armor"). A possessed shaman wearing the
21 gown becomes an ordinary Darhad person turned inside out, for the shamanic
22 performance and the design of the gown render visible, for a moment, what nor-
23 mally cannot be gauged from outer appearance, namely the invisible potential
24 for greediness, envy, and violence (the so-called black side) that every person
25 includes.⁷⁸ The costume, in short, provides the shaman with a second, alternative
26 body: a sort of magic skin that makes it possible to englobe, and probe into, the
27 otherwise hidden interiors of persons.

31 **The Hunter's Two Souls**

32 But a puzzle remains. If we look more carefully at what the hunter said to Peder-
33 sen, we see that he did not speak of hunters assuming the body of a marmot (or
34 a wolf) but rather the soul (*süins*) of a marmot (or a wolf). A given hunting vessel,
35 it would seem, does therefore not equip the hunter with two bodies but with *two*
36 *souls*, namely his own *süins* and the *süins* of the specific animal to which this talis-
37 man corresponds. How, then, are we to reconcile these two seemingly contradic-
38 tory ideas about the shamanic cosmos? On the one hand are the shamans, who,
39 while wearing their gown in the shamanic ritual, are said to have "two bodies,"
40

41 ⁷⁸. See Pedersen, *Not Quite Shamans*.

one human and one spiritual. On the other hand are the hunters who, while using their vessels, are known to be imbued with “two souls” (*süns*), one human and the other animal. But perhaps there is no contradiction between these two scenarios. Instead of constituting two opposite ideas, the Darhad shaman’s two bodies and the Darhad hunter’s two souls may be mutually reversible—or ontologically fuzzy—in the same way as the Chukchi term for soul (*uvi’rit*) includes its opposite (body). If, as Viveiros de Castro puts it, “the other side of the other side is *this* side,” then what from the one perspective is a body must take the shape of a soul when seen from the other perspective.⁷⁹ In the context of the Darhad shamanic ritual, the point of view remains on *this* (the human) side: the shaman is said to have two bodies because, from the point of view of the ritual audience, his or her shamanic costume constitutes a magic skin, which renders the so-called black side of Darhad persons visible. Conversely, in the case of the hunting vessel, everything is seen from the *other* (the nonhuman) side: the hunter is imbued with two souls (*süns*), because from the nonhuman perspective of the marmots, the marmot vessel does not constitute a visible thing (as it does for the humans) but an invisible soul, which automatically attracts the marmots, whose bodies in that sense become possessed by the *ongon* or, rather, by its “master,” the hunter.

Just as in the Chukchi case, then, “the invisible dimension of the invisible dimension is the visible one,” for what is visible to the Darhad hunter (the hunting *ongon* as a thing) turns out to be invisible to his game (the hunting *ongon* as a soul) and vice versa.⁸⁰ In that sense, the Darhad hunter can be said to be a sort of shaman in his own right (a point that is also sometimes made by the Darhads themselves), for the hunting vessel plays the same role, vis-à-vis the hunter’s game animals, as the shamanic costume does with regard to the shaman’s spirits: both artifacts are occult attractors or magical skins, imbued with the capacity to momentarily turn things inside out. The only difference is that, in the use of hunting vessels, the objects of reversal are not the bodies of humans (as in the shamanic ritual) but the bodies of animals.

Final Remarks

Our two case studies have focused on the most common Darhad and Chukchi terms for soul (*süns* and *uyi’cit*), but these terms by no means exhaust all the ways in which North Asian peoples speak about human and nonhuman souls or, more precisely, about their metaphysical concepts of different kinds of persons. Even adding *ami* and *süld* to *süns*, as Caroline Humphrey does, gives little sense of how rich is the vocabulary with which Darhads and other shamanic groups in Northern Mongolia speak about the metaphysical composition of human and

79. Viveiros de Castro, “GUT Feelings about Amazonia,” 42.

80. Viveiros de Castro, “GUT Feelings about Amazonia,” 42.

1 nonhuman persons.⁸¹ Some of the most prominent terms in use are: *sanaa* (“sen-
 2 sibility”), *ubaan* (“mind”), and—constituting a varied subset of their own—*buvil-*
 3 *gaan* (“metamorphosis”), *zarch* (“helper”), *daguul* (“escort”), and *güüdel* (“path”),
 4 all of which denote the different instantiations, in the landscape, wild animals,
 5 and sacred artifacts, of the shamanic spirits.⁸² Likewise, as regards the Chuk-
 6 chi and the Koryak, both Bogoras and Jochelson note the multiplicity of soul
 7 concepts among these two Siberian groups (as underscored by the many terms,
 8 already noted, that are used for their amulets).⁸³

9 Bearing in mind that, in Chukchi cosmology, the most common word for
 10 soul (*wi`rit*) also means body, we may perhaps speak of the singular soul (*siins*,
 11 *wi`rit*) as the sole assembly point of its many instantiations (Dar.: *süld*, *güüdel*,
 12 *buvilgaan*, etc.; Chuk.: *wê`kkIrgin*, *tetkényun*, *ya`nra-ka`lat*, etc.). In the same way,
 13 the body (or more precisely the torso) is the only point of intersection between
 14 the different limbs (arms, legs, wings). Indeed, the Chukchi say that, in addition
 15 to the soul (*wi`rit*) that pertains to the whole body, a person also possesses special
 16 “limb-souls” for the hands, feet, and other body parts. Any of these may be stolen
 17 and eaten by evil spirits, so that if you, for example, get frostbite, you may claim
 18 to be short of the limb-soul that inhabits your nose.⁸⁴

19 What might appear, then, to be two prototypical concepts of the soul in
 20 particular animist and shamanic contexts, turn out to be no more than conceptual
 21 gatekeepers or gathering points for multiple bundles of terms and assemblages
 22 of ideas, which together add up to “the concept of the soul” in the respective
 23 Darhad and Chukchi contexts. In light of the ontological perspectivism of these
 24 two North Asian peoples, it would seem to follow that—inasmuch as the soul
 25 (and, therefore, the body) is nothing more than a perspectivist implication of the
 26 constant exchange between different points of view—then there simply cannot
 27 be any single term (let alone definition) that encompasses all of these positions.
 28 Doing so would be like using the personal pronoun “I” not only for the first-
 29 person singular but for other grammatical combinations of number and gender.

30 With these observations in mind, we may return to Tylor and his much-
 31 lamented lack of a proper definition of *soul*. For it transpires that he was aware
 32 of the fundamental ambiguity between what is material (visible) and what is
 33 spiritual (invisible) in indigenous conceptions of the soul. Evidently, however, he
 34 was unable to theorize and explain this inherent fuzziness, using the conceptual
 35 framework available to him at the time. Instead, he described his approach as
 36 “Materialistic” (rather than “Spiritualistic”), presumably alluding to and siding
 37

38 81. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 213.

et Sibériennes 19–20 (1988–89): 357–58; Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 101–3, 297–98.

39 82. See also S. Badamhatan, “Les chamanistes du Boud-
 40 dha vivant,” *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes* 17 (1986); M. D.
 41 Even, “Chants de chamanes de mongols,” *Études Mongoles*

83. Jochelson, *Koryak*, 101–2; Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 332–33.

84. Bogoras, *Chukchee*, 332–33.

with the empiricist British philosophical tradition, as opposed to the more meta-
 physical schools of philosophy and theology of his time, with their Neoplatonist
 preference for entities, such as souls, ghosts, spirits, and gods, that are beyond
 empirical study.⁸⁵ Still, it was this dichotomy between the material and the spiri-
 tual that betrayed him, because it locked him into a Judeo-Christian understand-
 ing of the soul as spiritual, completely divorced from materiality, even though
 his own attempt at defining the soul flatly contradicted any such understanding.

Anthropologists and others with an interest in understanding non-Judeo-
 Christian and non-Cartesian conceptual traditions now have ontological per-
 spectivism as a theoretical framework allowing for conceptions of the soul that
 blur the distinctions between materiality and spirituality, inner and outer, self
 and other. Among both the Chukchi and the Darhads, as we have seen, what
 constitutes the invisible soul (and the visible body) depends on the perspective
 that one inhabits, and the two regularly trade places with each other. Indeed, the
 material and the spiritual become “flip sides” of one another. Such a deictic cos-
 mos necessarily calls for a bundle of names for what some in the West term, sim-
 ply, the *soul*, for the concept is not susceptible to naming with a single technical
 term with unambiguous referents. We can only praise Tylor for his sensitivity to
 the inherent fuzziness of animist cosmologies, though he lacked the conceptual
 toolbox to fully theorize them.

85. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 425.