Staged Otherness

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Chapter Five

Why Hidden Ears Matter: On Kalintsov’s Samoyed Exhibition in Vienna, 1882

Evgeny Savitsky

Authentic Fictions

Going out for a walk on Easter Sunday 1882, Friedrich Müller, professor at the University of Vienna, noticed a huge poster on the street depicting human figures almost at full height. The poster reported that Samoyeds had arrived in Vienna from the shores of the Arctic Ocean with a real yurt and their deer, and that a Russian accompanied them. Samoyeds were to be seen at the Orpheum Theater in the Wasagasse—a theater that was very popular among the public in the cold half of the year (Müller 1886, 25). Looking at the poster, Müller suspected something was amiss. He recalled that not long ago in Vienna an advertisement was issued about a show of real Zulus,1 whose arrival attracted great attention, but as soon became clear, these were not true Zulus but “the most harmless blacks” (Müller 1886, 25) from the Temne tribe (in what is now Sierra Leone), who had been taught while in Europe what should have looked like eerily wild Zulu dances. When the substitution of the Zulus was discovered, the police intervened and the organizers had to curtail their performance, taking it to other places.2 So, looking at the posters with Samoyeds, Müller suspected yet another deception. Could someone really bring Samoyeds to Vienna? Maybe the public would actually be shown just Ostyaks?3

1 Müller does not give the precise date of this show. The Zulus attracted particular interest in Europe after they defeated British troops at Isandlwana in 1879. Many in Germany saw similarities between King Cetshwayo and the Germanic chieftain Arminius who fought against the Romans.
2 On real and fake exhibitions in Vienna at this time, see Schwarz 2001.
3 The words “Samoyeds” and “Ostyaks” were used in the nineteenth century by Russians to describe a wide range of very different ethnic groups. “Samoyeds” referred mainly to those speaking Samoyedic languages and living along the Arctic shores of Russia from the White Sea to the Laptev Sea, including the island Novaya Zemlya (Nenets, Enets, Ngasans, Selkups). Ostyaks referred to different ethnic groups (mainly Khanty and Kets) living to the east of the Ural Mountains in western Siberia, including some groups speaking Samoyedic languages like the Selkups, who were known as Ostyak-Samoyeds. It was not a very
Müller’s doubts increased a couple of days later, when a friend of his who managed to visit the Orpheum informed him that the Samoyeds were sitting there on the stage around their tent at a decent distance from the public and that all attempts to ask them to come closer were unsuccessful. The huge Russian accompanying the Samoyeds answered all the requests with only a grin. Then Müller decided that he should go to the Orpheum himself and try to speak with Samoyeds in their language. Having met at the Imperial and Royal Court Library the journalist Johannes Meißner, who wrote for the *Deutsche Zeitung* (*German Newspaper*), Müller suggested that they go to the Orpheum together. So on April 13, 1882, in the afternoon, they entered the dimly lit hall of the theater, where in the middle around a yurt there were some fur-clad creatures fenced off from the audience by a special grill. As Müller wrote later (1886, 25), “I was determined to directly address these people in their native language,” and if they understood it, to find out what dialect they spoke and which Samoyed tribe they came from.

Why was Müller so interested in the Samoyeds, much more than in the Siberian Ostyaks? As an orientalist and linguist Müller was actively involved in ethnographic research. In 1873 was published his *Allgemeine Ethnographie* (*General Ethnography*). In those years, he knew very little about Samoyeds, but in 1881, a year before the events described, the French *Revue d’Anthropologie* (*Anthropological Review*) published a book review by Edmond Vars concerned with the works of the Russian zoologists Anatoly Bogdanov and Nikolay Zograf (Vars 1881). On the eve of the anthropological exhibition in Moscow of 1879, Zograf made a trip to the north to collect anthropological and ethnographic material. He bought up samples of “folk culture,” took measurements, and even secretly dug up and stole the remains of the dead. He reported his findings in letters to his senior coll...
league, Professor Bogdanov, who on the eve of the exhibition published a study of skulls brought by Zograf (Bogdanov 1879; on Bogdanov, Zograf, and anthropology in late imperial Russia see Mogilner 2013; see also Leskinen in this volume).

The works published by Zograf himself after returning from the exhibition contain curious details about both the life of the Samoyeds and the progress of research. For example, he reports,

that the Samoyeds eat up so much that they are often forced to roll on the ground for a better passage of food along the food routes; the stomach of a Samoyed, having just had lunch, around his circumference increases by tens of centimeters in comparison with the stomach of a hungry subject. (Zograf 1878, 8)\(^5\)

Reading these lines today, we may shake our heads incredulously: How can it be that the stomach grew tens of centimeters at a time? But when Zograf tells us that during the making of a cast of a Samoyed’s teeth, the Samoyed bit Zograf’s finger painfully, then there seem to be no grounds for distrusting the researcher. Zograf thought that this kind of Samoyed resistance could be explained by a rumor circulated in connection with the measurements—that Samoyeds would now be called on for military service; Zograf’s expedition took place only a couple of years after the military reform of Alexander II, when general conscription was introduced in Russia (1874, with exceptions for some categories of the population).

The Samoyeds’ resistance sometimes made Zograf’s expedition life-threatening:

On one of the nomad camps in the northern part of the Kanin Peninsula, the Samoyeds strongly refused my proposal to make measurements. When I began to persuade the eldest of the nomads to show others a good example and begin to measure, a young Samoyed with the most disgusting Russian curses jumped out of a nearby chum\(^6\) and ordered me to get

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\(^5\) Journey to the Samoyeds, published a year earlier, deals only with the fact that Samoyeds have “huge and drooping stomachs” (Zograf 1877, 5).

\(^6\) Pronounced “choom”—a kind of tent, a temporary dwelling used by the Nenets and other Uralic peoples of the Russian North.
out of their camp as soon as possible, but only on foot and without luggage. To my answer that I am ready to leave, but only with luggage and on deer, the Samoyed doubled his curses and called on his comrades, numbering about six or seven, to carry out his demand. My requests to deliver me to the foreman were resolutely refused, and when I, out of patience, threatened him with punishment from the justice of the peace, I was told that I could not see more, “neither Russia, nor the justice.” When I saw another Samoyed approaching, I ordered him to help me to tie up the most violent one, who had already swung at me at once, but the Samoyed took the side of his comrades, and the furious man rolling up his sleeves headed towards me with a purpose that was far from pleasant. I took out a revolver and announced that I would shoot anyone who dared to attack me; the Samoyed was not embarrassed and took out from somewhere a flintlock gun, and God knows how this curious duel would have ended if it had not occurred to me to point out the five holes in the revolver and say that “my gun shoots five people at once”; this statement was supported by the clerk who accompanied me, who during the whole continuation of the scene was deprived of the opportunity to help me, since there were three Samoyeds standing near him and beating him on the first attempt to open his mouth. The Samoyeds dispersed and went off to a meeting somewhere. At night, the Samoyeds decided to migrate . . . (Zograf 1877, 13)

The resistance of the Samoyeds in Zograf’s description looks wild and irrational. The most actively resisting young man is defined as possessed by fury—Zograf even considers it right to tie him up. In the end, however, the tone of the story changes to ironic. Fierce resistance is opposed by witty fiction, which should amuse the reader. These and other entertaining stories, which abound in Zograf’s works, made the Samoyeds amazing “subjects” for visitors to the 1879 exhibition and readers of richly illustrated books specially published for its opening. It may be that for Müller the Samoyeds, being very dangerous, were as interesting as the warlike Zulus. It should also be noted that in Russian Samoyeds means “those who eat themselves,” which was often interpreted in the late nineteenth century as an indication of the cannibalism allegedly still practiced by these people.

Entering the Orpheum hall, Müller went to the very edge of the grill, behind which the Samoyeds sat, and loudly turned to the eldest of them.
“Hasavanu?” (“Are you Samoyed?”). “Hasavadm!” he answered; that is, “Yes, I am Samoyed.” Then the professor asked, “Do you speak Samoyed?” and the person confirmed that yes, he did. Upon learning that the Samoyed’s name was Wasko, Müller commanded, “Wasko, come closer!” and the “shaggy” Samoyed obeyed the command—he got down from the sled on which he was sitting and hobbled closer. As the Russian translator will later explain, Wasko had lost one leg and part of his fingers in a fight with a polar bear. “Tolabar!” (“Count!”), Müller then commanded, and Wasko began to obediently count: “Nopoi, sidea, njabar, tjet, samljjan . . .” (Müller 1886, 25). It should be mentioned here that Zograf in his Journey to the Samoyeds noted precisely the inability of these people to count:

Samoyeds do not know how old they are; they generally count very badly, not one of them could tell me how many deer he has; the Samoyeds cannot even answer the question about the number of children, and they begin to list their names, even if there were only three of them. In Mezen I heard that during a visit to Arkhangelsk by His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich several Samoyed families were introduced; to the questions of His Highness’s retinue about the size of the family, not a single Samoyed could answer immediately, while the order to line up according to family was executed extremely quickly. (Zograf 1877, 9)

Despite this, it is precisely the ability to count up to ten that finally convinces Müller of the authenticity of the Samoyeds. Thus, it turned out that, unlike the Zulus, the Samoyeds (fig. 5.1) were not false and that they belonged to the “tribe of Yuraks” (i.e., the Nenets).

Meißner, who after the visit to Orpheum described it in an article for the Deutsche Zeitung (1882, 1–2), reports that the show was organized by Russian merchant Alexei Feodorovitsch Kalinzoff, who in Arkhangelsk was joined by Mr. Raab from Pressburg (modern Bratislava) as an impresario. Müller describes the organizers in a slightly different way: when he spoke to the Samoyeds, two people approached him—“Mihailowitsch, a Russian, and Raab, a native of Pressburg,” who were the leaders of the “caravan.” Upon learning that the professor intends to question the Samoyeds for scientific purposes, Mihailowitsch and Raab call for an interpreter, “a
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dense blond Russian,” who turned out to be Aleksey Kalinzow—his name is also given in full by Müller; only surnames were used for Mihailowitsch and Raab. Müller reports that it was Kalintsov who managed to push the Samoyeds on a long trip across Europe, since he had been engaged in barter trading with them for many years—partly independently, partly on behalf of his older brother—had lived among them and perfectly learned the Samoyed language. Mihailowitsch and Raab communicate with the exhibited people only through him. Thus, in the description of Müller, Kalintsov looks like a “subcontractor,” having an important but not a dominant position in the caravan. Meißner, on the contrary, does not mention Mihailowitsch at all, and only briefly—Raab, paying all attention to the conversation with Kalintsov as the main manager. Later, in the winter of 1883, when the same Samoyeds, except for the deceased Wasko, were shown at the Leipzig zoo (fig. 5.2) and at the Swedish ice rink in the Berlin suburb of Spandau (“D.” 1883), the Gartenlaube (The Garden Arbor) magazine named only Kalintsov as the manager; the people who helped him in Austria-Hungary and Germany were not mentioned (“v. J.” 1883, 399). But later in July 1883, when

Figure 5.1. The two photographs taken at Georg Wassmuth’s studio between late April and mid-June 1882, when the Samoyeds moved from the Orpheum Theater to the zoological garden in Vienna’s Prater, follow the pattern of the usual bourgeois family portrait. Printed side by side in Josef Szombathy’s anthropological report, they begin to represent a group of ethnic types in national winter clothes. Photos on the insert to Szombathy 1886, pl. III.
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the Samoyeds were exhibited in the zoological garden of Basel, the show was managed by the merchant L. Jurkiewitsch from Saint Petersburg. He was able to speak German but needed an interpreter to communicate with the Samoyeds. This interpreter seems to have been Kalintsov, again in the background, as he was in the Orpheum (Staehelin 1993, 35; Happel 2007, 175).

What Kalintsov reported about himself, apparently, corresponds to reality. In the Arkhangelsk province, the merchant family Kalintsovs (Kalintsevs or Kolintsovs in different spellings) was well known. Perhaps Alexey Fedorovich was the younger brother or son of the merchant Fedor Fedorovich Kalintsov from Mezen (a town to the northeast of Arkhangelsk, where several generations of Kalintsovs lived and continue to live even now).

7 This seems to indicate that the Samoyeds were unable to speak Russian. Also in Vienna it was Kalintsov who as an interpreter spoke for the exhibited people. But in Budapest the linguist József Budenz managed to interrogate Wasko in Russian. Together they checked Matthias Alexander Castrén’s dictionary of the Samoyed language (Budenz 1891). Wasko also made for Budenz an oral translation into the Nenets language of several fables and literary tales (Budenz 1890, 83–84; Kontler 2010, 185).

Figure 5.2. This drawing “from life,” made by Gustav Sundblad at the Leipzig zoo for the popular illustrated newspaper Die Gartenlaube in February 1883, shows only four Samoyeds—Wasko died in Prague on August 19, 1882, just few weeks after the Viennese photographs were taken. On the right, a pole with clothes hung on it seems to replace him. From “v. J.” 1883, 97.
Fedor Fedorovich Kalintsov was a second guild merchant (i.e., his business was worth at least 20,000 rubles) and owned a seagoing vessel. Both Fedor Fedorovich Kalintsov and Andrey Fedorovich Kalintsov (possibly brother to Alexey and brother or son to Fedor Fedorovich) had regular trade contacts with northern Norway, where in these years they could see recruiters seeking to hire Sami/Laplanders for ethnographic exhibitions and buying up ethnographic objects. Already in 1822 there was William Bullock’s exhibition of Sami with reindeer and artifacts in London; in 1853 a “Lapland Giantess” was shown in Britain (Burnett 2017). Laplanders were also the first ethnic exhibition held in 1874–75 by the later famous Carl Hagenbeck, who arranged another Lapland exhibition in 1878–79. However, the growing demand for ethnographic objects could be seen directly in Arkhangelsk province. Zograf mentions that shortly before him a British expedition came to the Samoyeds. The visitors paid big money for objects of ethnographic interest and thereby “damaged the situation for future researchers.” It is noteworthy that Zograf got to the Samoyeds precisely through Mezen, which served as the main transit point on the way to them. Also, it is in the vicinity of Mezen, in the Kuzmin Copse, that Zograf searched for good Samoyed skeletons to excavate for the 1879 exhibition in Moscow, following advice from a priest from Arkhangelsk.

The arrival of the British and then of Zograf apparently contributed to the elaboration of the Kalintsovs’ commercial plan. It was not entirely new—during the whole of the nineteenth century, merchants from Arkhangelsk and Mezen brought Samoyeds to Saint Petersburg, where sleigh riding with deer on the frozen Neva was a popular winter recreation (Leskinen 2019; see also Leskinen in this volume). Samoyeds had also been used as a curiosity in Baroque court culture: on January 1, 1710, for example, Samoyeds with deer and in fur clothes took part in the festive procession in Moscow to celebrate the victory of Peter I in the battle of Poltava (1709). According to the Danish ambassador Just Juel, Samoyeds constituted the retinue of a comic king (the

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8 Andrey Ruzhnikov has published a charter related to the Fedor Kalintsov trip to Norway in 1868 to buy salt (Ruzhnikov 2014, 227). According to Nikolay Okladnikov, in 1870 nine ships from Mezen visited Norway. In 1873, Russian exports to Norway from the port of Mezen were worth 4,677 rubles. This almost doubled in 1886. In the late 1870s, Fedor Kalintsov married his granddaughter to Solfest Gundersen, a merchant from Bergen (Okladnikov 2006).

9 In 1877–78, Hagenbeck also organized an “Eskimo” exhibition. The groups he showed included four to six adults, the same as Kalintsov’s groups (Thode-Arora 1989, 168).
role was played by a Frenchman) alluding to the folly of Karl XII of Sweden, who tried to conquer Russia. A month later they participated in the funeral procession of the “Samoyedic king” (the same Frenchman), who died after too much drinking (Juel 1899, 118, 142–43).

But Kalintsov’s plan seems to have been different from what had gone before. Already in 1879, at the same time the anthropological exhibition was opened in the zoological garden to the west of Moscow city center, a group of Samoyeds was revealed. They arrived without deer and had to sit there as anthropological objects, as a living addition to the scientific presentation of their bodies and cultural artifacts in the city center, where only plaster-cast mannequins were to be seen. During his journey to the north, Zograf had liked to imagine how the Samoyeds would look as cast figures in the exhibition hall. He described his beautiful dreams in letters to Bogdanov (Zograf 1877, 12; on the aesthetics of ethnographic representation in imperial Russia see Vishlenkova 2011).

The group exhibited at Moscow zoo was led by the Samoyed Vasily Kanyukov, and it is highly likely that it was the same Kanyukov who later spoke with Müller in the Orpheum (Leskinen 2019). The composition of the group was also similar: as in Vienna, Kanyukov arrived with his wife and little son, accompanied by another young couple. The family name of this couple was Bobrikov, but we do not know the family name of the young couple in Vienna, so it is not possible to say if it was exactly the same group. Kanyukov in Moscow is said to have come from the Kanin Peninsula, while Kanyukov in Vienna was from the island of Varandey, about 750 kilometers to the east.10 Wasko’s wife had relatives on the island of Novaya Zemlya. These differences concerning place of origin can possibly be explained by the Samoyeds’ nomadic way of life—they stayed in different places on the tundra during the year. During his travels of 1877 Zograf measured several members of the Kanyukov and Bobrikov families, but Vasily was not among them (possibly due to his absent leg and fingers he was seen as not suitable for measurement). The Kanyukovs were measured at the Tarkhanov cape; the Bobrikovs (a young couple of the same age as in Moscow two years later),

10 Today there is the village of Varandey, which arose in 1935 as part of the forced transfer of the Nenets to a settled lifestyle. In 1993, all the inhabitants of the village were evacuated: according to one version of events, because the sea began to advance on the coast, and according to another, because the territory was made free for the oil terminal and port. Some residents subsequently returned.
at the Shoyna River (west coast of the Kanin Peninsula, to the northeast of Mezen) where they had been fishing. Like in Moscow, during the Kalintsovs’ tour in Europe, Samoyeds were made into passive objects of ethnographic curiosity to be looked at only from a distance. As far as is known, it was only in Berlin, where the Samoyeds performed in winter on the Swedish ice rink, that they competed with skating people on a reindeer sleigh.

In answer to Meißner’s question of how he got the idea to bring Samoyeds to Europe, Kalintsov pretends to have invented everything himself. He said that he had been trading with them for a long time—selling “knives, hunting rifles, steel harpoons, colorful patches to decorate women’s clothing and especially vodka,” in exchange for seal fur, and then he thought that the Samoyeds themselves were amazing animals (Wunderthiere) and that it would be possible to put them into circulation quite well (kaufmännisch zu verwerten) (Meißner 1882). It is impossible to say with certainty whether this comparison was made by Kalintsov himself or whether the journalist Meißner invented it but, apparently, it reflects the general mood of the conversation. Meißner was further interested in how Kalintsov managed to persuade the Samoyeds to go on such a long journey with him, and he explained that the whole thing was due to vodka. Indeed, the journalist notes, the Samoyeds received a quarter of a liter of vodka three times a day. Also the anthropologist Josef Szombathy, who later measured these five Samoyeds, indicated that they received four to five liters of strong alcohol daily in the evening, which everyone drank, including a six-year-old boy. Usually they did not get drunk, but sometimes he saw them drunk completely. As noted by Zinaida Kupriyanova, who studied the Nenets folklore tradition, in their epic songs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there is often

vivid realistic descriptions of how Russian merchants traveled along the tundra and, alcoholizing the Nenets, took away fur and deer from them

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11 Here and on all other occasions Meißner refers to zjerka. According to him, zjerka was the same as wutki, and as an equivalent the Samoyeds received in Vienna Kornbranntwein (German vodka). I was unable to identify zjerka with any known drink; wutki seems to be vodka. Josef Szombathy mentions that in Vienna the Samoyeds drank Kornbranntwein mixed with rum. Rum was largely available in the Russian North due to legal and illegal imports from Norway. Maybe zjerka was an equivalent to the Russian zhezhenka (a kind of punch), a drink made out of rum with sugar, usually mixed with other alcoholic drinks. Meißner mentions that zjerka was sweet.
for almost nothing. The songs usually indicate the specific names of localities, settlements and rivers. Such songs usually end up with a young hero killing merchants and leaving for his native camp. (Kupriyanova 1965, 45)

Klintsov reported to Meißner that he first persuaded Wasko and then the others agreed. For ten weeks they traveled by deer to Arkhangelsk, then another three months to Saint Petersburg. On the way, the Samoyeds slept, wrapping themselves in skins in twos. Vienna was not the first stop of the “caravan” — Samoyeds were shown along the way in Saint Petersburg (cf. Leskinen in this volume) and Warsaw, where they stayed several weeks, and also only shortly (four days) in Kraków. Then they would travel from Vienna to Budapest, where they would stay during July (Szamójéd 1882; Kontler 2020), and to Prague, where they would be in August 1882. From Austria-Hungary, Klintsov’s “caravan” would later go to Germany and Switzerland12 and from there to France. The latest traces of these Samoyeds can be dated to summer 1883, when they stayed in Basel (July) and Lyon (perhaps after Basel).13 Already in Vienna in April 1882 Klintsov informed Meißner of his intention to spend the summer in France and England, but he obviously meant the summer of 1882, because Meißner said that Klintsov’s tour with the Samoyeds was planned to be one year long. In reality it became longer than a year and France was not reached until summer 1883. This may mean that Meißner misunderstood Klintsov, or it may indicate that Klintsov in April 1882 had no precise plans for the summer months; perhaps decisions to move forward or to stay depended on revenues with no fixed program for the year. The fact that Klintsov’s tour was much longer than expected could indicate that it was profitable.

Whose Voices?

Thanks to Meißner’s interview, there is an opportunity to hear, albeit indirectly, the organizer of this show, which is infrequent, with the exception of

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There were exhibitions in Leipzig, Berlin, Poznań (Dems 2020), and other cities. It may be the same group with Curt Terne as an impresario that was shown in Wrocław (Czarnecka 2018).

In Lyon, as in Basel, they were exhibited together with an Australian. The exhibition took place at “cours Parrache.” Parrache was a workers’ district also known for prostitution. In Lyon measurements and photos of the Samoyeds were made again and a certain Monsieur Chantre advertised his show of images in the Bulletin de la Société d’Anthropologie de Lyon (Photographies 1883).
cases in which the organizers were large companies. Particularly poorly studied until now is the participation of Russian entrepreneurs in organizing such exhibitions, and their role in both the exhibitions’ export to Europe and their import into Russia. In this regard, it is not yet possible to say if Kalintsov was a typical figure and whether the attitude toward exhibited people was different when the organizer was not Russian but, say, a Tatar merchant, as during the Somali exhibition in the Luna Park of Saint Petersburg in 1912.

Our insufficient knowledge of the organization of these exhibitions prevents us from answering the question of how such cultural practices would be treated today: if it was always an explicitly racist entertainment, a humiliation of human dignity, or, as was noted in some studies on European and North American exhibitions, if the exhibitions were very different in the quality of organization and ideological underpinning and cannot be considered all in the same way. The problem also is that in almost all cases we can rely only on the European view of the exhibitions; there are only rare testimonies from the other side.

Kalintsov, judging by his interviews and reports of Samoyed’s alcohollizing, seems to correspond to the type of unscrupulous trafficker that, apparently, became involved in these shows, as in this case, with a modest budget. At the same time, the idea of the Samoyeds as being the same as animals that could be disposed of at will was apparently a kind of boast by Kalintsov, who took advantage of the fact that the Samoyeds could not refute his words. A number of indications in the texts, as well as photos of Samoyeds taken in Vienna for anthropological research, perhaps allow us to see this story from a somewhat different perspective.

Can the voices of the Samoyeds be heard? Müller seems to convey Wasko’s direct speech when he forces him to answer questions and count to ten. Meißner, in his essay, not without a share of pathos, writes that the Samoyed Wasko, who was the first among the representatives of his people to have “descended to civilized Europe” from the shores of the “icy sea,” was very surprised and could not help laughing when he heard Professor Müller address Wasko in his own language (Meißner 1882, 1). Although such a reaction looks humanly natural and believable, Meißner seems to be flattering his learned friend, whose knowledge of the Nenets language was supposedly so overwhelming for the native speaker. Whether Wasko really was laughing and what he thought is hard to say, but perhaps in his short conversation with
Müller there was a misunderstanding. When Müller asked “Hasavahu?” he meant nationality, but the word hasava in Nenets also means simply a male person, so that the affirmative “Hasavadm” of Wasko might not refer to him being Samoyed. Perhaps it was precisely the ambiguity of the question that served as the reason for Wasko’s laughter.

According to the official documents Wasko was Vasily Kanyukov; this is reported by anthropologist Heinrich (in Czech, Jindřich) Matiegka in an article on the exhumation of Kanyukov’s body for scientific purposes in 1893 (1893, 62–63). Wasko/Vasily Kanyukov would die in Prague on August 19, 1882, just a few months after talking with Müller at the Orpheum. Vasily was a surprisingly common Christian name among the Samoyeds. It even gave rise to racist jokes: when Emperor Nicholas II visited the pavilion of the Far North at the All-Russian Industrial and Artistic Exhibition in Nizhny Novgorod in 1896, at the entrance he was greeted by a Samoyed Vasily and the talking seal Vaš’ka (diminutive from Vasily) in a barrel. The famous Russian painter Konstantin Korovin, who designed the pavilion, later recalled that Vasily (the Samoyed) and Vaš’ka (the seal) slept together in the refrigerator (Korovin 2016, 399).

Besides Wasko’s answers to Müller, which may be interpreted in different ways, the only thing that we can hear directly from the Samoyeds seems to be their names, which upon closer examination turn out to be very interesting. The names can be found both in Meißner’s article and in Müller’s story; they are also printed under photos published as an appendix to Szombathy’s anthropological study of the Samoyeds (figs. 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5). Names seem to indicate the evidence in the photos: “Here is Wasko with his wife Njeja and their little son Ortje, and here is a younger couple of Iderach and Pitiptija.” The anthropological gaze captured them, transforming them into the “ethnic types.” Names seem to be the only trace of individuality left to these scientific “objects” exposed to the camera. But as it turns out, that is exactly the question—whose names do we see here?

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14 Müller says that photos were made by Szombathy in the atelier of Georg Wassmuth in Prater. Wassmuth specialized in individual and group portrait photography. It cannot be ruled out that the two photos in fig. 5.1 were produced not only for scientific but also for a commercial purpose (as was the case in Lyon). Postcards with ethnic types were popular at that time, but no existing postcard is known to confirm that Wassmuth sold them.
Figure 5.3. Although the merchant Kalintsov compared the Samoyeds with animals ready to do whatever he wanted for rum, Iderach was the only adult exhibited whose full-length photograph Josef Szombathy could take. Little Ortje looks frightened and rests his right hand on a wall that has been made invisible to make the people on display look like isolated scientific objects. Photos on the insert to Szombathy 1886, pl. IV.

Wasko seems to be a variant of Vasily, from which the Russian diminutive form Vas‘ka derives, where a can be replaced with o in the typically northern Russian pronunciation. But Ortje, the name of Wasko’s little son, is neither Russian nor Nenets; it is Finnish. This name is even now very common in Karelia, to the west of Arkhangelsk province, and also among the Finnish-speaking Komi living to the south of the Nenets people in what is now the Komi Republic of the Russian Federation. Later the Austrian anthropologist Matiegka (1893) noted the difference between Wasko’s skull and the skulls of other members of the group, as well as compared with other Samoyed skulls stored in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. It is possible that the anthropologically different Wasko, whose son has a Finnish name, was of mixed origin or wasn’t a Samoyed at all, although the conversation with him convinced Müller of the Samoyeds’ authenticity. But not
only Ortje has a “wrong” name. Iderach also has no correspondence in the Nenets language, but in Komi there is a word *idoera*, meaning neat, tidy, or housekeeping. So, of the three men exhibited in Vienna as Samoyeds, none had a Nenets name.

Even more interesting is female anthroponymy. The young girl is called Piriptija, and regarding this we have correspondence in the Nenets language. The word *piribtya* means . . . a young girl! So this may have been another misunderstanding—the young girl, when asked who she was, may have answered that she was a young girl. But she named herself so (or was named by Kalintsov) not only in Vienna. Njeje, the name of Wasko’s wife, generally means aunt (*neya* in modern Nenets), but it can also be a denomination for a range of other kinship relationships (Kupriyanova 1954, 167). What seems to be particularly relevant in our case is that a husband calls his wife *neya*, while a wife calls her husband *vesako*. *Vesako* can also generally mean (old) man;

Figure 5.4. The front and profile photographs of Iderach and Piriptija seem to show these people completely delivered to the powerful anthropologist’s gaze. The bashful blush mentioned by Josef Szombathy can be seen on Piriptija’s cheeks. Photos on the insert to Szombathy 1886, pl. V.

Figure 5.5. Wasko and his wife and son are depicted here, like Iderach and Piriptija, up to the waist. It is noteworthy that their partial representation corresponds to the incompleteness of the data on their bodies below the waist in the table of measurements compiled by Josef Szombathy. Photos on the insert to Szombathy 1886, pl. VI.
sometimes it can be used to be synonymous with hasava. With vesako we get another possible explanation for the name Wasko, which seems to be not quite a name, like hasava is not quite a nationality. Later, after Wasko died, the group was joined by two more people (this also shows that Kalintsov had continuous support from Russia). The newcomers were Hada (grandmother in Nenets) and a young boy, Otzke (again, a Finnish name).

This strange situation with “names” might be explained by twentieth-century ethnography: Nenets people preferred not to reveal their true names to foreigners; they used instead either Russian or Finnish names or degrees of kinship/social status—this seems to be the case with Njeje, Piriptija, and Hada. This does not exclude the possibility that Kalintsov in reality showed Komi husbands with Nenets wives—in the region around the island Varandey the population at that time was mixed. In fact, all Samoyeds being (at least formally) Christians had to have Russian names (there was no religious freedom for Samoyeds in Russia). When a child was born to Piriptija in Berlin in 1883 he was baptized in a Russian church (“D.” 1883) and accordingly received a Christian name. All Samoyeds measured by Zograf had full Russian names with first name, patronymic, and family name (Zograf 1878). Obviously, the people shown by Kalintsov, being abroad, preferred not to use Russian names unless at official occasions. It may have corresponded well to Kalintsov’s marketing strategy, as indigenous names are more suitable for the image of the northern “wilds.” But at least for females we do not have their true indigenous names.

Available sources do not allow us to tell whether Professor Müller and other visitors of the exhibition were duped again, as they had been with the Zulus. This use of names contradicts the expectations of nineteenth-century nationalism concerning the relationship of language and national identity. Müller expected that through language true nationality would be exposed, but this kind of questioning does not seem to be quite appropriate when confronted with the complex cultural realities of the Far North. One may also wonder whether we have here a kind of tradition of name concealing, as is described in twentieth-century Russian anthropological research, or if it is applicable to speak here about what Homi Bhabha called “colonial mimicry,” becoming not quite visible against a background, in the double sense of “against”: with and counter to (Bhabha 1984; about “subversive mimicry” during ethnic exhibitions see Schär 2015, 122–23).
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When we now look again at the photos, which first seemed to be just another example of scientific objectification, inscriptions of “names” begin to indicate something different from before: something is hidden here, and hidden so well that Austrian anthropologists could not even ask about it. There is no complete scientific evidence in the photos any more; they are not just a surface, they seem to have a hidden interior.

But researchers in Vienna did not just take photos, they also wanted to make measurements, and what they obtained allows us again to see a little more and a little less at the same time. Müller’s story about visiting the Orpheum serves as a preface to the publication of an anthropological study carried out by his younger colleague, Josef Szombathy, mentioned above, an archaeologist and anthropologist working at the Museum of Natural History, nowadays best known as the person who found the Willendorf Venus. The measurements were carried out some time after Müller’s first visit, when the Samoyeds with the onset of warm weather had already moved from the Orpheum, where they were shown April 9–26, to the zoo in Prater (Müller 1886, 25), where they stayed until mid-June.

Szombathy sought to record everything that may be of anthropological interest. He noted that Samoyeds, like Europeans, tend to blush—this was revealed when Piriptija was stripped for examination. Her face in the photo looks angry, with lowered corners of the lips and frowning eyebrows. In the profile photo, it is as if one could even distinguish the blush mentioned by Szombathy. However, it is difficult to judge emotions confidently from a photo. Much less ambiguous evidence may be the view of the final measurement table, containing a surprising number of dashes, meaning no data (figs. 5.6 and 5.7). Szombathy could take all measurements with only one person, Iderach, whose name is the first in the table. This corresponds to the fact that there are also photos of Iderach dressed, as well as naked, waist up and head to toe.

The next column in the table describes Wasko, who allowed researchers to make almost all measurements of the head except for the ears (four dashes appear here). In addition to the head, Wasko allowed researchers to measure the width of the shoulders but in the remaining thirty-five lines of the table relating to his body are dashes. It is noteworthy that Szombathy also could not take a full-length photo of a stripped Wasko; there is only his image from the waist up.
Figure 5.6. The measurement table shows a lot of gaps, indicating that it was not possible for Josef Szombathy and his assistant Franz Heger to obtain a number of data. The quantity of gaps in the columns differs, and perhaps this allows us to see the different perceptions of measurements by the exhibited people, depending on their age, gender, and attitude to different parts of their bodies. Only the heads were measured almost completely, with the exception of ears in the family of Wasko. Table of measurements from Szombathy 1886, 33.

Here we can see again that photos that seemed to be the embodiment of an omnipotent objectivizing gaze of an anthropologist turn out to be only partial representations of bodies whose frames are negotiated with those who are photographed. Among the photos taken, there are no full-length images of the stripped Piriptija and Njeje, and this again finds a correspon-
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In the table, the numbers and dashes in which are distributed, however, differently than in the columns relating to Iderach and Wasko.

Piriptija, like Iderach, was apparently more open to being measured; she allows her head to be completely measured, including the ears. Szombathy also measures her shoulders and chest, but there is no data in the table for the hips; eleven measurements were not obtained. Njeje, like Wasko, allows Szombathy to measure the head only without ears and the width of the shoulders. Unlike Wasko, she allowed her overall growth to be measured. Ortje, like Iderach, was photographed stripped completely (he looks unhappy and scared, but rather curious, on the waist-up photo); however, his column in the measurement table is also incomplete. Obviously, the possibility of taking measurements was determined by the parents. There were no measurements of the ears, but a couple of other measurements were made: the distance from the floor to the fingertips and even the size of the pubic bone. The column corresponding to Ortje has thirty-one dashes. Neither his photo nor the photos of Wasko and Njeje allow a complete view of the ears, while the ears of Iderach and Piriptija are fully visible.

Figure 5.7. The continuation of the table shows the complete lack of data on Wasko and Njeje and only two measurements for Ortje: the length of the legs and the distance from the floor to the fingertips. These data could have been obtained not by measuring from life, but from the photograph in fig. 5.3. In the Piriptija’s column the data on greater trochanter as well as on thigh length and circumference are missing. Josef Szombathy wrote about a “suspicious dislike” of the measurements (misstrauische Abneigung) by the Samoyeds. Table of measurements from Szombathy 1886, 54.
Samoyeds resisting measurements being made in Vienna seem to act in the same way as those who did not allow Zograf to measure them on the Kanin Peninsula. The fact that they were away from their home camps did not detract from their determination to keep the scientists from touching some parts of the body or making them an object of the image—and no strong alcohol could break this resistance. But not everyone is resisting: Iderach allows himself to be measured completely. Szombathy even reports on the color of the hair between his legs; he did not have such information about any of the other Samoyeds. Piriptija is embarrassed to demonstrate her hips, but in the rest she allows the researcher to measure her, including ears that were untouchable for the older couple. Thus, there are individual differences between Samoyeds related to gender and age.

The approximate age of the Samoyeds is indicated in the table of measurements: Iderach, twenty years; Wasko, fifty-four years; Piriptija, seventeen years; Njeja, forty-five years; and Ortje, six years. Meißner, who visited the Samoyeds a few weeks before Szombathy, indicates that Iderach is aged nineteen; Piriptija, seventeen; Njeje, forty; and Ortje, six. About a year later, the same Samoyeds, except for the deceased Wasko (he died at the age of sixty, according to Matiegka [1893]), were examined by Julius Kollmann, professor of anatomy at the University of Basel, during the exhibition in that city. His data on the age of the Samoyeds were Njeje, c. forty-five years; her son Ortje, seven years; Piriptija, c. sixteen years; Iderach, c. thirty years.

Ethnological research has not offered a satisfactory explanation of why some body parts had to be hidden from the camera and were not measured. In the classical work Nentsy by Ludmila Khomich (1966) and even in the great post-Soviet compendium Peoples of Western Siberia, there are simply no chapters on the perception of the body. The body is treated only as an objective physiological reality (with measurements of skulls, etc.). The situation has changed in recent years, as can be seen from Viktoria Spodina’s book (2017), which offers an overview of the perception of different body parts by the Samoyedic and Ugric peoples according to recent research; but even by Spodina there is nothing on the Nenets beliefs concerning ears. Another Samoyedic people, the Selkups, believed that “looking into the ear you can see a different world, penetrate some secret” (Spodina 2017, 146). That is why shamans used the ear as a channel of communication with the other world. For some Ugric peoples, making photos was related to taking possession of someone’s skin, which can later be used by another person. This can also lead to illness and even death (Spodina 2017, 78). This can hardly serve as a reliable explanation for Samoyed resistance in 1882. One may even question whether ethnological explanation should be sought here or, as Frantz Fanon wrote, whether it introduces unnecessary exoticization of non-Europeans where, perhaps, common human feelings of shame, selfhood, dignity, and so forth can be seen (1952, 78–80). Fanon also warned against isolating ethnological research from the context of the colonial situation, which is still the case in the Spodina’s work (2017, 76).

In 1879 in Moscow Vasily Kanyukov was reportedly sixty-five years old.
(Kollmann 1884, 599–600). Absent from this list is Piriptija’s baby born in Berlin in winter 1882–83. Apparently, the Samoyeds could not say exactly how old they were or they determined their age based on their ideas of time, which caused significant discrepancies. The differences were, however, not only in the indications of age. Kollmann, who took measurements in 1883, was able to quickly publish them the very next year, but Szombathy’s publication was delayed for some reason until 1886, and the Vienna anthropologist was embarrassed to note that there were discrepancies between his measurements of bodies and those of his Basel counterpart that could not be explained by the passing of a year (Szombathy 1886, 27).

Allegoric Ambiguity

The Samoyeds elude an unambiguous definition not only as living people but also as allegories into which they turn in the texts of German authors. Here we need to look at the specific context into which both Samoyeds and the merchant Kalintsov were inscribed in Vienna in 1882. On the one hand, we can say that the Samoyeds are included in what James Clifford described as an ethnographic allegory of salvation (1986, 98–121). The need for research is justified for Austrian scientists by humanistic considerations: according to Meißner, Samoyeds living in vast spaces along the coast of the Arctic Sea are an endangered nation. There are only sixteen or, according to other sources, 11,000 left of them. Moreover, their language is unique, quite distinctive, and not related to any other “North Asian” languages belonging to the Ural-Altaï family. Meißner notes that, according to Professor Müller, it is incorrect to classify the Samoyed language as among the general North Asian group; Uralic, Altaï, and Samoyedic languages are three different groups. Thus, the study of Samoyeds was extremely important for answering the question of whether the Ural-Altaï family existed. Here the subject of research (a person) has value to the extent that it turns out to be a supplier of valuable resources—in this case, linguistic knowledge. The extinction of the Samoyeds is presented as a natural process to which weak, degenerating peoples are exposed, without regard to the specific historical conditions of the existence of the Nenets in the Russian Empire. In the nineteenth century, Russian colonization drove the Samoyeds farther north, into areas less and less suitable for human habitation, and attempts at resistance, such as
the uprising of Vauli Piettomin in the 1830s, could not change this general tendency. Before the extinction of the Samoyeds, the European linguist researcher turns out to be a cultural hero who saves the language from disappearance, fixes it for science, while Samoyeds are unable to do so themselves. At the same time, however, important for Müller is not so much the cultural heritage of the Samoyeds in itself as clarifying the mutual relationship of language families—filling in blank spots on the linguistic map of the world.

On the other hand, the contrasts between wild and cultural, healthy and degenerate turn out to be unstable, and reversible, and this is very well shown by Meißner’s text. It is already remarkable that if Müller and Szombathy are primarily interested in Samoyeds, then Meißner is no less occupied by the figure of a large bearded merchant, Kalintsov. This Russian also represents a certain degree of savagery, albeit different than that of the Samoyeds. Mentioning that the Samoyeds arrived from the island of Varandey, Meißner notes that these people do not actually have a homeland, since they are nomads. Even in the summer, fleeing from insects, Samoyeds strive to live where it is colder, and so they have been living for centuries in wild places where no culture could develop. Unlike the Siberian Ostyaks, the Samoyeds could not even create religion for themselves; they have neither shamans nor healers (cf. Sántha in this volume). They have no culinary art, either; they eat everything raw, which “disgusts even their Russian neighbors” (Meißner 1882, 1). Thus, through an ambiguous contrast, the Russians find themselves inscribed in the general joyless picture of northern savagery together with the Samoyeds.

Further, however, in Meißner’s reasoning there is an amazing turn: in his opinion, many will temper their self-conceit when they learn that Samoyeds live in Europe and, thus, are Europeans. Meißner does not stop at this challenge to the cultural hierarchy and goes even farther: although the Yuraks, as he writes, have no religion, sometimes they make idols and give them the blood of deer to drink; however, they do not really count on supernatural help because the sky is too great to take care of the problems of individuals. In this regard, Meißner observes, Samoyeds are more perspicacious than many Europeans. It should be noted here that the Deutsche Zeitung, in which Meißner published his “natural science feuilleton,” expressed the views of secular German nationalists. It is for them that the Samoyeds, who do not rely too much on heaven, are more perspicacious than German Catholics,
who still rely on ancient religious universalism and supranational Habsburg legitimism. It is noteworthy that only two materials were posted on the front page of the newspaper—the beginning of the feuilleton about the Samoyed exhibition and an editorial above it about the resignation from parliament by Baron von Walterskirchen, in protest against the loss by Austrian politics of its national German character. The editorial criticizes the baron for thinking mainly about Germans in the Alpine regions, believing that the interests of those living in Bohemia and Moravia are secondary. The article refers to language concessions made in the early 1880s by the Taaffe government, which needed the support of Czech deputies. The concessions threatened the position of non-Czech-speaking German officials. Thus, the general racist stereotypes in the Meißner text take on more specific meaning related to a concrete political situation, the threat that the Germans may lose in the fight against other peoples of the Habsburg Empire.

It is noteworthy that the images of the Far North in the same years could have had in Austria-Hungary completely different connotations. In 1873–74, the famous expedition of Karl Weiprecht and Julius Payer visited the Arctic, discovering Franz Josef Land. Forced to abandon their ice-wrecked ship, Payer and Weiprecht were able to withdraw their expedition almost at full strength and were received triumphantly at home. After a heavy defeat in the war with Prussia and the territorial concessions to Italy, after a forced division of the country into Austrian and Hungarian parts followed by demands for equality from other nationalities, readers who followed the news of the Payer–Weiprecht expedition could again feel themselves part of a single great power. Representatives of different nations of the empire took part in the expedition and they, working together and together suffering hardship, were able to win, to survive in difficult conditions, to make new lands known to mankind (Schimanski and Spring 2015). Thus, the Samoyed exhibition arrived in Vienna during a time when the Far North was already meaningful as a political allegory, which Meißner tried to turn in the opposite, nationalist, direction.

The ambiguity of Meißner’s representation of the Samoyeds also manifests itself in the way he characterizes the Samoyed women. Speaking about them in general, the German journalist calls them “the weak-willed working animals of their husbands,” but observing the two women who arrived in Vienna, Meißner remarks that “It seems that both our Yurak ladies have
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gained some independence. Just a few things seem to indicate their subordinate position” (1882, 1). Thus, the discrepancy between Meißner’s stereotype of Samoyed women being like animals and the actual behavior of Piriptija and Njeje creates the desire to fit them back into the framework of this stereotype, and this turns the two women into a model of European emancipation, about which Meißner, of course, is also ironic, turning “savages” into feminists and feminists into “savages.”

One could not attach importance to this circulation of images—an ordinary journalistic trick—if behind it were not the same difficulties in defining the exhibited people that scientific anthropologists also encountered. Are these emancipated Samoyed women real savages? What language is needed to speak to them? Paradoxically, the authenticity of the exhibited people is manifested not so much in what is shown as in various forms of evasion: in incomplete photos, in unnamed names, in the inviolability of certain parts of the body.

In July, the Samoyeds went to Budapest and then to other cities, but this did not give rest to Austrian anthropologists. The exhumation of Wasko’s body ten years later, and the replacement of the inadequate earlier descriptions with analysis of the dead and fully accessible body, was the last attempt to break through, finally, to anthropological authenticity. Matiegka (1893, 63), who made the new measurements, had to admit, however, that the Samoyeds’ skulls exhibit great variety, apparently resulting from the mixing of Finnish and Mongolian elements. And so it seemed hardly possible to reduce them to some particular type.

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