

Object Lessons: Wooden Spirits, Wax Voices, and Collecting the Folk

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Introduction

This chapter will examine the negotiation of material objects and performances as forms of cultural property through examples from the North Pacific collecting activities of late 19th-century anthropologists. Russian ethnographer Waldemar Jochelson's removal of a *chuchelo*, a sacred wooden figure historically connected in folklore and ritual to the Yukagir people and their land, forms the basis for a series of retellings of this abduction scene and its social consequences from different points of view. The various interpretations and meanings of this Siberian story blur the lines between image, artifact, and the performativity of the sacred, illuminating the power of symbolic ritual objects and the importance of place in maintaining a cohesive sense of group identity and cultural continuity. Variations on the legend of the *chuchelo* and its abduction contrast with issues arising from the field recording of sacred songs as spiritual property, seen against the background of the colonial-era museum project. Traditional Indian songs recorded on the Northwest Coast of North America remained in the possession of their owners even as they were pressed onto wax-cylinder records and preserved as objects. The introduction of new technologies for collecting performances as tangible artifacts posed a challenge to the proprietary status of ritual songs, which customarily belong to individual composers and their heirs. Native artists have responded by elaborating the restrictions, permission protocols, and performance practices surrounding their music as cultural property and the circumstances under which its reproduction is or is not approved. Finally, I return to the site of the *chuchelo* abduction and its resonance in contemporary Siberia.

The two case studies, of a performing object and of objectified performance, illuminate the distinctions and commonalities of artifacts and performances as cultural objects, as well as the conundrum posed for indigenous cultural continuity when outsiders attempt to preserve local heritage with acquisitive methods, technological means, and foreign values. The performativity of certain material objects, the material objectification of performance, and the ambiguous legacy of anthropological intervention has unforeseen consequences for cultural property rights, heritage issues, and identity concerns as reinterpreted by succeeding generations.

A categorical distinction can be made between found objects – including most artifacts as well as human remains – and documentary collections of dictated texts, photographs, phonographic records, and the plaster casts of heads. The latter are all copies created by and for science; when they are taken away, the originals remain in the possession of their owners. Both kinds of collections, found objects and documentary collections, depend on a subtle and complex negotiation of collaboration and coercion between anthropologists and their native subjects. With the passage of time everything takes on the patina of tradition, becoming traditional by default because of age. But in general, the documentary form of collection frequently allowed more input on the part of the informants to collaborate in shaping representations of culture. Objects of shamanic power like the Yukagir *chuchelo* are unique and irreplaceable, possessing an inalienable spiritual power, which manifests as an absence when the object itself has been removed. The power of shamanic song, on the other hand, is traditionally as transient as sound itself. With the invention of the phonograph in 1877, and the improved portable graphophone introduced in the 1880s, the utterances of human and spirit voices could be preserved as material traces to be collected, carried away, and reproduced. Songs invoking spirit powers are disembodied in the mechanical reproductions of phonograph recording; each doubling and duplication reproduces and reiterates the moment of contact and collection in which transient embodied experience is decorporealized and reified.

In the flow of historical time, explicit representations of tradition can assume the resonances and meanings of tradition itself, as acts of dramatization stand for and take on the qualities of what they symbolize. Sacred artifacts in museums enter a phase of their life histories in which they change from vessels conducting spirit power to inert objects symbolizing practice via a transitional stage, in which they are commodities bargained for within the expeditionary collecting process. The artifacts and recordings lying in museum drawers, display cases, and archives may appear to have become mere things, indexical of history but spiritually inert. Yet both the intangibles of sacred oral tradition and the physical artifacts used by shamans are potent cultural and historical agents, psychologically capable of actively shifting shape from spirit to object. Under certain historical circumstances, their return from object to spirit can be actualized by claims of repatriation and repossession.

The flip side of turning symbols into concrete things in museological discourse is the turning of material things into symbols. Through the historical chain of provenance and the valorization of tradition, cult value can be added to collected objects, songs, or stories. The historical importance

of recording a story or song is variable, depending in part upon whether or not it is subsequently lost at the source. In some cases involving traditional restrictions and community sanctions, the very fact of its having been recorded could cause it to fall into disuse. Collecting by removal (taking away) and by extraction (recording and transcribing) formed a single corpus of data. Contemporary stakeholders contesting ownership of the past wrestle with both kinds of patrimony preserved by past informants and their anthropologists (Jaarsma 2002, 106). In the course of their life histories, these artifactualized fragments of tradition and symbols of identity both inherit and assume power and meanings beyond representation. Identity as heritage is a form of cultural property whose boundaries may be historically fluid, yet whose ownership and control is seen as a birthright. Corporealized symbols of inalienable identity in objects and the conceptualizations of tradition in transcribed texts are pawns in the reification of culture and contestations over the control of heritage. The inalienable right to cultural identity is thus threatened by unauthorized reproduction and the “theft” of intangibles (see Bodenhorn and Eriksen, *this volume*).

Jan Vansina has defined oral tradition as “verbal messages, which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation” (1985, 27). This concept implies future generations continuing to remember and transmit the messages. It is a process, not a thing. Oral tradition recorded as folklore represents itself, while stories like the Yukagir *chuchelo* variations create bodies of oral tradition about sacred objects and their removal by collectors. The notion of the future as an integral part of oral tradition includes the possibility of a reversal of events and trends. In the contemporary repatriation of objects and human remains, as in virtual repatriation of photographs and recordings, historical objects and information flow in both directions between the museum and “the folk.”

***Chuchelo* variations: the abduction of the bride**

The taiga Yukagir, or Odul, are a small group of native people, traditionally hunter-gatherers, who live mainly in the Verkhne Kolyma region of the Sakha Republic and Magadanskaya Oblast in northeastern Asia. They categorize the stories they tell loosely according to genres, including *chuldzhy* – a word cognate with the Russian for alien or foreign and including Russian *skazki* (fairy tales); *chedzhyl* – like a legend or myth, neither fact nor fiction but a seamless blend of history and imagination; and *punduk* – a new story. In 1930, Yukagir writer Tekki Odulok published a variant on a traditional story called “*Kozh-Erge*” that crosses the fluid boundaries of

native genres. Odulok, whose real name was N. I. Spiridonov, framed the story as a legend come true, a myth which became history, “an old wives’ tale ... made real after the telling” (Spiridonov 1996, 50–2). He wrote that a sacred *chuchelo* (Russian for mannequin, puppet, or scarecrow), a large wooden figure in the image of a young girl, was carved out of a tree by shamans in 1878 when an epidemic of smallpox and measles killed nearly 3/4 of the taiga Yukagir people. A gathering of shamans found they were not powerful enough to fight against smallpox, a disease imported by Russians. They decided to make an offering to the *Kozh-Erge*, a hostile witch appearing in several old Yukagir fairy tales who embodied spirits of disease. *Kozh* is a Russian word for skin, and “*Erge*,” or “*Epie*” in some tellings, is a Yukagir equivalent to the Russian exclamation “Fool,” a nonverbal expression of surprise or disgust (Nikolaeva 1989, Zhukova 1992). The *chuchelo* was left as an offering to the *Kozh-Erge*.



photo: T. Miller

Tree at Windy Rock, site of the *chuchelo* abduction.
Against the mouth of the Shamanikha River, 1999

The life-size mannequin had carved eye sockets with large dark stones for eyes, a costume, and “all the features and the appearance of a real young woman.” The Yukagir placed the *chuchelo* against the mouth of the Shamanikha River, a tributary of the Kolyma, on a remote cliff known as Windy Rock or Shaman’s Stone. The *chuchelo* sat between two wide branches of a tall tree growing on the high bank overlooking the confluence of the Kolyma and Popovka Rivers. “The aim of this ransom,” Odulok wrote, “appeared to be that the *Kozh-Erge* took the *chuchelo* and gave her own son as a husband for the *chuchelo*. After this, naturally she could not disturb the Yukagir any longer because she was at the mercy of her kinsmen” (Spiridonov 1996, 50–2).

“But then disaster struck,” Odulok wrote: the bride was kidnapped by a foreigner. In a footnote, he added that the Yukagir accuse exiled Russian anthropologist Waldemar Jochelson of stealing the *chuchelo* “and blame him for the disappearance of several clans of Verkhne Kolyma, of the Popovka River in particular” (ibid., 51). (In the 1890s, Jochelson was collecting ethnological artifacts for the Imperial Academy of Sciences’ *Kunstkamera* Museum of Peter the Great as a member of the I. M. Sibiryakov expedition.) This foreigner, a man with a beard (a sign of Russianness), had just arrived, accompanied by Cossacks. “He had in his pockets a new kind of *kukul*,” a doll or demon figure unseen by the Yukagir. “Well,” Odulok continued, “they abducted it. The bride didn’t want to go with them, but neither did she want to be given to the *Kozh-Erge*.” As the foreigner and his expeditionary party drove off bearing the heavy load of the *chuchelo*, she jumped or fell off the sled three times, even though she was tightly strapped down. Yakuts residing in the settlements who witnessed these occurrences were astonished at what happened next:

Finally she was carried off and the *Kozh-Erge* became angry with the Yukagir, her former kinsmen. Suddenly people were being struck down. Some time later, at the mouth of the Yassachnaya River, the people assembled and all the women and girls put their heads together. They presented the *Kozh-Erge* with their best dress and bells, and mounted them in a similar tree. They cried out for a long time, grimacing, moaning, and cursing the foreigner. Then they all fell down on the ground in a state which was neither insensible nor completely dead.

Three decades later, Waldemar Jochelson completed his Yukagir ethnography for Franz Boas and the American Museum of Natural History’s *Memoirs of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition*. He recounted an episode closely resembling Tekki Odulok’s story, but differing in several key details

(see Miller 1999). “In memory of their shaman-ancestors,” Jochelson wrote, “the ancient Yukagir used to hang representations of human figures on trees near mountain paths, near the mouths of rivers or near hunting grounds.” According to Jochelson they called these figures “wooden men,” a term which also meant small amulets worn for protection and luck in hunting. “One such wooden man,” he claimed, “was pointed out to me in 1895. It was suspended from an old larch tree standing on a cliff called “Shaman’s Stone,” situated on a high bank of the Kolyma River opposite the mouth of the Popovka River.” It was very crude, made of a log five feet long, with stones placed in holes for the eyes. The Kolyma River tribes treated such wooden people with skepticism, even calling them *Shaitan*, from the Russian name for Satan. Nonetheless, they would halt when traveling past the figure, make a fire and throw offerings into it. Having found out the whereabouts of this wooden man, Jochelson decided to go there in order to take it for the Imperial Museum, but he thought it best not to reveal this to his Yukagir guides until they reached the place. When they got near the site, he told them he intended to take the wooden man. Although they did not protest, the idea certainly did not appeal to them: “You are taking it yourself,” they said; “We are not giving it to you. Our ancestor will of course be angry but we have nothing to do with it.” They made a fire and brewed some tea. Jochelson requested that the chief make an offering to the fire asking the wooden man not to be angry. The Yukagir chief “threw the offerings into the fire and said half-jokingly, half-seriously, ‘Our grandfather Istary [Old One], the Russian wants to carry you away; go with good thoughts.’” (Jochelson 1926, 165–7)

The sight of the bearded Russian bringing the wooden figure back to the village shocked some of the Yukagir women into fits of a nervous illness especially afflicting local native women in times of stress, which caused its victims to lose control of their behavior until their bodies froze into a semicatatonic state of rigidity (see Miller 2004a). Jochelson recalled that he tried to persuade the chief’s wife that the wooden grandfather would fare better with him than with them; that instead of being exposed to the wind on a lonely rock, “he will hang under glass in a warm room of a large royal house” (the Imperial Museum in St. Petersburg); that he would be with other wooden men, people would go there to look at him, and he would be fed. But the Russian was unable to calm their involuntary seizures as the women shouted, swore, and writhed helplessly on the ground.

A few days later, a young hunter returned to the village. Pretending not to have heard about the incident, he told of a dream he had while out in the woods: a man in silver garments appeared, saying, “I am your ances-

tor. Nine generations did not molest me; they respected me. Now I am being taken away, no one knows where. Get up and tell all that the one who first pointed me out, the one who took me down and the one who carries me off all shall suffer” (Jochelson 1926, 165–7). The wooden man never reached the museum in St. Petersburg, nor did it arrive in Yakutsk. Jochelson assumed his Yakut drivers had lost or destroyed it along the way.



photo:
T. Miller

Akulina Vassilievna Sleptsova and her son V. G. Shalugin, Nelemnoe, 1999

In 1999, I collected variations on the story of Jochelson’s abduction of the *chuchelo* from Yukagir people in the Yassachnaya River settlement of Nelemnoe (Miller 2004a). Some, like 69-year-old Akulina Vassilievna Sleptsova, whose husband’s grandfather was still alive in 1895, had heard it from elders; others, like schoolteacher Elizaveta Diachkova, had read the story in a reprint edition of Tekki Odulok’s writings published by the Institute for the Small Peoples of the North in 1996. They told me a young man was hunting in the taiga near the Popovka River when he heard strange singing. He went to investigate the enchanting voice and saw a young girl sitting in a tree. He was afraid, thinking she was a demon, so he shot at her with his arrow. She fell out of the tree, but when he got to the place nobody was there. Suddenly he was stricken; he became very sick and had to crawl back to his village. His father, a shaman, recognized right away that this was a demon spirit come from the lower world. They had to make offerings, so they carved a *chuchelo* out of wood. The *chuchelo* itself was believed to be some kind of demon.

As stories, the *chuchelo* variations fall between truth and fiction. Tekki Odulok called the story an old legend that consequently became reality due to the epidemic, a folkloric myth come true (1996, 50–2). An 84-year-old Yukagir man laughed and told me “It wasn’t a doll, it was a *Shaitan*.” He scoffed at the superstitious notion that anything bad happened after Jochelson took the idol: “No, of course nothing happened.” Then, after a pause, he added “Maybe something happened to him, but not to the people.”

The taiga Yukagir name for themselves is Odul, meaning strong and powerful. Many northern peoples refer to the stars or the northern lights as “Yukagir fire.” Legend has it this expression came about because the Yukagir campfires and hearths were so numerous that at night they could be seen dotting the landscape all the way to the horizon. Through assimilation and epidemics the once numerous Yukagir dwindled in number to around 200 at the turn of the 20th century (today their population has recovered somewhat to around 1,000). After the mid-18th century Chukchi wars, the Yukagir made strategic alliances with the Russians. As a result they suffered heavy losses from Chukchi raids. Between 1850 and 1897 the population of the Alaseia clan of Reindeer Yukagir (Wadul) declined from 99 to just 13, mainly from disease. Among the survivors was Igor Shamanov, the clan shaman and grandfather of the Kurilov brothers, who recorded spirit voices and sold his shaman’s coat and drum to Jochelson for the American Museum of Natural History.

The theme of abduction still echoes in the taiga, in local legends and indigenous people’s movements for recognition, land rights, and cultural recognition. One elder told me “They say there was a foreign epidemic, so the shamans gathered and decided to give ransom to this doll which they said was from the lower world, and this gave the people new life.” It would have been too dangerous to put the *chuchelo* at the mouth of the Popovka, where the hunter had encountered the demon. The Yukagir avoided that site and instead placed it nearby, against the mouth of the Shamanikha. “But then the tragedy happened,” one of my consultants said, echoing Tekki Odulok’s words: a bearded foreigner came and took it away. The *chuchelo*, presumed lost, destroyed, or stolen for a second time, was never seen again. As punishment for helping to abduct the *chuchelo*, Jochelson’s local assistant Aleksei Dolganov was banned from burial in the graveyard in the now abandoned settlement of Old Nelemnoe and buried alone, in a forsaken spot by a small lake on the opposite shore of the Yassachnaya River.

20th-century Yukagir writers and artists, led by Tekki Odulok and the Kurilov brothers, initiated a movement to preserve and revitalize their

identity. Odulok, the first Yukagir intellectual in the Soviet Union to publicly campaign for the rights of his people and the recognition of their traditional culture, was accused of spying for Japan and executed in Leningrad in 1938 at the age of 32. He was rehabilitated posthumously in 1955 (S. N. Gorokhov, in Spiridonov 1996, 4). Archaeologist Sergei Slobodin has suggested Odulok's naming Jochelson as the thief was probably necessary to satisfy Communist Party *apparatchiki* (Raven's Arch conference, Sapporo 2002). During the 1930s there was an official campaign to discredit Jochelson, a Jew with close ties to America and "bourgeois" anthropology in the person of Franz Boas. Jochelson's writings were suppressed in the Soviet Union, and he spent his last years in poverty in New York, living on small publishing contracts mostly arranged by Boas. One Yukagir elder told me in 1992 that he knew very little about Jochelson and his comrades, only that "they were repressed and they fled, but they did a lot for the people; they were good people." Today the Yukagir are using his published materials to reconstruct broken traditions, but they also feel he made some serious errors. Jochelson knew that the historical and ethnographic significance of the *chuchelo* he abducted from the Shamanikha River lay in its cult value. His "wooden man" representing the shaman ancestors of the clans was a symbol of tribal origins (the ultimate object of ethnogenesis, which became the rationale for Boas' and the American Museum of Natural History's Jesup North Pacific Expedition). But for the Yukagir people the *chuchelo* – a magical object, mimetic of a dangerous singing spirit, created by shamans to stave off a fatal epidemic, a physical manifestation of the old myth of the *Kozh-Erge* – was an active force working for their survival against the threat of extinction (the ultimate rationale of salvage ethnology collecting).

Nostalgia is a longing for something felt to have been lost. Kathleen Stewart has defined nostalgia as a polemic, a discourse which sets up a dialectic between possession and separation or distance (1992, 253). Turning that definition on its head, separation, distance, and dispossession can themselves create the conditions for nostalgia. The sense of loss evoked by a missing object, mourning the elders' wisdom erased under repression or forgotten by younger generations, alarm at the copying and distribution of lost knowledge outside the community, returning to abandoned lands and closed villages – all these absences carry the potential to spark renewal and become a rallying point for people to reassert their unique tribal identity (cf. Koester 2003). Nostalgia for symbols from the past preserved in stories and songs can become a social force helping to renovate and sustain a people's strength and determination to persevere. In their absence, the missing pieces become unifying symbols of loss and potential restitution.

The *chuchelo* variations illustrate the persistence of tradition despite the removal of the sacred. The evidence of folklore and oral tradition can strengthen indigenous claims to long-term occupation of traditional habitation sites and hunting grounds. The ancient Yukagir names of rivers indicate former places of inhabitation, potential evidence to help reestablish what in Soviet jargon was called ethnoterritoriality. In the 1990s Gavril Kurilov, the political leader of the Yukagir people who is also known as a poet under the pseudonym Uluro Ado, promoted legislation to designate an ecological and ethnic preserve in Yukagir territory similar to an American Indian reservation. The Russian Federation government, however, refused to relinquish claims to the Shamanikha, excluding the river from any protected environmental zone because it is thought to contain gold deposits over which the state reserves property rights.

Kurilov compares removing the *chuchelo* to going into a church in America and stealing sacred objects. It is a special type of cultural property, a sacred performative object of resistance to the foreign spirit of smallpox, symbolic of the dangerous siren whose seductive singing lured the young hunter in the legend to his downfall. In Tekki Odulok's story and contemporary variants told in Nelemnoe, the mannequin is a young girl, while in Jochelson's story it is an old man. Despite his doubly marginal status in imperial Russia as an exiled revolutionary and a Jew, from the standpoint of native Siberian people Jochelson was a Russian with an official mandate to collect, and thus a dangerously powerful figure. In Odulok's telling of the story, he carried a hidden doll of his own, capable of exerting a secret magical influence over the Yukagir and the *Kozh-Erge*. From the 19th-century anthropologist's point of view, the *chuchelo* was a material artifact whose true meaning lay in the unconscious level which was at the foundation of Boas' psychological concept of culture. Boas believed the full significance of a sacred object lay not in its form but within its context, in its origins at production, its use in ritual, and its role in the belief system of a people. While some Yukagir call the *chuchelo* an "idol" and others call it *Shaitan*, it is a demon, a mannequin, a magical artifact, a dangerous spirit mediating between the living and the dead. Jochelson's grandfather figure represented the shamanic ancestral origins of the Yukagir people; but the *chuchelo* described by the Yukagir originated as a protective offering in a time of fatal epidemic, and thus stands for their perseverance and survival. Its loss symbolizes their death.

The singing museum: folklore collecting

The collecting process began with exchange and ended in depletion. In 1886 Captain Johan Adrian Jacobsen and his brother Filip toured Europe

with a group of Nuxalk dancers, musicians, and artists from Bella Coola, British Columbia. Their performances gave the European public its first exposure to the living arts of the Pacific coast tribes, and first dislodged Plains iconography as the essence of Indianness in the German popular imagination, a trend Boas' later work would accelerate. Boas, who was then working in Berlin organizing ethnological collections as an assistant to Adolf Bastian at the Museum für Völkerkunde, spent his free time with the Nuxalk identifying museum objects, taking pictures, and attempting to transcribe their songs and speech. Later that year, arriving in Bella Coola on his first field trip to the Northwest Coast, he was surprised to find his photographs from Berlin already proudly displayed in houses. By 1930, Boas would write to his children from Fort Rupert that the host of a Kwakiutl potlatch had made the same speech he had been hearing for 35 years: "This bowl in the shape of a bear is for you, and you, and so on. But the bowls are no longer there. They are in the museums in New York and Berlin!" (Cole 1985, xxi)

The process of museumification was a way of naturalizing the culture death which was presumed to be taking place. As Jacob Gruber (1970) has noted, the act of collecting separated the data from lived experience, as the removals and decontextualizations of the salvage ethnology approach replaced living practice with a pathological model of lost culture. The impulse to salvage representational fragments was a near missionary fervor based in the belief that traditional cultures themselves were imperiled beyond saving. Boas was already invoking the rhetoric of urgency in predicting such culture death in 1886, in his efforts to publicize the Nuxalk dancers' tour from Bella Coola to Berlin; three years later, he predicted in a local newspaper that the Kwakiutl were headed for extinction (Cole 1982, 122; see also Miller and Mathé 1997, 22). In his introduction to James Teit's *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia* (1898), he wrote:

On the whole, the progress of invention among a more primitive people is not so rapid that man is induced to speculate on the possible future achievements of his race. There is rather a tendency to consider the present accomplishments as the stationary result of a previous development. Therefore it is hardly likely that Indian traditions will speak of lost arts; they will rather refer to the introduction of new arts... (Boas in Teit 1898, 8)

Before the more dynamic ideas developed by some of his 20th-century students, Boas thus downplayed the regenerative potential of native arts and the innovations of indigenous creativity in favor of a static view of native

actors who could hardly be expected to recognize the imminent demise of their own traditions.

Boas was a principal co-founder of the American Folk-Lore Society (AFS) in January 1888. The main purpose of the society was the collection, publication, and preservation of the “fast-vanishing remains” of tradition as a bulwark against rapid change (*Journal of American Folk-Lore* 1888 I:1, 3). Its principal objectives were the collection and study of the remnants of English lore in America (including ballads and songs), as well as the lore of southern blacks, North American Indian tribes, French Canadians, and Mexicans. Boas was on a mission to salvage the traditions of North American Indians; other Americanist folklorists considered these to be less endangered than the others, but more significant. Indian traditions were generally seen as the most fruitful and important area, a cornucopia of surviving folklore which, despite the presumed imminent disappearance of the tribes, could still be harvested in abundance if collectors moved quickly. In contrast, they believed that collecting the scattered and assimilated relics of old European traditions in America was an antiquarian, almost archaeological pursuit. Yet while collecting the latter could be considered “an amusement for leisure,” Indian folklore was “an important and essential part of history” (*ibid.*, 5). This paradoxical reasoning was premised on the assumption that over time whites would inevitably supplant the native population. The most urgent matter was to bequeath a sense of the historical roots of place and humanity as a whole to future generations of predominantly European stock: “One race cannot with impunity erase the beliefs and legends of its predecessor,” even if it could displace and eliminate the people themselves. The folklorists declared Indians “should be allowed opportunities for civilization,” a liberal orthodoxy of the era and a personal crusade for Alice Fletcher, the comparative musicologist and AFS council member who was one of Boas’ chief Washington rivals. Representing a minority anthropological view within the AFS, Boas and Daniel Brinton called not for “an anthology of customs and beliefs, but a complete representation of the savage mind,” uncensored and unvarnished.

After years of conducting freelance investigations, Boas finally established a base at the American Museum of Natural History. He soon reframed his collecting activities on the Northwest Coast as part of a grand research design encompassing both sides of the Pacific rim. In its early decades, the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History had overwhelmingly emphasized collections from the indigenous tribes of the Americas. By the turn of the 20th century, Boas was actively courting capitalist sponsorship to expand American ethnological collecting into East Asia. In the European American worldview of the time, this

meant a radical extension of the purview of ethnology beyond so-called primitive (tribal) societies to include so-called high civilizations (such as China and Japan). The Spanish-American war would draw the American public's attention to the Philippines, yielding a windfall of artifacts and curios among the booty and spoils of war brought back by returning military personnel. This provided the opening the opportunistic Boas sought, and he took advantage of the circumstances to further establish Asian ethnology within the discipline of anthropology.

In 1897, Boas had organized the Jesup North Pacific Expedition for the American Museum of Natural History to collect from the indigenous peoples of Siberia and the Northwest Coast of North America (see Boas 1903, 1905, Freed et al. 1988, Krupnik 2001). He hired Waldemar Jochelson to lead the Siberian side of the expedition. Russian and American scientists collected art, artifacts, photographs, sound recordings, and folkloric texts (as well as human remains) in order to represent what they considered dying traditions. The accumulation of material was unprecedented, with over 5,000 objects just from the Siberian side of the expedition. From plaster casts of children's heads to wax cylinders of shamans' songs, fragments of representation were cast as cultural icons frozen in ethnographic time. In his instructions to field workers on the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Boas charged them with amassing found objects but stressed above all the documentary collecting activities of physical-type measurements and casting, photography, and phonograph recording of stories and songs. The making of these virtual objects of representation required more active agency on the part of both collectors and informants than the simple acquisition of pre-existing artifacts. The documentary collections in the museum thus represent identity in both indigenous and anthropologized terms.

If phonograph records were testimonial actions from the point of view of the performers' intentions, the ethnographers producing them intended for them to provide documentary evidence in support of their own historical theories (Brady 1999). Between 1886 and 1900, Roger Sanjek observes, Boas refocused his attention from what he was seeing – in participant-observation among Baffin Island Eskimo – to what he was hearing: Kwakiutl stories about the past (Sanjek 1990, 6). The shift was part of a methodological turn from artifact collecting to writing down oral tradition and transcribing native texts. Reading objects as ideas, Boas was less interested in the form of things than their meaning. He defined anthropology for his students at the outset of his introductory courses at Clark University (Miller 2002a,b). In a draft of his opening lecture for 1898, he instructed them:

The ultimate aim of this study is the description of the history of mankind – not that of civilized nations but of man, beginning from the first bones we find buried deep under the surface up to the present time and in all parts of the globe. In order to accomplish this object it is necessary to trace the history and distribution of every single phenomenon relating to the social life of man and the physical appearance of the tribes. (Typescript in Boas papers, American Philosophical Society Library)

What came to be called the holistic method stemmed from Boas' insistence that the broadest possible variety of data had to be gathered before a proper view of history could be gained. The disciplinary rationale for this vacuum-cleaner approach to collecting found its most voluminous expression in the salvage enterprise of museum anthropology. During the age of expansion between the Civil War and World War I, American-backed scientific expeditions regularly moved men and material on a colossal scale. At one point Jochelson wrote back to Boas from the field that in just a few short weeks they had accumulated 36 crates weighing 752 pounds filled with 300 Yukagir items, 914 Yakut items, 400 photographic plates, 5 welded tin containers holding small mammals, one skull from an old Yukagir graveyard, 30 phonograph cylinders, 20 plaster masks, mammoth tusks, plant collections, and a good deal more. Human remains were the most sought after and most difficult objects to obtain, so when summer came Jochelson hired a team of Cossacks and a political exile to look for graves, dig up skulls and send them to New York.

The natural history museum, a universalist collection, is a tomb and a time capsule for the preserved forms of life on earth. The bones of ancestors lie silently in cabinets along with their sacred and secular artifacts in the house of the dead. The American Museum of Natural History, founded in 1869, followed the U.S. National Museum (Smithsonian Institution) in a distinctly American pattern of subsuming humans under the natural-history rubric together with chimpanzees and dinosaurs, rather than setting up a separate museum as most European institutions did. The sense of confidence and completism is now a relic of an earlier, more ambitious age of magisterial anthropology. At the time, however, it reflected an earnest impulse to preserve the remnants of the past for the science of the future. Collectors documented what they construed as pre-contact survivals from the past, but in their prophetic assessments of culture death they underestimated the long-term survival prospects for northern peoples and their distinct traditions. The Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, Alaska, founded by missionaries, was the only major museum of the era to collect

North Pacific ethnology primarily intended for future natives themselves; most others predicted they would soon go extinct or disappear into the general population.

Reshaping the image of the past, museums, archives, and the phonograph all preserve and project it into the future. The spatial logic of the collection spreads out the temporal into simultaneity. Theodor Adorno elucidated the dialectic of museum objects (1967, 173–85): Stripped of their original contexts and function, they undergo a kind of death, a suspended animation removed from the world which created them and gave them meaning. Over time, this world ceases to exist, while the museum object continues in its preserved state. At the same time, art and artifacts placed in museums embark on a “second life” in the new context of collections and display, as sterile contemplative icons and idealized floating signifiers in the vacuum of the glass case and pedestal vitrine. This dialectic is unresolvable, Adorno concludes, as the original context and function of which the object has been stripped gives it its meaning in its second life, while “The natural-history collections of the spirit have actually transformed works of art into the hieroglyphics of history and brought them a new content while the old one shrivelled up” (*ibid.*, 185). Born in a time of disastrous epidemics and rapid assimilation, salvage anthropology was fatalistic, an “abstract social archaeology” (Morris 1994, 80, 89) archiving images for a future it imagined as culturally impoverished and cut off from tradition. The calculus of loss over the 20th century is immense, but so is the capacity of native cultures for continuity and regeneration. The lives of ancestors are encoded in the objects they left behind. Museums are haunted by the sacred and mundane objects, bones, hair, and skulls in glass cases and cabinet drawers. Re-activating their images, voices, artifacts, and remains brings these relics back into circulation and wider contact with the living.

Among the objects most prized by collectors were shamanic drums, coats, ritual paraphernalia, carved spirit figures, and talismans. One Yukagir shaman told me that if the drum is taken away to another place, it loses its power because the spirits dwell in the place where it was used. When his own drum was collected and taken to a museum in Germany, he performed an elaborate ritual to dissociate his spirits from it lest they become a harmful influence (Miller 2004a). If the Yukagir shaman accompanies the drum to a foreign country, then the power would remain with him when he is with the drum. “But he wouldn’t do that,” the shaman added; “he would leave the drum where it is, and not take it away.”

Shamanic objects were sacred material possessions which, in the hands of a skilled practitioner, helped conduct the spirits into the vessel of his or her body through sounds. Phonograph records introduced a new kind of

performative object, a secularized entrapment which remains on call for anyone. Sound recording changed the rules of representing ritual. The collection provides the narrative, suspending the moment in wax. By fixing fluid practice, preservation can kill off improvisation, but it can also be a mnemonic insurance policy, over time enabling a partial recovery from incommensurable loss. The seemingly inert spiritual potency of sacred objects in museums also remains on call. The silenced drums wait for the moment when they might be implicated in some future action in the theater of culture.

In his talk on book collecting, “Unpacking My Library,” Walter Benjamin drew a sharp distinction between the act of collecting and the collection itself. The avid collector’s relationship to the objects constituting his collection is not merely proprietary but tactical and physiognomic. His life history is written in the stories of their acquisition – “Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them” (1968, 67). The collection is distinguished by its ability to be transmitted as an inheritance, yet it loses its individuality and fetishistic qualities when it ceases to be private and passes into the public sphere. Collecting has a culinary aspect in a manner similar to Brecht’s description of opera – as consumption for pleasure – but the bequeathed or institutional collection is depersonalized. In accessions donated to museums from private collections, the fetishism of the object is divorced from the influence of the idiosyncratic personal taste which selected it. Instead, the particular object takes on generalized qualities, making it iconic of such sweeping abstract and didactic concepts as culture, religion, or tradition. For Benjamin, the decisive element in collecting

is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar character of completeness It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone (Benjamin 1999, 204–5).

The collector embraces the objects within his purview and gives them a new narrative context, Adorno’s “second life” which only becomes possible once they are removed from their original settings. In this sense, collecting is a framing device like that described in Benjamin’s essay on the Russian storyteller N. S. Leskov, whose folkloric introductions and endings enclosed his tales within the telling of a narrator and so removed them from the sphere of history into that of myth (1968, 83–109). The histo-

riographic form of the epic is reinforced by the constant presence of death in stories of wars and successions: "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, it is natural history to which his stories refer back" (*ibid.*, 94). Natural history is the history of death. Like a bird which must be shot and stuffed before it can enter the physical narrative of the museum collection as a specimen representing its species, joining the dinosaurs and dicynodonts in the halls of the embalmed past, sacred objects of living tradition were retired from practice via the act of their transmission to the collector, their previous owners stripped of the possibilities they once carried.

Collecting for Boas on the Jesup Expedition, Jochelson had to bargain hard for the shaman's coat (AMNH #70/5620) and drum (AMNH #70/8528) of Igor Shamanov, the shaman of the Reindeer Yukagir Alaseia clan. Only 13 surviving clan members remained when Jochelson bought the coat and drum for the museum. Shamanov finally agreed to sell them only

after much persuasion on the part of the chief. When the deal was concluded, he passed the money over to the latter and in silence left the tent where the purchase was arranged. As I was informed later he was crying, because he had been deprived of his hereditary shamanistic dress, in which he saw the main source of his shamanistic power. (Jochelson 1926, 171)

Sweeping culture clean, with the camera and the phonograph serving as last witnesses, threatened to become a self-fulfilling prophecy: anthropology's recurring nightmare and urgent cause, the disappearing native subject.

On June 6, 1897, during the first season of the Jesup Expedition, Franz Boas and James Teit produced the first recordings from the North Pacific area. At Spences Bridge on the Thompson River in British Columbia's Interior Plateau, they recorded 43 wax cylinders of Nlaka'pamux Indian singers performing lyric songs, religious songs and prayers, dancing songs, medicine songs, a gambling song, and a grizzly-bear dance (Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music accession #54-139-F; see Abraham and von Hornbostel 1906, Wickwire 1988, 2002, Keeling 2001, Jacknis 2003). Boas' major activities in Spences Bridge were phonograph recording, photography, casting heads in plaster for the purposes of measurement and display, and hunting for skulls and bones. "Physical-type" anthropology, the collection of anatomical data and likenesses for the purposes of racial classification in typological categories, drove the entire collecting endeavor financially and scientifically (Miller 2004b). Throughout the

North Pacific, native peoples were dying in epidemics and assimilating through intermarriage. It was widely believed they would not survive the onslaught of modernity with their distinct identities intact. Boas' mission was to preserve their traditions and physiognomic make-up through representation in the recorded impressions of wax, plaster, glass-plate negatives, and texts (Miller and Mathé 2001).

Northwest Coast songs are traditionally the property of individuals. Customary rights grant composers control over the use of their songs, including those received in dreams and visions. There are even restrictions imposed after the fact on the songs Boas recorded for demonstration purposes in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Wax cylinders of Kwakiutl songs were willingly made by the singers, and some of them were composed, apparently on the spot, by Boas' partner George Hunt, who was raised Kwakiutl. Yet the songs engraved in them continue to be the inherited property of individuals. Several were reconnected with their owners by artist Bill Holm in the early 1960s. Reproducing technology throws a spanner in the works of the traditional notion of songs as property, forcing communities to come up with new ways of dealing with these sounds when they are turned into objects in the form of recordings. In the United States the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress has formally returned cassette copies of wax cylinders to Indian tribal communities. Early researchers recorded sacred songs in the same collections as secular songs; when copies of these sets came back to Indian communities, some people felt these things should not have been put together (Gray 1997). By today's local standards, some of the sacred songs should never have been preserved, yet there they were. The fact that certain songs could be recorded 100 years ago but not today shows that at least in this one respect, and contrary to the predictions of Boas and his contemporaries, some proprietary customs are stronger now than they were then.

Often, people are able to make use of such virtually repatriated materials if they can listen through the noise of the early medium, but ultimately their use and disposition is up to the people themselves. One Indian singer in British Columbia told writer Ruth Kirk that "Families value their songs and bitterly resent all unauthorized use of them," while another wished there had been tape recorders when his parents and grandparents were singing songs, "because now he just has to use what's in his brain to remember them" (Kirk 1986, 38). In Interior Salish country property restrictions on songs largely fell away, but through the influence of Coast Salish tribes they began to be reasserted at the turn of the 21st century.

With the encouragement of comparative musicologist Carl Stumpf, Boas made his first musical dictations in 1886 with the Nuxalk dancers

visiting Berlin. Stumpf traveled from Leipzig, where he had been attending a Bach festival, to Berlin in order to hear Nuxalk singing. Listening to Indian singing with the strains of the 18th-century *Kappelmeister* still echoing in his ears, he postulated an evolutionary chain in which the Northwest Coast tone system “must have preceded a mental development whose expansion and importance could perhaps measure the distance” from the tribal to the baroque (Stumpf 1886). This teleological error would later be elaborated and compounded by Boas’ acolyte John Comfort Fillmore. Working with Alice Fletcher in 1891, Fillmore, a music teacher, made piano arrangements of Omaha songs as an experiment to find out whether the Indians would accept the “natural” harmonies he had filled in. Since the result was something new and unknown, at first the Omaha and Ponca informants heard little or no resemblance to the original melodies. Fillmore repeated his piano harmonizations until the Indians agreed that they sounded familiar to, or even better than, the originals on which they were based. When the Indians, perhaps out of politeness, had accepted his chord choices, Fillmore concluded that all people are born with an innate sense of harmony, and that monophonic styles contain the incipient harmonies of musical “advancement.” This natural, unconscious sense of latent harmony was supposed to be undeveloped in the Indian, yet when subjected to Fillmore’s analysis it appeared virtually identical to the late romantic European tonal palette. His ideas about form were influenced by Robert Schumann (also a favorite of Boas’) and other European composers. Thus, Fillmore was surprised to find Indian singers using what he thought were implied seventh chords and harmonic modulations on the third and sixth scale degrees, as if these were compositions by Schumann, Chopin, Wagner, or Liszt. He concluded that the sense of latent harmony was a cross-cultural universal, and that cultural assimilation was possible because both Indian and European American were situated at different points along the same chain of advancement. Fillmore’s settings made traditional melodies dictated by informants resemble the psalmody sung in Christian churches on reservations; in this sense they were a musical analogue to missionization itself. He claimed his overlaid chord progressions were improvements: by basing them directly on the overtone series he believed he was actually making the songs more natural, hence closer to God’s will. Singing the praises of the romantic noble savage, westernization of Indian tradition was simultaneously a paean to a supposedly lost primitive nature and a reversion to a supposedly even truer nature reflecting divine intentions of progress. Fillmore considered his interpolations more representative than the real thing because they brought to full expression the inchoate “primitive” subconscious mind. But the musical language of Indian monody,

while flexible and adaptable to various settings, had neither structural nor psychological basis in western listening habits. Fillmore's westernized version of indigenous aesthetics lent a theoretical underpinning to official views on the desirability and attainability of cultural assimilation. The Indians would learn to sing church hymns, while composers in the European art tradition would absorb rudiments of Indian music to create a more authentically American voice. Like missionization itself, reform through modern aesthetic training would enable the adaptation of old cultural ways to the new social reality for both parties. The piano on the plains was to be the machine of musical manifest destiny.

Boas was intrigued by Fillmore's experiments, viewing them as a successor to his own 1886 dictations of Nuxalk songs in Berlin. As a piano student raised on the romantics and an ethnologist influenced by Bastian's theory of the psychic unity of mankind, the idea of universal innate harmony held a certain appeal for Boas. But when respected musical figures began to criticize Fillmore's theories and the accuracy of his transcriptions, Boas quickly distanced himself from the idea of universal harmony in music and reverted to his characteristic historical particularism in considering North American song styles. Henry Edward Krehbiel, Musical Editor of the New York *Tribune* and an opera specialist who had studied Chinese music, wrote to Boas after reviewing the phonograph record of a Kwakiutl song said to be composed by Boas' lifelong collaborator, the half-Tlingit George Hunt, at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. Krehbiel found Fillmore's notation completely unacceptable. Moreover, he added private asides to Boas in German casting doubt on the authenticity of George Hunt's own proprietary songs composed for the occasion: "He who believes pays a dollar, doesn't he?" (Krehbiel to Boas, APS, 20 Dec 1895)

Since Northwest Coast songs are traditionally property held by individual owners, typically the composers and their descendants, the rights to perform these songs are given by permission. The phonograph introduced a new twist in the cultural politics of song ownership, the potentiality for mechanical reproduction whose use is beyond the control of the tribal community. Even if they were made by singers expressly for reproduction and transcription, songs remain the hereditary property of individuals. At Powwows and intertribal gatherings on the Northwest Coast, audience members are advised when cameras, video cameras, and tape recorders must be turned off for a personally owned song or an honor song, Sun Dance, or other restricted items. In a typical occurrence at the 1999 Spirit Days Festival in Anchorage, Alaska, the leader of the Tlingit-Haida Dancers announced "The next song will be performed by our young men. It's a

song from Angoon, and if you're recording it's up to Larry Marvin." The master of ceremonies chimed in: "Just to reinforce what she said, it's a borrowed song, so no pictures, no video." The song leader explained they had been granted permission by Larry Marvin, the song's owner, to use it but not to distribute it. Like an object in a personal collection which circulates to be displayed in temporary museum exhibitions, the song was temporarily on loan. The master of ceremonies entreated the audience once more: "It's the traditional way, so please, let's keep it that way." In one sense, the problem of mechanical reproduction has caused the rules of practice to be retrofitted to "the traditional way;" in another, video technology has already entered the dialogue and been absorbed, and its control has become another part of the tradition.

The act of phonograph recording not only made fixed impressions out of transient vibrations, it secularized the sacred. The first ethnographic field recordings were made in 1890 by Jesse Walter Fewkes, who journeyed from Boston to Maine to record Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Indians with an Edison phonograph (Fewkes 1890a). He made some 30 cylinder records as a test for his subsequent use of the phonograph on the Hemenway Southwestern Expedition to Zuñi (Fewkes 1890b). The concept of schizophonia, the dislocation of sounds from their apparent sources, was not unknown to the Passamaquoddy. An important part of their beliefs was a magical power "by which a song, sung in one place, can be heard in another many miles away. This power is thought to be due to *m'toulin*, or magic, which plays an important part in their belief." (Fewkes 1890a, 265) The appearance of a secular, mechanical white man's equivalent amused them (cf. Taussig 1993). Fewkes, a museum man with little prior field experience, was hired to go to Zuñi on the Hemenway Expedition as a corrective to what were increasingly perceived in the east as the errant ways and unreliability of longtime Zuñi resident Frank Hamilton Cushing (Brady 1999, 52–9). Cushing, who was without formal academic training, inspired the mistrust of his backers not only by going native, but evidently using his acquired expertise to forge arrowheads and implements for sale to collectors when the coming of the railroad stimulated the burgeoning southwestern curio market. Boas was fond of remarking that Cushing was an extraordinarily talented field researcher whose work would unfortunately have to be done all over again. Fewkes, trained in Leipzig and at Harvard as a zoologist, knew little of the Zuñi culture he was sent to investigate. Frustrated in his efforts to record the most secret and sacred rituals, Fewkes was banished to his quarters during one all-night performance. As he lay in the darkness while strange vocalizations drifted in from afar, he was so disturbed by nightmares of demon spirits chasing him that he hast-

ily departed from Zuñi shortly afterwards. The transmuting of sacred performance into secular object was recognized immediately by both Fewkes and the Zuñi as the main obstacle and shortcoming of the new phonographic medium, transforming the reverential into the referential.

In the 1940s-50s, Alan Merriam studied the music of the Flathead, an Interior Salish tribe of the US southern plateau related to the Thompson River Nlaka'pamux. The culture-area concept in anthropology had intellectual roots in the diffusionist theories of the 19th-century German *Kulturkreislehre*. It was based primarily on material culture, but Merriam's music area concept was based on mental constructs. He reasoned that music, carried subliminally, is inherently more resistant to change than is material culture. The spiritual attitude of the singer and the supernatural realm of song were the keys to his understanding of style. Flathead songs approach the singer from afar, moving from the distant realm of the supernatural to the bodies of individuals when they are alone. One informant said the spirit comes and hits the "ears" or open flaps of a tipi, then gives a person instructions and sings the song (Merriam 1967, 7-9). The intrusion of the phonograph into this system could affect the composition of new repertoire; its powerful role as an agent transmitting accelerated culture change was a temptation regarded by local people with apprehension and resistance. One Flathead recorded a set of songs on wire in 1949, then experienced a run of bad luck. He sent an urgent request to the ethnographer asking him to erase the record of a particular song. The act of erasure brought him instant relief, and when another Indian later sang the same song for another ethnographer's phonograph he was unconcerned, although he refused to join in (*ibid.*, 14). The Indians discussed the problem of retrofitting traditional rules to new technology. Because the guardian spirits had not foreseen sound recording machines, the Flathead were unsure whether personal songs could be recorded. The conversion of proprietary songs into mobile and reproducible artifacts threatened to blur the historical group boundaries maintained in part by traditional rules governing performance rights.

For the Flathead, personal songs are an individual's means of calling on the spirit, but shamans' songs are considered collective public property. To be assured of keeping their individual power, shamans were required to sing their personal songs publicly during winter ceremonies. Personal songs of those who had died also became public. The Flathead were thus unconcerned over Merriam's recordings of public songs belonging to shamans or to the dead, because these had already been made public. The recording of personal songs belonging to living people, however, was poten-

tially harmful to the singers who recorded them. One woman wrote to the collector that her husband “don’t even sing no more because you got all of his songs, ha! ha!” (ibid., 14–25).

Shamans and science: the power of distance

Aural messages may carry different spiritual properties and restrictions from objects or images. In Siberia, “Uncle Vania,” a Yukagir shaman, told me he could neither sing nor be photographed in the graveyard in the abandoned settlement of Old Nelemnoe (Miller 2004a). However, his ordinary speaking voice could be recorded there:

“In the cemetery I narrate, like I’m an informant. I know what I will tell long before our discussion. First I consult with the spirits on the information I would share with you.”

“Would they allow you to sing?”

“No, to sing is forbidden. I can only speak. And why is it forbidden? A shaman’s actions actually resemble taking a photograph – you could block my actions.”

“And with a *magnitofon* [recording machine]?”

“Conversation is of no significance, but to sing is forbidden – even without any apparatus.”

With Jochelson’s wax-cylinder recordings in mind, I asked Uncle Vania whether a real shaman could ever perform a “fake” ceremony as a demonstration. He laughed, having just sung in Nelemnoe for my digital *magnitofon*: “Yes, certainly; around here, they do it a lot these days.” Yet even this was real; it would be impossible to fake “because of what *kamlanie* [shamanic singing] is: bringing the spirits, his helpers. So there’s no way he could defraud them. This is extremely difficult: the shaman’s action and its effect is not something organic, it’s something physical and moral. If you do it and it’s false, it comes to you anyway all by itself.” In contrast, professional actors playing shamans, like those from the Sakha National Drama Theatre in Yakutsk, don’t call spirits. Their *kamlanie* remains just a performance: “It’s as if we’re talking about inanimate objects. When people imitate shamans they don’t bring any influence.”

“Can you call spirits through the *magnitofon*?”

“No. If they come, the spirits can’t be controlled. They might eat the person who called them. They can’t be controlled.”

“Is it dangerous to listen to these recordings?”

“Certainly not. They won’t come, because it is repeated. The spirits have already come. The sound of the *magnitofon* is an isolated occurrence. But when doing a performance those spirits, my friends, my own spirits can

unite and gather with other spirits. Then they all have their own power, and it can't be controlled."

"When they performed for Jochelson, did the spirits come?"

"They definitely came. This couldn't be a real song without the spirits. If they didn't come then perhaps he called to the spirits and they got lost If the shaman uses the drum, he calls the spirits, but maybe if he doesn't the spirit-helpers are not awakened If I boast of something I've done, I probably would be punished. I'm giving you this information because it will be published outside this country and won't affect this place, but here they usually don't tell others about their shamanistic powers. One can't tell people here – if they know about the information I have given you, I would feel bad and might get ill. People might take the information I've given you and teach shamanism with it like a science – a very, very grave science."

"So is it dangerous?"

"No, it's good if it's far away. A shamanistic science can develop if it's published, say in America; then if the science comes back here it won't be bad. If someone tells about me, about my shamanistic activity, I would feel bad and the person who told might have troubles too. That person won't be punished by me, but what he will tell will go against him. I know that all the information will be used only for science. I don't want you to tell for any other reasons I'm telling you about this because I know people who published materials about shamanism, and they laughed at me. They were punished and died. A shaman himself might die."

Academic dialogue with shamans has a tradition of its own. In the 1920s Viktor Shklovsky wrote that a Siberian shaman was once brought to the Moscow Historical Museum to perform: "He picked up a tambourine and cast his spells for some professors; he saw spirits and fell into an ecstasy. Then he left for Siberia, to cast some spells there – only this time not for any foreigners" (Shklovsky [1923] 1971, 33–4). As what Gerald Vizenor (1994) calls "double others" in the academic literature, shamans performing such demonstrations separate real ecstasies from their representations (see Miller 1999). But a real shaman's invocation has genuine power to call the spirits even under spurious circumstances. For the late Evenk shaman Matriona Kurbeltinova, the danger of recording lay not in the secularization of the sacred, but in the leakage of the remains of the sacred into the air when the tapes were played back. Once, when a collector was listening to Kurbeltinova's field recordings, the shaman emerged from her tent and apologized to her spirits: "I'm sorry, I wasn't calling you." Afanasy Fiodorov, a Sakha professional actor who performs a note for note recreation of a *kamlanie* song he learned from pre-revolutionary materials preserved in

ethnographic archives, began to feel spirits coming over him and, fearing for himself and his family, says he pulled back from his study of shamanism. But real shamans say there's no harm in this, because the actor is just playing a role; he doesn't have the spirits, and thus doesn't have the power to invoke them. On the other hand, a real shaman might perform for an anthropologist's recording machine, but it is necessarily real because he cannot call his spirits without invoking them. He controls them by stopping short of crucial ceremonial stages. The *kamlanie* excerpts on wax cylinders are thus real but incomplete. Whether the mechanical copy is felt to have the ability to call spirits is culturally and individually determined. For Kurbeltinova, the reproduced sound of her voice was enough to summon them by mistake, but for Uncle Vania, the spirits already came the first time and won't come back for a copy. As the Russian ethnomusicologist Yuri Sheikin says, "They are through with us."

In the era of repatriation, the virtual objects of documentary collections are more mobile than unique material objects. Still, the incommensurability of loss means that some of what was captured in the collector's magic circle is beyond recall. After hearing the variations on the Yukagir story of the *chuchelo* and the *Kozh-ERGE*, I decided to go to the mouth of the Shamanikha River to look for the site from which the wooden bride had been abducted. An old shaman in Nelemnoe drew a map and instructed me on how to make offerings to the tree where the *chuchelo* had hung, and I hired a boat driver who bartered for enough scarce petrol to take me and a research assistant there and back. We traveled north, heading downriver on the broad Kolyma past the town of Zyrianka, built as a penal colony for political prisoners exiled to the Siberian gulag. The route took us past remote abandoned mines, dark caves of ice high up on the windy river bank where Stalin's convicts were worked to death with no chance of escape. In their midst, surrounded by death and suffering, the Yukagir, Even, and other native peoples had survived collectivization and the successive onslaught of famine, war, and terror to the present moment of socioeconomic uncertainty and tentative cultural reawakening. Finally we rounded a bank and reached the confluence of three rivers where the mouth of the Shamanikha, a quiet, shallow tributary of the Kolyma, overlooks the Popovka.

Against the mouth of the Shamanikha River, at the tall cliff known as "Windy Rock," the lone tree still stands. Boulders at the foot of the cliff appear to bear traces of ancient rock paintings in the shape of deer and birds. A handful of small, unusually shaped sticks and stones were nestled in the fork between the branches where the *chuchelo* once sat. We placed offerings of coins and paper in the tree, took photographs and video, made

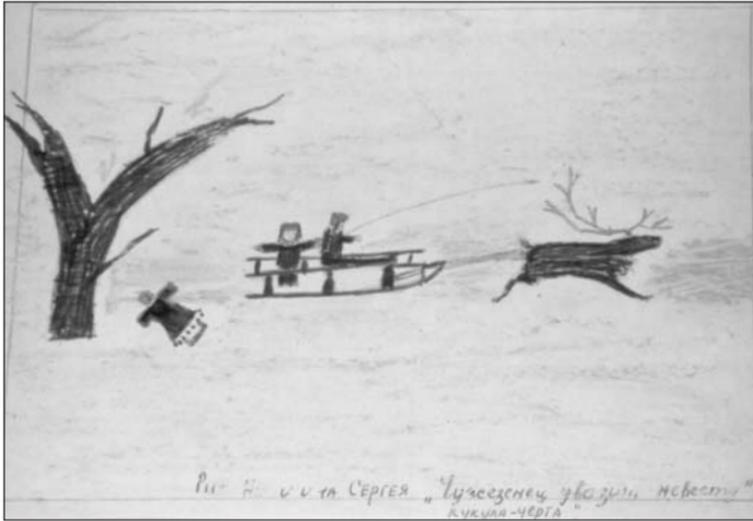
a fire and drank some tea, threw bread, meat and vodka into the fire to feed the spirits of the place, recorded the soundscape of the strong wind and broad flowing rivers, and fired a shotgun into the air to honor the dead.

When we got back to the settlement, a mildly distraught Akulina Vasilievna Sleptsova wanted to see us. The 69-year-old woman said she had been worried, because she'd heard we went to the tree where Jochelson had taken the idol. She said she was afraid we didn't know the *chuchelo* had been stolen, and were going there to look for it. Her eyes widened: "That's no ordinary tree," she remarked. Akulina thought it might not be a good idea to take photographs there. "Something bad might happen to you," she warned. "After Jochelson took the idol, many people died in Old Nelemnoe. Then, when they moved the settlement downriver, only one old woman had survived, and she didn't want to go. But they forced her to move, and she died soon after. The people say it's forbidden to touch those old people's things." She looked at me intently and cautioned, "It's bad if you even just touch an idol." I told her we had not removed anything from the site, that we had paid our respects to the tree and made offerings to the spirits of the place. Knowing the deed was already done, she replied "In that case, I suppose it's o.k. that you went there and took pictures – maybe."

In 1895, a young Yukagir hunter had warned that bad things would happen to those who stole the *chuchelo*. Aleksei Dolganov, Jochelson's guide in Kolyma, was punished posthumously for his role in the theft by being buried alone, banished from the Old Nelemnoe cemetery. An Even shaman named Athanasy (nicknamed Ma'shka) was the guide who brought Jochelson from Gizhiga to Kolyma on the Jesup Expedition. Before they parted company, Ma'shka staged a frenzied seance for Jochelson. The spectators were taken aback and physically worn out by his wild screaming, burbling vocables, whistling, and convulsions. At the end of this intensely vibrant performance, he calmly predicted the Russian would return safely home (Kendall, Mathé and Miller 1997, Plates 54–5). But today some say Jochelson himself was punished by the spirits for the *chuchelo* incident, just as Dolganov was punished by the people. One Yukagir shaman told me the abduction of the *chuchelo* from the tree against the mouth of the Shamanikha River was probably the real reason Jochelson died a lonely expatriate in America.

During the *perestroika* of the 1980s, mandatory Yukagir language instruction was introduced to the school in Nelemnoe (Vakhtin 1991, 14). In the post-Soviet era, the program was expanded into an experimental curriculum teaching traditional Yukagir culture (for comparable native education programs elsewhere in Siberia and on the Northwest Coast, see

Kasten 1998b). In 1999, elementary pupils made their own interpretations of the *Kozh-Erge* legend in artwork (cf. Kasten 1998a). In one child's drawing, the magical girl sits between the branches of the tree, singing her enchanting siren song to the captivated hunter. In another, the *chuchelo* is shown falling or jumping off the sled, unnoticed by the bearded foreigner as he drives away with his heavy load.



Drawing by Sergei N. "The Foreigner Abducts the Doll-Demon Bride"

Yukagir elementary school, Nelemnoe, 1999

photo: T. Miller

Having never having reached the museum in St. Petersburg, the *chuchelo* is a palimpsest of the *Kunstkamera* collections. Julia Kupina (*this volume*) notes the reticence of "mainstream" Russian curators to prepare exhibitions for the Sakha Republic because of what they consider a strong sentiment for repatriation, or more properly restitution. Despite its disappearance, the residual spiritual potency of the *chuchelo* to symbolically protect and restore health to the land and the people would be considered stronger if it still exists somewhere in Yakutia than if farther away. I asked Elizaveta Diachkova, the Yukagir schoolteacher, "If the *chuchelo* could ever be found, perhaps even in a museum somewhere, do you think it should be returned?"

"Only to the small museum here in the village, not to the mouth," she replied. "It's too far; no one goes there." An old man who had been listening in silence interrupted her: "They go there to hunt," he objected. She ignored him and continued: "Yes, if it's connected with the life and health

of the people, it would certainly be a good thing if the idol was returned, so that the little tale of the old woman doesn't fall away." These types of relics were connected with religious representations and beliefs, and taking it was a big mistake.

"But it's not just objects – it's people. Jochelson knew this, of course. All in all, though, it must have been that he simply couldn't resist taking it. It was just such a beautiful thing: far off in the distance, that unique, shining example of the folk."



photo: T. Miller

Elizaveta Diachkova looking at Waldemar Jochelson's photographs, Nelemnoe 1999.

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