

When the Fat Raven Sings: Mimesis and Environmental Alterity in Kamchatka's Environmentalist Age

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Kamchatka, in the Russian Far East, is both blessed with large areas of relatively pristine wilderness and unindustrialized landscape and cursed by the political ambiguities and economic complexities of attempting to manage that territory. As government planners, international, foreign and national non-governmental organizations seek, with Kamchatkan scientists and local groups, to divine a route to an environmentally sustainable future for Kamchatka, their models for development are based on globally recognized, technorational, economic ideas of subsistence and social life. In this worldview, human relations to the natural environment are defined almost solely in terms of resource use and environmental protection or preservation. There are, of course, panderings to 'traditional ecological knowledge' and sincere attempts to include local, indigenous knowledge into the scheme. Yet these schemes are designed to co-opt indigenous local knowledge to technorational purpose. In this paper I would like to offer an alternative perspective for understanding what are called, in general applied social science terms, 'human relations with the environment'. Ultimately, what I want to show is that singing, dancing, storytelling, joking, carving, drawing, ornamenting and so on need not be seen as *mere* leisure time activities. They were and to a surprising degree remain an integral part of social life in Kamchatka and in general constitute a form of knowledge in relation to the environment. This form of knowledge and being-in-the-world needs to be taken into account in considering the transformations that are taking place in the post-Soviet Russian North.

Part of what I will be arguing is an extension of one of Sahlins' main points in *Stone Age Economics*. He argued that affluence, the ability to produce more than what is needed with less than full-time effort, is not reserved solely for bourgeois sectors of Western society (Sahlins 1972). Life for many peoples, including the Itelmens of Kamchatka of three centuries ago, was not a brutal struggle of primitive means of subsistence against a harsh and

unforgiving environment. On the contrary, the Itelmens lived in a world of plentiful resources (Steller 1774, 141–42) and much of their time was spent on what early Russian visitors described as idle activities and entertainment. Indeed, the message that came from the earlier explorers was not that Itelmens needed to be rescued from a condition of savage misery but something more like Itelmens just wanna have fun. Itelmens thought the prospect of living like a Russian or a Cossack was absurd. In a statement that was widely quoted in Europe in the eighteenth century, Russian explorer Stepan Krashennikov, wrote

They are ... convinced that there is no way of life happier and more agreeable than their own. This causes them to regard the Cossack and Russian way of life with astonishment mingled with contempt. (Krashennikov 1972, 209).

The situation has of course changed greatly over the centuries. Now, in the political world of a group with minority status in an outback region of a huge nation undergoing economic collapse, subsistence and survival are critical issues. But, as development agencies such as the UN Development Program are working with local and regional officials to plan Kamchatka's sustainable future, I would like to attempt to describe a conceptual framework that integrates modes of knowing and existing in the natural environment other than those associated with the production and appropriation of resources. For if we anthropologists with applied aspects to our work are to contribute significantly to the betterment of the peoples for whom we labor, surely one of our roles should be to avoid visions of culture and society that merely replicate the rationalistic, economic, individualistic social order by which we know ourselves. This might lead to the possibility of the reestablishment of affluence in Kamchatka that does not involve money or capital accumulation and perhaps even replace monological ideas of rational economic improvement with a theory based on alternative forms of knowing and principles not only of work and industry but also of fun and creativity. I say this not because it fits my personal understanding of the world – I am as economically dreary as anyone – but because the principle of enjoying life seems much closer to the fundamental principle of Itelmen social life than we, or more especially development planners, are likely to give it credit. I would also like to argue that, in this case, Itelmen daily life involved a rela-

tion to nature that constituted a way of knowing not accounted for in the usual treatments of traditional environmental knowledge. Mimetic forms of apprehension and expression, ones that use our ability to make and to recognize copies or replicas or iconic images of objects of experience, are a powerful means of perceiving the world and vital component of expressive social life.

Enjoyment of Life

One does not have to look very far to find descriptions in the literature of Itelmen enjoyment of life. German natural historian Georg Wilhelm Steller, viewing Itelmen life through European eyes with a tone of both admiration and disdain, described Itelmens as being as carefree as animals in their attitude toward life. For him they presented an example of how a person could live in 'natural freedom, according to his/her temperament, without any cultivation of feelings and sensibilities' (1774, 245). A person in such a condition, he writes:

seeks freedom in natural diversions of the external senses. One wants to eat and drink well, sleep fully, change social station and personality often and not fret or worry; one seeks frequent, different sleep partners, phantasizes lustily, recounts these fantasies and represents them in dances, songs and enchanting tales; one avoids only pain and stress, forgets sins and does not consider what is pleasurable to be sinful; accepts power of others over oneself only as necessity determines... One lives thus without cares, works and thinks only about the present and the useful... (*ibid.*)

Clearly, this account tells as much about Steller's reflection on European society and the inverse that he felt he witnessed, as it tells us positively about Itelmen life. Yet behind the European inversion, there does seem to be a general principle of enjoying life. This idea also comes out in the Itelmen mythological tales recorded by Jochelson in 1910–1911. After the mythic characters go through sequences of ordeals, surprising events and absurdities, almost all of the tales end with the phrase, 'and they began to live well and rejoice' (Worth 1961).

Of course, the implication is not that Itelmens did not work in the sense that they did not labor to procure a living for themselves. Steller's, Krashen-

innikov's and later authors' accounts all give descriptions of Itelmen subsistence practices and the detailed knowledge of the world that went along with them. From the more labor intensive tasks of fishing during a salmon run or digging wild lily roots and Siberian ginseng to the less intensive ones of fishing during winter or gathering berries, Itelmens had a wide variety of activities to choose from and a wide range of security and satisfaction to develop.

One of the telling parts of Steller's description of Itelmen life is his account of the pleasure they derived from making use of their senses. In a curious way, this heightened sensuousness fits with emerging interests in ethnobotanical research. The UNESCO sponsored ethnobotany newsletter *People and Plants* recently quoted passages from Diane Ackerman's *A Natural History of the Senses* and David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*. The books, in different ways point to the limitations that circumscribe our daily, urban and semi-urban, techno-social use of our senses. Gary Martin, the editor of *People and Plants* urges readers to gain more from experiencing the environment by more fully engaging the senses. For this discussion what matters is how a way of life partakes of the natural environment. Procuring food, eating and creating shelter and clothing are clearly activities that can reflect basic economic necessity. Yet they, and a host of other experiences in the Itelmen world, make up a social life that, by all accounts, engaged the world with a full range of sensory experience and, from a European imperial, economic perspective, aimed at an exasperating amount of pleasure. The ways in which the senses are used and the ways in which they bring the world around into human-formed feeling and expression are culturally various. We need, therefore, to allow our understanding of human-environment relations to take account not only of differences in knowledge but of differing ways of knowing.

Traditional Environmental Knowledge versus Knowing and Living Traditionally Environmentally

I thus want to begin the analysis by contrasting traditional environmental (ecological) knowledge, as it is commonly portrayed (the usual focus of development initiatives among indigenous peoples), with creative mimetic forms of expression and understanding. Put simply, the traditional environmental knowledge movement recognizes differences between local forms of knowledge and scientific forms of knowledge and attempts to achieve a

level of mutual intertranslation between them. In a report on a pilot project studying traditional Dene environmental knowledge, Johnson and Ruttan introduced their results with a list of well known epistemological contrasts: oral versus written, qualitative versus quantitative and shared knowledge based on practice as opposed to stratified and specialized knowledge (Johnson and Ruttan 1993, 12–15). The types of knowledge that are recorded as traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) seek answers to science-generated, ecosystem questions through cultural understandings that are analogous to scientific practice (Cruikshank 1990, 52–53). TEK research typically proceeds by posing questions aimed at scientifically relevant responses: ‘Informants were asked to describe the seasonal habitats of moose and the uses made of them’ (Johnson and Ruttan 1993, 128). Conclusions to the research are equally drawn in scientific form: ‘from this preliminary study it appears that species identification by Dene is based mainly on physical appearance’ (174). The research strategy behind these statements is to elucidate the forms of knowing that can be mapped onto scientific knowledge structures (Martin 1995). This has, in fact, been a very productive area of research and has contributed to mutual understanding between native communities and government resource management agencies (Caulfield 1988; Freeman 1979; Freeman and Carbyn 1988; Gunn, Arlooktoo, and Kaomayok 1988; McDonald 1988). It has also proved effective in general ethnographic work. Steven Feld’s much acclaimed *Sound and Sentiment*, for example, presents a detailed description of Kaluli bird taxonomy interwoven with cultural interpretations and analyses (1990). The study of ‘traditional environmental knowledge’ has, however, been limited primarily to discussions of these scientifically encodable forms of knowledge and their relation to subsistence. Similar work would no doubt have been particularly valuable among Itelmens three hundred years ago. Steller noted in particular what a detailed knowledge they had of the plant world and of uses of plants for medicinal and nutritional purposes. My intention, however, is to extend the idea of traditional environmental knowledge beyond the knowing that yields taxonomies, ecological processes and all that which has to do with harvesting, production, distribution, consumption and conservation of resources.

Of the various forms of interacting with and appreciating the natural environment the ‘entertaining’ forms, or artistic forms practiced by Itelmens are based on a broad spectrum of tradition-marked and creative environmental

knowledge that was and continues to be a part of Itelmen life. In dances the performers imitate the sounds, movements and characters of animals (and sometimes plants) from the world around them. Itelmen songs speak of experiences of walking, hunting, dogsledding, fishing or berry gathering. In plastic arts animals are often the subject of carvings, etchings, paintings and the like, but the representations speak to much more than simply the bear, reindeer or salmon of tourist art. These animals are depicted as engaged in characteristic activities and as active agents in the landscape.

Songs and Social Life

Part of the inspiration for this paper comes from my attempt to understand the continuing importance of music in Itelmen daily life. I was impressed during fieldwork by the everpresence of singing, though it did not strike me as particularly 'traditional' since most people were singing Russian and sometimes patriotic Soviet Russian songs. The long-term significance of song began to sink in though, as elders recounted remembrances of singing while working in the fields, singing while traveling in boats up and down river and singing in the street in the evenings, not to mention, of course, singing on festive occasions. One elder, Jakov, an Itelmen teacher and self-taught musician explained to a group of school children how important music was to him when he was a child. He said,

I have very much loved music since childhood. I loved songs. And wherever I went, whatever I saw, I composed for the joy of it. Whatever I saw, I sang.

I was particularly struck because this statement echoed accounts from 250 years earlier by Steller and Krasheninnikov. Krasheninnikov suggested that Itelmen songs were simple accounts of whatever interested the composer: 'There is no imagination or inventiveness in the subject matter of their songs; there are only simple ideas about things that seem strange to them, or ridiculous, or worthy of admiration' (1972, 262). Steller similarly noted the simplicity and suggested the same kind of wide-eyed-ness present in Yakov's remembrance.

The Itelmens observe everything with interest, reflect on it, put their thoughts into unrhyming songs; they know nothing of poetics.

There is nothing deep in their music but rather simple ideas about things that seem either strange or wondrous to them (Steller 1774, 332).

From each of these three statements we hear that Itelmens were (1) very attentive to the natural environment in which they lived and (2) sought to express that experience for the joy of it. The joy was in both the experience and the reproduction of it in human-processed, vocalized form. One might from such songs about nature try to extract the kind of traditional environmental knowledge that some researchers have tried to draw from narratives. I do not think that this would be very productive. What the singing does show, however, is an intimate relationship between seeing, hearing and experiencing and seeking to record and express that experience. The songs are not merely exclamations of joy or amazement or sorrow, they give the experience socially realizable and durable qualities. They are to be remembered from the time that they are composed to the time that they are sung for oneself or for others back in camp or the village. It is hard to imagine what could be a more profoundly human form of relationship to the environment than turning experience of the natural world into memorable words that express and evoke feelings about nature.

This is not to say that such experiences in the natural world were for Itelmens divorced from productive activities. Yakov made his statement as an introduction to a song that he had recently composed in Itelmen. The song refers to a traditional activity, the gathering of *sarana* (an edible lily root, the procurement of which involves digging and is actually fairly labor-intensive). The song is, as Steller and Krasheninnikov reported of songs of 250 years previous, very simple.

Gathering sarana.

C'mon friend, grab the basket

Grab the digging tool

Let's go to a faraway valley

There are no bears there

No need to fear friend

The little birds sing very well

It means that there is much sarana growing

There's a river flowing

There we'll have tea

The song, set as an invitation to a friend, seeks to evoke the pleasurable experience that they will have on a *sarana* gathering expedition. Little birds singing, the protected enclosing feeling of a valley without bears, a river flowing by and the ultimate contemporary ritual of Itelmen social environmental experience, having tea in this landscape – all of these evocations convert the image and sensuous experience of a world into song. In writing this song he was both remembering and trying to keep alive the memory of the traditional activity. For him, the allure of traditional life and the way in which he felt he could make a connection for the children to whom he was speaking was through this experience in the natural environment. Clearly, the traditional activity itself cannot be taught with this song. Its didactic purposes reside in the invocation of Itelmen traditional life through the use of the language and the evocation of the pleasures of that life in the semi-ritualized practice of the outing. It is also not a good source for traditional environmental knowledge that can be converted into biological data. The descriptive terms, ‘little’ for the birds, ‘faraway’ for the valley without bears or ‘flowing’ for the river do not constitute much in the way of contributions to environmental science. Yet, I would argue, its contribution to the general picture of social life that is deeply bound up with appreciating the engagement of one’s senses with nature is profound.

The frequent expression of the beauty of landscapes and feeling for places in verbal arts in Kamchatka fully accords with and may be largely a reflection of the German-influenced, Russian romantic view of sublime beauty in nature. Yet at the same time, there are other ways in which the natural world is portrayed in verbal expression. In Itelmen mythology, or perhaps it would be better to call it phantasy storytelling, animals and people’s relations with them offer peculiar and amusing images of the social and natural world. I will give here one brief example. Many of the Itelmen myths recorded by Jochelson in 1910–11 concerned marriage, usually between the children of the great Raven Kutkh and some other anthropomorphosed animal or unspecified sentient being. In one story, Ememqut, Kutkh’s son, has failed in a search for ‘girls’ (as the story tells it). Following the instructions of his father, Ememqut is frightened by his sister into flying off to a place where Kutkh has seen a ‘nice girl’. Ememqut lands on a roof and the nice girl’s older sister perceives him not as a potential brother-in-law but as a potential food thief and throws rocks at him, shouting at him to go away. The younger sister

takes pity on him and they are eventually married. This vignette, suggestive of rivalry between sisters, also represents a common experience of people in relation to ravens. And in fact, theft by animals is a common theme in the myths. Brief as this scene is, it raises several issues that are common in the myths: brother or sister helps the other in finding a spouse, siblings are rivals and animals can be thieves. Animals and a human-with-animal image evoke human-human relations. Humorous, sad or absurd, the myths in Jochelson's collection, render theft, infidelity, abandonment, rejection, need and love in the characters and characteristics of animals.

Mimesis and Dance

Thus far I have only been talking about transformations of experience into verbal expression, albeit with musical embellishment. Dance is an equally important mode of Itelmen creative, artistic expression. Performances today have come to play a major role in displays of identity, as elsewhere, but these creative activities are still practiced for general enjoyment. Unlike song, dance seems neither to have been nor is it now a part of routine daily experience. Although it could be sparked by the most minor of occasions, its performance marked 'occasion', and brought enthusiastic participation. Krashennnikov wrote in 1755:

...they appear to derive such pleasure from [dancing] that once they begin, they do not stop until they are out of breath and have exhausted their energy. They consider it a great distinction to be able to dance longer than anyone else; sometimes they dance without interruption for twelve or fifteen hours from evening until morning; and there is not one in the iurt who does not wish to revel in this fashion. The elders, even the most decrepit, never refuse to enter in, to the limit of their strength. (261)

I witnessed this popularity and urge to participate in 1993 when I was filming an event at the village school in the Itelmen village of Kovran. Village elders were seated behind a u-shaped table that encircled the room. Dance performers, both children and adults came to the center of the room to perform. As the performances brought more participation from the onlooking children, the music seemed more greatly to affect the elders behind the table. Many of them participated in their seats, shoulders swaying and I thought

what a shame that the room was set up with the table blocking them from participating. I need not have worried. I was almost knocked over as the tables were pushed away and the elders streamed out onto the floor to take part in the dancing.

Dancing, like singing, can be thematic, representing scenes, actions or characters from the natural or the social world. Jean Baptiste de Lesseps, who traveled to Kamchatka at the end of the eighteenth century, recorded the following account of Itelmen dance that imitated the movements and character of a bear:

In their dances they are fond of imitating the different animals they pursue, such as the partridge and others, but principally the bear. They represent its sluggish and stupid gait, its different feelings and situations; as the young ones about their dam; the amorous sports of the male with the female; and lastly, its agitation when pursued. They must have a perfect knowledge of this animal, and have made it their particular study, for they represent all its motions as exactly, I believe, as it is possible. I asked the Russians, who were greater connoisseurs than myself, having been oftener present at the taking of these animals whether their pantomime ballets were well executed; and they assured me that the dancers were the best in the country, and that the cries, gait, and various attitudes of the bear, were as accurate as life. Meanwhile, without offence to the amateurs, these dances are, in my opinion, not less fatiguing to the spectators than to the performers. It is a real pain to see them distort their hips, dislocate every limb and wear out their lungs, to express the excess of pleasure which they take in these strange balls (Lesseps 1790, 105–6).

This account and further descriptions by de Lesseps concur with Krashennikov on the great amount of enthusiasm that centered on these dances. What I want to focus on is the relation to nature that is implicit in this imitative process and whether we can describe this relation as knowledge and study as de Lesseps has.

Empathic, mimetic, expressive forms of ‘knowledge’ of the natural world are different from observational, categorizing knowledge. To imitate a Kamchatkan brown bear is not to describe it in contrast to a black bear, to distinguish it from its musky, ecosystem co-habitant the wolverine nor to class it

with humans – both being large omnivorous mammals that shed tears. The study of which de Lesseps wrote did not include counts of foraging trips or sleep periods per day, nor did it consist in size measurements or scat analyses. Yet it did involve observation not necessarily of one particular bear but of bears in general, of their habits, movements, and perceived attitudes, intentions and character. It meant the processing of the observation of bears into some kind of mental image existing as movement in potentia in the body of the dancer. The title of this talk, as some of you may have recognized, was meant to draw reference to Michael Taussig's argument in his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, that the mimetic faculty is founded on a particular kind of grasping of things, objects, people outside of ourselves. Alterity is an inherent part of mimesis because the process of creating a resemblance in the form of an image or sound or movement brings the other/object resembled into oneself. It is, Taussig argues, a particularly powerful way of understanding and representing, that is, knowing, the world. Mimesis is used in magic to draw the powers of other beings or, even better, the spirits of other beings, to the aid of the practitioner. Taussig gives examples of the use of mimesis in shamanic healing, the bringing to bear of the power of the spirit world in healing by the mimetic representation in this world of spirits' powers from another. The mimetic faculty, in Taussig's account, is our combined abilities to make and recognize copies. Participation with an object-other can come by means of contemplating or creating its replica. Mimetic forms, from art objects to dances and songs, put the human endeavor of making a replica into a stored, durable, repeatedly witnessable form. It is in the creation of these forms that deployment of the mimetic faculty can be referred to as a kind of knowledge. It is, though, as I have argued, not the kind of knowledge that separates, distinguishes and critically analyzes. On the contrary, the more direct the appropriation, the more truly mimetic.

We do not actually know if Itelmen dancers at the time of de Lesseps were trying to tap into the spirit world of the bear for magical, mystical or mythical purposes. But that they were connecting the experiential world of the bear in its surroundings with their social world is, I think, an inescapable conclusion.

We cannot judge much about the meaning of Itelmen performance in earlier days from its significance today. In modern-day dancing I have seen some remarkable animal portrayals but much of the dancing is now heavily stylized. Starting in the 1930s, Soviet educators sought to help native groups

‘cultivate’ or ‘culture’ their dances. This meant extracting the less erotic elements and organizing the movements for performance on stage. Mimicking still takes place, but it is as much from trained study of what dancing like a bear is as from attempting to dance like a bear. One of the most popular performance dance pieces in the repertoire of Itelmen dance troupes is called *khamukh*, a chorally narrated dance in which the singers take turns in imitating the movements of various animals common in northwest Kamchatka. *Khamukh* roughly means ‘play’, as in, you play the part of a wolf or, you play the part of a bear. The song begins with a bear:

You play a bear, coming out of the dwarf pines
mimic like at the river; you’ll catch fish
growl, growl
You play a raven, grab a fish
caw, caw...

(Khaloimova, Dürr, Kasten, and Longinov 1997, 62–3).

The dancers stand on stage in a semi-circle presenting before the audience a scene of dancing for each other. Composed in the Itelmen language in the 1960s by Tatiana Gutorova, this piece transformed Itelmen dancing that could be done in a household or out on a berry-picking trip, into a demonstrative form that retained the image of the collective event while generalizing and explicating it for public performance. In this transformation of dances to stage performance the mimetic representation of animals along with the spirit of collective appreciation was maintained.

The power that is present in mimesis comes from the capturing of some essence – at least a superficial essence – of the object in the replica. A bear dance, even a stylized one, engages the mimetic faculty precisely to the degree that the dance is performed and perceived as imitation. Iconic representation blurs into symbolic, as the quality of sameness that exists between replica and object becomes increasingly publicly shared, socially recognized and stereotypical. As the effect of realism wanes, the symbolic takes over. Many dancers today learn their dance movements from human instructors. As long as human instruction helps the learning dancer to perceive the effectiveness of the movements as imitation of the bear’s, there still is mimetic effect. Nevertheless, while human teachers can contribute to the performance aspect, observation of bears that stimulates replicative movement in potentia remains

a necessary ultimate source for the dance to be mimetically effective. If the dancer is truly effective, then the audience member can experience the real bear as representation, captured in its really made, performative image. Bateson's notions of digital and analogic coding in social interaction are useful in this regard (1972, 372–4). The object, not the bear, but the perception of 'bear', in all its movements and characteristics, is realized in the mimetic performance not digitally, not linguistically, that is, not through analysis of its parts or practical demonstration of its distinctiveness from other animals. The realization, however removed from direct perception, is analogically perceptual, perceived as the reflex of experience because our mimetic reflex experience is precisely the mode that conducts the transfer from direct observation to imitation. Our perception of a replica can be greatly informed by the actual physical-mental process of making a replica, of tracing the shape in ones mind in order to trace it in another medium, of reproducing the echo of sound in memory located in our neuro-muscular vocal system, or of using the jointed, moveable parts of our bodies in the space that they occupy to recreate the motions of other objects and bodies in space.

Memory complicates this picture and makes it more social. Understanding or recognition of a replica comes in part from past experience of copying, from our sensation of participating in other-objects by our attempts to imitate or reproduce them. Thus our perception of a replica can invoke memory of the experience of making copies as part of the perception. A carver, for example, cannot only better appreciate the technical aspects of the work of another carver, but also, based on experience, has insight into the relationship of the carved object to its object-referent. This is no doubt true of all forms of mimetic experience. The more experience people have of expressing themselves by means of mimetic forms, the more they are able to appreciate such expression. And the more these forms of performance and appreciation are shared, the more they constitute ways of knowing in which the community participates. The song *Khamukh*, staged as it is, nevertheless points to the expected public appreciation of this shared knowledge. Such performances invoke traditional dancing by engaging the mimetic faculties of the dancers and the audience, who respond to the mimesis.

I want to make one final point before I try to draw this to a conclusion. Taussig is careful not to cast his understanding of mimesis as referring to an 'individual organism as a biological entity adapted to tough material condi-

tions' (1993, 83). He does not want to suggest, in other words, that what are seen to be primitive societies, living without the screen of elaborate technologies between them and the natural world, have a greater propensity for mimesis. Rather, he defines his task as an inquiry into the social aspects 'of the life of the imagination as expressed by art, ritual and mythology of 'primitive' societies' (1993, 83). What is critical here is that the mimetic faculty implies a double sided human capacity to make the experience of an object or an other into one's bodily experience and to apprehend that process in others, to recognize a replica as a result of the process of copying, of capturing and reproducing.

Conclusion

There is a powerful convergence of themes brought together in the notions of mimesis and alterity, environmentalism, traditional environmental knowledge and economic development. Leaders of the contemporary environmental movement have along with other theorists of modern and post-modern trends offered the movement as a critique of Enlightenment philosophy. Bruce Rich, in his devastating critique of World Bank environmental policies, traces the error of our environmental ways back to Descartes and Bacon. Descartes, he argues, gave us an analytical, skeptical perspective that separated reason and knowledge from the distractions of our bodies and the muddiness of the world in order to make us, that is, our mind-defined selves, 'masters and possessors of nature' (Descartes in Rich 1994). Mathematics and other forms of symbolic representation, in combination with the technological devices they would permit us to create, would give us mastery over the natural world. Francis Bacon's plan for a global empirical project brought broad social participation to the inductive formulation of scientific knowledge. To Bacon we owe the idea that knowledge is power. He organized political will, royal courts, that is, to invest in the idea of a technocracy that would be, as Rich quotes him, 'the empire of man over things' (Rich 1994, 205–7). Similarly, environmental philosopher, David Abram, argues that Descartes set the course of our technologically powerful, environmentally destructive ways causing us to lop bodily experience out of our productive encounters with the world. This conceptual exclusion raises an important question about the relation between economic development and the creation

of such physically cruel forms of labor as coal mining or sugar cane production.

Taussig's inspiration too comes from the Enlightenment reaction, particularly the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, whom Rich also cites, and from Benjamin. The mimetic faculty has been used in the modern world, Taussig argues, to control the human environment in creating rational, juridical beings, stamped out as citizens. Horkheimer and Adorno saw the Enlightenment age as taking control over mimetic functions, organizing mimetic forms to the powers of state and capital. At the same time, the vast replicative power of industrialized production and its power to create relatively homogeneous experience over significant distances in social and physical space provided familiar boundaries, limiting the range of human action and interaction. Individual mimetic activity can, however, do the opposite. Adorno, as Taussig argues 'gave ... emphasis to the notion that the mimetic faculty, with its capacity to combine sensuousness with copy, provided the immersion in the concrete necessary to break definitively from the fetishes and myths of commodified practices of freedom' (Taussig 1993, 254). Separating our minds as logical entities from bodily experience has caused us to see logical analysis as absolute truth and techno-reality as the real, limiting freedom of thought and experience. The human social world, however, by its nature, not being a mechanically or logically derivable collective summation of our individual urges and fancies, is, in the end, socially, culturally and individually made up. Taussig concludes that focus on the mimetic faculty can give us a new freedom, what he calls 'the freedom to live reality as really made up'.

I raise these critical accounts of the political outcomes of Enlightenment because as I indicated at the outset I think this discussion of Itelmen forms of human-environment relations touches on political-economic questions in Kamchatka's environmentalist age. I began by saying that what I would argue was an extension of Sahlins' notion that affluence is not necessarily tied to bourgeois capitalism, industrial production or technological and scientific advancement. In environments of subsistential excess such as Kamchatka, the economic aspects of social life need only be a minor, if necessary component of the total social complex. A more general view, abstracted from our narrow, economic vision of political economy might focus on human

social relations founded on forms of understanding and perception, desires, needs, dreams and hopes that have local relevance.

If our Cartesian worldview is based on abstract reason, logical analysis and induction from empirical observation, Itelmen philosophy in contrast seems to have been founded on principles of joyful interpretation, absurd juxtaposition and mimetic appropriation and representation. And if our post-industrial ethos is organized around production, capital accumulation, consumption and guilt about our destructive tendencies, Itelmen attitudes shared with us probably consumption, lacking the guilt, and contrasted with an orientation to songmaking, joking, dancing and storytelling.

My aim in comparing Itelmen cultural activities with traditional environmental knowledge as it has often been studied was not to suggest a way in which we might gain more scientific knowledge from mimetic, jocular or artistic forms of interaction, though this is certainly conceivable. Rather, my intention is to turn the critical focus on industrial developers, environmentalists and even social scientists such as myself and offer a cautionary word to those who are now invading Kamchatka's every corner. In a recent book about the Hudson Bay region, inhabitants' relations to the environment are brought to bear as critique of industrial development. The book is a fine example of working to empower local communities and give voice to their concerns. It claims to be a groundbreaking study: 'unique and historic because for the first time traditional Cree and Inuit have come together to record cultural knowledge for the benefit of their environments and communities' (McDonald, Arragutainaq, and Novalinga 1997, 7). Yet, in the whole book there is not one song, not a single joke nor even a photograph of native arts. The Cree and Inuit world in the book is in many ways Cartesian; the book itself is Baconian in its efforts to catalogue data and the world envisioned is a techno-rational one overlain with narratives of native spirituality. Certainly we need the kind of critique that this book offers. It speaks to the threats that Cree and Inuit inhabitants of the Hudson Bay region face and to the problems in political and scientific terms. This does not mean, however, that the vision of the world that is to be shaped in response to the critique ought to remain in these terms. For it is from this perspective on the world, which has alternately seen wilderness as something to be conquered and something to be revered, that we hear discussion, among politicians,

industrialists and environmentalists, of 'stewardship' of the earth. But just as ruling is different from befriending and taking care of is different from loving, knowing and managing scientifically is different from living in and enjoying the abundance of the natural world.

We may, with a good deal of practical experience and the capital necessary to put infrastructure into place, be able to offer Kamchatkans help in managing their environment and developing a sustainable economy based on freely contracted wage labor and efficient production technologies. But what I would argue is that while such sustainable, wise stewardship is a well-intended correction of our society's faults, we ought also to avoid foisting on our neighbors a vision of the world that, like a huge Kamchatkan practical joke, mimics our own follies and haphazard fixes in raven-like gestures.

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