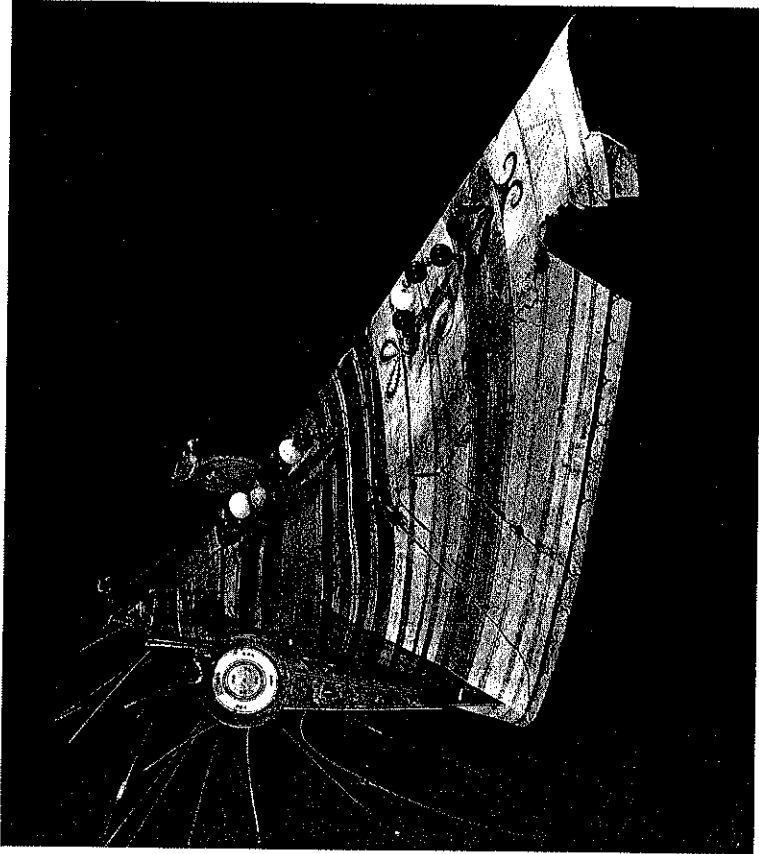


from: JAMES CLIFFORD

Routes = Travel & Translation in the
Late 20th Century (1997)



Aleut seahunter's hat, Unalaska. Given to the Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, in 1829 by Captain William Osgood. Made of bent wood with walrus whiskers, this hat is painted red, green, yellow, black and turquoise blue. It is adorned with ivory birds, trade beads, and incised, inlaid metal ears (or eyes). The hat's form suggests it may have functioned like a mask, identifying its wearer with mobile predatory seabirds as well as with cosmological cycles (Black, 1991). (Courtesy Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. Photo by Mark Sexton.)

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Fort Ross Meditation

JAMES CLIFFORD

The Orchard

The orchard is on a hillside facing west. The fort spreads out below. And beyond: sparkling, swaying, the big ocean.

Paintings and sketches of the Russian settlement, made before 1850, take this viewpoint. Perhaps the artists sat somewhere just below the orchard; perhaps they worked under one of these large, unkempt pear trees. But the trees, newly planted then, would not have given much shade. Maybe the artists ate pears.

Their pictures show a walled enclosure, with blockhouses at two corners and a chapel at a third. Several large wooden buildings with reddish sloping roofs are scattered near the walls. Outside the fort, one sees clusters of smaller buildings, fenced fields, and a windmill. The structures spread along a bluff, below which a path descends to a cove and a small beach.

In 1995, seen from the old orchard, the fort's main structures don't look much different. They have been accurately reconstructed. The surrounding houses are gone, and some large new trees—eucalyptus and cypress—have taken hold. Behind the trees, you can see a parking lot. A paved road—California Route 1—curves in front.

A pamphlet informs me that the orchard was begun in 1814, with peaches brought from Peru on the schooner *Chirikov*. In the next few

years, more peaches, as well as grapes, arrived on the *Kutuzov* from Peru and from the Spanish mission in Carmel, 150 miles to the south. Olive trees also can be traced to the mission. Over the next three decades of Russian settlement in Alta California, more seeds and cuttings arrived: pears, apples, plums, evergreen bitter cherries, and figs. Their provenance is not entirely clear, but the routes were certainly various: from Europe and Russia, by ship around Cape Horn to Alaska, and thence to the Ross colony; up the coast from Chile, Peru, and Spanish California; from the eastern United States by boat, and later overland by wagon.

By 1842, when the Russian-American Company abandoned its Ross outpost, the orchard extended to five acres, tended by local Indian workers and partly enclosed by an eight-foot board fence. The site of a house is still faintly discernible, probably a dacha for the fort's last commandant, Alexander Rotchev. Through the mid- and late nineteenth century, the orchard was maintained and expanded by German and Anglo Californian ranchers who acquired Fort Ross, first from the Russians and then from the Mexicans, who considered the Sonoma coastline north of San Francisco as part of their domain. In 1906 the property passed to the State of California. And in the same year, the site, located directly over the Andreas Fault, was badly damaged by the great earthquake. Sliding earth uprooted or buried many of the trees. Thereafter things fell into neglect, and it was not until the late 1970s that a preservation project was begun, largely by local volunteers.

Currently, the "Russian Orchard" is mowed and enclosed by an electrified deer-fence. Some of the old apples and pears are surrounded by new "daughter trees," made from cuttings. Seven numbered posts refer the visitor to descriptions in the pamphlet, available at the Fort Ross State Historic Park Visitor Center. The orchard doesn't seem to be much visited (there's a combination lock to negotiate), and the general feeling is one of unkept repose.

There has been some debate, and no doubt wishful thinking, about which, if any, of the trees growing here were actually planted by the Russians. Some of them look the part. There are several thirty-five-foot pear trees, which the pamphlet says were "possibly" planted before 1841. A clump of large evergreen bitter cherries, preserved from rot by their hard wood, are linked to the Russians by the story that their fruit was used to flavor the fort's vodka. The old olives "probably" go back to the Carmel Franciscans. All the apples are of later origin, though possibly connected

to the original arrivals by seeds or cuttings. A single Gravenstein, the only one to survive the 1906 quake, twists near the fence.

The aged trees are unpruned, sometimes toppled and overgrown, lightly hung with moss. One of the pears still produces a small round fruit of gritty texture. The tall pears and cherries are planted in groups, as described in Russian accounts. Indentations in the earth, a sag pond and long fault trough, register the effect of the Pacific Plate's sliding beneath the North American. In the trough bank an enormous old pear tree—more horizontal than vertical—has miraculously survived 1906. A few dark leaves can be seen at the tips of its bare branches, and a couple of fruit—shrunken moons—against the sky.

I try a green-and-brown apple that has fallen from a "daughter tree." Its rough skin is covered with blemishes, and it tastes good—tart and sweet. The flavor reminds me of apples I ate sitting on a branch in an old orchard in Vermont, where I spent summer vacations as a boy. Did these apples come across the continent, or around Cape Horn from the eastern states—migrants, like me, to this coast? And how must such apples have tasted to Russian, Yankee, Aleut, Native Alaskan, or Hawaiian voyagers who put in at Fort Ross after months at sea? A taste of land, home, childhood? A strange taste? Did the California Indians who worked here like the alien fruit?

An empty ocean. In the old Russian paintings of Fort Ross, the horizon's line is broken by a ship. Under full sail, it seems to hover on the water, too large to be quite real. Always desired. Always arriving.

History

I'm looking for history at Fort Ross. I want to understand my location among others in time and space. Where have we been and where are we going? But instead of a clear direction or process, I find different, overlapping temporalities, all in differing ways "historical." The long rhythm of the San Andreas fault, which began moving 50 million years ago, makes little distinction between 1906 and 1996. Geological time is inhuman in scale, yet its effects on human life have been direct, catastrophic. The cyclical temporalities of weather—fog, water, wind, erosion. Looking down the coast from the old Russian orchard in the autumn of 1995, I see dust from the earth-moving trucks of CALTRANS in their endless struggle to keep Route 1 from slipping into the sea. Plants keep their own

times: distinct life-spans, forms of propagation and travel. Seeds and spores get around with help from animals, including people—hair, digestive tracts, hands, clothes, wagons, boats, airplanes. Germs and viruses have their histories, deadly when long-separated populations come into contact. The histories of animals are entwined with those of humans: most notoriously, on this coast, the lives of gray whales and sea otters, both hunted till nearly extinct but now returning. Finally, the mix of human times we commonly call history: the long span of indigenous traditions and folk histories; the waxing and waning of tribes and nations, of empires; the struggles and ruses of conquest, adaptation, survival; the movements of natives, explorers, and immigrants, with their distinct relations to land, place, and memory; the changing rhythms of markets, commodities, communications, capital—organizing and disorganizing everything.

At Fort Ross, I hope to glimpse my own history in relation to the movements of others in a regional contact zone. Call it, for convenience, but too simply, the North Pacific. I want to ask some large and ultimately unanswerable questions in a personal way. To think historically, I need to be both globally aware and locally situated. For the forces—economic, political, environmental—that have brought us all together here are materialized as historical reality only through particular local projects and stories. These are neither uniform nor finally determined. Historical reality, what happens in nonrepeating time, is a changing set of determinations, not a cumulative process or a teleology. This, at least, is my assumption—and hope. Fort Ross is a place to start in again with history. Located on the rim of the Pacific, my home of eighteen years, the fort's nineteenth-century stories, seen from an uncertain fin-de-siècle, may provide just enough "depth" to help make sense of a future, some possible futures.

"Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?" Gauguin affixed those questions to his largest canvas, painted in a real Pacific place of his imagination. They are the questions we endlessly ask of history. With a critical and growing uncertainty: Who is asking? I, my parents, my grandparents did not come to this coast from China, Japan, the Philippines, Mexico, Guatemala, Samoa, Cambodia, Vietnam . . . We do not remember a time on the coast before strangers arrived.

Standing at the reconstructed Russian fort, one finds it odd to recognize that when its builders gazed at the Pacific horizon, they were looking back, not out. Odd, that is, for someone conditioned to think that the direction of historical development in the "New World" was from east to west. The

national space of the United States has long been conceived as an expansion west, and (less canonically) south. This westward-looking dream topography had its origin along the Asiatic and African edges of Europe, over centuries of violent and creative contacts. The dream—productive, expansive, violent—had a destination: the Pacific. Here the "West" culminated. Beyond the final ocean lay the East.

At Fort Ross, even "Western" history arrives from the wrong direction. And it comes contaminated, an extension of Russia's great Asian encounter: the Siberian frontier. In fact, few of the builders of Russian America were, in any pure sense, European. Most of the pioneers at Fort Ross were, after all, Siberians (mixed Russian, creole, and native), Aleuts, and Alaskans. It is strange to stand on the California coast and imagine yourself at the farthest extension of an eastward-expanding empire centered in St. Petersburg. And it is disorienting to realize that what brought so diverse a crew to this isolated coast in 1830 was a trading network centered on Chinese luxury goods. The China Trade, fueled by the Anglo-American love of spices, porcelain, and especially tea, transformed much of the Pacific. The search for commodities to sell in Canton unleashed destructive scrambles for sandalwood, sea cucumber, and, in Alaska and California, sea-otter pelts. Fort Ross is as much part of Asian as of Western history.

It is also part of hemispheric history. The presence of Russia in America accelerated Spanish (and, after 1821, Mexican) colonization of Alta California. The relations of Fort Ross with the religious and military centers at Carmel, San Francisco, San Rafael, and Sonoma were both tense and cooperative. Here a frontier moving west-to-east encountered one moving south-to-north. Moreover, the links with South America were palpable, via Pacific sea routes. The very-American George Washington Call, whose ranch occupied the fort in the late nineteenth century, came to the Sonoma coast from Valparaiso with his Chilean wife, Mercedes.

Today these transpacific and hemispheric involvements make renewed sense. They prefigure something . . . As contemporary California fills with Pacific and Asian immigrants, many linked across the ocean in familial and financial diasporas, and as the state's southern border becomes ever more porous, the mix of forces and peoples on the 1830 Sonoma Coast seems less distant. The fact of Fort Ross helps dislodge a dominant "American" history, making room for other stories, other discoveries and origins, for a United States with roots and routes in the Asian Pacific, in

the Americas. And around the fort I begin to feel the ongoing presence of native histories, stories differently situated, linking other origins and futures—histories that tell the experiences of those who saw sails appear on an empty horizon with emotions very different from joy.

Russian America

Russian America was an extension of Siberia. The famous Cossack *promyshlenniki*, self-governing freelance hunters and frontiersmen who in sixty years burst across the Ural Mountains and raced to the Eastern Sea of Okhotsk, did not hesitate when faced with a mere ocean.* Their conquest of Siberia had been driven by what the Russians called "soft gold"—the skins of beaver, silver fox, and especially sable, which brought high prices in Europe and China. Where the fur-bearing animals were killed off—and it did not take long—the hunters moved on. When the land stopped, they continued by other means. Rumors told of places beyond the water. Vitus Bering's expeditions of 1728 and 1741 glimpsed Alaska and touched on the Aleutian Islands. Survivors from his luckless second voyage returned to the Kamchatka Peninsula, after a winter of shipwreck, with little more than their lives (Bering lost his). But they did collect 900 sea-otter skins, which fetched an amazing 90,000 roubles on the China market. After Bering's crews reported that the Aleutian coasts teemed with otters, the race was on. Within twenty-five years, *promyshlenniki* in crude boats had tracked the Aleutian chain as far as the Alaskan Peninsula and Kodiak Island, 2,700 miles from Okhotsk. By 1799 the Russian-American Company, a private, quasi-governmental body, had obtained a monopoly from the czar to hunt furs in North America. Under the energetic leadership of Alexander Baranov, it moved its headquarters from Kodiak further east to Sitka (New Archangel). Fort Ross, far south on a temperate coast Sir Francis Drake had named New Albion, would be the company's farthest outpost.

Russian America was a coastal-extractive, not a settler, colony. At its peak, no more than several hundred ethnic Russians lived there. The major work of hunting and exploration was accomplished by indigenous and creole employees. The *promyshlenniki* had routinely intermarried, or

*The principal sources for the facts and interpretations in this "meditation" are cited in a postscript. References for direct quotations appear in the text.

at least cohabited, with the indigenous peoples of Siberia, and the practice was continued by Russians of all classes in America. A large creole population developed, which occupied intermediate places in a graded, not a binary, racial hierarchy. These mixed-race employees worked with indigenous conscripts under the direction of a small minority of ethnic Russian leaders and experts.

The colony was heavily dependent on native labor organized in large hunting parties. Some of the work called for very special skills. Fur seals could be easily clubbed as they bred by the thousands on the Pribilof Islands; beavers could be trapped much as they had been in Siberia; but sea otters, the linchpin of the American operation, were another matter. Mobile, living in treacherous coastal waters, they usually were speared from moving boats. Only Aleuts and Koniags from Kodiak Island (the Russians called them all "Aleuts") were good at this. The Aleuts in particular, trained from childhood to hunt on the water in superbly designed *baïdarrkas* (kayaks), were virtuosos of the otter hunt.

The freelance Russians who worked their way along the Aleutians were quick to exploit native hunters. This was accomplished by the familiar early-colonial combination of carrot and stick: mutually beneficial trade, alternating with naked terror. Some of the explorers were fair in their dealings; and some stayed on, marrying local women. Others were brutal. They organized work parties, sending the conscripts to remote coastlines, sometimes for extended periods. Aleut men were cajoled or coerced onto these expeditions, often after their families had been taken hostage. With organization of the extractive system, work for the invaders became a required tribute. Payment tended to be minimal, sometimes in the form of goods produced by Aleut and Koniag women, themselves forced to work at Russian settlements. The disruption of island subsistence patterns was serious, at times devastating. A wave of epidemics, brought by the invaders, decimated the Aleutian and coastal Alaskan populations, continuing their devastations well into the nineteenth century.

By the early 1760s, the generally peaceful Aleuts had had enough. Several eastern groups carried out a well-prepared attack on five Russian ships, destroying four and killing most of their crews. The response was exemplary: scores of villages on Unalaska and neighboring islands were destroyed, their inhabitants tortured and killed. Concerted resistance ended. Processes of assimilation, forced and voluntary, followed: local chiefs, supported by the Russians, controlled the regular supply of hunting

parties; individual islanders were taken to Siberia, educated, converted, and returned to serve as translators and local leaders. With the help of liberal priests such as Ioann Veniaminov (an important early ethnographer/historian and colonial reformer), by the end of the eighteenth century virtually all Aleuts were nominally Russian Orthodox—a faith to which they gave an indigenous stamp. Though conversion to Christianity was not coerced, as it often was in Spanish America, it occurred against a backdrop of superior power and sporadic terror. The same was true of somewhat more liberal labor regimes instituted at the end of the century by the Russian-American Company. St. Petersburg regularly exhorted the pioneers to treat American natives well, but with limited effect. The realities of the distant colony, undermanned and needing to hunt in ever more distant regions, left it wholly dependent on indigenous labor. Re-supply expenses were high, profit margins narrow.

The quest for new hunting grounds continued south along the American coast, sometimes with the help of New England trading vessels, to whom Baranov supplied parties of Aleuts and Koniags with their kayaks. The hostile Tlingit impeded work in the inlets and islands south of Sitka. Here British and Yankee traders, willing to pay better prices and trade on native terms, did better. But farther south in California, there was less resistance and the otters were still plentiful. Aleuts aboard Yankee ships worked all the way to the Sea of Cortez in Baja California. The first Russians with their hunting teams arrived at Bodega Bay, just north of San Francisco, in 1809. Then, in 1812, concerned about Spanish opposition, the company moved its base up the coast to a more defensible site that would become Fort Ross ("Ross," short for *Rossia*; thus "Fort Russia"). From this base the Koniags and Aleuts prowled coastal waters as far south as Monterey. They carried their light *baidarkas* across the Marin Peninsula, to poach in the great bay that was ineffectively guarded by a small presidio at San Francisco.

The fort was conceived as a permanent settlement. Although its primary reason for existence was sea otters, and to a lesser degree fur seals, the supply of "soft gold" would not last. Further expansion down the coast was blocked by the Spaniards. By the 1820s, the outpost's secondary function, agricultural production in support of the Alaska colony, was becoming its prime rationale. And with the turn to large-scale farming, the Russians required increased local labor. Having brought along their own teams of hunters, they had not initially depended on the coastal

Pomos and Miwoks. Indeed, relations, though not without tension and mutual fear, were relatively friendly. Ivan Kuskov, the fort's first manager, chose a site long occupied by a Pomo settlement, Métini (Mad-Zhi-Ni). He negotiated a formal treaty with local chiefs of the band that would later come to be called Kashaya Pomo, acknowledging their permission to use the land. This formal recognition of indigenous rights may have had as much to do with producing a "legal" right to occupation, against prior Spanish claims, as it did with respecting Native American ownership. In any event the Kashaya had little choice, confronting invaders armed with rifles and cannons. Although they fought sporadically among themselves and with their neighbors—raids and revenge killings—the Kashaya were not a warlike group.

According to oral tradition, the Russian sailing ships were at first thought to be giant bird-spirits; the Kashaya learned better when the strange winged vessels anchored in the cove at Métini and began unloading cannons, supplies, and fleets of kayaks. Perhaps referring to the appearance and disappearance of ships on the horizon, the Kashaya called the newcomers, both Europeans and Alaskans, "undersea people." They entered into relations of trade and cohabitation with the newcomers, maintaining the indigenous settlement at Métini near the fort during thirty years of Russian occupation. The Kashaya, a small Pomo group probably less than a thousand in number, moved among summer coastal villages and winter settlements inland atop steep ridges. There was a good deal of coming and going along the thirty miles of their coastal territory, bordered by Central Pomo on the north at the Gualala River and by Coast Miwok on the south, just beyond the mouth of the Russian River. A significant number of California Indians lived near the Russian fort. At first, Russian protection, trade goods, and cohabitation with Alaskans and creoles kept Kashaya, largely women and their offspring, at the fort. Later, extensive agriculture and husbandry would require a large labor force, especially at harvest times. When they found themselves shorthanded, the Russians resorted to force, sweeping into more distant Kashaya villages, rounding up work parties at gunpoint, and taking hostages to ensure discipline.

But this was not their preferred method; nor could they practically keep large numbers of people at the fort by raw coercion, as the Spanish and Mexicans did in their mission and ranch colonial system. On the whole, the Indians who worked at Fort Ross did so under a more flexible system of constraints and rewards. Among colonizers, the Russians in California

were far from the worst. They left native culture alone, so long as the colony's economic goals could be met. Theirs was not a civilizing or a proselytizing mission. Inter-marriage and the growth of creole populations were encouraged. The Kashaya, who had been quickly apprised of the harsh prospects offered by the presence of whites north of San Francisco Bay, recognized the relative advantage of alliance with the Russians. There was significant communication among the region's Indian groups. The Pomo were divided into seven mutually unintelligible language groups, but multilingualism was common, and the Kashaya had (and still have) strong trading and kin ties to the Coast Miwok. The Miwok knew the Spanish (and later Mexican) colonial system at first hand. Many of their men had been subjected to forced labor, some of their women raped. The inhabitants of native villages were moved to the missions, where Spanish language and religion were imposed. Even when they were kindly treated, there was always pressure to give up Indian ways. News of these harsh realities, and of the invader's superior military power and deadly diseases, spread quickly. California Indians had good reason to fear the arrival of whites.

At Fort Ross, a significant number of Miwok women figure in the censuses. Many had fled north to join their allies, the "Fort Ross Pomo," for protection from the Spanish invaders. The stories they told would have been chilling. The Russians at least provided a relatively safe zone, a barrier against the more destructive settler colonization of the Spanish and Mexicans. Indeed, one of the things that impressed the Kashaya at Fort Ross, if the stories collected by linguist Robert Oswalt in the 1950s are any indication, was the Russians' willingness to discipline "undersea men" (probably creoles or Alaskans) who mistreated Kashaya women. At Métimi, if one worked and followed certain rules, one could live as an Indian, with enough food and a real degree of protection in a world newly darkened by uncertainty and terror. Other Indians living nearby, or passing through the Fort Ross complex, no doubt had a different mix of motives. The undersea people had goods to trade. They were, culturally, a very mixed lot. You could deal with them.

Fort Ross was a cluster of settlements, with the vast majority of people living outside the walls. Inside, the governor, his family, and a handful of other privileged Russians dwelt in a half-dozen large houses which also held provisions, trade goods, furs, arms, and gunpowder. There were workshops, offices, kitchens, a lockup. A Russian Orthodox chapel stood

at one corner of the stockade. Outside, just above the cove, a Koniag village sheltered the sea-mammal hunters who made up half of the population in the 1820s. Indian settlements were scattered inland. And various creole and lower-class Russian/Siberian workers and artisans lived in another cluster of dwellings surrounded by barns, a wind-driven flour mill, workshops, and other outbuildings. A ship-building operation and a forge were located near the cove, along with a crucial building, especially for sailors and oceangoing hunters: the steam bath.

Who, exactly, lived at Fort Ross? A census made in 1820 by the first governor, Ivan Kuskov, gives a reliable snapshot. Of 260 inhabitants, 14.6 percent were Russians, 6.5 percent creoles, 51.2 percent Eskimos (126 Koniags, 7 Chugach), and 21.5 percent California Indians. In addition to these principal groups, the census records three Aleuts, five Siberian Yakuts, four "Sandwichians" (Hawaiians), two Tlingits, one Tanaina Indian, and one unidentified. The proportions varied over the years, and there was a good deal of coming and going. Kirill Khlebnikov's travel journals of 1822 record several discontented *promyshlenniki* (lower-class Russians) deserting to the Spaniards south of San Francisco. Some later returned, under duress. And there were transients, deposited by the various ships that made port at Fort Ross or at Bodega Bay. On May 29, 1822, "a Negro and an Irishman" disembarked from the *Lady Blackwood*, a British East India Company ship en route from Calcutta. The "Negro" proved to be a good carpenter and farmer, skills desperately needed at the fort. Before moving on, he repaired farm implements and constructed two devices for threshing grain.

Of the local Indians counted, 84 percent were women. (Later, as the scale of agriculture increased, more men would reside at the fort, at least seasonally.) Of the forty-eight women counted in 1920, twenty-six were "from the vicinity of Ross" (Kashaya); twenty-one had come from the south (Miwok from Bodega Bay, Pomo and Miwok from the Russian River area); one hailed from Point Arena in the north. Most of the Indian women were living with Koniags and Chugach. A few lived with Russians and creoles. Some Russian and creole men cohabited with creole, Koniag, or Aleut women, of which forty-seven were counted. In 1920, almost all of the Indian men living at Fort Ross were "convicts," serving sentences for acts such as attacking Koniags hunting in their coastal waters or killing Russian horses. There was a punitive aspect to the colony's peaceful coexistence with the coastal tribes.

It was a remarkable social mix, governed by complex, cross-cutting ethnic and racial hierarchies. Russians were at the top, followed in descending order by Russian/Siberian creoles, Russian/Alaskan creoles, the various Alaskans (including Aleuts), Alaskan/Californian creoles, and, at the bottom, the California natives. This, at least, was the hierarchy as seen from above. How affiliations were negotiated across the various levels is unclear, and there must have been a range of alliances. The largest number of "marriages," or cohabitations, were between Koniags and Californians. What sorts of exchanges occurred in these relationships? Current archaeological work outside the walls of the fort is turning up some clues. Russian "loan words" in contemporary Kashaya speech, some with detectable features of Koniag pronunciation, are tantalizing reminders of a heteroglot history. The alliances were, for the most part, temporary. When the Alaskans departed for extended hunting expeditions, their partners might go to a home village to await their return. Relations with family outside Métini were sustained. When the Russians left Alta California in 1842, six Kashaya women accompanied their partners to Sitka. In Russian accounts, their departure is voluntary, in Kashaya oral tradition, it is coerced.

In the 1820s a Dena'ina (Tanaina) Athabaskan named Qadanalchen worked for a spell at Fort Ross. On his return to Cook Inlet, Alaska, he was rebaptized Nikolai Kalifornsky, and he founded a village near his home which for many years bore his name: "From California." In March 1979 his great-great-grandson Peter Kalifornsky visited Fort Ross Historic Park, spending the night as an honored guest of the Kashaya Pomo at their Stewarts Point reservation. It is likely that he sang a song for his hosts, a song for homesickness, composed by his ancestor during his time at Fort Ross. Qadanalchen sang it while rubbing the bottoms of his feet with dirt he had brought in a small bag from his home village (Kalifornsky, 1991: 253).

Ki q'u ke sha nuntalghat!
 Quin' a hk'u, qildu ki.
 Shesh t'qelani.
 Shi k'u ki.

Another dark night has come over me.
 We may never be able to return home.
 But do your best in life.
 That is what I do.

Histories

We have very unequal access to the experiences of those in the Fort Ross / Métini contact zone. The records of Russian and other European visitors are abundant. They, along with company documents, make possible the history I have just sketched. The visitors tell of hospitality at the isolated stockade, and provide more or less reliable details on the California Indians and local flora and fauna. Such accounts predominantly represent views from a base inside the stockade, or on shipboard. But most of the life of the fort took place outside and around the stockade. Here the traces—textual, archaeological, and oral—of the different histories are more scattered. The experiences of the visiting Koniag, Chugash, Aleut, and Athabaskan voyagers are the most obscure. Russian observers, perhaps overly familiar with the populations from Alaska, record little of their social life at the fort.

Kashaya oral traditions contain first-hand accounts of the Ross experience, stories that reflect Indian perspectives and critical sensibilities. Some of these are recorded in *Kashaya Texts* (1964), transcribed in Kashaya and translated into English by the linguist Robert Oswalt. Two elders, Herman James and Essie Parrish, provided most of the myths, stories of unusual or supernatural events, and folk histories, supplemented by songs, recipes, prophecies, and conversations. Oswalt collected the texts in 1958 as records of a dying language and as sources for folklorists and historians. Today they are available to Kashaya and others as foundations for local tradition, as sources for an emergent Kashaya "literature," and as ethnographic representations for a wider audience, products of a particular contact relationship with white anthropologists and linguists.

Stories that conform to Western historical ontologies—events in nonrecurring time, without supernatural interventions—are grouped by Oswalt in a section titled "Folk Histories." (He notes that the Kashaya do not distinguish these stories from tales he groups under the "supernatural," a category including unusual occurrences that are not myths.) Folk histories in principle, sometimes in practice, can be mapped onto Western chronologies. Glenn Farris (1989a) has argued that these oral histories should not be considered inferior to written records. And he demonstrates the point by comparing the accounts of an event provided by Herman James and Essie Parrish with archival sources on the same occurrence. In 1833 a large trapping expedition organized by the Hudson's Bay Company passed Fort Ross / Métini on its way up the coast. The effect was spec-

tacular: 163 men, women, and children, with 450 horses and mules, appeared on a hilltop, the rising sun behind them, and paraded past the Kashaya village in a seemingly endless train. "They went on and on . . . The stories of Parrish and James record astonishment, fear, curiosity; and they include many details of the strangers' speech, dress, and behavior, as well as the observations of a Kashaya man fishing nearby who was captured and spent a day with the train. Herman James also records that "the undersea people were afraid, too, and gave them food even though they didn't ask for it" (Oswalt, 1964: 253). Presumably this memory refers to Alaskans or creoles at the fort, for the Russians knew of the Hudson's Bay party and had, grudgingly, given permission for it to pass. Farris concludes: "The fact that the 'undersea people' reacted similarly [to the Kashaya] indicates how removed from the council of the tiny ruling minority of white European Russians was the populace of Fort Ross" (Farris, 1989a: 479).

Kashaya oral histories offer more concrete and detailed accounts of the event than do the journals of the expedition leaders, which have little to say about the Fort Ross settlement. The Kashaya texts are thus "good history," providing factual information and glimpses of Indian reactions to the events of early contact. "Folk histories" are conventionally defined as stories whose historical "reality" can be verified and dated by reference to independent sources, usually written accounts. Essie Parrish's story of the first sighting of a Russian boat, seen in the distance as a big bird-person, evidently refers to a real "historical" event. And Herman James's descriptions of how the Russians grew and milled grain are quite particular. They reflect a willingness to observe new processes closely and to learn, in this case to learn to eat flour. But the new would not, should not, cancel the old. Herman James ends thus: "Later on, when [the Russians] had lived there a while, [the Indians] ate flour, too. And they also ate pinole in their own way" (Oswalt, 1964: 269). Learning was reciprocal. One story about two "undersea youths" who freeze to death in the rain ends with Kashaya teaching the newcomers how to protect their bodies from the coastal moisture.

The tales, while recording historical events, also have a didactic purpose. Stories about the Russians' harsh beatings of men who abused their wives convey a clear warning, as does an account from the years following the Russians' departure, a story Oswalt titles "A Lynching." Two Indian youths kill a white man. Each one, thinking the other has been captured,

gives himself up to the whites and is summarily hanged. The story ends with Indian threats of revenge petering out in the face of ever-more-numerous settlers. ("White men" here refers to American settlers who arrive after the Ross colony; Russians, creoles, and native Alaskans are always called "undersea people.") In these cautionary tales, colonial "justice" appears spectacular and fearsome. The new rule of the game, for Indians: don't be violent; and especially, don't hurt whites.

One of the most intriguing texts in Oswalt's "folk history" section, while offering an account of events now somewhat vague, gives a good sense of how Kashaya viewed the Russian operation. The story has been titled by the editor: "Hunting Sea Otter and Farming." I will quote it in full and explore some of its implications as Kashaya history. Like most of the accounts directly concerning Fort Ross, it derives from Herman James's maternal grandmother, Lukaria.

Lukaria lived almost her entire life in the vicinity of Métimi and was about eight years old when Fort Ross was founded there. She lived through the Russian occupation, the subsequent filling of the land with American settlers, and the consequent dying of much of the old Indian way of life. Herman James was brought up mainly by Lukaria and acquired his knowledge of myths, tales of the supernatural, and folk history directly from her. He was a grown man in his twenties when she died in 1908. By this fortunate circumstance of an intimate overlapping of two long life spans, we are able to transcribe, at only second-hand, accounts of personal experiences as much as 150 years old. (Oswalt, 1964: 9)

Although the history retold here is clearly intended to represent a general, moral viewpoint, it is never separated from personal experience. As Herman James insists at the end of each retelling, these stories are true because they were told to him by his grandmother, she who had first-hand knowledge.

Most of James's tales reflect a woman's perspective. (This is true of virtually all the materials in *Kashaya Texts*.) One story centers on a mother's defense of her children against white marauders. And the accounts of punishment for wife beaters at the fort focus on strong women: one protests her treatment in a dramatic suicide; the other declines to return to her abusive husband, despite his public reformation. The tales pointedly refuse "happy endings" through male redemption. In the story "Sea Otter Hunting and Farming," quoted below, one feels a moral sensibility

which may have a gendered aspect, while the story also reflects a general Kashaya judgment of the activities of the "undersea people." Parts of the account reflect Lukaria's direct observations at Métini; other parts must derive from Kashaya conversations with Alaskan hunters at the fort.

"Hunting Sea Otter and Farming"
(Told by Herрман James, September, 1958)

1. I am going to tell about what the undersea people did. When they first came up, they lived at Métini. They lived there a long time.
2. After a while, it turned out that they had sailed out and found a land up north. After sailing a while, they arrived during what we call leafing-out time (early spring); the land was already starting to warm up. When they had been traveling for six months, they sailed south from there. Sailing along, they were long overdue. They must have found what we call otter—otter skin is valuable; they sell one skin for a lot. When they arrived back, they told about it—their own people, the undersea people—the Indians didn't know about that yet.
3. After a while they filled a slightly larger boat with everything—food, guns, ammunition. Having gotten everything ready, they sailed off at pinole time [summer]. They sailed for a while—it was perhaps one month that they were sailing towards that place. At that time the ships moved around by sail only. There were no motors at that time operating to propel boats.
4. Then they sailed up to that place. That land in the north was a cold place. We Indians called it Ice Country [Alaska]. After staying a while, they sailed southward. They were transporting south many skins—many otter skins. They say it was six months before they showed up.
5. Once in a while they ran out of food; they saw hard times. Many times that happened to them, but they didn't listen [profit from their mistakes]. They sailed off for long periods and sold those skins. Loading up the boats, they sent them off to some other place. When they sold [the skins], they made quite a lot of money. Other things they didn't do much. They only did that work. They went collecting in the north.
6. One time, many young men sailed out in two boats. Still others had already sailed on ahead. One [of the two boats] sailed off after them. That one didn't find the others, but the second one did sail up to the north to the Ice Country. Nowadays that has become a big town [Sitka]. But at that time it was wild country; there was no one there—only a lot of wild animals.

7. The other was absent for a long time; it turned out to be lost; it had sailed a little off course. They set out to search for it and unexpectedly found it way off somewhere else. [The lost ship] accompanied the others now; when they sailed off, they followed. They landed over there. They were starving, having run out of food. For a while, for a week perhaps, they had been starving. Some had become very weak; only a few of the stronger ones could walk around.

8. When the two [crews] had landed there, rested a while, become a little stronger, then they went out hunting. They found a lot [of sea otter]; they are said to have killed quite a few in one day—about twenty or thirty. Some of the men skinned them, dried them, put them in sacks, and loaded them in the boats. There were many, about two or three hundred skins, when they returned. That is what they did.

9. They did that for a long time. With that money they lived there—the undersea people. They didn't grow anything; they didn't even keep cattle. They only did that one thing. With that they made money for food to eat and clothes to wear and food to feed their wives and children. They did that for a long time.

10. After a while it got so that they couldn't sail up there because of the ice. They say that in that country the ice was like houses floating around, it was so cold. It was like mountains rising from the sea. Once in a while when a boat was bumped by one, it was smashed to pieces. When that happened the people drowned and froze stiff from the cold. One time when that must have happened to a boat, the undersea people—there were perhaps twenty in the boat—were all drowned. They were never found, never heard from again; they were never to return again.

11. They still didn't listen but still sailed off to gather and shoot the many [otter], and having loaded up the boats with them, sail off to their home—which was Métini. One time, after a while, as I said before, the route where they were accustomed to sailing up turned out to be closed off by ice rearing up like mountains. It was blocked where they usually went, it having really begun to turn cold. It got so that they couldn't return; there was no way to sail forward. When that happened, they said, "Let's go back; it's too hard for us to break a way through," and, having turned around, they started back. When they were sailing along the way, they, too, ran out of food—the food ran short. Starving, they sailed along.

12. When they didn't show up from there, the other undersea people from Métini set out to search; they already knew what had happened to them when they didn't show up for so long. Now they set sail. They found [the lost ship]

when it had sailed about halfway back. Some of the men had already died—starved—only the few stronger ones were sailing the ship. The ship that had sailed out from Métini was carrying a lot of food, for they had known the others would be starving. They gave them a lot of food. After a while the others [rescuers] took over the operation of the ship, letting them relax and just live on the boat while being fed. They became stronger. They sailed along. They sailed in without anything. They had just turned back on the way without otter skins. They didn't catch even one.

13. They say that it was on the last trip that that happened to them. "Let's quit. We can't sail up there any more," they said to the commander. At first the commander didn't agree. "It's true," they said. "These sick people are sick from starvation," said one [captain of the expedition]. While speaking, he announced that he wasn't going to sail off any more. The commander then said, "We'll find something else [to do]."

14. Then they sold the skins and got a lot of money for them. With that they bought what they could grow for food [seeds], because they couldn't sail off northwards any more. With that they bought wheat to plant where the fields stretch out at Métini. The whole land was covered; that was their business now. By growing they learned how to grow the food, all the things they ate. They lived there a long time. That was the only way they prospered.

15. Other people didn't do that work that they had discovered—of valuable otter skins. When they sold those, everywhere they prepared clothes—made expensive coats. Poor people, however, couldn't buy them; they were so expensive then. But they made their own coats, everything for their women and for the children. They sewed them for wearing in winter. That's what they say they did, realizing they couldn't get them any more, couldn't find otter skins any more.

16. This, too, is true; this, too, my grandmother saw and told about. She had remembered well everything they did. Then she told it to me. I have remembered it for a long time. It was sixty-five years ago that my grandmother told me that; I still remember it and have told it true. She also said that it was true about how they first landed, and made money for food to eat, and did those things. This is all. (Oswalt, 1964: 261–265)

Lukaria's account, retold by Herman James, describes several dangerous hunting expeditions and rescues. It also explains the basic economics of the sea-otter trade and the transition at Fort Ross from exclusive reliance on commercial hunting to agricultural production. In these domains, it is true to historical "fact."

But there are additional dimensions in which this historical account is true. Its narration of the facts is faithful to a Kashaya way of seeing the undersea people at "Métini"—not, significantly, at "Fort Ross," a name that does not appear. The old Kashaya settlement becomes the undersea people's home base. Their forays north to Alaska begin and end at Métini. How are we to understand this historical recentering? The story's fourth sentence says that, after living a long time at Métini, the undersea people "had sailed out and found a land up north." Robert Oswalt supplies a clarifying footnote: "Herman James was under the impression that the undersea people came to Fort Ross first and then discovered Alaska from there rather than the reverse, true sequence." Here the story diverges from the "facts." But Oswalt's footnote opens up new questions.

Herman James was scrupulously retelling what he heard from his grandmother. Whatever changes may have occurred in the process of oral transmission and recollection, it is unlikely that the centering of the tale in Métini would have been added. In this respect, Herman James was certainly retelling the story as it had come down to him. Thus, if Oswalt asked him whether he believed it was true that the undersea people came first to Métini and then sailed to Alaska, and if James answered yes, what would this mean? Would it mean that it was true in the story, or true independently of the story? And if Oswalt asked James whether he knew that the Russians and Alaskans had come to Métini after Alaska and the answer was no, would it follow that the story told to him by Lukaria was not true on this important point? On the occasion of this retelling, was James primarily concerned with being true to the story, or to an independent historical reality referred to by the story? If the former, on this occasion, does it preclude recognition of the latter at another time, in a different relational context?

Whatever Herman James believed about the independent historical facts of discovery, the truth of the story he told cannot be separated from a way of narrating, and judging, history. This truth depends on a specific location at Métini, an important Kashaya center and the place Lukaria spent most of her life. It must have seemed mysterious to the Kashaya, at first, that the undersea people could feed and clothe themselves without producing the necessities of life. How could they live, when all they did was hunt for sea-otter skins? There was no place—no land, plants, animals—from which they drew their sustenance. Soon, however, the workings of a distant market became clear, and the story explains them. Moreover, the

Kashaya's most substantial contacts with the newcomers were with native Alaskans. Where did they come from? What did they do on their hunting trips? Why did they travel so far? Lukaria passes on stories that Kashaya women surely heard from their domestic partners. Indeed, the stories probably refer to actual experiences; but given imperfect knowledge of each other's languages, and lacking the detail that comes with eyewitness accounting, the stories have a vague, somewhat dreamlike quality.

The Ice Country, with its intense cold, dangerous floating mountains, and constant threat of starvation, is anything but inviting. Why would anyone go there? The stories take a dim view of the only conceivable reason: hunting otters for sale at a great profit. The hunters, driven by this aim, always end up starving or lost at sea. "They didn't listen [profit from their mistakes]," the narrator says repeatedly, using phrases common in the teaching of children. The story clearly approves the fact that the undersea people eventually turn away from sea-otter hunting to agriculture, away from selling skins for coats poor people can't afford and toward making their own coats. Self-sufficiency is valued over reliance on a faraway market. The sea-otter trade, dangerous like the shifting northern ice, brings famine when things go wrong. A cautionary tale. Don't cut yourself off from producing your own food and clothing. Don't be seduced by the lure of the market.

A critique of mercantile capitalism? Or merely a warning to stay home, stay connected to the land, avoid floating mountains? There's a risk of overinterpretation here. But it's hard not to see this Kashaya history in relation to ongoing struggles to *stay*, actively, to resist being subsumed by a mobile world, a world of abstract commodities and exchange values. How does this story continue to make sense of contact history in light of twentieth-century Kashaya histories of separatism and wary engagement with white society? Herman James, a recent Mormon convert when he recited the story to Oswalt, had lived most of his life under the influence of the Bole Maru Dreaming Religion, a revivalist movement. Its most powerful Kashaya prophets, Annie Jarvis and Essie Parrish, promoted traditional values and local attachments. Before the Second World War, Jarvis actively resisted federal proposals to relocate the Kashaya on lands more accessible to employment. What might the recurring themes of "Sea Otter Hunting and Farming"—the themes of rescue, nourishment, and return "home" to Métini—signify at these later moments, when many Kashaya were leaving the land for work elsewhere?

In the story, active staying meant keeping "Métini" (a Kashaya center) from becoming "Fort Ross" (outpost of a foreign empire). In this history the stretch of Sonoma coastland is a homeland, a place of return, rather than a discovered, frontier place. Seen in this light, the centering of contact history at Métini is less a historical error than a narrative strategy, with moral and political consequences. Oswalt (1956: 11) points out that the Kashaya storytellers always set the scene for their tales in a known territory. So vague a place as Alaska (let alone Russia) could be located concretely only in relation to a narrative center at Métini. Moreover, this repositioning of the factual history of discovery would have the added effect of establishing a moral center for the tale, literally grounding its critique of the sea-otter trade.

Narrative histories organize facts in meaningful series. They make sense in spatial/temporal "worlds" which situate the truth of the story, its concrete reality for specific communities. What different forms of "history" are juxtaposed at Fort Ross / Métini? Nonrepeating events in linear time are recalled here, retold from distinct perspectives. Can the "facts" be extracted from the different records, sifted and compared? Yes, but only as known from a specific place in time and at the cost of evacuating the historical content of the different narratives' *form*—the differently centered maps/histories they presuppose. The "facts" come to us encoded in concrete experiences and projections. Can we accept the historical reality of complex contact relations where events are construed by differently positioned subjects in overlapping but nonidentical ways? Is it possible that historical reality is not something independent of these differently centered perspectives, not their sum total, and not the result of a critical sifting of different viewpoints by independent experts "at the end of the day"? Can we conceive of historical reality as an overlay of contextual stories whose ultimate meanings are open-ended because the contact relations that produced them are discrepant, unfinished?

Lukaria's repositioning of contact history at Métini takes on fresh significance in current contexts of native resurgence. The recent anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the "New World" provoked a chorus of objections from indigenous peoples to the very idea of "discovery." For the notion, uncritically repeated for centuries, made Europe the exclusive center of historical dynamism and consciousness. Historical visions with deep sources in the Americas were inconceivable—recognized, if at all, only as legend or myth. All this has changed. Indigenous stories of contact recent-

ter familiar stories of discovery, conflict, acculturation, and resistance. The line between myth and history can no longer be drawn along a border between Western and non-Western epistemologies. And in the wake of growing arguments over the cultural and political location of historical narratives, it becomes harder and harder to sustain a unified, inclusive historical consciousness capable of sorting and reconciling divergent experiences. Hegel's synthetic historical realism was turned on its head by Marx, but not dented. That would be the philosophical project of Nietzsche, and the practical task, still unfinished, of decolonization.

Commodities

I'm wandering around the reconstructed fort, peering into rooms filled with trade goods—china plates and teapots, bales of tea, animal traps, coils of rope. On a desk: pens and ink, ledgers . . . In another room I observe the animal skulls, insects, plant samples, and notebooks of a naturalist. Downstairs: scores of muskets, powder horns, and casks of gunpowder. The buildings have been reconstructed according to original plans, using thick redwood timber and Russian building techniques when possible. (Modern roofing, glass, and fire extinguishers are also in evidence.) I recall reading somewhere that the carpenters who built Fort Ross used maritime joinery. And I find myself thinking of the fort as a kind of beached, reconfigured ship.

The one house still incorporating Russian materials was built by the fort's last governor, Alexander Rotchev, for his wife, a princess, and their family. According to a French visitor, it contained a "choice library, a piano, and a score of Mozart." Now the house is empty, except for a series of interpretive panels. Outside the door a docent and some visitors are sitting in the shade of an apple tree. She is filling in historical details. I approach warily, wanting to hear what she's saying but jealous of my dreamy independence, reluctant to become just another tourist. When the guide passes around some objects, I join the group for a closer look.

We take turns holding a flat black square, about the thickness of an average book and embossed with Chinese writing and designs. She tells us it is compressed tea in the form it traveled across the Pacific, around Cape Horn to New England and Europe. We sniff the dry square to see if we can pick up a faint scent of tea, or even of the ox blood with which it was mixed for travel.

Then I am holding the thing I have been wanting to touch: a sea-otter pelt. The docent passes around a Californian and an Alaskan otter skin, each one thick and soft—the latter, she tells us, preferred by nineteenth-century consumers for its especially dark luster and thickness. Sea-otter fur has more hairs per square inch than the coat of any other creature. Chinese traders in Canton paid a hundred dollars each for skins speared along the American coast. A hundred dollars, in 1820, was the profit made by a Pennsylvania farmer for a year's work! I register these facts as the "soft gold" slips between my fingers . . . And as our guide hastens to add: "These otters died of natural causes."

I cannot quite get my mind around the fact that pelts like these could have driven the whole undertaking—the far-flung enterprise of Russian America, with its violent disruption of Aleut and Koniag societies; the crucial expansion (in conjunction with whaling) of New England merchant economies; the establishment of the North Pacific as a zone of imperial competition, thus hastening Spanish colonization of Alta California. The Russian-American Company would never have attempted its costly Alaska operation without the wildly profitable sea otter. And for the early New England-China trade, these animals, bought cheap on the American coast and sold dear in Canton, were a crucial link. What else could North America or Russia offer the Chinese luxury market? What other item of exchange could fill ships with tea, spices, and porcelain, generating the profits needed to sustain risky navigation in badly charted seas? The challenge of the China trade was to find things that would sell in Canton. In the later nineteenth century, sandalwood and sea cucumber from Hawaii and the South Pacific would fill the bill. During the Fort Ross years, the fur trade which had fueled Russian imperial expansion was already in decline.

A century and a half later, here on the edge of the Pacific, a sea-otter pelt reminds me of the overwhelming influence of Chinese demand for exotic goods—its power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and again today. Much has changed, and Asia feels nearby again. Now Japanese are buying up prime properties along the Sonoma coast. Chinese exports disrupt the U.S. balance of trade. The otter pelt lies limp in my hands. What did it feel like to Manchu aristocrats in 1800? How could this thing somehow equal a year of farmwork? What does it equal now? How could these remains of dead animals create such wealth, driving people to perilous exploits, to death, and to conquest?

Marx called the commodity "a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor" (Marx, 1961: 72). Seen as commodities, sea-otter skins and bales of tea exist as relations of equivalence independent from the work of Aleut hunters or Chinese coolies. The skins are valuable because they can be exchanged in Canton. Tea is worth producing in quantity because strangers will pay for it with rare luxury items. Exchange value, as Marx recognized, determines production. An Aleut might hunt sea otters for skins or meat (also for fun and a challenge), but he would not hunt in large teams, far from home, without the material compulsion of the market and the labor discipline it required. The value of the products of his labor, in no proportion to any wage received or to the risk and social disruption imposed, would remain a mystery. As a commodity, the sea-otter skin would take on an independent, alien existence, an abstract relation between things traded in Canton, or at the Mongolian trading city of Kiakhta. We hear this abstraction, this distance, when Lukaria (through Herman James) says: "They sailed off for long periods and sold those skins. Loading up the boats, they sent them off to some other place."

Recalling Marx, as I stroke the luxurious, dead otter skin, I think of the human activities—the hunting skills of men, the tanning skills of women—that, around 1800, transformed living animals into pelts, counted, bundled, priced. These "productive" activities resulted in the virtual extermination of the sea otter. And today, as capitalist markets expand, virtually unopposed, throughout the planet, and as the gap between rich and poor grows apace, I hold on to the need Marx recognized for some ethical and political purchase on these global equations, with their transforming local consequences. At a moment of rampant neoliberalism, the question is urgent.

Corn, for example. Under the present North American Free Trade Agreement, peasant corn farmers in Chiapas, Mexico, must compete with large-sale agribusiness in Kansas, USA. The peasant corn economy, with all of its rich symbolism and long tradition, is subjected to an international market that has the power to sweep it away, swiftly and violently. And coffee. In eastern Chiapas, where barefoot *campesinos* and Mayan Indians arduously carved plantations out of the Lacandon forest, a drop in global

coffee prices and a "liberal" withdrawal of government support have meant ruin. It is not surprising that the Zapatista rebellion was centered in Chiapas and that its outbreak coincided with implementation of the Free Trade Agreement.

In 1995 I hold a sea-otter pelt and think of its power in 1830. This skin, in Canton, equaled a year of farm labor . . . The fact still does not compute. And it should not—any more than a sack of corn in Chiapas should, somehow, equal a sack from Kansas. Corn weeded by hand on steep hillsides by people who eat tortillas with every meal cannot be equivalent to something dispensed from giant grain elevators.

I struggle to keep commodities mysterious, to grasp the sheer incongruity and violence of their fantastic equivalences. This mystery is not something to be reduced, as Marx wished, to a true measure of equivalence in social labor. (What a world of different circumstances is hidden in the word "social"!) But rather, the mystery inheres in commodities' openness to diverse appropriations, their capacity for being historically made and remade. What is corn for a Mayan Indian? A fax machine for Subcommandante Marcos? What is a sea-otter skin to an eco-tourist? A VCR or acrylic paint in the hands of Australian aboriginal artists? A rum bottle in a Santeria altar? A Bob Marley recording in Hawaii? A Rambo T-shirt in Lebanon? A pack of cigarettes and a beer can left at the Vietnam War Memorial? A car used by California Indians to return to their reservation for a festival?

Animals

The first detailed scientific descriptions of American sea otters were provided by the German naturalist Georg Wilhelm Stellar. In 1741–1742, Stellar accompanied Vitus Bering aboard the *St. Peter* on its disastrous final voyage. Shipwrecked for a winter off the Kamchatka coast, Stellar had ample opportunity to observe the curious creatures. Otters were the survivors' staple food for six months, and they were killed by the hundreds for their skins—in hopes of profit in the event of a safe return, and to serve as stakes in the endless card games that occupied the men all winter. Stellar disapproved of this excess.

[The sea otter] is an extraordinarily beautiful and pleasant animal, as well as amusing and comical in its habits; at the same time it is a very cajoling

and amorous one. When one sees them running, the gloss of their hair exceeds the blackest velvet. They lie together as families; the male is with its female, the half-grown offspring called *koshioki*, and the nursing young. The male caresses its female by stroking, for which he uses the front feet like a dog, and lies on her, but she teasingly often pushes him away from her. Not even the most loving human mother engages in the same kind of playing with her children, and they love their children in such a way that they expose themselves to the obvious danger of death.

In Stellar's account, as in many other conservationist portrayals of the sea otter, anthropomorphism abounds.

They stand in the sea upright like humans and hop up with the waves, hold the front foot over the eyes and look at one as though the sun were bothering them. They lie on their backs and scratch their noses with their front feet, they throw their children in the water and catch them again. When a sea otter is attacked and cannot see an escape route anywhere, he blows and hisses like an infuriated cat. When he receives a blow, he gets ready to die in this fashion: he lies on his side, pulls his hind feet after him, and covers his eyes with his front feet: and when he is dead he lies like a dead person, since he crosses his front feet on his chest. (Stellar, 1988: 147-148)

Since Stellar's time, this most human of animals, forever playful and sad, has gained pride of place in the ecological pantheon of endangerment. Its destruction during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was swift and relentless. By the time Nicolai Resanov, the visionary architect of Russian America who visited Fort Ross in 1806, began to talk of sea-mammal conservation, the damage had been done.

Today, gray whales, also hunted to the brink of extermination, pass Fort Ross on their migrations between Baja California and the Arctic Ocean. Boatloads of tourists trail in their wake. Sea otters, their small population closely monitored, are glimpsed again in the waters near Carmel, or playing starring roles at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. From deadly to benign commodification: these creatures have, at least, survived the techno-capitalist history that visited them in the late eighteenth century. The efficient killing and processing machine of the nineteenth-century whaling ship, the relentless *baidarkas* with their organized, quick spears, are gone, replaced by a safe-zone of human love, a bubble of compassion in which to live.

In the years around 1800, piles of skins and barrels of whale oil were prized by an expanding mercantile capitalism. The "life" of the otters, seals, and whales was a natural obstacle which had to be overcome, something processed and discarded in the course of production. Today this "life" is itself commodified. It is figured on T-shirts, in stuffed animals, consumed at gift shops, toy stores, at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and on the Santa Cruz tourist pier—where the *baidarkas* once hunted. The endangered otters and whales are once again historical actors, limiting, to a degree, what can be done in the coastal environment. Whales and otters versus offshore oil rigs. There is some power here.

Historical "actors"? Surely this is going too far. For what I have said suggests only that whales and otters have become a new kind of raw material for human appropriation and commodification. They hinder development only inasmuch as they are mobilized as potent symbols by environmentalist culture and politics. The agency, surely, is all human. Yet if environmentalism teaches anything, it is that "we," humans, are not the only actors in the nonreversible course of the planet, and it questions a worldview that keeps "history" exclusively located in human action and consciousness. Leaving aside the overlay of species- and ethnocentrism in such a worldview (Kashaya histories can include animals as conscious agents), human-centered historicisms increasingly seem dated, legacies of nineteenth-century notions of progress and development that cannot be sustained. The nature of historical agency and consciousness is newly uncertain.

A symptom, perhaps, of this uncertainty is my hankering to ask an absurd question. What does the history of changing environments, including their own near extinction, commodification, and consumption since 1700, look like to sea otters? How might this history appear to them? The arrival of a new predator? Holocaust? The predator's removal? Survival? Can we imagine a nonhuman historical consciousness? The anthropomorphism of such a question makes Stellar's projections seem tame by comparison. Why this desire to find something like historical consciousness and agency in nonhumans?

What temporalities define the consciousness of sea otters? Days and nights? Tides? Seasons and currents? The life cycles of kelp and other food? Reproduction? Birth and death? Perhaps even generations—a sense of living through offspring? None of these temporalities, the feelings, actions, and skills associated with them, come within distant translation-

range of "history" in its human senses. Still, the life of California sea otters in 1995 is clearly different from that in 1800. They are drastically fewer, their environment is more polluted, the flora and fauna around them have changed. Could otters have a feeling that the environment in which they now live is not the one for which they evolved? The changes have been abrupt, the destruction nearly total. And two hundred years is very short in evolutionary time. Could the discrepancy between evolutionary and historical temporalities register somewhere in the otter's experience? A feeling of being in a world that doesn't quite work? In this sense—a consciousness of "historical" change? Is the perception of a rupture a kind of bare minimum of historical consciousness, a before and an after that break the flow of cyclical, repeatable time? Could historical consciousness be minimally defined as the awareness of a linear sequence different in quality from other sequences—for example, transitions between fall and winter, or between generations?

Why indulge in such speculations? Perhaps to glimpse, from a translated place of animal difference, the enveloping waters in which I myself swim, the environment in which my "life" unfolds, a habitat called history. Otters have been part of this history. We both, with our different consciousnesses, are affected by its changes, constraints, possibilities. And we have a future, perhaps, together—sharing a "nature" that is being ruined, transformed, and preserved largely by humans. The life of sea otters, once destroyed by human ambition, enterprise, and greed, is now sustained by human environmental vision. This vision, emergent and embattled, is composed of scientific interest, romanticism, and guilt, as well as by a positive sense that terms like "history" and "nature" are not mutually defining opposites but, rather, linked terms in a global transformative process, a process whose endpoint and even direction escape certain knowledge. Something that cannot be grasped by a single "consciousness."

Perhaps this explains the clumsiness of my questions about sea otters' "historical consciousness." For as we struggle, in the late twentieth century, to articulate a historical imagination that no longer assumes humans to be the godlike subjects of destiny, are we not still entangled in a nineteenth-century ideology where attaining fuller, more complete consciousness is the progressive goal of being-in-history? But is consciousness, a process which presupposes a central, individual subject, the ultimate crystallization of life-in-history? "Historical consciousness" may be only one form of historical imagination, a form which came to a kind of apogee, with

Hegel, in a context of nineteenth-century belief in the knowing, "Western" self. A certain Reason. And although the global reach of this form of historical consciousness has been pervasive, and although it now defines "reality" for many people in non-Western, twentieth-century contexts, it is no longer adequate to the heterogeneous experiences of environment, continuity, and change which clamor for recognition as properly "historical," as different paths into and beyond modernity. Perhaps this splitting up of "historical consciousness" enables me to ask about nonhuman temporalities which intersect with but are not reducible to human history. An impossible translation exercise, since the code to which I compare these experiences is premised precisely on their exclusion. This is my predicament within a historical ontology, a specific sense of the real becoming visible at the fraying limits of a triumphant West.

Standing at Fort Ross, remembering the San Andreas Fault, its obscure, devastating temporality and the short span of human intervention and management. Why do I want, still, to call the whole uncontrollable process "history"? What sense does it make to speak of natural history, the history of the planet, the history of the universe? As if dates and linear time could consolidate all the temporalities, aligning them with human agency. Yet I seem to need historical meanings, the way an otter needs a kelp forest. A place to live.

Empires

Having stumbled onto the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), Captain Cook put in at Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island during the spring of 1778. Relations with the Indians were friendly, and some metal was traded for sea-otter skins. He then explored the Bering Sea, refuted theories of the Northwest Passage, mapped many islands and coasts, and returned to winter in Hawaii. After conflicts with the Hawaiians resulted in Cook's death, his ships proceeded to Kamchatka, and thence homeward. In Macao the few pelts casually acquired at Nootka fetched £2,000. With this news and the availability of the Sandwich Islands as a base and stopover, the North Pacific soon teemed with English and Yankee traders and whalers. It became a site of intense imperial competition. The arrival of British and American ships broke the Spanish and Russian monopolies. Between 1810 and 1850, the disposition of power from Hawaii to Alaska and Baja California was largely settled in its present form.

Not long after the Russians arrived in Alta California, the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819 established 42° north, the current Oregon-California border, as the extent of Spanish aspirations. The Oregon Territories, as far north as Sitka, were claimed by Americans, English, and (sporadically) Russians. Alta California, though formally Spanish (and soon Mexican), was in fact under little effective imperial control. The Spanish Empire, overextended and distracted by European wars, could not provide colonists in large numbers. Its overland supply lines were uncertain, and a maritime presence along the coast virtually nil. After the Mexican Revolution of 1821, the Californios, whose leaders were padres, royalists, and independent rancheros, became even more disconnected from the center, ejecting Mexican governors who displeased them. They traded with Yankee and British ships and with the Russians at Fort Ross (while formally insisting that the intruders depart). A trickle of settlers had arrived from the United States, including the Swiss-American Johann August Sutter, whose Sacramento fort became a welcoming point for overland arrivals. Sutter's discovery of gold in 1849 would transform Alta California's population and economy. Mexican California was quickly overrun—and the rest, as we say, is history.

History: what happened, what had to occur. In retrospect. Can we imagine Los Angeles as part of Mexico? Or perhaps California, New Mexico, and Arizona as an independent, Spanish-speaking country? It is still a shock to come across a map from 1845. The border begins at New Orleans, twists north and west until it reaches the forty-second parallel in what is now Montana, and then runs straight to the Pacific. The vast area south of this line is labeled "Mexico." This is not one of those early maps one finds amusing because they contain distortions of topography and blank spaces. Just 150 years old, the map shows a fully recognizable North America, in which the United States has a very odd form. The familiar cut-out of the continental United States—a shape we saw every day on the wall in school, from sea to shining sea, its southern edge naturally following the Rio Grande—is not there.

Could things have happened differently? If Japan had not been closed to commerce for centuries and had helped solve Russian America's resupply problem? If the czars had taken an active interest in their eastern frontier? In the 1830s Ferdinand von Wrangell, governor of Russian America, was arguing that Fort Ross should expand into the Sacramento River valley, territory which no empire yet controlled. What if the czar had not

refused the price of Mexican agreement: recognition of their revolution? Straws in the wind.

Or what if British Canada had gained control over the entire Oregon Territory? What if the U.S. election of 1844 had gone the other way, putting a brake on expansionist politics? And what if Santa Ana had been a better tactician in Texas, or had, with British help, persuaded the Texans to stay independent? And if this had slowed the move to annex Alta California, would there have been a Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848?

Straws in the wind. In retrospect, everything is all too clear. Mexico and Russia were overextended. England could control coasts and trade, but not fill a territory with colonists. The demographically and economically expansive United States had to prevail. But if the Civil War had taken a different turn . . . ? Playing against History is always a losing proposition. The deck is stacked.

Yet the counterhistorical work of reaching into the past for alternative futures is not about claiming that it could—or should—have been different. It's a process of thinking historically in the present, breaking the spell of inevitability I return, again, to the U.S. map, and to the crucial decades before 1850, when it was made. Isn't the "naturalness" of the U.S.-Mexico border at the Rio Grande mocked by the blatant arbitrariness of the U.S.-Canada border? In school, I wondered how this line could be so straight. Why that particular parallel? Who chose it? Individual statesmen at a contingent moment reflecting a balance of power. It could easily have been pushed up a bit. Or down.

Is the shape of Canada permanent? In 1995 Quebec just missed, by the slimmest of margins, provoking a constitutional crisis, perhaps separating from the union. Large areas of the Arctic have been returned to Inuit control. Moreover, Canada's economic and cultural ties with the United States are profound. On many levels, the border does not exist. On others, it is vehemently defended. Indeed, virtually everywhere one looks nations and empires seem both powerful and fragile, united and disunited, discrete and permeable. Complex balances of power and interest sustain and undermine them.

Britannia once ruled the waves; now America rules the airwaves. But how completely? For how long? The British Empire, which on my school-room maps painted large red swaths across Africa, declined in less than a half-century. Shrunk now to a few small islands, the United Kingdom

includes populations who reject "English" national, cultural, and racial hegemony: Caribbeans, Africans, South Asians. Nationalist movements in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales disturb the English peace. European affiliations make the "English" Channel a very permeable border.

The Soviet Union, in many ways a continuation of the Russian Empire, is in disarray. Centuries of expansion across a vast continent suddenly appear less inevitable, less driven by historical necessity. This geopolitical fact, which colored my schoolroom maps with a different red, splits into different regional facts and histories reflected in the reappearance of names such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan. The suddenness of the Soviet/Russian imperial crisis is shocking: without even a fifty-year "decline"—and nothing like the slow erosion of the Roman or Spanish empire.

Fort Ross. The West Coast of the United States, not long ago the eastern edge of Russia, is being bought up by investors from Japan and Hong Kong. Is the U.S. American empire in decline? Or perhaps in metamorphosis? It's unclear. We are not yet able to recognize these wavering contradictions as the beginning of an end that some "history" might judge definitive. Currently the changes look more like realignments, recenters. "Transnational capitalism" is the inheritor of Euro-American imperial dynamics, "Americanization" a common shorthand for the spread of techno-capitalist, market, and media systems throughout the globe. And simultaneously, Anglo California is being displaced by the Pacific and Latin America. People, capital, commodities, driven by global political-economic forces, do not stop at national borders. Will "English Only" movements, immigration restrictions, xenophobic terror attacks, and back-to-basics initiatives be able to stem the tide? Can a rusting "American" assimilation/exclusion machine be repaired?

It would be ironic if the United States were transformed by sheer numbers of people. For in the crucial decades, 1840–1860, when Texas, California, and Oregon were annexed, when the national map took shape, it was sheer numbers of uncontrolled immigrants who took over the lands claimed by Mexico and Britain, creating facts on the ground that battles and treaties would eventually ratify. Now, new facts are being created in transnational cities and in immigrant enclaves throughout the land. The homogeneous territory and history ("Westward-ho") of the United States is complicated, challenged, by populations from the Latino South, from Asia and the Pacific. The new immigrants are racially marked in ways the

prior generations from Europe were not, or were marked only temporarily. For them, like the slaves who came from Africa, the melting (whitening) pot works unevenly or not at all. Normative immigrant experiences of assimilation are interrupted by relations of border crossing, by diasporic attachments "elsewhere."

Commodities and markets release forces that tear down borders and unsettle empires; they also consolidate dominant polities. Because economic globalization works both with and against national attachments, it is premature to decree either the end or the consolidation of nation-states. And although the centers of capitalist power are still largely in the European and North American "West," this is changing. Asian economic power is an inescapable reality, whether centered in Japan, Korea, Indonesia, or—most powerfully perhaps—in diasporic and mainland China. Can we still say that global economics, because it is capitalist, is inherently "Western"? As Marx understood, capitalism is revolutionary, destructive and productive. And it does not usher in a unified, "bourgeois," or "Western" sociocultural order as it spreads. It has proved to be flexible, working through as well as against regional differences, partially accommodating to local cultures and political regimes, grafting its symbols and practices onto whatever non-Western forms translocate its logic. It does business with monarchies, dictatorships, oligarchic bureaucracies, and democracies, with neo-Confucians, Hindus, Orthodox Jews, a range of Islamic societies.

Fort Ross, 1830/1995: the progress of the "West," as teleology, as the end or cutting edge of History, falters. Why these dates, this place? In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" Walter Benjamin saw the need to break the thrall of historicist inevitability, "how it really was." Historical reality was always the story of the victors. A materialist, he said, shuns universal history and works to "blast" past times, "charged with the time of the now . . . out of the continuum of history." In a present emergency, forgotten or doomed elements from the past flash up in consciousness, projecting different, discontinuous futures. The materialist historian labors to stop time, to interrupt the flow of thoughts, "in a configuration pregnant with tensions . . . a monad" (Benjamin, 1969: 262–263).

Fort Ross, 1812–1841, is my monad. It helps disarticulate California, showing it as historically constituted from Asia as well as from Europe; relocating it in the shifting borderlands of the Americas, connected to the Island Pacific, to the Alaska/Siberia crossroads. And it opens an alternate

space of contacts between whites and Indians: unequal, often violent relations, but not based on the stark alternatives of extermination or assimilation. It offers resources for thinking historically in the present emergency—linked, disparate pasts and futures.

Walls

The Great Wall of China was many walls—border fortifications built, ruined, rebuilt by different dynasties over nearly two thousand years. At times “China” was defined against the north by wall-building, at other moments by commerce and diplomacy. The wall came and went. Its last and most spectacular version, constructed by the Ming in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was probably financed, in significant degree, by Peruvian silver. As much as a fifth of the production of New World mines was shipped by galleon to Manila, where Chinese merchants traded luxury goods. Borders close and open, selectively. The Great Wall is a monument to failure: Ming inability to manage relations in a changing frontier zone. A two-thousand-mile wall could not preserve them; the Manchus swept in.



In his novel *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh writes of an Indian family whose members cross and recross two geopolitical borders. One border joins and divides Calcutta and London, the other Calcutta and Dhaka. Toward the end of the book the narrator’s failing grandmother prepares for a return visit to the city she left, years before, when India was partitioned: Dhaka, East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. A short flight from Calcutta. The old woman asks whether, from the plane, she will see the border. Her son informs her that it won’t look like a map, with different colors on either side of a dark line. “But surely,” the old woman persists, “there’s something—trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land. Don’t they call it no-man’s-land?” Her son laughs: “No you won’t be able to see anything except clouds and perhaps, if you’re lucky, some green fields.” She remains puzzled: “But if there aren’t any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where’s the difference then? And if there’s no difference, both sides will be the same; it’ll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody

stopping us. What was it all for then—Partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn’t something in between?” (Ghosh, 1989: 148).



Gloria Anzaldúa writes from a place where the 1,950-mile U.S.-Mexico border meets the Pacific. At the beginning of *Borderlands / La Frontera* she walks through a hole in the chain-link fence, feeling with her fingers the wire, “rusted by 139 years / of the salty breath of the sea.” Mexican kids chase a soccer ball across. Her subversive borderland draws from everyday life along the *frontera*: multilingualism, code switching, migration back and forth, a peculiar savvy or *facultad*, undoing binary structures But then the borderland shrinks to a narrow line, a wound: “This is my home / this thin edge / of barbed wire” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3).



“In Berlin, the prevailing winds are from the west. Consequently a traveler coming in by plane has plenty of time to observe the city from above. In order to land against the wind, a plane must cross the city and the wall dividing it three times: initially heading east, the plane enters West Berlin airspace, banks left in a wide arc across the eastern part of the city, and then, coming back from the east, takes the barrier a third time on the approach to Tegel landing strip. Seen from the air, the city appears perfectly homogeneous. Nothing suggests to the stranger that he is nearing a region where two political continents collide” (Schneider, 1983: 3). Writing in the early 1980s, Peter Schneider tells of casual crossings, “for the hell of it,” to see a movie and return—many subversive crossings, but also internalized walls, the hardest to jump. Today Berlin’s wall is rubble—swept away, among other things, by television, which never respected the partition.



Inside the stockade at Fort Ross, cannons, powder, supplies and trade goods, residences for the few relatively genteel Russians. Outside, a cluster of villages, hierarchies, social relations. Inside, a place of refuge and purity; outside, contacts, contaminations. By 1833 there were more than sixty mixed-race children at the colony. Outside the wall a “Russian village” was composed of European-style houses, gardens, and orchards. It housed lower-class ethnic Russians, ethnic Siberians, and Creoles. A Native Alas-

kan neighborhood was built, Koniag style, facing the water, on a bluff just over the cove. Russian-style plank houses were mixed with several Alaskan semi-underground sod houses, or *barabaras*. The houses over the cove were inhabited by single men, by native Alaskan couples, by a large number of Alaskan men coupled with local Pomo or Miwok women, and by more or less transient kin of those women. A third "village," actually several hamlets scattered on hillsides behind the fort, was inhabited by Pomos and Coast Miwoks. Métini. Contemporary accounts describe cone-shaped houses of redwood, and archaeological research has identified at least one large indented circle, with remains of a center post—probably a sweat lodge or ceremonial structure of some kind.

It is intriguing to speculate about everyday mixing in the communities outside the walls of Fort Ross. Contemporary accounts, archaeological excavation, and Kashaya oral history offer many hints. The role of Pomo and Miwok women as cross-cultural mediators and brokers is particularly significant. They made up the bulk of the "permanent" native Californian population at the fort, complemented by men increasingly recruited, or coerced, for seasonal agricultural labor. Women lived with their Alaskan partners, observing new ways, exchanging stories and skills, bearing children, preparing unfamiliar foods (for example, sea-lion meat, a staple at the fort) in Kashaya/Miwok ways, introducing venison and acorn mush to the sea-mammal hunters. They maintained regular connections with their families inland and along the coast.

Why did so many women come to the fort? The reasons would have been complex. Coercion? Possibly, but escape to remote Kashaya villages on the high ridges inland was always possible. Protection from Spanish and Mexican abuses? Certainly, in the case of Miwok refugees. And the Kashaya, though not under direct pressure from the *padres* and *rancheros*, certainly realized that the Russians could offer a useful barrier. Perhaps women lived at the fort to sustain relations with the undersea people, to observe, to understand and control them. Perhaps they were there because Fort Ross was still Métini, in Kashaya eyes—their place. Archaeological evidence from the native villages at the fort confirms a long-standing pattern of Kashaya contact history: wary and selective engagement. There seems to have been little accumulation of Western trade goods.

Russian colonization had long encouraged intermarriage with native peoples; their cultural policy was live and let live. Unlike the Spanish Empire, the regime at Fort Ross undertook little forced resettlement and

religious conversion; and the priority was extractive trade and agriculture, rather than the massive expropriation of lands that came with later Yankee colonization. In the early nineteenth century, the Kashaya were able to sustain traditional lifeways along the coast and atop the high inland ridges. Métini, alongside Fort Ross, was a link in a living Kashaya chain of settlements and kin relations, a site of multiple crossings, never a closed frontier or bastion. In spite of bad working conditions and the Russians' occasionally brutal roundups of indigenous labor at harvest times, Kashaya comings and goings in the neighborhoods around the stockade reflected indigenous agency and were never strictly controlled.

Contacts. In the early nineteenth century, a wave of epidemics swept through Kashaya country. At Fort Ross in 1823, twenty-nine Creoles and native Alaskans, along with an unrecorded number of Indians, succumbed to measles. A second wave of measles struck in 1833. Between 1836 and 1839, epidemics of smallpox, whooping cough, measles, and chicken pox raced through Russian America from the Aleutians to California. Here, as elsewhere, the epidemiological assault, often preceding the establishment of forts, missions, and presidios, was devastating. Indian communities reeled under successive blows, regrouping, holding on. Physical and cultural survival meant making the best of bad situations. If the Kashaya, in contrast to the Miwok and other native Californians, were able to sustain their language and many elements of traditional culture into the 1950s, this was due, in part, to the protection offered during crucial decades by the relatively *laissez-faire* Russians. The interventionist paternalism and slave regimes of the Spanish and Mexicans were held off; traditional lifeways were adapted to the new contact situation. And one should not underestimate the importance of seeing the "undersea people" depart in 1841. Even as the new "white men" moved in, the possibility, the hope, of a time *after* invasion was renewed.

Fort Ross / Métini: a coming and going of empires: walls built, ruined, rebuilt. When Indian revivalist movements, related to the Ghost Dance, arrived in California during the late nineteenth century, they took hold in Kashaya country. In the twentieth century, the Bole Maru Dreaming Religion was strongly traditionalist and localist, particularly under the charismatic leadership of Annie Jarvis and Essie Parrish. The Kashaya reservation, atop a ridge inland from Stewart's Point, was not abandoned in the 1930s, despite government offers of resettlement in a more practical area of the Russian River valley. The Second World War, with its job opportu-

nities and other disruptions, largely emptied the reservation. When people returned in 1945, their attitude was less insular. Soon Mormon proselytizing divided the community. With Essie Parrish's death in 1979, the Kashaya lost a powerful spiritual leader, yet to be replaced.

In 1996, less than a hundred Kashaya live on the reservation. Signs of poverty abound—patched together houses, dead cars with grass growing through them, planks thrown across rutted driveways. Some elders keep the old ways alive, passing on the stories. Members of the tribe who work in Santa Rosa or the Bay Area return for seasonal reunions. Some no longer attend. The Bole Maru ceremonial house is locked, waiting for a new dreamer.

Just up the road, surrounded by a moat-like lagoon, Odiyan, a large new Tibetan Buddhist study center, displays its eighty-foot-high temple and gleaming copper dome. Constructed by exiles and members of North America's growing Buddhist movement, Odiyan is a replica of Samye, Tibet's first Buddhist monastery.

Pasts

Kashaya maintain a presence in the Fort Ross Interpretive Association (FRIA), which supports interpretive and research activities at the state historical park. Violet Chappelle, daughter of Essie Parrish, serves on the board of directors. During my visit to the fort in December 1995, I joined the association. In its newsletter I found statements by new candidates for the board. Some excerpts:

John Allen (community-college instructor of Asian and American history): "My interest in history is wide-ranging: Byzantine and Russian history and culture, Siberian expansion and the development of the Pacific Rim. As a native of Alaska and long-time resident in my adopted state of California, I also take a special interest in the Russian involvement in North America."

Ludmilla Ershow (professor of Russian at San Francisco State): "I accompany my students to St. Petersburg, and my friends and relatives keep me in touch with Russians, who are very excited about Fort Ross and Russian America. My chief interest in Fort Ross is the Russian period. My serving on the Board would put to work for FRIA my contacts in the local Russian community and my access to academic and cultural circles in Russia."

Otis Parrish (former clockmaker and counselor at the Oakland Consor-

tium of United Indian Nations, Inc. Currently doing graduate work in anthropology at Berkeley): "I am a member of the Kashaya Band of Pomo Indians, whose aboriginal territory encompassed the Fort Ross State Park lands . . . I am a teller of traditional Kashaya stories. My life-long interest has been education and the use of education to get a clearer picture of the lifeways of my Kashaya people. My interest spans the time from the future to the present to the historic, and most importantly the prehistory of the Kashaya people. For me to better understand the future, I must have a better understanding of the people who have come into contact with the Kashaya during its historic periods . . . I believe that the Kashaya part of the park's plan could be further developed, thereby enhancing other components as well."

John Sperry (engineer; teacher of physics and math at Sierra College): "At Fort Ross I've been up to here in Call House restoration work—foundation, roof, and fund raising. I plan to turn now to the building of a baidara and seeking grants to fund the project. Baidaras, thirty-foot skin boats, were important freight craft here at the fort. They were of Aleut design."

Domi Tunheim (architectural color consultant): "As co-founder and co-chairman of the Adobe Coalition, I worked for ten years with all levels of local and state governments as we successfully promoted, funded, and oversaw the restoration of Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park . . . As co-chair of the First Annual Home Sweet Home tour to benefit the Call Ranch, I am enjoying my involvement in the community."

Jerry Wheeler: "I am a longtime resident of the Fort Ross area and have participated in Living History Day for the last two years as the blacksmith. I know that my talents and skills would enhance the programs at the fort."

The state park at Fort Ross represents three important histories—of Russians, native Californians, and California ranchers—histories that intersect in partial ways. Moreover, each constituency is internally complex. Russian American history includes Siberians, Aleuts, and especially Koniags, along with ethnic Russians and creoles. Kashaya Pomo, along with some Coast Miwok, make up the native Californian constituency. The early history of California during the Ranch period (1842–1906, at the fort) includes Anglo and other European pioneers, along with Mexican cowboys, loggers, farmworkers, and charismatic individuals such as the Chilean ranch-wife Mercedes Call. Initially, the reconstructed fort and historic park were assumed to be primarily a Russian story; and this

emphasis continues to dominate the presentation at the site and visitor center. In recent years, however, the park's official interpretive policy has embraced a "flow-of-history" approach. In this vision, the significance of the site includes the natural environment and precontact Kashaya history, as well as the Russian and Ranch periods. The different emphases are connected in a single historical flow.

This policy formally resolves a question that often besets historical (or "heritage") museums and sites: Whose history, whose heritage? The flow-of-history idea answers, in effect: Everyone's history—each finding its proper place in an overlapping sequence. But the policy does not resolve pragmatic, often political, problems of relative emphasis. After the fort was abandoned by the Russians, it became a ranch, then a sawmill; it contained a dance hall, barns, elaborate equipment for loading timber on ships. The reconstructed Russian stockade, chapel, and dwellings largely erase this moment in the flow. The Ranch period is condensed in the lovely old Call Ranch House not far from the stockade. There, restoration projects are well advanced, including plans for Mercedes Call's garden overlooking the Pacific. The Kashaya settlement at Métini, the Koniag and Russian villages, are left to the imagination. Staff at the fort would like to represent them more concretely. But it is hard enough, with a shrinking state-parks budget, to find funds to maintain what already exists. Currently, one wall of the stockade is down, its reconstruction delayed by a shortage of funds.

A docent tells me that the flow-of-history idea is nice, but people don't get it. They ask, for example, what the Russians did in the ranch house. They look, she says, for a core experience, a central moment . . . It has been said that history is just an arrangement to make sure everything doesn't happen at once. Chronology, history's orderly "flow," must be among its least intuitive devices.

Archaeological research has for some time been reconstructing the life that took place outside the walls of the Russian fort. The community's interethnic mix is documented by excavations at the old Russian cemetery, directed by Lynne Goldstein, and by ongoing work on the Koniag village and the Kashaya settlements, organized by Kent Lightfoot. The cemetery and Koniag-village project required consultation and permission from native organizations on Kodiak Island. The Métini work, in its early stages, can be pursued only with active Kashaya support. If this is forthcoming, and when detailed knowledge becomes available, how will the native

aspects of the Ross contact zone be publicly represented? Who will control the story to be told?

Current interpretive signs at the fort portray good interethnic relations, a happy family. Russian-Alaskan relations are seen as voluntary and fair. The plaques stress that the Russians, unlike other colonizers, paid, fed, and clothed their native workers. There is no account of forced recruitment or hostage-taking. Accounts of relations at the fort with the local Indians stress intermarriage, but do not mention epidemics. Today's Kodiak Island natives and many Pomo and Miwok take a less charitable view of the Russians and their historical legacy. Park staff agree that the interpretive plaques at the fort and the introductory displays at the visitor center are, to put it kindly, outdated. When resources become available to replace them, who will write the new narratives? And how will the different historical constituencies be balanced? Will it be possible to celebrate California's ranch history without describing the forced expulsion of Kashaya from Métini, not long after the Russians left? Will the stories of lynchings, the tales of harassment and protection of native women by ranchers—accounts that appear in *Kashaya Texts*—appear alongside Mercedes Call's garden?

And if the Kashaya villages around the fort are described, how will any differences between oral history and scientific archaeology be reconciled? If a settlement were to be reconstructed, what historical moment would be chosen? Must it fall within the Russian period? Important community stakes direct such questions, as well as issues of relative historical truth. For example, what would be done with any large round indentations, which may be ceremonial structures? How would such structures be related to the circular, semi-subterranean dance houses that became prominent during the revivalist movements of the later nineteenth century and which, according to many scholars, were offshoots of the Ghost Dance? Indigenous memory contradicts this history, giving such dance houses an older, local origin. How should the difference be resolved? Would scientific dating of the site and its contents adequately settle the matter, as a practical, indeed a political issue?

If the excavations are completed and interpreted at the fort, or if a portion of Métini is reconstructed, the story told there will be a Kashaya story. The current politics of excavation and public interpretation demand this. But why should the Kashaya, who do not necessarily speak with a

single voice, want to tell their history to outsiders, in this arena? And if they do, what will their story be like? I don't know. That will be negotiated among different tribal authorities, scholars (native and nonnative), funding sources, and park staff. But it seems evident that the Kashaya will and should have a determining role. And their story would certainly present Métini as much more than an addendum to the Russian fort. The ongoing story of Indian life here reaches back to the primordial land, to animals and plants, to the activities of Coyote and other mythic or ancestral actors. It long predates and has outlasted the Russian decades. Thus, Kashaya history does not so much complement or fill in Russian and Euro-American histories as cut across, intersect with them. In the public space of Fort Ross Historic Park, would this narrative need to be reconciled with the histories of Russian America or of California ranching? Should the primary purpose of such an addition be to present a "full" slice of historical reality, if only during the early and mid-nineteenth century? I do not think so. Its principal purpose, and achievement, would be to make a space for the telling of a Kashaya story, a differently centered history drawing on overlapping historical and archaeological traditions, but not limited by them. This presupposes the activity of Kashaya as more than simple consultants or advisors in the process of narration and reconstruction. Something more than an articulation of "heritage," this public re-membering of Métini would be historical work by a community both reckoning itself among others and articulating a tribal past-becoming-future. The project's primary task would be to tell history "our way."

Outside the visitor center, hanging beneath the wooden sign that reads "Fort Ross," is a smaller plaque: "May-Tee-Nee." Noticing it, I wonder how Kashaya history can be made present in a way that does not seem merely added on, supplementary, to the history of Russian America? Current plans for the addition of "culture trails" around the fort would not actually reconstruct portions of Koniag or Kashaya villages, but would evoke them through displays of archaeological excavations, sheltered and under glass. Such an approach, while beginning to fill in the complex lives outside the walls, would leave the imposing reconstructed fort, and the Russian history it incarnates, as the park's centerpiece. Other histories would remain ancillary (ranching located at the Call house) or literally in fragments (the Kashaya/Miwok and Alaskan settlements). Perhaps this is inevitable. But perhaps a reconstructed Métini could be combined with other strategies to offset Russian "monumentalism." These would be reinforced by a re-

vised display at the visitor center, helping people visualize (and hear?) the complexly rooted, intersecting lives outside the walls.

However the different stories at Fort Ross / Métini are materially represented, the difficult dialogue of the three constituencies must continue. A proper "balance" of messages and sensibilities will always reflect open-ended, political relationships in an ongoing contact history. Final agreement may not—should not—be possible. Told from Native Alaskan and Californian perspectives, the story of Russian America can appear bleak, as invasion and plague, with the Russians portrayed as exploiters. Is such a view one-sided? How do the interested Russian communities react to so negative an assessment? How do Native Californians respond to the adventure of early California ranching, a history that includes their expulsion from ancestral lands? And within the costumed Living History days celebrated each summer at the fort, is there a place for a person dying of measles? Can the representation of heritage ever be balanced—inclusive and consensual—when the flow of history is actually an overlay of different, conflicting, and ongoing stories, histories continuously reinterpreted?

Futures

To make a story, one starts with a place and a span of time, beginnings that are never simply given. The histories at Fort Ross highlight specific pasts, prefiguring certain possibilities. The years of Russian Alta California, 1812–1841, take center stage. This historical moment brings into focus a Northern Pacific zone of trade and exploration, linking California, Moscow, New England, China, Latin America, Hawaii, London. These were years of devastating colonial contact for indigenous populations in North America, a time of rivalry among imperial powers during which the United States achieved continental dominance. But in this relatively recent past we also glimpse other Americas in which outcomes now taken for granted seem less assured. Contact relations, borders and powers, line up differently before "definitive" mid-century events such as the California Gold Rush or the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

In 1830 the "United States of America" was still the weakest of the three contenders for the Sonoma coast. Fort Ross was the easternmost outpost of a vast Russian empire. Today, even Russia's continental reach is in doubt. Will the United States of America be united a hundred years hence? Will California still be thought of as belonging to an empire with roots in

Europe? In the early nineteenth century, China was a potent economic force in the transformation of this coast. And in the future? In the year 2100, the North Pacific will surely look different as a site of empire, commerce, the traveling and dwelling of peoples. Will the "west" coast be an "eastern" border again?

As the twentieth century draws to a close, apparently overwhelming forces connect and differentiate the world's peoples—global capitalism, nationalism, modern communications. The recent history of these forces in the expansion and structural dominance of Euro-American industrial society is fairly clear. What is less clear is the ultimate reliance of globalizing forces on Western cultural institutions. Capitalist culture, flexible and locally adaptive, is not a single thing. Nationalism, often a destabilizing power, can be articulated in contradictory situations, as domination and as resistance to domination. Advanced communications technologies are used by Western and non-Western religious fundamentalisms, by movements for social justice and tribal rights, by Coca Cola, Toyota, and Citibank. But in recognizing the enormous power of capitalism, nationalism, and communications technology, we need not make them all-powerful. Historically linked processes, they work together and pull against one another; they are made and unmade in local contexts. Unevenness, contradiction, instability, and invention are inseparable from recent global developments some call a "new world order," others an "empire of chaos" (Amin, 1994).

I derive something like hope from unexpected news—for example, accounts of the pope's visits to New Guinea and Africa. The Catholic faithful, bare-chested in traditional regalia, perform tribal dances to greet the costumed white man. What historical changes have brought John Paul II, of all people, to preach the value of indigenous culture? Where are these forces leading us, separately and together? What are we to make of the fact that Russian Orthodoxy, among Aleuts, Koniags, and Yup'ik Eskimos, has become a mark of *native* identity? What has been lost? What has survived? What is being reinvented in the ordered disorder of contemporary "cultures"?

Something like hope . . . Not prophecy or a revolutionary vision. A recognition, perhaps, of contingency, of minor utopias. But is it not blind, even perverse, to speak of hope in the face of so many devastating facts: relentless environmental degradation, neocolonialism, overpopulation, a growing gap between privileged and desperate people virtually every-

where? The question is inescapable, crushing. Yet pessimism gets one nowhere, and frequently lapses into cynicism, a predictable "tough-mindedness." That temptation, today, is all too familiar. It must be possible to reject pessimism along with its opposites—the celebratory, ameliorist visions of progress through development, techno-science, the internet, neoliberal consensus at the "end of history." Can we sustain a more complex and unstable sense of constraint and possibility, bleak and hopeful prospects? Gramsci named a problem, not a solution, with his formula, "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." But why is hope always on the side of the nonintellectual "will"?

At Fort Ross, something like hope . . . The North Pacific is a geopolitical space whose transformation by capital and empire is less than two centuries old. Is it possible, as one contemplates the area's "Russian period," to feel, for a crucial instant, that nothing has been settled? That the historical processes unleashed then—the power of markets over vast spaces, the making and unmaking of political borders, the decimations and movements of peoples—are incomplete? The "West Coast," the "United States of America" . . . Such things did not exist here a century and a half ago. Will they be here a century hence?

Pried out of the continuum of a triumphal (or tragic) American History, the moment of "Fort Ross" offers strands of historical contingency. In its entwined stories I glimpse the rise and fall of empires, the historical shallowness of U.S. American hegemony, the perseverance and renewal of native peoples, the unfinished relations of north and south in the continent, the ongoing Asian influence in North Pacific history. Living and thinking inside a triumphant Western history, I am brought up short by statements like the following, by Barbara Shagin, an Alutiq (Koniag) elder, descendent of the sea-otter hunters at Fort Ross:

Our people have made it through lots of storms and disasters for thousands of years. All the troubles since the Russians are like one long stretch of bad weather. Like everything else, this storm will pass over some day. (Pullar and Knecht, 1995: 15)

A different vision. Does it translate? What inspiration can I derive from Barbara Shagin's words? Can they be taken seriously—here, in "postmodern" California—without romanticism? History is thought from different places within an unfinished global dynamic. Where are we in this process?

Is it too late to recognize "our" diverse paths into and through modernity? Or too early?

Fort Ross history draws me north to Alaska, the Bering Strait, the Aleutian Islands: places where America and Asia merge. As a schoolchild I was fascinated, troubled, by the maps which stopped precisely there: a line of tiny dots where west somehow ended, starting over as east on the opposite side of the world. In the Aleutians, "east" and "west" stopped making sense.

Another line of northern dots fascinated and terrified me. (Perhaps this was the line I first wanted to cross, to erase, at Fort Ross.) It stretched across Alaska north of the Arctic Circle: the DEW line. Distant Early Warning: the dots were radar outposts supposed to give us a few extra minutes before the End. In my school we marched out of class to sit on metal stairs, heads between our knees. My family's apartment building in New York City was marked with a yellow and black civil-defense plaque, announcing a shelter in the basement somewhere. (I could never find anything except some barrels marked "Water.") We formed vague images of Russian missiles crossing the Bering Strait and the Arctic Ocean. Then there would be sirens, perhaps some kind of a roar . . . East becoming West.

I grew up in the everyday fear of this implosion and the real possibility that I and everyone I knew might not survive. The fear, a fact of life for more than three decades, has receded. I, my family, and my friends will probably live into the next century—a time with its own dangers, known and unknown, but at least without the threat of imminent extermination. All at once, the millennium feels like a beginning.

In the middle of the Bering Strait, two tiny islands lie within sight of each other: Big Diomedede and Little Diomedede. For many centuries, Yup'ik-speaking and later Inupiaq-speaking Eskimos inhabited the two islands, in close and continuous contact with each other and with Eskimo populations on the Seward and Chukchi peninsulas of Alaska and Russia. The dotted U.S.-Russia Convention Line, ruler-straight on the map, passes between the two Diomedes. Just to the south in the Bering Sea, St. Lawrence Island has long been the home of Yup'ik Eskimos who share a virtually identical language with Eskimos on the Asian shore, a twenty-four-hour row away. Close ties have existed for centuries, both before and after 1867, when St. Lawrence Island, culturally and geographically an

extension of Asia, was included in the Alaska Purchase and became part of America.

Cold War politics turned the ancient borderland into a sealed frontier. In 1948 Soviet authorities evacuated residents of Big Diomedede to the mainland—those who had not already moved to Little Diomedede. Ten years later, the Eskimo populations of coastal communities along the Bering Strait and opposite St. Lawrence Island were moved inland, out of range of any visits with their Alaskan kin. For forty years the borderland was effectively closed, except for a few secret crossings, some possibly organized by intelligence services. But as the political ice began to thaw in the late 1980s, pressure grew for an opening of the Beringia "crossroads," as it was coming to be called. In 1987 an American, Lynne Coxe, obtained permission to swim from Little to Big Diomedede. Some Diomeders came along in a boat and renewed connection with Naukanski Yup'iks who had journeyed from the Soviet shore to meet them.

In the three years that followed, politicians, journalists, natives, and businessmen crisscrossed the area. Visa-free travel for Eskimos was reestablished. By 1991 more than ten thousand people a year were traveling between Anchorage and various Soviet locations on regularly scheduled Aeroflot and Alaska Airlines flights. Sister cities exchanged delegations. Eskimo groups renewed their former relations, and Aleuts of the Commander Islands agitated to contact their American kin. Cruise-ship tourism was up. In July 1991, Chukchi and Eskimos from Siberia visited Little Diomedede for the first time in four decades, crossing dangerous seas again in open boats.

Sources

This essay draws on conversations with people knowledgeable about Fort Ross and its history. Lyn Kalani, Dan Murley, and Bill Walton, staff at the Historic Park, were generous with their time and advice. Archaeologists Lynne Goldstein, Kent Lightfoot, and Glenn Farris provided leads and corrected errors. Robert Oswalt carefully answered my questions on the Kashaya texts published in his collection; Otis Parrish discussed with me his vision of Kashaya cosmology and history in relation to archaeology at the fort; and Greg Sarris offered stimulating perspectives on Kashaya and Miwok histories. The Fort Ross library was particularly useful. Dan Murley generously made available to me his unpublished lectures on Alaskan sea-mammal hunters and on interethnic relations outside the stockade.

The Orchard. The paintings of Fort Ross to which I refer are by V. Ushanoff (after a sketch by Bernard Dubaut-Cilly), 1828, and by I. Voznesensky, 1841. On the orchard's history: Stainbrook (1979); and collected plans, photos, and memorabilia at the Fort Ross Library.

History. Said (1978) provides a genealogy of the "West" sustained against the "East." On "American history" seen from Asia and the Pacific, I have learned from the work-in-progress of Glen Mimura. On rewriting "America" as the "Américas," see, among others, Saldívar (1991). For a complex vision of North Pacific history, I draw on McDougall (1993).

Russian America. For the contact history of Russian America, I have relied on standard works by Chevigny (1951, 1965) and Tikmenev (1978), supplemented by Gibson (1976, 1988); Black (1977); Starr (1987); Fitzhugh and Crowell (1988); Fitzhugh and Chaussonnet (1994); Oswalt (1988); Farris (1989b); Istomin (1993); Kari (1983); and a sampling of contemporary accounts—for example, Khlebnikov (1990); Alekseev (1987); and Farris (1988).

Histories. In addition to Oswalt (1964) and Farris (1989), I have drawn on Sarris' dialogical approach to Native Californian texts (Sarris, 1993). The notion of a spatialization prior to storytelling is derived from Leenhardt (1947) and from Bakhtin's concept of "chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1937). On Pomo ethnography and the Bole Maru dreaming religion, I have consulted Dubois (1939); Kennedy (1955); McLendon and Oswalt (1978); and Sarris (1993, 1994).

Commodities. For a complex sense of local/global commodity systems, I have been influenced by the work of Daniel Miller (1987, 1994, 1995); also Taussig (1980, 1987); Sahlins (198); and Thomas (1991).

Animals. On the diversity and structure of "historical" consciousness, see, among many recent works, Rosaldo (1980) and White (1987). My general approach to nature-in-history reflects that of Cronin (1995). On history as a "European" phenomenon, globally articulated but possibly displaced or "provincialized," see Chakrabarty (1992). The final paragraphs of this section owe a great deal to comments by Chris Healy.

Empires. McDougall (1993); Sahlins (1988); Benjamin (1968). My general approach to globalizing processes reflects that of Stuart Hall (1991); also Abu-Lughod (1991) and Hannerz (1991). For a survey of recent developments in anthropology, see Kearney (1995). For a brilliant discussion of the "geo-body" of the modern nation reminiscent of my comments on the cartographic image of the United States, see Winichakul (1994).

Walls. Schneider (1983); Anzaldúa (1987). On the Great Wall, see Waldron (1990). On borders and borderlands, the literature is now quite large. For a survey of recent work centered on the U.S.-Mexican border, see Alvarez (1995). For recent archaeology around the walls at Fort Ross, I draw especially on Lightfoot, Wake, and Schiff (1981); also on Martinez (1995).

Pasts. On FRIA doings, I have sampled recent newsletters and discussed projects with staff at the fort. Sketches of the "flow-of-history" approach, as well as initial plans for "culture trails" and restoration of the Call House, are available in the Fort Ross library. My discussion of possible Kashaya projects at the fort is indebted to Otis Parrish. See Chapter 7 for further sources on dilemmas and opportunities in museums/heritage sites seen as "contact zones."

Futures. On Gramscian politics adapted to current circumstances, I have learned from Stuart Hall (1985, 1988). Richard Gordon (1994) provides a view of the world capitalist economy as composed of contradictory processes, including disparate sites of innovation and regional mobilization. Jonathan Friedman (1994) very suggestively explores a paradoxical "world system" which fosters not hegemony but rather a systematic disorder productive of cultures and identities. Samir Amin (1994) sees capitalist global regulation as unable, over the long run, to control nationalist revolts and disorders. For diasporic dis- and rearticulations of culture and nation, see Chapter 10; also Gupta (1992) on the instability of national and transnational identities. On Russian orthodoxy as a "native" religion, see Black (1977) and Fienup-Riordan (1990). Arguing for "a kind of hope," I often find myself struggling with the compelling *noir* visions of Mike Davis and Talal Asad. On histories of partition and crossing in Beringia, I rely especially on Krauss (1994); also on Fitzhugh and Crowell (1988) and Chaussonnet (1995).