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Prologue

Returns is the third volume in a series beginning with *The Predicament of Culture* (1987) and followed by *Routes* (1998). Like the others, it collects work written over roughly a decade. Ideas begun in one book are reworked in the others. All the important questions remain open. *Returns* is thus not a conclusion, the completion of a trilogy. It belongs to a continuing series of reflections, responses to changing times. In retrospect, how can these times be understood? What larger historical developments, shifting pressures and limits, have shaped this course of thinking and writing?

Situating one's own work historically, with limited hindsight, is a risky exercise. One is sure to be proven wrong, or at least out of date. Re-reading my words in *The Predicament of Culture*, I feel most acutely their distance. They belong to another world. There is no "globalization" in the book's index, no "neo-liberal," no "postcolonial." Searching for a historical narrative to make sense of what has changed, I now recognize a profound shift of power relations and discursive locations. Call this change, for short, the de-centering of the West. I hasten to add that "de-centering" doesn't mean the abolition, disappearance, or transcendence of that still potent zone of power. But a change, uneven and incomplete, has been going on. The ground has moved.

A conversation from the early 1970s comes to mind. I was a doctoral student conducting research in the Malinowski papers at the London School of Economics. One day outside the library I found myself discussing the history of his discipline with Raymond Firth, the great anthropologist of Tikopia. Firth had been a student and colleague of Malinowski. He wondered about attempts to connect anthropological research with colonial power, in particular the important book edited by Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. Without minimizing the issue, Firth thought the relations between anthropology and empire were more complex than some of the critics were suggesting. He shook his head in a mixture of pretended and real confusion. What happened? Not so long ago we were radicals. We thought of ourselves as critical intellectuals, advocates for the value of indigenous cultures, defenders of our people. Now, all of a sudden, we're handmaidens of empire!

This is what it is like to feel “historical.” The marking of colonialism as a period, a span of time with a possible ending, came suddenly to Euro-American liberal scholars. Who would have predicted in the early 1950s that within a decade most of the colonies ruled by France and Britain would be formally independent? Feeling historical can be like a rug pulled out: a gestalt change perhaps; or a sense of sudden relocation, of exposure to some previously hidden gaze. For Euro-American anthropology, the experience of being identified as a “Western” science, a purveyor of partial truths, has been alienating, a difficult but ultimately enriching process. The same kind of challenge and learning experience would engage many scholars of my generation with respect to gender, race and sexuality. For of course more than “the West” has been de-centered during the past fifty years.

In retrospect, I locate my work within a postwar narrative of political and cultural shifts. Like Firth, I have come to feel historical.

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Born in 1945, I grew up in New York City and Vermont. This was the peace of the victors: the Cold War standoff and a sustained, American-led, economic expansion. My fundamental sense of reality—what actually existed and was possible—would be formed in circumstances of unprecedented material prosperity and security. Of course my generation experienced recurring fears of nuclear annihilation. But since disarmament was not around the corner we learned, on a daily basis, to live with “the balance of terror.” In other respects the world seemed stable and expansive, at least for white, middle-class North Americans. We would never lack resources. Wars were fought elsewhere. The lines of geo-political antagonism were clearly drawn and, most of the time, manageable.

New York City during the 1950s felt like the center of the world. North American power and influence was concentrated in downtown Manhattan. A subway ride took you to Wall Street, the United Nations, the Museum of Modern Art or avant-garde Greenwich Village. The decolonizing movements of the postwar period arrived belatedly in the form of civil rights, the Vietnam debacle, and a growing receptiveness to cultural alternatives. My critical thinking was nurtured by radical art and the politics of diversity. Its sources were dada and surrealism, cross-cultural anthropology, music and popular culture. New historical actors--women, excluded racial and social groups—were making claims for justice and recognition.

Like many of my generation, I saw academic work as inseparable from these wider challenges to societal norms and cultural authority. The moment brought a new openness in intellectual, political, and cultural life. Established canons and institutional structures were challenged. The ferment also produced exclusivist identity politics, hedonistic subcultures, and forms of

managed multiculturalism. The language of diversity could mask persistent inequalities. Most academic writing, including my own, never questioned the liberal privilege of “making space” for marginal perspectives. One should not overestimate the changes associated with “the sixties.” Many apparent accomplishments—affirmative action, women’s rights—are now embattled or in retreat. Yet something important happened. Things changed, unevenly, incompletely, but decisively. To mention only American universities: the ethnocentric, male-dominated English Department of the 1950s now seems like a bad dream.

When I was thirty-three, I moved from the North Atlantic to the edge of the Pacific, from one global ocean and world-center to another. For a time, I lived as a New Yorker in diaspora, out on a periphery. But little by little the presence of Asia, the long history of north/south movements in the Americas, and influences from culturally rich Island Pacific worlds made themselves felt. In a de-centered, dynamic world of contacts, the whole idea of the West, as a kind of historical headquarters, stopped making sense.

In Northern California it soon became clear that the de-centering I had begun to feel was not just an outcome of postwar decolonizing energies and the contestations of the global Sixties. These forces had made, and were still making, a difference. But the shift was also the work of newly flexible and mobile forms of capitalism. I was caught up in a double history: two unfinished, post-war forces working in tension and synergy: decolonization and globalization.

Santa Cruz, California, my home after 1978, epitomized this doubleness. A university town and enclave of counter-cultural, sixties visionaries, the town was also a bedroom community for the new high-tech world of Silicon Valley. This was the “Pacific Rim” of massive capital flows, Asian Tigers, and labor migrations. I also lived on a “frontera,” a place in the uncontrolled,

expanding borderland linking Latin America with the United States and Canada. In the northern half of Santa Cruz County: a university and town government that strongly identified with multicultural, feminist, environmentalist, anti-imperial agendas. In the south county: a changing population of Mexican/Latino workers, and the growing power of Agri-business. I began to think of the present historical moment as a contradictory, inescapably ambivalent, conjuncture: simultaneously post- and neo-colonial.

Driving along the cliff tops to San Francisco I could contemplate a line from Charles Olson: "... where we run out of continent." We? California was coming to feel less like the "West Coast" of a United States of America and more like a crossing of multiple histories. The essays in *Routes* would reflect this sense of mobility. And the final essay, "Fort Ross Meditation," would point me to north to Alaska, a different *frontera*. Fort Ross, now reconstructed just up the coast from San Francisco, was an early nineteenth-century outpost of the Russian fur-trading empire. Among the rather diverse populations gathered there, the most numerous were Aleut (Alutiiq or Sugpiaq as they now call themselves), a coerced labor force of sea otter hunters. In my subsequent research, Part Three of *Returns*, I followed the tracks of these mobile Natives to Kodiak Island where today their descendants are rediscovering a lost heritage. The Fort Ross contact zone also led me to a deeper interest in the histories of indigenous California, an interest I have pursued in the renewed story of "Ishi," the state's most famous Indian. California's violent settler colonial history has been reopened. The many new interpretations of Ishi's iconic experience are the subject of *Returns*, Part Two: a meditation on terror and healing, repatriation and renewal.

Teaching at the University of California, Santa Cruz also opened contacts with South Asia and the Island Pacific through the graduate students who studied in UCSC's interdisciplinary

History of Consciousness program. Academic voyagers, they identified themselves as “post-colonial” and/or “indigenous.” Some would remain to teach in the United States; others went home. These younger scholars’ clear sense of working within, while looking beyond, a Euro-American world of ideas and institutions intensified my own sense of being at the edge or the end of something. I had a part to play in the history they were constructing.

The essays in *Returns*, like their predecessors, are rooted in the 1980s and 1990s. As the sixties waned and a globalizing neo-liberalism took hold, visions of revolution were replaced by cultural and intellectual tactics of transgression and critique. By the 1980s, frontal resistance to a mobile hegemony seemed useless. We were in a Gramscian “war of position,” a series of small resistances and subversions. What could not be defeated might at least be undermined, transgressed, deflected, opened up. For many intellectuals working inside Euro-American centers of power this meant supporting “diversity” in both epistemological and socio-cultural registers. Space could be cleared for discrepant senses of the real; positions could be staked out for future struggles; dominant forms of authority and common sense could be criticized, theoretically disassembled. Much of my writing in *The Predicament of Culture*, with its rejection of monological authority and its commitment to experimentation, made sense in this conjuncture. *Routes*, too, belongs in this world of critique, though its receptivity to emergent forms, both diasporic and indigenous, hints at something more. The third book, *Returns*, though still marked by the 1990s, begins to register a new historical conjuncture.

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Developments after 2000 are less susceptible to narration than the post-sixties decades. A few things seem probable: The United States, newly vulnerable, is no longer an uncontested global

leader. Its military surge following 9/11 proved unsustainable--a spasmodic reaction to secular, irreversible changes. There will doubtless be further adventures, but American global hegemony is no longer a credible project. It is countered by new centers of economic power, by Islam as only the most visible among non-Western globalizing ideologies, by forms of authoritarian capitalism in Asia. The signs of systemic crisis and transition are everywhere: financial instability and uncontrollable markets; rising inequality and scarcity; deepening ecological limits and competition for resources; the internal fragmentation and fiscal emergency of many nation states. Crisis without resolution, transition without destination. In the 1980s Margaret Thatcher could famously declare: "TINA: "There Is No Alternative." Today, a statement like this makes no sense: everyone knows there are alternatives, for better and for worse.

From my perch in the new millennium, I understand the last half-century as the interaction of two linked historical energies: decolonization and globalization. Neither process is linear or guaranteed. Neither can subsume the other. Both are contradictory and open-ended. And both have worked to de-center the West, to "provincialize Europe," in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words. This is an unfinished but irreversible project.

"Globalization" is not, or not simply, "the capitalist world system." It is of course capitalist, and more. Globalization is a name for the evolving world of connections we know, but can't adequately represent. It is a sign of excess. This is obviously not the nineties version: "the end of history," "the flat earth." Nor is this the universal enemy: Jose Bové tilting against McDonalds, the "Battle of Seattle." Globalization is the multi-directional, un-representable sum of material and cultural relationships linking places and people, distant and nearby. It is not just a continuation of Empire, dominion by other, more flexible, means, as critics on the left tend to argue. You can't say imperialism from below, but you can say globalization from below, or from

the edge. “Globalization” is a place-holder, *in medias res*. The essays in *Returns* begin to explore this articulated, polycentric totality. Multiple Zeitgeists. A bush, or tangle, of histories.

Similarly “decolonization” is an unfinished, excessive historical process. More than the national liberations of the 1950s and 1960s that were initially successful and then co-opted, decolonization names a recurring agency, a blocked, diverted, continually reinvented historical force. The energies once bundled in phrases like “the Third World”, or “national liberation,” are still with us. They re-emerge in unexpected places and forms: “indigeneity” (all those people once destined to disappear...), the “Arab Spring” (whatever that turns out to be...).

There is something hopeful in the surprises that history can be counted on to deliver. And we can certainly take heart from the failures of the dominant systems we resisted (and came, in the process, to depend on). The inability of neo-liberal ideology to subsume alternatives, to round up and account for everyone, makes it easier to imagine new identities, social struggles and kinds of conviviality. But this exciting sense of historical possibility is inseparable, at least for me, from another feeling, something I didn’t experience twenty-five years ago: the visceral awareness of a given world suddenly gone. Feeling historical: the ground shifting.

Suddenly there are serious questions about our grandchildren’s future. And this sense of insecurity, no doubt related to cyclical processes of political economic decline, is intensified by long-term ecological threats that can no longer be managed or exported. Historicity at a different scale: that of a species among other species, the past and future of a whole planet and its ability to sustain life. What happens when the supplies run out, when the resource wars get really desperate? These instabilities are deep and world changing. Of course the feeling of exposure is something like what most people in the world have always known.

The certainty of having lived in a bubble, a “First World” security that is no more. Good bye to all that. And now?

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Returns follows one emergent strand: the indigenous histories of survival, struggle and renewal that became widely visible during the 1980s and 90s. Tribal, Aboriginal, or First Nations societies had long been destined to disappear in the progressive violence of Western civilization and economic development. Genocide (regrettable) or acculturation (inevitable) would do history’s work. But as the twentieth century came to an end it became apparent that something different had been going on. Many native people died; languages were lost, societies disrupted. But many held on, changed, reassembled the fragments of an interrupted way of life. Cultural survival has been an active process of becoming. New forms of activism have been reaching back to deeply rooted, adaptive traditions: pathways in a complex postmodernity. *Returns* explores multi-scaled processes of engagement with globalizing powers, with diverse capitalisms, and with particular national hegemonies. To account for indigenous integrity in these powerful force fields I grapple with issues of political-economic determination. And I revisit questions about cultural wholeness and historical continuity that were raised in the concluding chapter of *The Predicament of Culture*, “Identity in Mashpee.” Twenty-five years later, the processes of indigenous persistence and revival are more than just occasions for questioning Western categories. They are real, alternative paths forward at a time of systemic crisis and uncertain transition.

I argue for an ethnographic and historical realism--recognizing that ideas of history and the real are currently contested, and inventively translated, in sites from land-claims courtrooms to

museums and universities. *Returns* is written under the assumption that every conjuncture is contingent and composed of multiple strands. Thus an adequate realism must juxtapose-- connect and keep apart—consequential, partial stories. This is the case whether one addresses the past or the present. I work here with three narratives, active in the last half-century: decolonization, globalization, and indigenous becoming. They represent distinct historical energies, scales of action, and politics of the possible. They cannot be reduced to a single determining structure or history. Nor can they be held apart for long. The three histories construct, reinforce and trouble each other. “Big enough” histories like these need to be held in dialectical tension, simultaneous but not synchronous. *Returns* thus offers a lumpy verisimilitude in which political, economic, social and cultural forces intersect but do not form a whole. If the book is unable to wrap things up, to master the changing times, this failure, consciously engaged, is its claim to realism.

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I address the contemporary significance of indigeneity in three loosely connected sections. Part One is general and theoretical in scope. It explores various ways of understanding the indigenous today, and it argues that ideas of historical destiny and developing time need to be revised to account for these cultural renewals and social movements. Tools for analyzing historical transformation and political agency are introduced: articulation, performance, and translation. Theories of cultural materialism, hegemony, and diaspora drawn from cultural studies in the tradition of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall are linked with ethnographic-historical approaches from cultural anthropology. Presupposing a displaced, “post-Western” perspective, the three essays collected in Part One experiment with new terms of engagement

for imagining power and agency in fractured post-modernity. Sections Two and Three deepen these ideas in particular historical contexts.

Part Two tracks an exemplary story of indigenous disappearance that has become one of renewal. “Ishi “was famous in 1911 when he turned up in a settler-California town and was understood to be “the last wild Indian in America.” He was famous again after 1960, when his biography, by Theodora Kroeber, became a best seller. And around 2000, Ishi could again be found in the newspapers as California Indians finally buried his physical remains and in the process reopened a legacy of settler colonial violence. I followed the repatriation with interest, attending public gatherings and talking with participants. I report, here, on my impressions. Once a symbol for the disappearance of the state’s original people, Ishi now represents their survival. His experience, enigmatic and productive, in life and in death, has been meaningful to many people in many different ways. The story addresses the continuing legacy of colonial violence, the history of anthropology, the efficacy of healing, the prospects for postcolonial reconciliation, and much else.

Part Three, after a comparative glance at the Island Pacific, focuses on central Alaska, specifically the Kodiak archipelago. My discussion of Alutiiq/Sugpiaq cultural renewal is based on research over the last decade that could be described as academic visiting (or perhaps, journalism with theoretical characteristics). The results are gathered here in two long essays. The first discusses collaborative heritage work, especially a major exhibition and multiply authored book of 2001, “Looking Both Ways.” The second centers on The Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, a Native administered cultural center in Kodiak. It describes the return of nineteenth-century masks, loaned from their present home in France, and the new meanings these ancestral artifacts evoke in a changing world. I trace interactive processes of

cultural re-articulation and diverse sites of performance. The masks' translated "second life" unfolds in tangled contexts of local history, transnational indigeneity and state policies of corporate multiculturalism.

If Parts One and Three of *Returns* are conceived under the sign of realism, Part Two unfolds in a different analytic and imaginative way. It traces the collapse of a settler-colonial history but does not seek to replace it with a new, more adequate narrative. Instead it adopts an ironic, "meta" perspective that leaves space for plural, contradictory and utopian outcomes. The stories surrounding the name "Ishi" proliferate, opening new possibilities. I try to imagine other kinds of progress: utopias that may be already here, ways forward that are turning and returning; different movements in history, together and apart. Here, *Returns* runs out of language.

The book's architecture requires some explanation. Like its two predecessors it is a collage of essays, written at different times and in distinct styles, or voices. I have not smoothed over the bumpy transitions. This rhetorical diversity keeps visible the contexts and audiences that have shaped the book's research and thinking. It suggests a process not a final product. Familiar genres—the monograph, the essay collection—are in flux. Since the publication of *The Predicament of Culture* a quarter century ago, reading practices have been changing. Fewer people, it seems to me, consume books continuously, starting at the beginning and proceeding to the end. *Predicament* and *Routes*, after a period of existence as "books," have enjoyed an additional life in the form of photocopies and PDF files. The academic book, as a physical object, does not travel very well. But disassembled and modular, the text manages to get around. *Returns* is constructed with this informal distribution in mind. While it is more than the sum of its parts, the three sections are separable. Each is an extended essay that can be read

independently and in any order. For lack of a better name, I have thought of them as academic “novellas”--intermediate forms of writing that can sustain complexity and development without sacrificing readability. I imagine that three short books can be read with more pleasure, at different times in different moods, than a single long one. Moreover, within the three sections of *Returns* each chapter is a stand-alone essay. For purposes of teaching and a wider dissemination, let a thousand PDFs download.

A book organized in this way will contain a certain amount of redundancy. Important contexts need to be established more than once; essential arguments recur. *Returns* does not proceed in a straight line: its “argument” loops and starts over. I have tried, however, to keep blatant repetitions to a minimum. It should also be noted that some inconsistencies of usage remain in the three sections. For example in Alaska contexts I adopt the local convention of capitalizing Native and Elder, but not elsewhere.

A final word on changing names. Indigenous societies everywhere are in the process of removing colonial names and reviving, sometimes inventing, old/new ones. This is an essential part of the decolonizing process. Kwakwak’awakw replaces Kwakiutl; Tohono O’odham, Papago; Inuit, Eskimo; Aotearoa, New Zealand. In *Returns* I respect the changed names and use them. There are times, however, when it is appropriate to include both the colonial and post-colonial versions. This can reflect unsettled local usage, a desire to avoid anachronism in historical contexts, or the need be clear for uninitiated readers.

For my central subject, there is no universally satisfactory name: indigenous, Native, Aboriginal, First Nation, tribal, Native American, Indian (to mention only words in English). Depending on where one is and who is paying attention, one risks giving offense, or sounding

strange.