
The Waking Ice

Sea ice speaks to itself, and to any being near, in groans and cracks; in rumbles that grind on for hours, percussive bangs and shrieks and silences, and then a snow-muffled roar. Sailors who overwintered their ships in the ice called it the devil's symphony. Beneath the surface, there were other instruments in the score: bowheads singing, and walruses, and bearded seals. Each male walrus has its own song, and each song lasts for days, filled with creaks, twangs, whistles, barks, and a rhythmic knocking.¹ The song of bearded seals belies their eight-hundred-pound bulk, with an eerie trill, a lost hum, and a moan.² Paul Tiulana described their song as "four notes and sounds like a musical instrument far down in the ocean."³

Tiulana was born on Ugiuvaq, in the Bering Sea, and as a child in the early 1900s he learned to hunt on the ice, following older men as they looked for walruses and bearded seals, which they called *ugruk*. Listening in on the world under the ice. *Ugruk* they pursued in winter, the ice a pale glow in the brief twilight that replaced daylight so far north, and on into spring. Walruses they hunted in late spring's thin but constant

sun. A hunter might stalk a seal alone, but it would be butchered in company; a seal must be drawn before its intestines go green with sepsis. Breastbone, flippers, backbone divided up in walrus-stomach bags. Tiulana learned to carry even the blood-soaked snow back to Ugiuvaq, for soup.

To hunt on the sea ice and not die is an act of sustained, complete attention. Early in winter, ice still elastic with salt droops underfoot. Late in winter, ice is mountainous and chaotic, a landscape of bergs driven over and under each other by tides and winds, cut with snaking rivers of exposed water.⁴ The ice is frozen, but never still. Tiulana hunted on a surface that drifted beneath him; too fixated on a rising seal, he might look up miles from home. His teachers told him to repeat the phrase “The ice never sleeps; the current never sleeps” as a reminder.⁵

It is movement that makes the ice sing. In forming, thawing, and shifting under the wind, ice steadies the circulation of the world’s oceans, making them hospitable for living things. The white surface refracts sunlight off the Earth and seals in some of the solar energy absorbed by the ocean. Both movement and reflection moderate the Earth’s temperatures, calming the intense gifts of the sun, doing work on a planetary scale.⁶ An arctic fox determines the lines of trappers and shapes the world as lemmings know it—here, a danger. A walrus sets the season of hunters and shapes the sea where it eats, pluming nutrients as she roots for clams—above, a bloom of algae. The sea ice shapes being, human and otherwise, on this planet. From its groaning surface, the world as we know it is made.

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In 1917, the Russian Empire was disquieted by the world that foreign commerce had made on its shores. For more than half a century, since the first Yankee ship started killing bowheads, borders had been elusive. In their absence, Americans tied Chukotka to a corrosive market, one

that took ivory and pelts in exchange for alcohol and starvation. How to provide the material goods of civilization without such moral pillage? Imperial Russia was out of time to find a response. Over three thousand miles away, the Russian Revolution was making a new state.

The Bolsheviks had an answer—Marx’s answer—to the empire’s question: excise capitalism, take its industrial tools, and turn them to material liberation and moral transformation. For Marxist revolutionaries, the material and moral were linked by labor: under capitalism, poverty forced most people to sacrifice their ability to direct their own actions—to even *conceive* of directing them—because they had to earn the wages paid by the wealthy. Because life without conscious purpose deadened the soul, a worker became a thing, an object whose labor enriched someone else. But if all people worked according to their desires and ability and gained according to their needs, there would be no starvation and no reason to drink. It was a utopia of the exploited last becoming the enlightened first.

The vision of salvation the Bolsheviks brought to Chukotka required the elimination of private property and market exchange, as private property concentrated wealth unequally and markets aided such accumulation. Thus, after the Russian Revolution, two different ways of making an economy, moral and material, came to mediate foreigners’ visions for the relationship between human and nonhuman in Beringia. Yet, on the shore, the United States and Soviet Union came to a similar accord with the creatures that fueled their productive faiths. Both used foxes and walruses as the economic base by which they would transform Beringians into Americans or Soviets. Both tried to farm foxes, in order to make inconstant populations—and thus production—predictable. Both found the porous, shifting shore hard to enclose; they uprooted and resettled communities that seemed at risk of drifting away ideologically or physically across the ice. And both concluded that the energy in walrus bodies was essential to the few people who lived on the Cold War border. Around walruses, both ideologies acknowl-

edged their dependence: on plankton, sea ice, and blubber. The generation of wild walrus life became as valuable as the accounting of profit or plan.

I.

In the winter of 1919, Anadyr was a cluster of cabins, storehouses of fox and bear and wolverine pelts bundled for summer trading, the offices of a few American and Russian fur companies, and the imperial administrator's post. It was a village built on animal extraction. A village also built by a "capitalist system," Mikhail Mandrikov argued, a system that would "never save workers from capitalist slavery." Mandrikov and his colleague Avgust Berzin, like young Bolsheviks everywhere, saw capitalism as irredeemably exploitive, divided at its functional core between the owning rich and the laboring poor. The solution was not tsarist enclosure and reform, but collective ownership. In Chukotka, they preached liberation, a future where "every person . . . has an equal share of all the value in the world created by work."⁷ Their revolution was already two years old in Petrograd when Mandrikov and Berzin took control of the Chukotkan administration, seized fur storehouses, and proclaimed the First Soviet Revolutionary Committee, or Revkom.

Six weeks later, most members of the Revkom were dead. Bolshevik speeches against American traders like Charlie Madsen and their lines of credit—debt that doomed the poor "to a cold and hungry death"—left the Revkom with many enemies.⁸ But Anadyr's merchant class was only temporarily better armed. Bolsheviks sailed and walked and took dogsleds north from Kamchatka. Small, nasty battles erupted with remnants of the empire. It was 1923 before the Red Army declared Chukotka liberated from "White [Army] bandits and foreign predators and plundering armies," and part "of a new world, a new life of fraternity, equality, and freedom."⁹

Chukotka came into this new world just a year before Vladimir Len-

in's death. East of Beringia, wartime state economic control and requisitioning had given way to the New Economic Policy, as the Soviet government temporarily let markets operate. Peasants sold their surpluses and retailers peddled without state direction. The step back was Bolshevik strategy: a chance to woo peasants disaffected by war and by communism's habit of seizing their cows, to build up industry impoverished by imperial policy, and do something for people still living on the first rung of history's ladder, like the Chukchi and Yupik. To help these potential Soviets, a group of Bolshevik faithful—many of them ethnographers experienced with “backward peoples”—formed the Committee of the North in 1924.¹⁰ From Murmansk to Chukotka, the committee sent “missionaries of the new culture and the new Soviet state,” as one member put it, “ready to take to the North the burning fire of their enthusiasm born of the Revolution.”¹¹

New worlds and missionaries and conversion: the stuff of the American coast for thirty years. Except the Soviet kingdom was one where heavenly utopia was completely of the Earth, and everyone would belong to it equally. Marxism, especially the variant interpreted by Lenin, promised complete liberty, an escape from both natural caprice—there is no freedom in hunger—and from political contention. After all, if all wants were supplied equally, what strife could remain? The state was a necessary initial guide to this change, but would wither away along with the haggling over what that is politics.

For the Bolsheviks, history made this future visible: a set of scientific laws that tied production to social evolution and evolution to the revolution, to the next step in profound state change. The Committee of the North had a plan for this transformation in places like Chukotka. Conversion—which the Soviets called enlightenment—would begin, as Lenin said, with the “victorious revolutionary proletariat” engaging “in systematic propaganda in [the natives'] midst.” This was enlightenment through knowledge. Then, the government had to “assist them through all possible means”—that is, forge enlightenment through industrial

development.¹² Such “economic organization,” the Tenth Party Congress made clear, would transform “the toiling native masses from backward economic forms to a higher level—from a nomadic lifestyle to agriculture . . . from artisanal production to industrial-factory production, from small-scale farming to planned collective farming.”¹³ Utopia was a product—or rather, utopia was *in production*, organized not to benefit the capitalist few, but the communist all.

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The power of communism as an idea was in its universality; dialectical materialism described a scientific process whereby the socialist future was inevitable. In their theory of revolution, Bolsheviks were just the accelerant. But everywhere they found the inevitable very difficult: among peasants, among less strident socialists, among those devoted to orthodoxies other than Marxism. And then there was Chukotka, where even the seasons were recalcitrant, with a “severe winter lasting almost all year long.”¹⁴ The Bolshevik missionaries found themselves living in “dark, windowless *yarangas* (tents), which are lit and heated by fat-burning lamps,” G. G. Rudikh wrote from Cape Dezhnev. “The usual food was the meat of seals, walrus, whales—often raw. It was blatantly unsanitary . . . and [people were] hungry.”¹⁵ And the people! No one had “an idea about culture,” one Bolshevik wrote.¹⁶ Yupik and Chukchi practiced shamanism, or were under the influence of Lutheran missionaries from Little Diomedé.¹⁷ They lived in a time that human history was supposed to have surpassed, without literacy, temperance, science, gender equality. No proper food or clothing. No soap. The list of woes would have been recognizable to Ellen Lopp.

The cause of this backwardness, for the early Bolsheviks, was clear. First, there was that year-long winter. “The natives are still dependent on the elements,” P. G. Smidovich wrote, and “starve after a bad season.”¹⁸ Communism was a product of workers mastering nature, so its

opposite, backwardness, was a symptom of closeness to natural tempers. Then there was capitalist exploitation. “The Americans, having destroyed the creatures along their coasts,” visited Chukotka “with inflated prices on highly desirable products, thereby forcing the natives to intensify and increase the number of animals killed.” This produced “forced dependence on the kulak merchants,” I. Krivitsyn wrote, who were “vitaly interested in the natives being benighted, cowed, unable to struggle, and economically without power.”¹⁹ The president of the second, more successful, Anadyr Revkom explained to his comrades how “foreign firms ruthlessly exploit and rob the natives—the labor of a Chukchi is worth a box of biscuits. The Chukchi, as politically backward elements, do not understand. . . . If only they could eat.” Without stable food, only the “voracious [capitalist] sharks gain.”²⁰ And the Bolsheviks shared imperial concerns about “the predation of marine animals by American marauders for entire decades.”²¹ The vagaries of capitalism made the vagaries of nature worse. Thus, the Yupik and Chukchi lived in two pasts at once: the past of their own primitiveness, and the past of capitalist exploitation.

The Bolshevik missionaries came to make Chukotka part of one liberated future. Their means was the “Collectivization in the North,” wrote one expert from the committee. Collectivization was the only way to “fully increase the productivity of the indigenous economy.” Productivity would ease poverty, collectives would provide meaningful work, and both would enable conscious action. Because of northern conditions, collectivization had to “start with the simplest forms—associations for common use of land, *artels* (workshops) for the communal manufacturing of products—and ascend gradually to higher forms of the socialization of production.”²² Each *artel* would become a *kolkhoz*, or collective farm, where workers owned their production means and plans, and eventually a *sovkhoz*, a state farm, with centralized ownership and quotas.

In the Bolsheviks’ theory, such economic restructuring would make

more of whatever raw thing came under collective production. Freed of American predation, fox numbers would increase, as “the intensive destruction of sea animals influences the condition of hunting for fur-bearing animals, since arctic foxes eat the carcasses of sea animals that have washed up on shore.”²³ Then, as a committee member wrote, “rational use and politically just valuation” would create “the conditions for raising foxes in model fox-farms,” guaranteeing a “long-term fur supply.”²⁴ Soviet marine biologists described a future in which “the fat of sea animals flows in a fast, broad wave into the tanks” of hunting *artels*.²⁵ The way to make more walrus was to collectivize their killing.

To do so, the Revkom concluded that its first priority was to supply “sufficient rifles and bullets” for the “spring run of walrus.”²⁶ Not a huge step toward utopia; in the 1920s, the Committee of the North assumed that exiting two pasts at once was a gradual process. But even slow change required ammunition—along with flour, sugar, tea, potatoes, and other tools. The local purveyors were exactly the capitalists the Soviets were there to eject: American traders. The Bolsheviks began nationalizing their property—the warehouses of furs and goods.

Some traders chose to risk having their cargoes confiscated and kept sailing west from Alaska. Some, married into coastal families, stayed. But most of the fox and ivory traders left. Supplies in Chukotka dwindled. In 1924, the Revkom reported hearing “very often . . . from the Chukchi: ‘yes, you are Russian, you say every year we are all a society, that soon we will have cheap Russian goods and schools and hospitals, [but] we see that with each year things are worse and worse for us.’”²⁷ People in Uvelen took a note to Ijalik, asking any trader passing to visit “and we will give you fox skins . . . we are very short of everything.”²⁸ With frustration familiar to past imperial administrators, the Chukotka Revkom finally signed a five-year contract with an American trader named Olaf Swenson in 1926, exchanging continued access to Chukotka’s ivory and fur for tons of supplies.²⁹ The revolution would be fed by the capitalist sharks, at least until the “proper organization of supply”

allowed the Soviets “to keep the border” themselves.³⁰

II.

Walrus are ever in company: fresh from the sea, a lone animal rocks toward the touch of others. They sleep flipper to flipper and communicate by twitching their whiskers, sometimes a bristly kiss. Roger Silook had an ancestor who joined this welcoming commune. First, the man walked out onto the floes and migrated south with the herd every autumn. Then, as Silook told it, “one day the walrus hair started growing on his body” and he joined the herd.³¹ For years after, the ancestor barked to his family from the ice. In the 1920s, that ice was home to growing numbers of walrus. No government counted them in those years, but, dissuaded by American law and Russian revolution and low demand, the commercial hunt waned. When walrus died, it was for men like Paul Tiulana, killing a few at a time to eat and sell the occasional carved tusk.

Foxes had no such reprieve. The commercial value of fur was a fickle thing, changing quantity and species year over year. Demand declined in 1919, then surged in the early 1920s. When Jay Gatsby motored toward the American dream, his passengers wore fox fur against the cold speed of combusting fossil fuel. Car fashion helped make an arctic fox pelt worth fifty dollars. Blue foxes were worth four times as much. Each spring on ships, and later by airplane, buyers scrambled to reach Alaskan trading posts. The “grey haze” of Daisy Buchanan’s fur collar might have begun as a fox near Utqiag’vik, now often called Barrow, where Simon Paneak learned to set traps.³² Or it could have come from Sivuqaq, now often called Gambell, where children scouted for fox dens in the summer, marking the location for winter traps. Everywhere, people learned to shoot foxes when the tundra was overrun with lemmings and to set traps in leaner years. People still sold a few ivory carvings. But “when the price of fur got high,” one trapper recalled, “everyone

was happy.”³³

Born in 1906, Napaaq grew up watching her father trap foxes outside Gambell. Once, in camp, she met a “witch doctor” who could “travel high and swift” and knew the future through his songs.³⁴ She knew that animals judged their hunters. She sat through arithmetic lessons in a wooden building, sketching daily life in her notebooks: men hunting on the ice; women skinning seals or preparing berries outside a canvas tent with a metal stove.³⁵ Around her, a world filled with “spirits that live in wild place and are good,” and those close to the village that “cause deaths.”³⁶

But the state of beings was changing. Along with shamans and walrus-people, there were Christians, and not just foreign ones. Near Nome, an Iñupiaq man converted because it promised everlasting life.³⁷ So did a man in Gambell. His father also became Christian, but to ward off deaths in the family.³⁸ Others joined congregations after epidemics or because shamans were seen as too powerful; even decades later, some hoped that shamans would “never come back. They bring death and trouble to people.”³⁹ Punginguhk, the man who drove away the revenue service, gave up “doing crimes with false spirits” because he wanted to.⁴⁰ Much of shamanic practice, the singing and drumming and acts of war, eroded from daily life.

Yupik and Iñupiaq histories often explain Christian participation and commercial participation as a practical matter. *We converted because it offered life. We used outboard motors as they are fast. We went to the mission doctor when our medicine did not treat diphtheria. We trapped foxes to buy outboard motors. And: we distributed the meat from our kills to the weak among us, and treated a successful hunt as a gift, whether the result was eaten or sold or a bit of both.* Using an idea for its practical worth did not require absolute conversion, but adaptation. Doing so changed both practices, carrying shamanic trances to church altars and rituals of community giving to market transactions.⁴¹ Napaaq drew a life where, out of the transformed sea and society brought by

the market, people made a world from both Beringian ceremonies of reverence and imported ceremonies of exchange: a fox for so much ammunition, a soul for so much prayer.

The rite of the Eucharist, for Beringia's missionaries, was exclusive; to believe in Christ meant not believing walrus were once people. Holding the two ways of being together at once was impossible. The only kind of transformation officially tolerated by Lutherans or Catholics or Methodists was communion, and life becoming life after death. Yet the road to salvation was also earthly. In the 1920s, many missionaries in Beringia taught Christianity as a practice of making nature useful, and use was measured in profit. And profits tied people to a future made better through material accumulation, a kind of liberation from privation through growth. It was a view shared by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), whose instructors worked alongside missions to teach "those things which will enable [the natives] to secure a livelihood," including carving ivory and harvesting pelts.⁴² From these "little dabs of things," one Gambell teacher wrote, they could "accumulate thousands [of dollars] every year."⁴³ Christianity took care of souls and capitalism took care of bodies, and together they were a potent answer to the problems of life: to the needs of living tissues, and to tissues bound to pass into death.

The Bureau of Biological Survey had a different opinion of fox-based accumulation. In charge of tracking Alaska's animal life, the bureau reported that while "greater numbers of walrus . . . have been observed" in 1919, Alaskan "fur-bearing animals . . . not classed as game animals" were suffering the "high price now commanded by all classes of fur."⁴⁴ Where the BIA saw foxes helping assimilation, the Bureau of Biological Survey saw them as a common resource at risk of plunder by hunters in search of wealth. When Congress gave the bureau control over fur animal regulation in 1920, game wardens asked teachers—often the only government representatives in communities—to report "molestation of dens of foxes" and prevent "the extirpation of any kind of fur animal."⁴⁵

Evidence of canid decline was thin; foxes breed quickly and tolerate substantial hunting.⁴⁶ And their cyclic populations made them hard to count. But in 1921, the bureau outlawed the shooting of foxes. Hundreds of skins harvested before word of the new policy reached remote villages were reclassified as contraband. The regulation was “a very serious hardship on the Natives,” according to one trader, because the tundra was too flush for foxes to take bait in traps.⁴⁷ The following year, the bureau allowed guns, but banned metal traps. Frank Dufresne, the warden on the Seward Peninsula, snuck through villages to find Iñupiat in violation of the rule, “sweating them what I thought was a proper time” for their infractions.⁴⁸ Then Dufresne shortened the trapping season. Point Hope’s missionary wrote to protest the lost revenue.⁴⁹ So did Charles Brower, reporting that Barrow had “hundreds of fox tracks all coming in off the ice” after the hunt closed.⁵⁰ Yupik trapper Bobby Kava wondered at the sense of “such a short season.”⁵¹

Instead of wild, trapped foxes, the Bureau of Biological Survey wanted farmed fox. Foxes bred from “intelligent selection of the right types of breeding stock.”⁵² Foxes raised in pens, killed at prime pelage, thus making profitable land that was of little “value for agriculture.”⁵³ Fish and seal offal bought from local hunters would replace lemmings. With such steady food, stable populations would replace cycles of boom and crash. Enclosure would turn the fox into consistent income for owners and their employees. The inevitable demands of “expanding civilization” need no longer diminish “the supply of furs.”⁵⁴

Stability was expensive: farms required tens of thousands in lumber and wire and breeding stock. Such costs meant most farmers were foreigners. A “couple of white guys came off the boat” near Barrow, Adam Leavitt Qapqan remembered, “and they start a fox farm there.”⁵⁵ Another opened in Kotzebue. Small hutches and runs proliferated around Nome. On Shishmaref, a trader named George Goshaw imported eighty blue foxes in 1924. Dufresne reported with satisfaction that a few “Es-kimo” women earned thousands a year by owning hutches and pups,

but they were an exception. Where Beringians profited from the farms, it was usually by selling fish or labor, not by ownership.⁵⁶

The bureau saw fox profits—from trapping them, farming them, or by working for wages tending them in pens—as bound to keep growing. But the roaring demand for fur crashed with the rest of the American economy in 1929. Foxes lost more than half their value by 1930.⁵⁷ The progress preached to the Yupik and Iñupiat had shown itself to be full of temper: one year, prices for fur swelled; another they dipped. One year, fur farms bought salmon; the next, they closed. One foreigner championed salvation through profit; another restricted trapping. The state was one of contradiction. Commerce stirred demand in a place, then moved on, an inadvertent reprieve for once-demanded species that left poverty for their hunters. It cast people outside market time, far from the promises of growth.

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Like Paul Tiulana on his island, Mallu learned as a child how not to die among the ridges and snaking leads on the ice near Ungaziq. He learned that wronged animals would seek retribution.⁵⁸ He also learned Russian from the Chukchi coast's lone Orthodox missionary. When the Bolsheviks came with their promises of "mastering the full use of resources" through "the socialist reconstruction of the northern economy," Mallu's comprehension was not limited by their terrible Yupik.⁵⁹ What he heard was an escape from winters "when we had hunger, because the sea animals did not come," leaving "children without fathers." So, he wrote later, "I decided to organize a *kolkhoz*" named Toward the New Life.⁶⁰ By 1928, Mallu and half a dozen other young Yupik men were elected members of the local Soviet administration. The Bolsheviks had converts.

Mallu joined the revolution just as the revolution lost patience. Lenin was dead, taking the New Economic Policy with him. Josef Stalin led the

worker's state—a state Stalin found insufficiently revolutionary. There were still class enemies among the peasants and merchants, still spiritual enemies among the clergy. And there was still not enough production or industrialization. In 1928, Stalin's first five-year plan demanded that the country speed up: peasants would collectivize and produce more grain, grain exports would pay for imported equipment, and equipment would build industrial socialism by 1933. It was a task of urgency, of *Time Forward!* as a novel of heroic socialist labor proclaimed. In the north, there was no grain or factories, but there was a sense of haste. The truth of the Stalin revolution lay in its ability to transform any place at the same rate. The Committee of the North could no longer make allowances for people “who, because of their extreme backwardness, cannot keep up either economically or culturally with the breakneck speed of the emerging socialist society.”⁶¹

But how to tell whether socialism was emerging? Utopia was in production, but what was the product? The five-year plan hurtled toward a future only vaguely described by Marx or Lenin. The Stalinist method of substantiation was quantification: how many new *kolkhozy*, how many new people joining the *kolkhozy*. This was much of Mallu's work: recruiting Yupik and coastal Chukchi by explaining that “a good life can only be built through a collective farm.”⁶² He also offered flour, ammunition, metal boats, and outboard motors. The capitalist sharks had finally been exiled from Chukotka, and the Soviets controlled supply, if imperfectly; even Mallu complained that there were no “cooking pots or needles.”⁶³ But what the Soviets had, they gave to people in collectives. It was, Mallu admitted, an excellent reason to join a *kolkhoz*.

And the *kolkhozy*, rhetoric aside, did not look all that transformative. Members hunted walrus and seals in order to refine “fat which can be used for industrial purposes.”⁶⁴ Yupik already hunted walrus and seals. The collective required hunting together and distributing the catch after the *kolkhoz* manager tallied it against the plan. Yupik already hunted in groups and distributed their catch. A collective

wanted fox pelts in exchange for sugar and tea, an old rite of transmutation by 1930. No one in a collective could be substantially richer or poorer than anyone else. Among the Yupik and coastal Chukchi, no one was. Elsewhere in the Soviet Union, collectivization was a conflagration. Peasants by the millions fled, killed their livestock, fought with the Bolsheviks; Bolsheviks beat, robbed, and killed the peasants they called *kulaks* for wanting to own a horse. Elsewhere in Chukotka, reindeer herders acted like peasants. But on the coast, the breakneck speed of the five-year plan meant carrying *kolkhoz* ammunition on the spring hunt and hanging a portrait of Lenin in the *yaranga*; the material dictates of Stalin's revolution were not initially so revolutionary.⁶⁵

The material form of the revolution had a cultural end—what the Bolsheviks called “consciousness,” the state change from spontaneous reaction to full awareness of how each person furthered the laws of history. The mental part of conversion was not as simple as calling a hunting party a brigade. It required replacing all prior beliefs with those of a good socialist. The Bolsheviks “agitated that we ought to stop observing our festivals,” Andrei Kukilgin recalled in the 1970s, ordering that “they had to be tossed out altogether.”⁶⁶ Not everyone was willing. Some avoided Soviet participation in case it angered seals and other animals.⁶⁷ Others warned that walruses would stop coming if children went to Soviet schools.⁶⁸ Even Mallu still ritually fed decapitated walruses in the 1920s.⁶⁹ A few slipped out of Soviet borders. On Sivuqaq, Napaaq drew a portrait of the shaman Walunga when he arrived from Soviet Chukotka. Anders Apassingok's family crossed in 1928.⁷⁰ Most of the people on Soviet Imaqtiq, or Big Diomedes, traversed the few miles of open water to American Iqjaliq.⁷¹ As Yupik and Iñupiat had once tried to exile Alaskan missionaries, a man in Naukan named Nunegnilan created a set of rituals meant to drive away the Soviets. Wearing robes and crosses like Christians, his followers danced and avoided soap and its smell of being Bolshevik.⁷²

Nunegnilan was arrested by the Soviet police. Shamanism, to the Soviets, was the open practice of living in another, lesser, time. It was deliberate rejection of the Soviet future. But Nunegnilan's was a rare arrest, on the coast; the purges among inland Chukchi herders stopped shy—mostly—of Mallu's followers. Mallu led a campaign against a woman who foretold the end of communism, and against a Chukchi man named Ekker, on Arakamchechen Island. Ekker had taken over the walrus beach, scaring away other hunters with his ability to "kill by casting a spell."⁷³ He was driven off his island by two boatloads of men.

In place of Ekker's spells, the Soviet state had its own rites: those of the plan. In the plan—a five-year plan, subdivided into a series of annual plans, further broken down into monthly plans—the state set production quotas for each factory or farm. The plan was a way to make speeding through history a material, sensory fact: the plan set out a number that indicated socialism was beginning to exist, to overtake capitalism. Exceeding the plan—killing twenty walruses where ten would have done—meant that socialism could arrive sooner, and made a person or a *kolkhoz* a hero of socialist labor. And the plans' quotas increased, year over year. More walruses, more seals, more foxes. Where the market measured success in general growth and tolerated abandoning species and places and people when desires shifted, the plan expected each person and every farm to show increase.

Yuri Rytkeu was born on Uelen's sandspit in 1930, into a world partly made by the plan. Or aspiring to it: that year, Chukotka's collectives killed under fifteen hundred walrus.⁷⁴ Fox harvests were a paltry few hundred, hardly enough to feed "an artisanal blubber processing industry" or the Soviet demand for fur, let alone the ideological need to exceed past capitalist production.⁷⁵ At *kolkhoz* and party meetings, foreign Bolsheviks lectured Beringian Bolsheviks: if it took "forty rounds [of ammunition] for a seal and fifty for a walrus," then "Eskimos and Chukchi shoot badly."⁷⁶ Beringian Bolsheviks complained of bad schools and worse police interference with travel along the coast.⁷⁷ Everyone want-

ed motors. But even with their complaints and worries over unfilled plans, such meetings and the rituals of tallying the year's fox pelts and blubber pounds substantiated the state of being Soviet.

When Rytkeu was five years old, Chukotkan *kolkhozy* harvested almost six hundred arctic foxes and a few more walruses than the year before. In *kolkhozy* meetings, people discussed how to make even more: better boats, improved trapping procedures, and faster butchering to improve the "quality of the products (hides and meat)."⁷⁸ Rytkeu learned from his uncle incantations for good weather and many walrus. He went to school—a hut with a blackboard and glass windows. From his teachers, he learned how to read and write and to condemn shamans and *kulaks*.

When Rytkeu was seven years old, brigades harvested nearly six thousand animals from metal boats. Two small ships, the *Temp* and the *Nazhim*, killed twenty-five hundred more at sea. Almost four thousand arctic fox pelts became tallies in *kolkhozy* logs. Rytkeu watched the first electrical lines go up along Uelen's single gravel road. A man cut a hole in the roof of his family's *yaranga* and attached a lightbulb, making real part of Lenin's dictum that communism was Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country. It was a childhood, Rytkeu wrote later, "lived simultaneously . . . in many different times."⁷⁹

One of those times was the time of people who became walrus. The other was the time of the lightbulb and the plan, a time in which the decision not to hunt more and more had become irrational. Soviet time moved so quickly, it forgot the devastation of overharvest the Bolsheviks had lamented only a decade before. Lack was a capitalist problem. In 1938, nearly ten thousand arctic foxes filled the plan. So did over eight thousand walruses. Only on Big Diomedede did people ignore *kolkhoz* plans and limit their walrus kill.⁸⁰ At Inchoun, ceremonies of restraint dissipated with collectivization. Perhaps the idea of the plan and its certain future was welcome in the village. Perhaps the Inchoun ceremonies drifted from public life like so many others: without violence,

but not without cost. Even voluntary conversion is loss.

III.

Each autumn, cold converts the Bering Sea to solid, and a frozen ghost of ice-age land stretches between the headlands of the continents. The ice is uneasy, without the deep repose of the submerged earth over which it floats. It can shift away from shore, suddenly, or take people. It took Paul Tiulana's father; gone out to find seal, he never returned. In 1936, it took a group from Chaplino. For days, they were stranded among the grinding floes, their mouths raw from drinking salty water. They were rescued by villagers from Gambell, Alaska, more than forty miles from where they started in the Soviet Union, across the International Date Line.

When the ice retreated that year, whaleboats from Gambell took the hunters home. Chaplino welcomed them with a celebration, and likely some suspicion from the police.⁸¹ It was a rare visit, by then. Together, on the beach, sharing the relief of survival, the American Yupik and Soviet Yupik spoke dialects of the same language, ate the same succulent plants soaked in the same seal oil, looked for the same birds signaling spring. But in their respective villages, their missionaries now preached different kingdoms coming, amid economies that set different measures of value. In Chaplino, the *kolkhoz* took any walruses or foxes killed in exchange for supplies, even if those supplies were more likely to be posters of Stalin than sugar. In Gambell, the store had more sugar and no Stalin, but valued walruses and foxes erratically. Lived communism was consistent, if often insufficient; lived capitalism often bounteous but capricious.

In 1936, the American experience of caprice was particularly severe. Even in a year when foxes shadowed every snowdrift, their pelts gave just enough income, one trapper remembered, to buy at most "coffee, sugar, beans, canned vegetables, oatmeal, canned milk . . . and Sailor

Boy pilot bread.”⁸² Not profits to buy timber to frame cabins, or boats and motors. Most fox farms, owned by foreigners wanting profits, closed during the Depression, taking with them the consistency of wages, and of foxes fed seal offal rather than lemmings. Whole villages bought their ammunition on credit. In the years when Yuri Rytkeu saw himself advancing toward a “new way of life, a just life” under “the banner of the Russian Revolution,” Beringians just a drifting ice floe away hoped for a different future.⁸³ A future that looked like their recent past, with its generous fox profits and little debt.

The present of 1930s Alaska looked, in practice, more like an older past: one in which calories came off the ice or did not come at all. People in Gambell and Wales and Point Hope had eaten walrus and seal, no matter the price of fur, over the fox-rich decades because it was delicious, and because to not hunt was neglectful, a violation of a reciprocal connection that, if abandoned, would force the walrus to “return to their own kind to report on how they had been treated.”⁸⁴ But in the 1930s and into the 1940s, stalking walruses and bearded seals singing under the ice was also, again, a necessity, the creatures more stable than those human demands that were mediated through money.

And walruses could also give small profits. The Department of the Interior, eager during the Depression to support “the economic welfare of the Indian tribes through the development of Indian arts and crafts,” became a distributor for Yupik and Iñupiaq ivory carvers. Figures of dogs and polar bears sold particularly well in Anchorage and Seattle and beyond.⁸⁵ The demand only increased during the Second World War. Paul Tiulana, like many other English-speaking Beringian men, was drafted. At home, less experienced hunters were more likely to shoot, but not recover, their kills. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Japanese landfall in the Aleutian Islands, three hundred thousand foreigners came to Alaska. The military flew lend-lease planes out of Nome, and built installations on Sivuqaq, which they called St. Lawrence Island. The military imported many things: alcohol, overt racial segregation, tons of concrete

and tin infrastructure—and demand for walrus. Everywhere the military went, a surging market “for both carved and uncarved ivory” followed.⁸⁶ Alongside the new profits came rumors of headless walruses washing up on Beringian shores and reports of bored soldiers shooting the herd from airplanes.⁸⁷

Worried again about walrus extinction, Congress passed new legislation in 1941. As before, only Alaska Natives could hunt; killing walruses for their tusks was illegal, as was selling raw ivory.⁸⁸ But in the new law, the state protected sales of carved tusks, a concession desired by the BIA, which sought to protect profits from the worked-ivory market, a business that was worth a hundred thousand dollars by 1945.⁸⁹ The Department of the Interior also wanted to assure more walruses. Officers from the Fish and Wildlife Service, convinced the 1941 law still incentivized overhunting, sent letters to Beringian teachers, suggesting that “killing their year’s supply [of walrus] with spears” rather than guns would reduce the harvest.⁹⁰ Their inspiration was an article, twenty years old by then, about the Chukchi practices at Inchoun.

Not so far from Inchoun, lend-lease planes from Nome landed in Egvekinot and Markovo with cargoes of truck parts and medical supplies and other assistance for the Red Army. An army, as N. A. Egorov wrote shortly after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, suffering from an “insufficient supply of fat.”⁹¹ Egorov commanded the Soviet whaling fleet, and saw in the oceans great stores of unused lipids, not just in whales, but in walrus. Walrus oil production, Egorov believed, could double. When Chukotka failed to meet these new plans—in 1942, walrus kills were less than half the goal—the fault was put with technology.⁹² Their motors were “not designed for continuous operation with a heavy load,” one *kolkhoz* reported, exposed to “rain and damp, not to speak of the storms which happen so frequently in the north-eastern sea.”⁹³ The promise of the plans remained. In trying to meet them, even without the right motors, even with most ammunition and petrol allocated to the front, sixteen thousand more walruses became entries in

kolkhozy accounts during the war. By 1945, the Beringian herd was reduced to sixty thousand animals.

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In 1948, seventeen Iñupiat from American Little Diomedede took their boats two and a half miles to Soviet Big Diomedede. It was not an accident of drifting ice, but a planned visit. Each person had filed applications with the Soviet government months before for permission to cross the border.⁹⁴ But the party set off that summer in the midst of the Berlin airlift. Unknown to them, in their boats filled with food, their respective states' alliance against a common enemy was over. A Soviet patrol arrested the American Diomedede residents. After weeks of detention, they were released with orders never to return.

The Cold War made the need for borders and assimilation a question of existential survival. The United States looked to the Soviet Union and saw an unnatural nation devoid of markets, frozen under leaders totalitarian and nuclear. The Soviet Union looked to the United States and saw a country with a long habit of invasion, committed to immoral exploitation in the name of commerce, now with an atomic bomb. All that lay between them was a strip of water that, for half the year, was as good as land. Before the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Beringian shore was considered a logical site to stage an invasion or an air attack. Soviet authorities closed the village on Big Diomedede, forcing residents to the mainland.⁹⁵ The Red Army installed heavy artillery in Avan, Yuri Pukhlouk recalled, after "we were taken away from there, so we wouldn't bother it."⁹⁶ Across the strait, military installations moved to Nome and Wales, to make Alaska a "bristling bastille and a major launching point in any future push-button war against any aggressor Nation in the northern hemisphere."⁹⁷ Beringians needed to be American or Soviet because, as one U.S. official put it, "the Eskimo . . . are the only people who can live within the Arctic, and the Arctic

is even now becoming the frontier defense of these two governments.”⁹⁸

But were Beringians sufficiently patriotic to withstand socialist influence? J. Edgar Hoover worried that “the Eskimo” were not loyal Americans.⁹⁹ During the Cold War, being American meant being capitalist, and being capitalist required making nature valuable, as a wage laborer or proprietor or small farmer. Independence from the federal dole was ideologically and practically important.¹⁰⁰ As a result, many federal teachers, even prior to the 1950s, had no issue with market hunting for “large numbers of walrus, because they form a large part of the livelihood of these [Native] peoples.”¹⁰¹ Missionary Benedict Lafortune wrote that, “were it not for [the ivory] all the King Islanders would have to be put on relief. The seals give them their food and fuel, and the walruses give them their clothes and ammunition and outboard motors etc. etc.”¹⁰² The BIA ship *North Star* supplied village stores and bought carved ivory and a few fox pelts. Killing walruses for profit was a rational act, because profit made Yupik and Iñupiat economically free, and economic freedom was the ideal state of man. The alternative was socialist-seeming dependence on federal aid.

Yet the Bureau of Biological Survey, and after 1959 the Alaska Fish and Wildlife Service, frequently did not see Iñupiaq and Yupik hunting as rational. Their vision of walrus use was closer to that of the Boone and Crockett Club than to BIA hopes of self-sufficiency. As one report stated, walruses suffered from “the Eskimo’s careless behavior” and the encouragement of the Department of Interior’s ivory marketing program.¹⁰³ The BIA and the Fish and Wildlife Service were caught in a conundrum: only present walruses could help assimilation; assimilation demanded market participation; market participation demanded too many walruses. These contradictions were expressed in ever-changing state rules—Did walrus tusks need to be tagged? Were there limits to the walrus kill? Where could ivory be sold?—that penalized Yupik and Iñupiat for participating in the rites of commerce the state simultane-

ously demanded they join.

Then there was school, with its incongruities. Napaaq had attended because her father wanted her to. Literacy was useful. It was also more or less optional in the 1920s: children went to local day schools between months spent in trapping camp. But federal presence expanded in the 1930s, and especially alongside military infrastructure in the 1940s. William Ig'giag'ruk Hensley moved to Kotzebue, away from his parents, to "attend school steadily enough so that the authorities left me alone." He remembered the welcoming warmth of the schoolhouse, but the teacher beat his knuckles when he spoke Iñupiaq, sending the "message that our language was inferior."¹⁰⁴ He, like many students, had to leave Beringia after eighth grade, for BIA boarding schools in southern Alaska, or in Oregon and California. The journey, even if parents and children desired it, was a rupture. Beringian experience was reduced to summers, not the long round of a year; Beringian languages to what words survived enforced English. Beringian parenthood was replaced by institutional brusqueness and, too often, abuse.

Like rules for hunting, education made foreigners' visions for Beringia unavoidable even for people who never left. In 1959, the government closed the school on King Island. Parents remember the BIA threatening to take their children if they did not stay in Nome for the school year. Over the next decade, Paul Tiulana watched his community trickle away from the place he learned to hunt—the place he still hunted, even with one leg amputated during his military service—until he, too, had to leave. How to stay? To be with their children, to raise a future, parents had to abandon the home of their long past—the "places," King Island Iñupiaq poet Joan Naviyuk Kane wrote in 2018, "that gave rise to highly specific dialects, stories, dances, and song that passed down knowledge that is absolutely necessary for survival of the body and the intellect."¹⁰⁵

As an old man, Tiulana recalled contradictions the state offered. "On the one hand we are told that we have to go to school to make a living, more income, cash for our pockets to buy better things for ourselves,"

he remembered. All this meant more education. “But when we go to school, we lose our own culture.” And the “only income we get from Native culture is food for our families. In the Native way, everything is given by nature. . . . Even the modern society cannot compete with Mother Nature.”¹⁰⁶ At issue, in Tiulana’s words and all along the Beringian coast, was the incongruity between assimilation based on profit, and profit based on changing live animals into dead. Convert too many of any species into a commodity, and consumption exceeds reproduction. So, there were regulations, an annual zigzag of quotas and restrictions. But the ideal of capitalism is to outstrip death—each year, more consumed! More profits! Growth is an incantation against mortality. To be American in the Cold War was to seek this ideal. To be Beringian was also to face its impossibility, the fact that so much of growth is built on accelerated entropy.

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Being Soviet was a material state. A state antithetical to living in hide tents, even with a lightbulb. It meant, by the early 1950s, not traveling between times as Yuri Rytkeu did as a child, but living in the same future. In that future, Rytkeu was a graduate from Leningrad University and, in 1953, published his first short story, “People from Our Shore.” It begins with a Chukchi family in a village very like Uelen, trying to install glass windows in their *yaranga*, and where the *kolkhoz* manager “recorded everything in his ‘speaking leaves’ (as the old people called all papers on which something was written).”¹⁰⁷

That same year, Stalin died. In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev vowed to drive Stalin’s ghost out of the country and quicken progress. A series of Communist Party decrees ordered new housing, cultural centers, schools, machinery for collectives, hospitals, and roads. Across Chukotka, communism was under construction. Often slow construction—“of the planned building for 1954 only four properties have been complet-

ed,” one party report noted.¹⁰⁸ But it was, for its boosters, a sign of enlightenment arriving—finally—in the north. Even a *yaranga* with windows, Yuri Rytkeu wrote, “could not satisfy the needs of present-day man,” because there was no place to put a table for reading and writing, for keeping the speaking leaves with their tallies.¹⁰⁹

To be Soviet was to live in modern apartment buildings, with roads between them and water inside them, consolidated around schools and hospitals. The architects of Khrushchev’s reforms saw no sense in dispersed settlements, in the string of small villages and camps scattered along the coast, but wanted people moved to town. To become Soviet by moving was not voluntary. The government did not speak openly about security, about ideological loyalty, but the people they moved first were the people closest to America.¹¹⁰ Iñupiat from Big Diomede were sent to Naukan. Naukan was closed in the 1950s, its residents moved to Lavrentiya, Pinakul’, and Nunyamo. Then Pinakul’ and Nunyamo were closed. Chaplino was moved to Novo Chaplino. Between 1937 and 1955, the number of inhabited coastal villages in Chukotka dropped from ninety to thirteen.

The promise of the First Five-Year Plan, to make everyone live in one time, was finally becoming reality. Yuri Rytkeu celebrated these changes, writing that the “peoples of Chukotka have traversed a hard path together with the whole country . . . they have emerged from darkness to light.”¹¹¹ Other coastal people were less triumphant. Nina Akuken left Naukan “crying the entire way,” having not gone “to the graves to bid farewell” to buried ancestors. Her new village was filled with “unfinished houses. Nothing was plastered, and there was no stove.”¹¹² At Chaplino, residents left so quickly, pots of soup still boiled on their abandoned fires. “Nothing was as it should be,” Vladimir Tagitkak recalled, because “I didn’t hunt anymore.”¹¹³ Like many people moved by the state, he worked now in construction.

Contraction also had an economic end. Khrushchev’s policy of *ukreplenie* (consolidation) merged small *kolkhozy* into larger *kolkhozy* or

into *sovkhozy*, where plans and products were controlled more fully by the state. The number of Chukotkan collectives shrank from forty-six to twenty-six in the eight years following Stalin's death.¹¹⁴ The new farms were organized to mimic industrial factories; small teams of metal boats still hunted walrus and seals, but more of the catch came from ships crewed by foreigners, able to kill on a mass scale far from land. Walrus were still butchered and distributed by the collective, but more of the catch was processed in mechanized blubber refineries.¹¹⁵ Workers hauled leftover muscle and offal from the plant at Sireniki to fox farms. In long sheds filled with cages, foxes were fed "year round fresh sea mammals and vitamin feed."¹¹⁶ Such enclosure was a product of fuel: petrol for motorboats to reach places with walrus and seals, coal for electrical plants and seafaring ships, diesel to run the refinery vats, imported energy to make energy.

For a few years in the 1950s, *ukreplenie* worked. The number of fox farms grew from a single breeding operation to nineteen by the end of the decade; liberated from the rise and fall of their wild numbers, fox production first became stable, then grew to thousands of pelts each year. And despite walrus trying to escape—the "females and their calves" diving from the sea ice "when the first shot was fired"—over five thousand were harvested by ships and boat brigades in 1955 alone.¹¹⁷ It was an example of "Stakhanovite work practices in exceeding the annual production plans," named for Alexei Stakhanov, who proved himself the ideal socialist worker by mining fourteen times his daily quota of coal in 1935.¹¹⁸ The coastal equivalent was in slaughter or skinning; the more animals become blubber and leather, the more proof there was that people in "traditional occupations," as Rytkeu described, were a "component part of the economy of the country in its building of socialism."¹¹⁹

The contributions were not just in oil and hides, but in art. Rytkeu began writing stories of socialism arriving in Chukotka. In Uelen, a collective of ivory carvers etched old legends of giants and walking

whales into walrus tusks, alongside new legends of Bolsheviks bringing the word of socialism north. A carving of Lenin reclining on a stuffed sealskin was so celebrated in Moscow that Uelen avoided closure.¹²⁰ In that carving, like many others, the Soviet Union was drawn literally ahead of the capitalist world. History moved down the length of a carved tusk as in the panels of a comic book; past trade with Americans ended in a frame where the Soviets planted their flag, then new panels filled with helicopters and bathhouses and Red Army salutes began. Socialism was a different space, one ahead in time and sealed off from the rest of the strait.

The walrus recognized no such border. In the Bering Sea, some lived mostly in Soviet territorial waters and some in American, and some rode the ice back and forth between. Their way of being resisted enclosure. In the 1950s, out of concern for the decreasing number of walruses, hunters in Gambell passed a local ordinance stricter than state regulations.¹²¹ Yet the source of the decline, as one Yupik man noted, was clear: “‘it looks like we are saving the walrus for the Russians.’”¹²² There were now fewer than fifty thousand Pacific walrus.¹²³

IV.

Throughout their migration, walruses stir nutrients into the water column, especially nitrogen, that help photosynthetic organisms bloom, and those blooms feed squids and clams and small fishes and tube worms.¹²⁴ Without walruses, the productivity of dozens of small bits of life goes slack.

Soviet plans on the coast went slack just a few years after Khrushchev's reforms made them bounteous. Soviet marine biologists, who counted every walrus hauled into a *kolkhoz* beginning in the 1930s, now surveyed ice become conspicuously bare. There was no obvious technological reason; people were in collectives, and collectives had boats and refineries. Yet, of the “33 former coastal concentrations on the

Chukotsk Peninsula,” wrote biologist S. E. Kleinenberg, only three remained in 1954.¹²⁵ The result, the Academy of Sciences reported to the Council of Soviets, was “a significant reduction in the number of walruses, which has a very painful effect on the situation of the local indigenous population of the Chukchi and Eskimo.”¹²⁶

Walruses had stopped obeying the promise of socialist production, the utopia Marx indicated would arrive when humans bent the world completely to serve their freedom from material wants. Soviet practice conflated liberating people with increased production, whether the products were needed or not. On the tundra and in the open ocean and under Chukotka’s mountains, Soviet planners continued to forecast unending reindeer growth, expanding whale production, and mines spitting forth ore at ever-faster rates. Generally, falling productivity signaled retreat. But even with ships and fossil fuels, Yupik and Chukchi communities were isolated from the “necessary food and household items” that walruses could provide.¹²⁷ Ice cut off most external energy from October until nearly July. Chukotka without walruses risked a return to hunger.

Starvation was hardly what the Soviet 1950s were supposed to be about. Moreover, Khrushchev wanted the Soviet Union to lead the world not just in factories and missiles, but in international enlightenment. “Capitalist and colonial countries,” explained a report from the Commission on Nature Protection, experienced the “profound and irreversible depletion of natural resources . . . before they realized the need for conservation. The Soviet Union cannot and should not repeat this path.”¹²⁸ The 1954 meeting of the International Union for the Protection of Nature brought Soviet delegates together with American conservation biologists, now half a century into trying to reconcile modernist demands of production with walrus reproduction.¹²⁹ The Soviets, like the Americans, concluded that returning to old, Inchoun-like, limited hunts would allow walruses to flourish. Doing so, one delegate reported, had “high urgency and not just internal, but international, importance.”¹³⁰ Glossing over the

recent Soviet rate of killing, Kleinenberg noted how commercial hunting brought herds to a “catastrophic condition,” while, in the USSR, walrus could be “preserved in bigger numbers.”¹³¹ Socialism in the 1930s required more production to overtake the capitalist world; in the 1950s, it could also entail comparatively smarter production, able to leap ahead of the market’s errors.

In 1956, at the urging of biologists from the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Soviet ministers of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic passed a decree prohibiting industrial walrus hunting at sea—even as plans for whales, foxes, reindeer, tin, and gold kept growing. Yupik and Chukchi *kolkhozy* could only kill walrus for food and use the ivory in their carving workshops. The “purchase of fat and hide” by other organizations was prohibited, as was the killing of nursing females.¹³² Gray whales took the place of walrus as fox food. It took several years for these regulations to make their way from ideal in Moscow to practice in Chukotka, but by the 1960s, only about a thousand walrus were killed each year in Chukotka.¹³³ The Soviet practice of always producing more was subsumed by the need not to consume too much.

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Both the market and the plan tried to accelerate time: to increase the speed with which people consumed things, and thus generate growth, or overfill plans and thus bring about the future more quickly. Neither capitalist time nor socialist time fit the cycles of walrus life. But on the shore, both economies were able to change their cadence, learning within a few decades of their respective onslaughts to curtail the appetite of the market and the collective.¹³⁴ In 1972, the two countries formalized their similar compromises with walrus biology in the Environmental Protection Agreement. The accord managed walrus according to values other than escalating human use by limiting kills to indigenous subsistence. It made the floating coast a space apart, exempted from the market’s roving parox-

ysms of demand or the plan's exponential plot of increase. Doing so protected the livelihoods of the few people the state could assume would live on the Beringian shore. Sovereignty depended on walrus energy, and walruses depended on protection from the ideology that each sovereign state wished to make universal. In an action far different from their treatment of whales, foxes, caribou, and wolves, both governments accommodated what a walrus *is*: a migratory animal, one that moves energy from sea into new flesh consistently, but not quickly. In the Arctic, constancy does not have the speed of fox lives.

For Beringians, walrus legislation kept the state present: to count the kill, to prevent hunting for ivory, and to keep preaching the contradiction that a growing market or growing plan made life better while curtailing such possibility with walrus. For walruses, regulations gave back time. A few thousand walruses a year died by human hunters, a number in line with Beringia's long historic norm—before walruses became part of a plan or bottom line—allowing the herds to regain a population near that which existed before the century of slaughter. The population was healthy enough for the Soviet plan to expand, in 1981, to five thousand kills a year, prompting a Yupik woman to complain that her *kolkhoz* hunted walrus cows and calves for the fox farm, something that “should not be done” and would “destroy the spiritual base of our culture.”¹³⁵ A year later, biologists found that walruses were thin, starving even, and in their desperation behaving like arctic foxes: scavenging seal flesh, their usual prey of mollusks chewed to bare mud by the swelling herd.¹³⁶ To consume beyond primary production is not only a human trait.

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On the wall of the lodge in Gambell, where visitors stay, there is a framed letter: an apology from the Presbytery of Yukon to the people of the village. It repents for “failing to understand what the people of Gambell would have wished us to know,” for contributing to Yupik lan-

guage loss, for devaluing Yupik dances, and for confusing Yupik “identity in the world.” Nearby are ads for fox-fur mitts and hats, and posters with the year’s walrus hunting regulations. Kills for subsistence; ivory for sale only when carved. Those carvings remain one of the few ways to make money in Gambell; growth, in Alaska, has moved to the distant petroleum frontier.

Outside the lodge is beach covered in dark stones, dotted with the occasional white vertebra from generations of walruses become food. To the northwest, the hills above the abandoned village of Chaplino are visible across the water and the International Date Line. But people do not cross by boat. The border, like laws limiting Russian walrus kills, outlasted the Soviet Union. In fall, people on both sides of the strait watch the sea ice form a new floating coast, with new leads where the walruses come to breathe, new crystalline ridges of ice where the foxes wait. Every year is particular and temporary; all conversion is a loss.

The instinct of capitalism and communism is to ignore loss, to assume that change will bring improvement, to cover over death with expanded consumption. Such modernist visions are telescopic: from the present, each leaps into a distant world, a future place of freedom and plenty. The present must accelerate to reach that far country. Speed is quantified in what can be converted to material value for sale or the state. What exists in between, the mess of lives lived in shifting concert with tides and winds and the never-fixed mark of ecological complexity, slides from focus. These ideological habits make thinking in terms of generations, both human and nonhuman, difficult. But, as the walruses show, it is not impossible.