The eleven chapters of this book came together over the past decade, although the idea of writing a book about the Yurok Indians goes back to my first meetings with Yurok people, in 1971. The year before, I had met Harry Kellett Roberts, then living in Sonoma County, north of San Francisco. From about 1912 until the mid-1930s, Harry had been the adoptive nephew and student of Robert Spott, a Yurok man from the village of Requa, at the mouth of the Klamath River in northwestern California. By 1973 I was spending time in the Klamath region myself, eventually coming to know a fair number of Yurok, Karuk, Hupa, and Tolowa people.

It was Harry Roberts, by 1972 my own adoptive uncle and teacher, who suggested that I go back to finish college and study anthropology, so that I could “set the record straight on the Yuroks.” My casual stays on the Klamath turned into graduate anthropological field work in 1976–78, and
then into my 1982 doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, “Yurok Realities in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” (the present book bears little resemblance to it). I have stayed in touch with people in northwestern California ever since, returning there when time and money allow, for weeks or months at a time when that is possible. Today I continue to visit as a friend and a witness, occasionally doing some advocacy work, but my systematic research in the area tapered off after 1990, about the same time that the Yuroks became fully engaged in achieving a federally acknowledged tribal organization. Since 1993, full federal tribal status has spurred a chain of dramatic changes in the Yuroks’ material world. The period since 1993 is not of immediate concern in this book—hence the second date in its subtitle.

All along, my primary interest has been in men’s and women’s spiritual training, in the ways people think about the world and act in it, and in the ways that these things vary and reemerge changed through time. Finally, after these many years, I have a good sense of what I want to say about all of this and about Yurok Indian people whom I’ve known over the course, now, of more than half my lifetime.

By the 1980s, my work had branched out to include the study of the history of anthropology and particularly the work of Alfred Louis Kroeber (1876–1960) and his junior colleagues in California between 1900 and the Second World War. I have published much of this research elsewhere and very little of it is repeated in Standing Ground. Yet I came to understand that I could not write Yurok ethnography and ethnohistory without enrolling a dialogue with Kroeber within this writing. Kroeber’s influence has been that powerful, both among potential readers of my work and within ever-emergent Yurok culture itself.1

Dialogue in fact became the dominant theme in Standing Ground: dialogues between Kroeber’s understanding and my own, between Yurok and other regional native individuals and myself, between contemporary Yuroks and their historical past, and among Yurok individuals, particularly in ritual contexts. Indeed, dialogue provides a metaphorical basis both for my method and, by the end of the book, for a theoretical understanding of how Yurok culture has emerged through time. It is here, I believe, that Standing Ground pans out from a tight focus on the Yuroks (and to a lesser degree, on Kroeber’s and others’ “salvage” ethnology of clas-
Standing Ground is not a particularly technical work, however. I’ve tried to keep stories and their tellers in the foreground. These stories range from transcribed tape recordings and extensive field notes that I compiled with Yurok teachers in the 1970s to my own stories about my times on the Klamath (although the latter are fewer than the former; this is not a confessional book). In part, my emphasis on stories, left to speak for themselves rather than to support distantiated analyses, grew out of and allowed me to center my inquiry on the relationship between individuals and the “culture” that they share. Doing this, I approach an old Boasian conundrum that Kroeber himself had struggled with: Do culture and society determine human action, or can individual human beings improvise creatively on shared cultural themes, themselves determining, to an extent, cultural and social processes? When one reconsiders Kroeber’s classic Yurok ethnography, for instance, these are matters of some consequence, for Kroeber denied individuality any place in defining “culture,” and yet considered the Yuroks and their neighbors “anarchic” (1925: 35). Spirituality, communally shared but grounded in the hearts of individuals, provides an arena in which the relationships between individuals and societies are especially accessible.

As much as possible I have built this book on what I have heard, observed, or participated in myself, together with received, transcribed oral native testimony and work published by native authors in the region. Kroeber himself becomes a problem in my book, rather than an assumed benchmark authority (contra Keeling 1992). I have relied on his copious field notes and many publications to fill in gaps in my own research and experience, but overall my approach is more historical and developmental than Kroeber’s, in the everyday senses of those words. While Kroeber hoped to capture the “superorganic . . . fabric” of “native primitive” Yurok culture, held “in static balance” by an ethnographic present, ca. 1848 (Kroeber 1917b, 1948, 1959; cf. Buckley 1996), I am skeptical of the notion of any fixed Yurok “culture,” at any time, seeing the history of Yurok spirituality as part of a history of constant cultural emergence. Culture, I conclude, is a process, not a thing. Such abstractions, however, need to be
grounded in the actualities of daily life and, in Standing Ground, spiritual practice and training.

ONE

Pecwan is a small but ancient town on the Klamath River, straggled along a shelf within a forested mountain canyon about fifteen miles upstream from the river mouth, which is on the Pacific coast, thirty-five miles south of the California-Oregon border. The Yurok Indian jump dance at Pecwan takes place at the end of the summer, and it is often very hot during the day. I first saw a jump dance in 1988, the third time it had been made since Yuroks restored it in 1984—forty-five years after the last performance, in 1939. The dance struck me with its sheer difficulty and demand for endurance and sacrifice as much as with its extraordinary beauty. “It’s not easy to fix the world,” said a friend, a dancer and ceremonial singer.

In 1990 I was there again. It was a fine dance with wonderful regalia. The famous, very old, boy’s head roll made entirely of the scalps of hummingbirds danced, and four brand new baskets, woven in the two years since the last dance, danced for the first time. (Regalia themselves are sentient. They are not “displayed,” but “cry to dance” and dance together with the human beings who wear and carry them, before an audience that includes invisible spirit beings who “cry to see them dance.”)

Dance after dance (nearly a hundred in all, over ten days), day after day, the lead singers’ voices wove and intertwined in counterpoint, the sidemen steady in the deceptively simple chorus. It is singing full of yearning and sadness. The music is old, but new songs are made, and you can hear a touch of the electric blues in some good younger singers’ voices today.

Overhead, in 1990, helicopters made a constant, racketing drone, state agents searching out marijuana plants in the mountains. A few beat-up cars cruised by slowly on the narrow gravel road below the dance ground. Ospreys dived on the river from the ridges in bursts of buff feathers against the sky and trees and water and rose again with the flash of silver fish in their talons.
The jump dance builds for ten days. Fasting, thirsting, waking, singing—people are cheerful, glad to be there in the heat of the sun, the smoke of the fire, the air rich with burning angelica root. “Don’t say it’s hot,” said an elder, “say it’s a wonderful day!” The prayers build—the medicine man’s, the dancers’, the women’s prayer in the camps, the spectators’ prayer, witnessing. On the last day girls join the men and boys who have already danced for nine days, and by the end of the last dance of this tenth day all of the dancers are in the pit at once with the very best of all of the regalia. Finally the single great prayer rises up and hangs in the sky above the river, luminous and powerful. Then everybody dances, maybe a hundred people, from the dance grounds and down across the road, along the gravel bar by the river.

As the evening cools, at feasts in the three dance camps, each led by a senior woman holding hereditary rights to offer “a fire” or “a table,” people review how well it has gone, tell stories, laugh. In another two years it will be time to fix the world again, but for now everyone is happy, the human beings and the spirit beings who have been watching the dance all along, crying for the beauty of it.

The Yurok jump dance at Pecwan is for the whole world, some people say, for the planet that would have failed long since without it. This seemed likely to me in 1990, after ten days: the completed dance felt that important. At the same time, the jump dance is a local event, the prayer of a people in place. The world that it fixes is most immediately the regional, communal world of native northwestern California, its mountains and ragged coastline, its rivers, fish and fowl and many animals, large and small, its innumerable plant-forms, and also its indigenous peoples, American Indians who remain as dynamic a part of it all as they were when their ancestors first put up the dance at Pecwan, “long years ago” as the late Frank Douglas (Yurok) was fond of saying.

Mr. Douglas and other Yuroks have often been noted for their independent spirits, as individuals and families. But they are also integrated into
a regional network of indigenous peoples who are at once distinct by virtue of territories and diverse languages, and are also richly intertwined through shared histories, customs, marriages, trade, ceremonial participation, ecological and political interdependency, friendship and enmity alike. In the past, when Yurok people spoke of ṭo·lekʷel, “the human world,” it was this regional world of interrelated peoples living in an intimately known and specific physical environment to which they referred. Today, that world includes people now called Karuk, Hupa, Tolowa, and Wiyot Indians, a world commonly known in ethnology as “native northern California.” “Yurok” has a very real political meaning today: the Yurok Indian Tribe, with about 3,500 enrolled members, was fully, federally organized in 1993. Yet this modern organization continues to exist within a wider regional social and cultural network—a large Indian population functionally integrated with the dominant, non-Indian population yet remaining among the most culturally autonomous in contemporary native California.2

“Yurok” is a relatively recent name that originally derived from the word for “downriver” among these people’s upstream neighbors on the Klamath, now called the Karuk Indians, “the Uprivers.” Yurok became the standard appellation for the Downrivers among non-Indians in the eighteen sixties and seventies as outsiders began to constitute them as a “tribe,” an objectified entity (with an evolutionary niche implied) that could be militarily supervised, bureaucratically managed, and ethnographically inscribed. As late as the nineteen seventies some elders joked that they couldn’t remember if “Yurok” was supposed to mean Uprivers or Downrivers—Karuks or puliklah, one of the Yuroks’ many names for themselves.3

Aboriginally, these puliklah, “Downrivers,” and n.äʔ.ąny.šh, the closely related coastal people, spoke variants of the same language, saʔagogh, one of only two known Algonquian languages west of the Rockies. (The second is Wiyot, closely affiliated with the Yurok language and spoken by the Yuroks’ neighbors to the south.) Aboriginal Yurok political organization was minimal, subtle, and implicit, focused on villages and village clusters and sometimes on single great houses within villages, all highly independent, in and out of alliances and feuds with each other and with
other neighbors who spoke their own, very different languages in their own territories.

Again, A. L. Kroeber found these aboriginal people “anarchic”—a misperception as wide of the mark as calling them a “tribe.” The puliklah and nr?rnyrh together were neither anarchic nor tribal but something more difficult to pin down in European terms, an emergence through time and speech and ongoing interaction. They were the “human beings,” ?o·lekⁿoh, “the ones who stay here” after the wo·gey, the Spirit People or First People, had invented culture and—for the most part—departed at the beginning of “Indian Time.” Some early American visitors called these ?o·lekⁿoh “the Allequa”; Yuroks came to call the whites wo·gey, pronounced, today, with an ironic twist.  

At the time of first contact, in 1775, the Yuroks were fishers and foragers and hunters, secure enough in their abundant estuarine world to stay in permanent settlements of redwood plank houses along the lower forty miles of the Klamath River and along the Pacific coast to either side of the river mouth, seven miles north to Tolowa country, thirty-five miles south to the Wiyots. Like these neighbors, Yuroks lived primarily by harvesting acorns and salmon, but also sturgeon, lampreys, steelhead trout, and surf fish, deer and elk and waterfowl, vegetables from sea lettuce to brodiaea bulbs, berries to grass seeds. On the coast they worked the abundant shoreline for shellfish, sea lions, the occasional stranded whale. They traded such specialty foods as well as raw materials like elk horn and fine worked goods, like redwood river canoes, far inland, bringing back dentalia shells from north along the coast, obsidian from the mountains to the east, the scalps of pileated woodpeckers from other inland mountains beyond their own territory. These things were real wealth, suitable for dancing in the great dances, helomey- (“to dance”), as regalia, and also for paying bride wealth, thus securing legitimate children. Strong and ambitious men amassed wealth, power, and influence, became numi pegik, “real men,” tough, learned, rich, and independent, and founded “high families” that their sons tried to maintain for their own generation at least.

Often these great houses lasted a good deal longer, although it is usually hard to tell just how long in the Western sense, limited by its three dimensions. Spiritual acumen was also nurtured in these houses although
spiritual leaders were not necessarily rich. Besides, the oral histories of houses and high families have often been adjusted to account for the prominence of the newly ascendant. It was a fluid system. Families rose and fell in an order that resembled a class system but was not. The system might best be conceived of as a meritocracy in which the wealthy and those with deep spiritual acumen both had an advantage and were often one and the same.

The women who became sucking doctors, *kegeyowor* (sing. *kegey*), brought in “clean money” as well in fees for the cures they accomplished and in the bride wealth their male kin demanded for them, bringing esteem and prominence to themselves, their children, and their houses alike. Other women were wealthy in the fine baskets they wove, some of the finest in North America, and other forms of women’s wealth that were received for baskets in trade. While power seems, at this distance, to have been rather evenly distributed within the society, terms like “gender symmetry” threaten to obscure genuine difference. Men’s and women’s worlds were generally separate, socially and architecturally, and complementary rather than symmetrically balanced in terms of power (see Buckley 1988). Exceptions were found in the sucking doctors themselves and a few other females who, like doctors, were sociological males, “real men”: *pegik*.

This is the hypothetical pre-contact Yurok world that appears in the printed records compiled by early European visitors and, most decisively, in the cumulative “salvage ethnography” reconstructed and published by Kroeber or by his literary executors between 1902 and 1976. (Kroeber’s work was based primarily on field work carried out on the Klamath River between 1900 and 1907.) While Kroeber salvaged this account from the memories of the oldest surviving, primarily male Yuroks of his time, the world that he and various of his younger colleagues and protégés witnessed was, in fact, a world vastly and terribly transformed from the one that they inscribed in their salvaged ethnographic reconstruction of classic Yurok Indian culture, ca. 1849.5

“The end of Indian Time,” as some people call it today, had come with the California gold rush. Although a few Europeans and Euro-Americans made brief visits to Yurok territory beginning in 1775, in the first three months of 1850 an estimated 10,000 prospectors poured into the
lower Klamath drainage, and more followed every month after that (Heizer and Mills 1952; Bledsoe 1885). “Whiteman Time” had begun. The ensuing conflict between Yuroks (together with their allies) and the invading whites extended into the mid-1860s, a period during which new pathogens ran rampant among the region’s indigenous peoples as well. By Kroeber’s conservative estimate (1925: 883), approximately 81 percent of the aboriginal population of northwestern California was lost between 1850 and 1910, the nadir of demographic collapse. “The end of the world,” “the time when the stars fell,” “the end of Indian Time”: however people name it today, it was a time of horror and the beginning of the Yuroks’ modern history, a history almost entirely neglected by Kroeber himself (1925: vi ff.).

The term “genocide” is often invoked, in popular usage, to refer to a broad range of oppressive practices that are technically distinct in more legalistic international discourse. With reference to native North America, these practices include massacre, murder, involuntary manslaughter, imprisonment, the spread of disease, enslavement, dispossession, impoverishment, and ethnocide (the ideological effort to destroy cultures, rather than the physical being of the ethnic groups that bear those cultures). Some scholars have argued on the basis of contemporary international law, however, that, while comparable losses of population occurred throughout native North America after 1492, it is primarily in northern California between 1850 and 1865 that a major factor in this population decline can be legalistically and technically defined as “genocide” under 1948 United Nations Convention criteria (e.g., Norton 1979; M. Field 1993). By no means do all such scholars seek to minimize the great North American colonial tragedy, exculpating the colonists, but rather to point out the particular evil of state-sanctioned attempts to exterminate outright all Indian people in northern California. Doing so, they hope to establish a firm legal connection between what happened there, between 1850 and 1865, and widely and legally acknowledged modern genocide in places like Nazi Europe or, more recently, Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. By this means, these scholars attempt to intrude upon a general white North American historical oblivion regarding the post-contact histories of all native North American peoples.
The estimated 2,500 Yurok Indians of 1850 had lost at least 73 percent of their population by 1910, and estimated losses among their 4,500 close neighbors were comparable: Karuks, 47 percent; Hupas, 50 percent; Tolowas 85; Wiyots, 90. Of the 6,000 additional people of smaller, less well-defended groups peripheral to the Yurok world—Shastas, Mattoles, Chilulas, Whilcuts, Chimarikos, Nongatls, Sinkyones, Cahtos—only 3–4 percent survived beyond 1865 to be absorbed by marginally more fortunate neighboring groups.

In some cases the parents of the oldest people whom I met on the Klamath River in the 1970s had witnessed this cataclysm firsthand. One can no more understand the contemporary world of native northwestern California without coming to terms with the facts of genocide than one can, for instance, understand the contemporary state of Israel without accepting the reality of the Holocaust. There is no local Indian family whose history does not include a nineteenth-century legacy of attempted extermination, burnt houses, disease, murder, rape, kidnapping, and involuntary servitude, although many share a proud history of armed resistance as well. It is best, I think, to let native authors themselves write of these things as they see fit (chapter 3).

Ecological devastation was as much a part of the great human tragedy engendered by the white invasion and occupation of the later nineteenth century as demographic collapse. Human beings, flora, fauna, and minerals were all reduced to objects subject to commodification when possible, extermination when not, in a white rage for profit that has yet to be exhausted.

The jump dance at Pecwan and a dozen other events that Kroeber and E. W. Gifford (1949) were to lump together as a “world renewal cult” were inaugurated in a mythic “beforetime” by the wo·gey, who knew that the dances would be needed later: that greed, breaches of the law, and disease would imbalance the world once the Indians came and Indian Time began. After 1849 the world became unbalanced almost beyond the power of the dances to fix it. In Karuk, Hupa, and Yurok territories along the lower Klamath and its tributaries, the Trinity and Salmon Rivers, damage to the riverine system from hydraulic mining for gold was already so extreme by 1851 that the spring run of Chinook salmon had stopped, their
spawning beds silted in. There was no longer any point in holding the First Salmon rite at the mouth of the Klamath since there was no longer a First Salmon (Kroeber and Barrett 1960).

When the gold played out the loggers came, cutting the most accessible and profitable timber first—the giant redwoods along the coastal shelf—then moving inland, eventually clearcutting thousands of square miles of Coast Range mountains for their Douglas fir, white cedar, and other old growth. Del Norte and Humboldt County timber fed the growth of the burgeoning metropolis around San Francisco Bay and later traveled much farther, Doug’ fir reduced to plywood, sacred (“he is a person”) rot-resistant redwood providing picnic tables and decks and lawn chairs halfway around the world. By the 1980s, saw-logs bucked from the trunks of ancient trees were a good part of what America had to offer the Japanese in return for their newly efficient automobiles and sophisticated consumer electronics in a then-futile effort to balance international trade. (The Japanese were powerful enough, then, to refuse any milled lumber or plywood; our export of logs to them did very little to relieve chronic unemployment along the lower Klamath and on the adjacent Pacific coast.)

The Klamath River salmon stock was once among the most abundant in the world, second in North America only to the Columbia River stock. Even after the enormously destructive hydraulic mining of the 1850s and ‘60s stopped, however, spawning grounds continued to be destroyed by the slash, silt, and, eventually, chemical run-off created by industrial logging practices that, by the 1970s, included the defoliation of deciduous growth with herbicides containing the carcinogenic compound 2,4D. (These hardwoods compete with profit-yielding conifers.) The ecological disaster has been deepened by other factors. River waters depleted by upstream hydroelectric and flood control dams became too warm, too shallow, and too murky for salmon to spawn. International trawling fleets fishing at sea, off the mouth of the Klamath, decimated the stock before it reached the increasingly untenable spawning grounds. With salmon nearly gone and old forests going, by 1990 multinational corporations had turned once again to mineral exploitation in the ravaged coastal mountains, seeking exotic minerals to extract with ever-more powerful technologies, scraping off the last of the fat of the land.
What one sees of the north coast of California, traveling along the few major highways, is still breath-taking in its beauty—a rugged, sparsely settled region, the “Redwood Empire” of postcards and tourist brochures. Equally far removed from the San Francisco Bay area some three hundred and fifty miles to the south and Portland, Oregon, three hundred miles to the north, however, the region is chronically economically depressed. A new maximum security prison in Crescent City, once Tolowa country and the northern limit of the old Yurok world, affords a few new opportunities for employment as guards. A big shopping mall in Eureka, sixty miles south of the Klamath in what was once Wiyot territory but is now wreathed in the sulfuric stench of pulp mills, hires clerks on a regular basis. Most salmon in the markets comes frozen from distant fish farms. Along the back roads the fractured bones of the mountains jut through the earth’s skin, ravaged by clearcut logging and by far smaller but equally devastating mining operations. “This place is a colony of Wall Street,” Brian Tripp, the Karuk artist, said one day in Eureka.  

Three

The Yurok Indians have been exploited by ethnographers and psychologists in much the same way as trees and fish and minerals have been exploited by capitalists, their lives commodified as “culture” for exchange in an academic marketplace. This is not a new charge, of course, nor does the argument for it need to be made by outsiders like me, today, on behalf of the people themselves. Many among them are well aware of its particulars, complexities, and ironies, and they are articulate in voicing their diverse views of anthropology, ethnohistory, and cross-cultural psychology. I come to my work under an embarrassing cloud, although one not nearly as heavy as that which occludes the memory of my very famous predecessor, A. L. Kroeber. “Yuroks generally resent the way they have been depicted in the literature of anthropology,” writes Richard Keeling (1982a: 72), “and—whether he deserves it or not—they focus their bitterness on Kroeber.”
Throughout his Yurok oeuvre, Kroeber insisted that “the Yurok” were doomed by 1850, that “native primitive” Yurok culture existed only as a memory artifact by the time he arrived on the Klamath in 1900, and that no authentically Yurok culture could be said to have existed since 1850, when it began to be supplanted by a “bastard” culture, neither Indian nor white (Kroeber 1948). Both Kroeber’s denial of Yurok cultural survival after 1850 and the historical obliviousness toward genocide that accompanied it, at least until 1990, are profoundly resented by many native readers of now widely accessible works, such as Kroeber’s monumental *Handbook of the Indians of California* (1925).

There are other sources of bitterness about Kroeber among his native readership. As his widow Theodora Kroeber Quinn put it to me in 1978, he “just wasn’t very interested in religion” and this lack of interest feels like disrespect to native readers today, as does Kroeber’s dismissal of Yurok polity (largely implemented through ceremonialism) as “the extreme of political anarchy” (Kroeber 1925: 830). Today, as Richard Keeling continues (1982a), “The Indians tend to feel that their traditional spirituality has not been appreciated. The first thing that an elderly Yurok or Hupa Indian wants to impress on an outsider is that ‘For old-time Indians, everything used to be religion.’” In 1978 Geneva Matz (Yurok) told me somewhat the same thing. “We are the praying people, that’s who we are. In the old days everything we do is pray.” At about the same time—before I had learned better—I told another local woman, a brush dance doctor, that I was interested in “Yurok religion.” “Well,” she said with a grimace, “I guess you could call it that.” Neither she nor Mrs. Matz would have, however. Among Indian people in northwestern California who are concerned with such things, “religion” tends to refer to Christianity, to beliefs and rituals that manifest institutionalized teachings. “Praying,” privately or in communal rites like dances, is about something else: “our sacred ways,” “the Indian Way,” “the old way,” sometimes, locally, “spiritualism.” In this book, I will call it “spirituality.”

Spirituality, of course, connotes individuality: its locus is in individual subjectivity, affect, and experience, yet it finds voice through socially shared means and, given such means, becomes communal as well as individual. Missing the central importance of spirituality to Yurok society, Kroeber fell
short in grasping Yurok social organization. “The Yurok recognizes no public claim and the existence of no community. His world is wholly an aggregation of individuals. There being no society as such, there is no social organization” (1925: 3). Working primarily with elderly high family men, Kroeber recognized the importance of individuality among “the Yurok,” but did not understand how these people’s independence served a processual communality. His “ethnocentric” failure in this regard (Bean and Blackburn 1976: 9) was intertwined with his lack of interest in religion and his focus on social structure, law, and material culture. Contemporary native intellectuals are correct in understanding that a dynamic web of wealth and spiritual acumen and competencies classically supported communal goals and thus formed the channels through which social action was directed. Kroeber’s failure to acknowledge this web—metaphorically woven, in myth, by Skymaker, who knotted the sky net and set it in place—reflects his want of interest in “religion,” more generally speaking.

Disappointed not only by the Yuroks’ lack of formally structured social organization, Kroeber was also disappointed in them as individuals. Making much of the traditional sucking doctors, as the most significant among spiritual actors, he also saw these women in the negative terms of what he found missing in them. He was disappointed that, in Yurok “shamanism,” the “idea of an association between the shaman and certain spirits personally attached to him is weakly developed” (1925: 3). Lacking the dramatic, highly “symbolic” shamanism of North American Indian “civilizations” that were, in his opinion, more highly developed, the Yuroks seemed to Kroeber merely “addicted to magic” (1959). “Concepts relating to magic are as abundantly developed among the Yurok and their neighbors as shamanism is narrowed. Imitative magic is particularly favored and is of the most crudely direct kind” (1925: 4). Because he was fixated on personal “magic,” the extraordinary complexity and metaphysical subtlety of collective events like the jump dance at Pecwan were quite lost on Kroeber, reduced to individual displays of profane wealth:

the idea of organization being absent, there are no cult societies or initiations. Symbolism is an almost unknown attitude of mind except in matters of outright magic: therefore masks, impersonations, altars, and
sacred apparatus, as such, are not employed. The tangible paraphernalia of public ceremony are objects that possess a high property value—wealth that impresses, but nevertheless profane and negotiable wealth. The dances are displays of this wealth as much as they are song and step. All life being individualized rather than socialized. . . . [1925: 3]⁷

Kroeber (after all, a sensitive and intelligent man and an expert observer) described the “song and step” of these dances in an evocative and accurate way:

The northwesterner, particularly in the music of the great dances, loves to leap upwards an octave or more to a long, powerful note, and then sink back from this by a series of slides, often in continuous tonal transition. The accompanists at times chant a rhythmic base pulse without definite melodic relation to the strain. The levels and climaxes vary enormously in pitch, in rhythm, in intensity of intonation. [1925: 96]

Yet Kroeber did not find in this remarkable and highly emotional music (“Indian blues,” some people call it today) an interpretive key that might open to him the richer spiritual meanings of the dances and of the wealth that dances in them. While recognizing that this music, with its “plaintiveness” and “emotions,” was the means by which the regalia owners and dancers “expressed some of their profoundest feelings,” Kroeber lamented that he could not “make a single exact and intelligible remark” about it (1925: 96).

Understanding that the Yuroks were profoundly concerned with individuality, manifested as emotion expressed within contexts of communal spiritual practice, Kroeber could not subject the singers and dancers or the meanings of the regalia that danced with them to positivist reduction and objectification. This was a methodological constraint that had numerous interpretive consequences. Because Kroeber could not objectify affect, neither could he professionally communicate the ways in which Yurok individuality was the basis of a social organization that flowed from a collective spirituality, rather than the sign of an absence or lack of socialization. This is part of what contemporary native northwestern Californians mean when they say that Kroeber “got his facts right” (for which