On July 12, 1776, Captain James Cook and his crew left England in search of the famed Northwest Passage which was thought to link the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans and promised to open up a new, more direct trading route with Asia. The public records of Cook’s last voyage alerted a vast reading public, both in Europe and the early United States, to the commercial opportunities emerging from the exploitation of the North Pacific’s rich natural resources. Using the example of the sea otter and other “strange beasts of the sea,” Dr. Braun’s talk explores how new knowledge of the natural world and its dissemination through print culture helped the newly independent United States establish itself as a transoceanic empire.

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