

The Indian's White Man

Indigenous Knowledge, Mutual Understanding, and the Politics of Indigenous Reason

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This article uses three Ho-Chunk discussions of “whiteness” (from first contact to the mid-twentieth century) to outline an approach to Indigenous knowledge that challenges approaches that depict other cultures as constituting incommensurable worlds. Arguing that the idea of ontological alterity leads to a form of ethnographic entrapment, it instead theorizes Indigenous knowledge production as a process rooted in empirical observation, moral evaluation, and critical engagement within a common but contested world. The Ho-Chunk examples illustrate a long-term, collective process of inquiry that produced an understanding of settler whiteness emphasizing its relationship to practices of dispossession and governance. They also show events in which such knowledge was used by Ho-Chunk people in efforts to compel white interlocutors to self-awareness and more reasonable forms of behavior.

Introduction: Honorary Whiteness

In August 1941, Albert Yellow Thunder stood in front of the audience at the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial, a popular tourist show in the Wisconsin Dells, so that Wisconsin's governor, Julius Heil, could offer him “an honorary membership in the white race” (*Madison Capital Times* 1941; see fig. 1). Heil explained that the honor was being offered as acknowledgment from “we of Caucasian heritage . . . of the generosity of you, the North American aborigine” (*Madison Capital Times* 1941). Like the majority of Stand Rock's performers, Yellow Thunder was a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation (then known as the Wisconsin Winnebago), the people whose ancestral territory included the Dells and its environs. In his response to Heil, he thanked the governor for the “unique honor” and described to the audience his vision of “the great new life” it promised him. His new status would require him to

give up the simplicity of the American Indian life for worries about my neighbor's affairs. When I make baskets and other handicrafts, I must first see the mayor and the chief of police . . . and buy a license to sell them. If I want to catch fish for my family, I must buy a fish license. In fact I must now become license-minded the same as my new white brothers. (*Madison Capital Times* 1941)

One of the many journalists reporting on the event characterized Yellow Thunder's response as a “jibe” but assured readers that Yellow Thunder had continued, in “a more serious mood,” to express his hope that the event was “significant of a growing spirit of sympathy and understanding between the white-people and my own.”¹

1. On the event and Yellow Thunder's “jibe,” see *Madison Capital Times* (1941). For other accounts of the event, see *Chicago Tribune* (1941), *Eau*

This special ceremonial in the Stand Rock arena will strike many readers as an unwitting parody of the now widely recognized idea that racial statuses—in particular, whiteness—are bestowed by social institutions rather than by biology, an idea extensively explored in recent scholarship.² Yellow Thunder's response, however, deserves our attention as an example of something less frequently discussed. In deftly questioning the honor of honorary whiteness, Yellow Thunder confronted his audience with the idea that whiteness could be viewed as something other than an honorable status. His jibe raised questions about the value of being white, implicitly posing a question explicitly formulated earlier by W. E. B. Du Bois (1920) as “What on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?” (30). Yellow Thunder suggested an answer in terms that speak directly to a long history of Indigenous critiques of what we now call settlerness—the idea that white racial status is connected to the ongoing colonization of Indigenous lands and lives (e.g., Moreton-Robinson 2015; Rifkin 2011, 2014; Veracini 2011). His jibe expressed his place in a Ho-Chunk history of political struggle and activism (Lonetree 2011, 2019; Ramirez 2018), confronting the Stand Rock audience with knowledge distinct in its origins from their own ways of knowing

Claire Leader (1941), *Milwaukee Journal* (1941), *Milwaukee Sentinel* (1941), *Vesper State Center* (1941), and *Wisconsin Dells Events* (1941).

2. Most readers will have their own relationship to this literature: Roediger (1991) and Allen (1994) are well-recognized early moments in the discussion. For a sharp critique of “whiteness” studies, see Fields (2001) and, more recently, Fields and Fields (2012). For recent discussions in the context of settler-colonial societies (and “settlerness”), see (especially) Moreton-Robinson (2016), Rifkin (2014), Veracini (2011), and Wolfe (2011).

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Figure 1. Albert Yellow Thunder, ca. 1941, in a publicity photograph used on a souvenir postcard for the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial in the Wisconsin Dells. H. H. Bennett Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-(126046).

themselves yet aimed at provoking them to reason with him toward a new understanding of their whiteness and his Indianness.

Indigenous Inquiry and Knowledge of White People

The documentation and analysis of Indigenous and other local forms of knowledge—the concepts, classifications, categories, and beliefs through which peoples make sense of their worlds and make their ways in them—have been the “sine qua non” of ethnographic research throughout its history (Marchand 2010). Whatever the preferred taxonomic or analytic framework proposed or used (for proposed frameworks, see Barth 2002; Crick 1982; Fabian 2012), anthropological accounts of such knowledge are usually compatible with, if not in fact committed to, the de facto pragmatist assumption that knowledge is related to doing and that truths are revealed in the context of particular practices of inquiry and evaluation (Misak 2010, 2013). Pragmatist commitments can be found in the works of Boas (Lewis 2001; Rodseth 2015), in Evans-Pritchard’s (1937) account of Azande oracles, in various analyses of exotic systems of animal classification (see Sahlins 1996), and in

contemporary “ontological anthropologies” (e.g., de la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Holbraad 2012; Viveiros de Castro 2015), to name some key examples from across disciplinary history. For more than a century, anthropologists in various traditions have used their research to document the practical situations in which Indigenous concepts about the world emerge and persist. For decades, they have also attended to the fate of Indigenous knowledge in confrontations with other ways of knowing, especially in the sort of struggles over land claims, resource management, bioprospecting, and intellectual property characteristic of Indigenous predicaments today (Blaser 2016; de la Cadena 2015; Nadasdy 2007; Povinelli 1995, 2001). Accounts of such confrontations have shown, unsurprisingly given the differences of power involved, that Indigenous knowledge claims rarely carry the day when they confront antagonists uninterested in reasoned deliberation and mutual accommodation.

Indigenous concepts of “white people” can be of particular value in understanding the complexities of Indigenous knowledge and the factors leading their non-Indigenous interlocutors to overlook or reject it. In Native North America, knowing about white people (qua settlers) is intrinsically linked to knowing what it is to be Indigenous: these have emerged as co-constitutive categories of both conceptual and practical differentiation (Gal 2005). Yet while there have been numerous illuminating studies of Euro-American concepts of American Indian and other Indigenous peoples—what Berkhofer (1978) dubbed the “white man’s Indian”—there have been relatively few anthropological accounts of the “Indian’s white man” (one of the important exceptions being Keith Basso’s [1978] *Portraits of the Whiteman*).³ Deirdre Evans-Pritchard (1989) once proposed that the absence of Indian accounts of white people had been created by an anthropological belief that such images did “not represent true Indian culture” (90). This obstacle should have been removed by efforts like Basso’s and the widespread acceptance of Indigenous cultures as active processes linked to the past but engaged in the present in the 1990s (e.g., Ginsburg 1991; Turner 1991). Scholars in Indigenous studies have documented the centuries-old tradition of (to follow Audra Simpson [2014]) “deeply resistant, self-governing, and relentlessly critical” (97) Indigeneity in Native North America (e.g., Brooks 2008, 2018; Warrior 2005).

3. Key here is the qualifier “relatively”; there are other important examples of attention to Indigenous accounts of whiteness, such as DeMallie (1993) and O’Neill (1994), to name only two. It should also be noted that Ira Bashkow (2000, 2006) has presented a rich ethnographic account of Orokaiva (Papua New Guinea) knowledge of whites inspired by Basso’s work, with many insights with relevance to the argument made here. I focus on Ho-Chunk examples in this article in order to foreground the ongoing discovery at work in Indigenous knowledge, not to deny the complementary project of inquiring into the comparative dimensions of Indigenous knowledge of whites (qua settlers and colonials) in a way that is compatible with both my own agenda and recent scholarly investigations of whiteness by scholars in Indigenous studies.

More recently, Indigenous Australian scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004:85) argued that the absence of scholarly acknowledgment of Indigenous accounts of whites is the result of an enduring tendency among ethnographers and others to treat Indigenous peoples as bearers of culture but not as reliable producers of knowledge. The charge is familiar from concerns over the status of Indigenous testimony and the problem of epistemic injustice facing Indigenous people. Moreton-Robinson's fellow scholars in Indigenous studies have critiqued this epistemological failing—a form of “ethnographic entrapment” (Arndt 2016*b*)—for decades (Moreton-Robinson, Casey, and Nicoll 2008; Simpson 2014).

Despite important anthropological attention to Indigenous activism and attentiveness to sovereignty and nation rebuilding in ethnographic work in North America (see Strong 2005 for an earlier review and see, e.g., Cattelino 2008; Dennison 2012; Lambert 2007; Nadasdy 2017), contemporary anthropology's response to the charge of epistemic injustice is rendered somewhat unclear by important and influential work that seeks the “decolonization of Indigenous thought” via ideas of ontological difference and radical alterity (e.g., Blaser 2016; de la Cadena 2015; Holbraad 2012; Kohn 2015; Viveiros de Castro 2015). Participants in this “ontological turn” clearly share with other anthropologists the broadly pragmatist commitment to understanding truth as emergent within particular practical engagements with the world (this is explicit in de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). They tend to work through this idea by calling for anthropologists to reject the idea that ethnographic accounts of Indigenous ontologies should reduce them to a distinct set of mere beliefs about the world (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). This general stance is compatible with the characteristic pragmatist “aversion [to] transcendental accounts of truth” (Misak 2010:81).⁴ But the ontologists go on to insist that people from different collectivities and cultures be understood not as knowers of a shared world through a distinct set of projects of inquiry and action linked to different ways of living in the world but rather as dwellers in different worlds made up of incommensurate things (the key theorist of this point is Viveiros de Castro; see also de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). They see this framework as a way to challenge the “insidious” tendency of scientific epistemologies to treat Indigenous people as “simple carrier[s]” of “a mistaken ‘culture’ that represent[s] distortedly” the external nature known to science (Viveiros de Castro 2015:5). Yet in seeking to defend Indigenous knowledge from scientific empiricism and ethnographic disparagement, onto-

logical anthropologists turn Indigenous knowledge into ontologies conceptualized as impervious to reasoned engagement (or especially vulnerable to it; see especially Holbraad 2012). However much such a vision of “cosmopolitics” (Blaser 2016; de la Cadena 2010) works to defend the autonomy and integrity of Indigenous ways of knowing, the ontological approach undermines the sense that Indigenous knowledge can demand reasoned engagement from non-Indigenous interlocutors. Critics have argued that the assumption of radical alterity and ontological multiplicity seems to make Indigenous knowledge incompatible with a politics based on the critique of claims to knowledge and the unmasking of such claims as ideologically motivated (e.g., Bessire and Bond 2014; Cepek 2016:624–625). Moreover, Indigenous scholars have noted that an emphasis on radical alterity and the pluriverse seems to lead to a turn away from Indigenous voices exactly when they speak most insistently and eloquently to global audiences, reviving older patterns privileging the voices of non-Indigenous mediators (Hunt 2014; Todd 2016; Watts 2013) and implicitly raising anew the dilemma of authenticity and authority critically analyzed in work on Indigenous media activism (see Graham 2002).⁵ The problem is not with the notion of radical alterity itself, given that, as David Graeber (2015:28) has argued, alterity is always possible because reality always exceeds any particular effort to conceptualize and engage it.⁶ The problem is with the concept of a pluriverse of self-constituting worlds since conceiving Indigenous understandings as something other than alternative ways of knowing a shared world makes it difficult to see how Indigenous knowledge can have the power to convince others to understand reality differently and thus be an effective tool for Indigenous-led political programs of survival and self-determination.⁷

We can retain the insights that come from engaging with diverse cosmological perspectives as exemplified by ontological approaches as well as the enlightenment (Sahlins 1996) that is the general legacy of anthropological work (ontological or otherwise) when undertaken (and read) in a spirit of generosity along with an approach to Indigenous knowledge that emphasizes histories of epistemological self-determination

4. I highlight Misak's account of pragmatism because she focuses on the pragmatist approach to knowledge. While I invoke the idea of pragmatism throughout this article, I am very sympathetic to Robert B. Talisse's (2018) recent argument for a “deflationary” understanding of pragmatism not as a particular tradition of philosophy but rather as “a loosely-related series of promising insights, suggestions, and gambits about how considerations concerning human action should inform our theorizing about meaning, truth, inquiry, and value” (415).

5. Even Kohn's (2013:7–8) semiotically informed, ontologically oriented work—with its welcome engagement with the writings of Terrence Deacon—turns explicitly away from works of semiotic anthropology that offer tools critical for efforts to understand Indigenous political speech and the obstacles Indigenous people face in colonialist contexts.

6. In another recent account, Brandom (2019) makes a similar point, noting that “sensuous immediacy overflows conceptual mediation” (752).

7. The debate over ontological anthropology is the most recent moment in a longer debate over issues of epistemology and politics. To cite one example of an earlier moment (discovered fortuitously during the final stages of writing this article), Satya Mohanty (1989) drew on still earlier debates over rationality and relativism to point to the problem with positions that create “debilitatingly insular spaces” that impede questions about “how your space impinges on mine, or how my history is defined together with yours” (67).

rather than radical alterity.⁸ The perspective is grounded in the recognition that what we mean when we talk about knowing as differentiated from states such as believing, hoping, imagining, lying, and so on can be understood in terms of truths provisionally established by experience (Misak 2010). Truth is not whatever those who take up the mantle of science (or of alterity) proclaim it to be but rather a belief supported by experience—that is, by a brute encounter with the external, which has “logical consequences that . . . fit in harmoniously with our otherwise grounded knowledge” and would be sustained “were we to pursue our investigations as far as they could fruitfully go” (Misak 2010:87). Knowledge of the world, as distinct from mere beliefs about the world, is subject to the test of future experience and to argumentation that may require reassessment of established commitments in order to maintain a solid footing in the world.⁹ “Science” is one family of modes of practical engagement with the world, one that is and has been highly effective for its purposes, but there are other modes (and other purposes), and they can also lead to experiences that confront subjects with challenges to their inherited commitments and call for revisions.

Such a concept of knowledge and definition of truth make it possible to suggest that to the extent that Indigenous knowledge engages a shared, albeit contested, world, it can be the basis of a politics as reasonable as any other, even (or especially) in projects that bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowers. In such interactions, Indigenous knowledge need not be taken as inherently incompatible with other modes of knowing. Experience may require both Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowers to revise their commitments, although they may fail to do so, just as they may comply with demands that they nonetheless find unreasonable. From such a perspective, problems of silencing and epistemic injustice result not from the vulnerability of Indigenous knowledge to reason but from its vulnerability to the refusals of interlocutors to reason together toward greater mutual understanding. Documenting the reasonable nature of Indigenous knowledge and its encounters with various refusals to reason provides an approach to decolonizing Indigenous knowledge that does not depend on postulating a pluriverse.¹⁰

8. Such a magnanimous understanding of the potentials of ethnographic research (including ontological approaches) is not incompatible with investigation of the problem of ethnographic entrapment and similar “genealogical” concerns. On magnanimity and genealogy, see Brandom (2013); the basic contrast is between identifying “causes masquerading as reasons” and an effort to “give contingency the shape of necessity” by identifying what seems to have been learned, despite the limited, situated, and fraught nature of the process of inquiry. See also Ira Bashkow’s (2019) recent reflections on the importance of approaching the history of anthropological research with “a measure of generosity.”

9. As Brandom (2019) expresses the point, “Experience is an exercise in vulnerability to how things actually are” (348).

10. Within the ontological literature, there are passages that come close to making similar points, despite the overall emphasis on radical

In this article, I outline some elements of such an approach to Indigenous knowledge through an examination of the historical development of Ho-Chunk knowledge of whites that takes Albert Yellow Thunder’s jibe to be a product of a centuries-long Ho-Chunk inquiry into the nature of whiteness. Two other historical fragments illustrate earlier moments in the process of discovery through which Ho-Chunk people developed knowledge of white people. The first of these fragments of history is a Ho-Chunk narrative about the moment of first contact and the arrival of Europeans and explains how (and why) Ho-Chunk people initially came to know the first Europeans they encountered (the French) as “spirits” (Radin 1990 [1923]:17–21). Collected by anthropologist Paul Radin during his fieldwork with Ho-Chunk people at the beginning of the twentieth century, the account is particularly important for explaining both the Ho-Chunk people’s exotic (from a contemporary point of view) initial classification of white people in the era of first contact and how they discovered it to be erroneous, leading them to revise it in ways that fit with their otherwise still stable understanding of the world.

The second historical fragment is a speech by a Ho-Chunk spokesperson at an early treaty negotiation with the United States in 1829 that introduced the American delegation to Ho-Chunk knowledge of whites in the process of seeking mutual understanding. I take the incident to illustrate how the refusal of whites to engage Ho-Chunk people in establishing a reasonable, mutually acceptable relationship further developed Ho-Chunk knowledge of whites in conjunction with an emerging sense of the importance of remaining “otherwise” (Povinelli 2012). As a subsequent moment in this sequence, Yellow Thunder’s jibe stands as an attempt to use the intercultural space of touristic performance to provoke his audience to rethink their own understanding of whiteness, revising it from a superior (and thus honorable) racial status to one entwined with the structures of settler-colonial governance. His jibe confronted his audience with a critical Indigenous perspective that representatives of settler society had long attempted to evade. Following the development of the Ho-Chunk concept of white people through these three examples provides a sketch of Indigenous knowledge as a process of discovery, illustrating both the complexly dynamic nature of Indigenous knowledge and the particular challenges to reasoning together that exist and help to constitute colonial situations.

The Burdens of Apperception: Situating White People in the Space of Reason

Scholars seeking to understand Indigenous knowledge on its own terms may find the pluriverse model attractive as a way of approaching Indigenous cosmologies because it provides a

alterity and the pluriverse, especially in the work of Blaser and de la Cadena, probably because both focus their attention on examples of Indigenous activism.

means of understanding exotic ontologies without being forced to take them up and defend them as knowledge of one's own world. The idea of a pluriverse provides a conceptual barrier warding off the threat of commensuration. But there are other ways to proceed. This section addresses an example of the sort of seemingly exotic ontology analogous to those widely attested to in the ethnographic literature and a situation that has often seemed to render the threat of commensuration tangible: situations of first contact with Indigenous peoples around the world in which white people are initially understood as manifestations of some locally recognized class of other-than-human persons. A now famous case is Marshall Sahlins's (1981, 1985, 1996) account of the reception of Captain Cook as an avatar of the deity Lono on his first contact with the Hawaiian islands (at least by the priests of Lono). Sahlins (1996) defended his account by invoking Nietzsche to formulate the idea that there is "no immaculate perception" and that we can understand such classifications as justifiable cultural apperceptions.¹¹ He challenged an alternative (and perhaps default) view that would regard such cultural classifications as mistakes that, if taken seriously, raised questions about the epistemological capacities of Indigenous communities, making Sahlins's account seem to be a threat to Indigenous culture and agency (for a discussion of the debate, see Borofsky 1997; for a useful discussion of the issues of culture involved, see Li 2001). This section shows, however, that when knowledge is understood as the product of a socially grounded and historically dynamic process, the discovery that initially reasonable classifications are erroneous in some way (that Cook was best regarded not as an avatar of Lono but as a human visitor from another island) becomes a normal part of the social life of cultural orders. Threats to culture and self-determination lie elsewhere.

At the start of the twentieth century, a Ho-Chunk person in Nebraska wrote a narrative about first contact with Europeans for anthropologist Paul Radin that provides insight into both a classic form of the cultural apperception of whites as spirits and how Ho-Chunk people found this classification to be unsustainable. Radin (1990 [1923]:17–21) published an English translation of the story under the title "How the Winnebago First Came into Contact with the French and the Origin of the Decora Family" in his ethnographic compendium *The Winnebago Tribe*. I invoke the text here as evidence that the falsification of cultural apperception is an ongoing part of the epistemological life of Indigenous communities (as with all other human communities). My use of the document is programmatic rather than philological and does not explore either the structure of the text or its relationship to the complicated

political context of Radin's fieldwork (for a glimpse of this, see Radin 1991 [1945]:35–49).¹²

The Ho-Chunk narrator begins with a concise overview of Ho-Chunk life at the moment of contact, noting that Ho-Chunk people lacked iron and relied on bows and arrows for hunting and that "the greatest honor was to be a brave man and for that reason they did nothing but go to war" (Radin 1990 [1923]:17). Ho-Chunk people of the time, the author explained, "fasted and became holy," offering tobacco, "their most valuable possession," "to the spirits [waxopini], who would bless them and make them hard to kill in battle" (17–18). It was in this context that "the first [whites] to come to the Winnebago," the French, appeared in a ship, and "the Winnebago went to the edge of the lake with offerings of tobacco and white deer-skins," items traditionally gifted to the spirits in ceremonial feasts. There, hearing the sounds of the ship's guns firing an arrival salute, the welcome party is depicted as declaring of the strangers, "They are thunderbirds" (wakandja), a key spiritual patron linked in Ho-Chunk teachings to success in battle (19, 239).

The assertion—"They are thunderbirds" (wakandja; elsewhere in the same text, the author uses waxopini [spirits] more generally [Radin 1990 (1923):234])—recalls other accounts of first contact in the western Great Lakes. As ethnohistorian Bruce White (1994) has shown in a very rich and rewarding analysis of historical documents, from the eighteenth century on, the Ojibwe and Dakota peoples of the region described the French as spirits in their early encounters, manitou in the case of Ojibwa people and waischitu in Dakota cases. Analogous cases of first encounters leading to the classification of Europeans as particular categories of other-than-human social beings (including ghosts and spirits) have been documented around the world (Sahlins 1996:188–189).¹³

12. Radin never identified the Ho-Chunk author of this text. It is possible that it was produced by Sam Blowsnake, who collected materials for Radin from other Ho-Chunk people using the Ho-Chunk syllabary. See Radin (1987 [1933]:245–252) for a partial discussion of the document that addresses neither its authorship nor the issue of cultural apperception I emphasize here. My references to Ho-Chunk terms rely on Richard L. Dieterle's transcription of the original syllabary text from Radin's field notebooks (Winnebago V, 17, pp. 1–34, Freeman 3897), available online in Dieterle's "Hotcak Encyclopedia" (<http://www.hotcakencyclopedia.com/ho.HTS.FirstContact.html>; accessed February 6, 2020).

13. An anonymous reviewer of a previous draft of this article drew my attention to Shorter's (2016) recent critique of the use of "spirit" and "spirituality" as ethnographic glosses of Indigenous concepts because of the distorting conceptual binaries such terms smuggle into discussions of Indigenous modes of relationality. In the present section, I retain use of "spirit" but note the potential pitfalls of the terminology as analyzed by Shorter. I feel that the uses made of the term by Sahlins, White, and other scholars accord with Shorter's emphasis on relationality (and reason), and the Ho-Chunk account itself supports points made in the rich literature Shorter discusses, such as Morrison (1979, 1992) and the important original work of Hallowell (1960) on the idea of ontology (and epistemology).

11. The concept of apperception was foundational to the development of the modern anthropological idea of culture. George W. Stocking Jr. (1982 [1968]:157–160) famously identified Boas's (1889) critique of the idea of "alternating sounds" in American Indian languages, with its discussion of apperception, as an overlooked generative source for the anthropological culture concept.

The author of the Ho-Chunk account emphasizes the justified nature of the Ho-Chunk classification of the French as spirits, explaining that the Ho-Chunk present at first contact perceived the French as spirits because they associated the sound of the ship's cannons with thunder (Radin 1990 [1923]:19). White (1994:376 *passim*) points out that similar Dakota and Ojibwe classifications of the French as spirits were linked to evidence of French guns, metal, and technology, understood as manifestations of forms of power traditionally associated with spiritual beings. Radin's research contains evidence that a human appearance would not have contradicted the identification of the French as thunderbirds or spirits. Despite the use of thunderbirds as the conventional English gloss of *wakandja*, such beings were not considered to be innately or consistently ornithomorphic and often appeared in human form in narratives (Radin 1990 [1923]:391). He also reports that even in the early twentieth century, "Powerful shamans and warriors not infrequently claim that they are merely reincarnated Thunderbirds" (391). Radin (1990 [1923]:108–109, 120n7, 242, 243–262) also published materials showing that such claims were subject to discussion and dispute within the Ho-Chunk community according to local standards of evidence, as were all important claims of contact with spiritual beings.

Moreover, the initial classification of the French as spirits was reasonable and practical, suggesting to Ho-Chunk people how they could seek to interact with this new sort of person (see Sahlin 1996; Shorter 2016). White (1994) suggests that the Dakota and Ojibwe classification of the French as spirits presented a workable framework for establishing mutually beneficial relations with them, particularly because of the Indigenous experience of the Europeans' combination of power and unpredictability. Sahlin (1996) suggests, in other contexts, that "the interpretation of Europeans as known spiritual beings . . . may reduce 'awe,' not simply by virtue of familiarity, but potentially by bringing Whites under familiar modes of control: that is, ritual and exchange" (181).

The Ho-Chunk author of the text published by Radin makes a similar point. Having already in the first part of the narrative established the importance of tobacco as a means of mediating with the spirits, the author explains that at the meeting at Green Bay, the Ho-Chunk "poured tobacco" on the heads of the French "to ask them to give them blessings for success in war" (Radin 1990 [1923]:19). The author of the Ho-Chunk account goes on, after establishing that the perception of the French as thunderbirds was both reasonable and practical, to explain how Ho-Chunk people found it to be erroneous. The account narrates a series of misunderstandings that followed the establishment of contact: when the Europeans attempted to shake hands, the Ho-Chunk responded by putting tobacco in their outstretched hands. The French attempted to speak with them but could not make themselves understood because they did not know the Ho-Chunk language. Moreover, seeing an older Indian man smoking tobacco, the central sacrament for the mediation of the relationship between spirits and humans (Radin 1990 [1923]:17–19, 241), they "poured water on him, because

[they] thought the [man] was on fire" (19). Evidence of the cultural ignorance of the French, as well as increasing familiarity with French trade goods, the story explains, led Ho-Chunk people to become "accustomed" to the French and to interact with them as fellow human beings in the years and decades that followed (19).

The Ho-Chunk account of first contact with the French relayed by Radin illustrates the political and evaluative complexities of the development of Indigenous knowledge of whites. It shows cultural apperception to be a collective social and historical process in which initially justified classifications can be discovered to be in error and revised. It also testifies to the recognition of such processes of falsification and revision within Indigenous communities. Most importantly, it shows that Ho-Chunk knowledge of the world was not endangered by the discovery that the initial classification of the French as spirits had been an error—it was, rather, refined and improved. Despite the discovery of that classificatory error, the spirits endured elsewhere because there existed other sites of encounter where truth and experience also mattered and other perceived spirits withstood the relevant empirical tests. Radin's (1990 [1923]) *The Winnebago Tribe* contains many examples of encounters with spirits (243–262), in part because of the contemporary controversy over such encounters in the era of his fieldwork (340–377). Certain ideas about the world may be revealed by experience to be unsustainable and to entail a change of commitments, but the experience of error is a natural and ongoing part of dealing with the world and in itself poses no danger to Indigenous cosmologies. The danger that came with the arrival of Europeans lay instead in the violent dispossession that would come later, with the refusal of subsequent generations of European colonists and settlers to behave reasonably in their dealings with Ho-Chunk people.

Reason and Guidance in a Space of Anticolonial Commitment

Narratives describing situations of first contact provide useful contexts for initial accounts of the problems of Indigenous knowledge because they make it possible to treat the problem of knowing social beings in terms of the problem of classifying objects. In such cases, the evaluation of ways of knowing is focused on the problem of properly classifying things in the world. Yet the development of Ho-Chunk knowledge of white people shows that knowledge, Indigenous or otherwise, has additional dimensions when it concerns other persons. Knowledge, then, includes normative expectations about behavior in social practices of engagement. In such cases, Indigenous knowledge becomes knowledge of how to navigate a social space organized by relational positions, including those we now label settlerness and Indigeneity.

A second fragment originating in the early decades of Ho-Chunk struggles against American expansion shows how Ho-Chunk people attempted to share their knowledge of whiteness with American colonial officials in the process of seeking mutual understanding. The fragment is the English gloss of a

speech given by Ho-Chunk leader and orator "Little Elk" at a treaty council held in July 1829 at Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi River and published in a book by Caleb Atwater (1831), an Ohio lawyer and politician who attended the event as a treaty commissioner for the United States. Little Elk's speech provides insight into the way in which the refusal of whites to enter into a shared space of reason with Ho-Chunk people shaped the conceptualization of whiteness in conjunction with an emerging sense of Ho-Chunk Indigeneity. As in the case of the Ho-Chunk account of first contact, my use of the document is narrowly programmatic, leaving aside deeper considerations of the historical context of both the speech and Atwater's book.

Little Elk's speech occurred during the period when the United States was pressuring the Ho-Chunk Nation to cede a third of its territory on the lower Rock River, an area containing an economically valuable lead mining region. The area had been the site of conflicts between Ho-Chunk people and incoming white miners culminating in the so-called Winnebago War of 1827, a complex event involving a murder and a frontier skirmish (Arndt 2004, chap. 4; Murphy 2000). Although it was an open secret that American officials recognized that the event was not actually an act of war against the United States, they nonetheless planned to use it as a pretext for pressuring Ho-Chunk leaders to cede their claims to the region. A delegation of Ho-Chunk leaders was invited to Washington, DC, to meet with President John Quincy Adams and was given a tour of other major American cities so that they would be impressed by the size and potential military strength of the United States (Kellogg 1935; Viola 1981). Little Elk was one of the members of the delegation.

In the English translation of Little Elk's speech (based on the French translation provided at the treaty council), Little Elk offers an overview of Ho-Chunk perspectives on their encounters with the white men over the past two centuries. He first gives a general account of the history of the white man:

The white man came across the great water—he was feeble and of small stature—he begged for a few acres of land, so that he could by digging in the earth, like a squaw, raise some corn, some squashes and some beans, for the support of himself and family. Indian pity was excited by the simple tale of the white man's wants, and his request was granted. He who was so small in stature, became so great in size, that his head reached the clouds, and with a large tree for his staff, step by step he drove the red man before him from river to river, from mountain to mountain, until the red man seated himself on a small territory as a final resting place, and now, the white man wants even that small spot. (Atwater 1831:121)

He then delineates the various national varieties of white men: The first white man we knew, was a Frenchman—he lived among us, as we did, he painted himself, he smoked his pipe with us, sang and danced with us, and married one of our

squaws, but he wanted to buy no land of us! The "Red Coat" [British] came next, he gave us fine coats, knives, and guns and traps, blankets and jewels; he seated our chiefs and warriors at his table, with himself; fixed epaulets on their shoulders, put commissions in their pockets, and suspended medals on their breasts, but never asked us to sell our country to him! Next came the Blue Coat [the American colonists], and no sooner had he seen a small portion of our country, than he wished to see a map of the whole of it; and having seen it, he wished us to sell it all to him. (Atwater 1831:121–122)

Little Elk then tells the treaty commissioners of his participation in the delegation to Washington, DC, the previous year, including their meeting with President Adams:

So large and beautiful was the President's house, the carpets, the tables, the mirrors, the chairs, and every article in it, were so beautiful, that when I entered it, I thought I was in heaven, and the old man there, I thought was the Great Spirit; until he had shaken us by the hand, and kissed our squaws, I found him to be like yourselves, nothing but a man! (Atwater 1831:122)

Here Little Elk, with obvious irony, invokes the idea that earlier Ho-Chunk people had perceived Europeans as spirits to turn his encounter with Adams into a miniature iconic restaging of the moment described in the previous section, when Ho-Chunk people first came to a deflationary, mundane understanding of the nature of white people.

Little Elk ends his statement by making explicit his effort to draw his interlocutors into a social space of reason and morality, addressing them as "Fathers":

Fathers! Pity a people, few in number, who are poor and helpless. Do you want our country? Yours is larger than ours. Do you want our wigwams? You live in palaces. Do you want our horses? Yours are larger and better than ours. Do you want our women? Yours now sitting behind you . . . are handsomer and dressed better than ours. Look at them, yonder! Why, Fathers, what can be your motive? (Atwater 1831:122)

Little Elk's narrative thus moves from a parody of the discovery of error—the idea that Indians believed whites to be spirits—to assert that whites were not gods to him but could, potentially, act as "fathers," a status that turned their ostentatious displays of wealth and power into the basis for claims on the generosity to which they were morally obligated under Indigenous understandings of the nature of kinship duties (see, e.g., White 1991). His speech thus provides evidence of his recognition of the multidimensional grounds of settler whiteness (Moreton-Robinson 2015) while also calling for his interlocutors to think of their relationship in alternative terms. Little Elk reviewed the Ho-Chunk knowledge of whites as a way to make a reasonable claim on the generosity, pity, obligation, and responsibility of the negotiators, protesting the violation of the norms of solidarity and empathy that should

hold between people in such a situation. His speech thus sought to remind the treaty negotiators of relationships that held the potential for constructive engagements, reasoning with the negotiators in a search for “mutual understanding in the conduct of life” (to quote, with all due caution, Habermas 1971) in terms of that particular time and place.

In his 1831 commentary on Little Elk’s speech, Caleb Atwater proposed to readers that it offered an example of “Indian eloquence” that illustrated the virtues and limitations of Indian rhetoric, providing an example of the way whites could evade reasoned engagement with Indigenous speakers and with the perspectives on white people they offered. Atwater (1831) acknowledged the great “enthusiasm” that speakers such as Little Elk brought to their art but lamented the “poverty of all the Indian languages” (76), which led them to “express ideas by figures, which their language is not copious enough, to enable them, by words, to convey” (119). They resort to “violent gestures” and “repetitions” in their public speeches, as they struggle with “the agony of thought” (119) in the service of their peoples and their land.

Thus, we see, that our red men are not sufficiently advanced in the arts, either of life or of government, to give an orator all the consequence which our condition as a people affords. Could the man of America . . . adopt all the new wants of civilized life, which are the true fountain heads, of all our industry, he might excel as an orator at the bar, on the stage, in the desk, in the mixed assembly, and in the Senate hall. Until then, he will rise no higher than he now is: his speeches will be vehement, his gesticulation violent, and repetitions, and darkness, and obscurity, mixed with some beautiful allusions to nature, and vague traditions, handed down, from ages gone by, will be found in all his harangues. (Atwater 1831:123)

Atwater’s commentary illustrates a process of silencing Ho-Chunk knowledge that made it possible for whites to reject norms of justice, fairness, and so on through patterns of linguistic racialization that have been well documented by other scholars (Arndt 2010; Graham 2002, 2011; Hill 2008; Rosa and Flores 2017). Atwater’s judgments demonstrate how linguistic ideologies can be deployed to silence Indigenous criticisms and to exclude Indigenous experiences of whites from the claims of both reason and morality.

The refusal of mutual understanding evident in Atwater’s response to Little Elk’s speech illustrates pathologies in the process of mutual understanding and limitations in the politics of “truth” across radical difference (linguistic and social, or cultural). In her work on incommensurability, Elizabeth Povinelli (2001) points to the idea that even recent liberal thinkers who recognize an obligation to “charitable translation” all too often appeal to reason merely to “shift the burden” for addressing oppression to those suffering from it (Simpson 2014). Indeed, the idea of reason has been used throughout the modern history of imperial expansion and racial subjugation to rationalize and legitimate forms of exclusion, repression, and

elimination, calling into question the idea of reason as a progressive tool for overcoming or avoiding oppression (e.g., da Silva 2007). And yet the problem here is not reason itself but rather the refusal to reason responsively (see DeMallie’s [1993] discussion of the Lakota description of white people as “having no ears” in the context of treaty negotiations).

Looking ahead from the sort of encounter documented in Little Elk’s speech and Atwater’s response, it is evident that although colonial officials forestalled one sort of mutual understanding when they refused to reason responsively with their Indigenous interlocutors, they energized another. In response to the refusal to reason with them, Indigenous people persisted in the space of reason that whites had abandoned. They mobilized the pragmatic powers of language to the end of producing a practical knowledge of Indianness and whiteness that turned reason against the unreasoning power of the colonial project. This project is noted in recent studies of Indian-European diplomacy that argue that Indigenous peoples in eastern North America developed a sense of European colonists as white people in the eighteenth century as a mode of political organization, in conjunction with an emerging conceptualization of themselves as “red people.” Ives Goddard (2005:16) has suggested that this latter designation was devised by Indigenous peoples of the western Great Lakes to distinguish allied Native peoples from Europeans and Euro-Americans during the struggle against the expansion of the United States, before it was turned into a racially derogatory term by Euro-Americans (Shoemaker 1997:643). Engaging in a process of coming to know a world often threatening to survival because of the agents of colonialism, Indigenous self-making demanded critical knowledge that colonizing forces refused to engage.

Evidence of this sort of defiant reason is present in the Ho-Chunk text of the narrative of first contact discussed in the previous section. The Indians in the narrative are quoted as referring to the French as spirits (*waxopini*, etc.), but the narrator’s voice refers to the French as “*maixede*.” Radin always translated the term as meaning “white people,” but it contains no color reference: it is best glossed as “big [or long] knife” (“knife” [*mai*] and “large” [*xede*]; see Marino 1968). Contemporary Ho-Chunk people explain *maixede* as a reference to the bayonets of the American soldiers their ancestors encountered in the nineteenth century (Grant Arndt, unpublished field notes, 1998–2008). Alexander Chamberlain (1912) explained that “a name signifying ‘long knives’ or ‘big knives’ occurs in many Algonquian and Siouan dialects” for “English Americans” (179), citing Narragansett and Massachusett terms from the seventeenth century meaning “knife-men.” More recently, Ives Goddard (2005:34n) traced the label “long knives” back to a term used specifically for Virginian colonists, explaining that Lord Howard, governor of the Virginia colony, was given a Mohawk name meaning “big knife” as a translation of his name treated as the Dutch word *houwer* (cutlass) at a conference in Albany in 1684. Whatever speech chain brought it into use in the Ho-Chunk community, the label made reference to the historical particularity of American colonists with respect to Indian lands

and lives. The cultivation of references to European colonists and settlers as long knives occurred in tandem with the emergent self-identification of Indian peoples as different and opposed, in an emergent mode of political identification in which knowledge of whites became salient to knowing how to be not white in response to the project of settler colonialism.

This process of using knowledge of whites in practices of ritual and experiential teaching that create diagrammatic lessons in being Indian is illustrated in rich detail in Keith Basso's (1978) pathbreaking analysis of Western Apache joking imitations of whites in *Portraits of the Whiteman*. Basso (1978) documents incidents in which Western Apache people impersonated representative types of whites, from Bureau of Indian Affairs bureaucrats to tourists, behaving in arrogant, irrational, insincere, and generally foolish ways that marked them as "gross incompetents in the conduct of social relations" (48). According to Basso, the imitations placed "two versions of human guidedness in sharp juxtaposition" (56), as "little rituals of reversal and inversion, of denial and rebellion, of affirmation and intensification" (62) important to the ongoing construction of Apache social relations and identities.

The Apache jokes about whites that Basso documents were an esoteric aspect of Apache culture that was never presented to whites. In this section we have seen Little Elk presenting his knowledge of whites to American agents at the 1829 treaty negotiation, making Indigenous knowledge public as an invitation (and provocation) to whites to enter a space of reason and reason with him, including about what it meant to be white. More than a century later, Albert Yellow Thunder did something analogous in his remarks to the crowd gathered for a tourist spectacle in the Wisconsin Dells.

White People and Indigenous Discourses: Critical Knowledge

Returning to the incident with which I began, we can turn to the nature of the venue within which Albert Yellow Thunder delivered his "jibe." In 1941 and for decades before and after, the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial was the most popular tourist attraction in the Wisconsin Dells, itself one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Midwest (Hoelscher 1997, 1998). The Ceremonial was the most successful of a number of tourist-oriented Indian shows staged in Wisconsin in the early twentieth century, most derived from the commercialized powwows developed by the Ho-Chunk people in the first decade of the century based on their prior experience as performers in Wild West shows and related attractions (Arndt 2016a). When staged by Ho-Chunk people, such commercialized powwows provided a novel context for Indian-white relations in which Ho-Chunk people in particular and Indian people more generally had authority and status as they negotiated their exchanges and relations with each other and with whites. Yet collaborations with white communities seeking to host powwows eventually led to a loss of Ho-Chunk control over the events and led such powwows to be remade to resemble the older models of American Indian show business that they had

been developed to replace (Arndt 2016a). In the case of performances at the Dells, the entrepreneurial Ho-Chunk performers who first began offering dance performances in the area were displaced from the leadership of performances by 1920, and as local landowners and business operators took over the performance venues, the Indian performance at Stand Rock came to enact a largely stereotypical story about American Indians and American history, with performances ending with the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" as a large American flag was unfurled and the performers—in the words of the souvenir program—"gave their thanks to the white man" (Arndt 2016a:98–114; on Ho-Chunk people and the Dells, see also Hoelscher 2003, 2008).

By the time of Yellow Thunder's jibe in 1941, there had long been backstage tensions and struggles between the Stand Rock "artistic director," Phyllis Crandall Connor (whose family owned much of the Dells region and its key tourist infrastructure), and the Indian performers, most of whom were Ho-Chunk. According to an unpublished memoir by Crandall Connor's sister, Lois Musson (*The Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial*, unpublished manuscript, Bennett Papers, box 51a, folder 11, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI), the 1941 ceremony took place amid the efforts of Ho-Chunk performers to organize a union (which they had tried before and would attempt again in the 1950s). Musson offers little sense of the reasons for the effort, with which she had little sympathy. She does report that the induction ceremony itself restaged a skit first held at a private party hosted by Crandall Connor. According to Musson, the skit had been a parody of the practice of chiefing that Crandall Connor had used over the previous decades to attract publicity to the Dells (at times to the consternation of some of the performers). In the private skit, Yellow Thunder "was crowned with a tall plug hat, standing a top a soapbox," and Musson notes that he had improvised "hilarious comments on the disadvantages of being 'taken in' by the white man." Seeing the skit as a possible way of generating publicity for the Ceremonial, Crandall Connor recruited Governor Julius Heil to officiate at a public restaging of it, with Yellow Thunder again acting as the recipient. Musson notes that Yellow Thunder spent the day before the performance "polish[ing] up his acceptance speech."

The public restaging of the skit maintained its parodic qualities: Heil's opening remarks established for the audience the links to the "chiefing" ceremonies carried out at the Dells and other public events over the previous two decades. Establishing this model of the ceremony created expectations that Yellow Thunder would express gratitude at being offered honorary white status as a reciprocating gesture. Yellow Thunder's jibe thus inverted the expectations of the ceremony. His jibe reformulated the nature of the status he was being offered. It spoke of licenses, restrictions, and taxes and thus invoked topics that had long been used against Native people, allowing whites to justify local racial inequities in, for example, schooling by contrasting themselves as taxpayers with Indians, whom they imagined did not pay taxes (e.g., Arndt 2015). At the same

time, the jibe reframed the value of whiteness by identifying it with regulation, taxation, and the political structure of settler society and depicting whiteness as a mode of subjectivity whose essence was a concern with control and domination. He thus linked whiteness with the colonial framework of everyday life and contrasted it with the idea of Indian “simplicity” and freedom, positing Indian identity in valued terms that contrasted with the dispossession and impoverishment experienced by Ho-Chunk people as a legacy of the violent dispossession of the nineteenth century and the ongoing racism of the twentieth. Yellow Thunder was not unique in expressing this sort of critical reevaluation of whiteness. His jibe echoes concerns expressed by other Ho-Chunk voices in the era (Arndt 2010, 2013, 2015) as part of the ongoing project of Ho-Chunk survivance and activism (Lonetree 2011, 2019; Ramirez 2018). The point was to challenge the assumptions entailed by Heil’s honor by provoking the audience to reflect on whether it really was an honor for an Indian to be offered honorary white status.

Yellow Thunder lived in a world saturated by white representations of Indians but came from a community that had long developed its own knowledge of whiteness, knowledge that usually circulated outside the experience of whites. He used the 1941 event at the Stand Rock Ceremonial as a platform through which he could bring ongoing Ho-Chunk reflections on the nature of whiteness (and Indianness) into a space of Indian-white encounters and reason with his audience about their whiteness (and thus about his Indianness) across whatever gaps existed in their ways of knowing themselves and their places in the world they shared.

Conclusion: White People as Objects of Knowledge, Occasions for Error, and Subjects of Reason

To identify ourselves as *rational*—as the ones who live and move and have our being in the space of reason, and so to whom things can be intelligible—is to seize demarcationally on a capacity that might well be shared by beings quite different from us in provenance and demeanor. (Brandom 1994:5)

In this quote, the philosopher Robert Brandom speaks to the importance of conceiving “one great community” of those who recognize themselves and others as subject to the authority of reasons, whatever other deep ontological differences distinguish them. This vision of an inclusive community of sapient beings is foundational to his effort to theorize how discursive social practices of language use can produce knowledge about the world by being forever subject to rectification in light of further experience. Brandom here gives voice to the stance I have found in my Ho-Chunk protagonists, who seek to elicit reason (both epistemological and ethical) not just from each other but also from interlocutors very different from them “in provenance and demeanor.” Their accounts of whiteness give us glimpses of how the Ho-Chunk community came to incorporate evidence of unreasonableness into their knowledge of

settler whiteness even as they responded to such unreason with practices of what we now recognize as emergent Indigeneity.

The account of Albert Yellow Thunder’s jibe that I have proposed here, which sees it as one moment in an ongoing process of rectification and revision in Ho-Chunk understandings of white people and, as such, a tool for calibrating how they understood their own ethical and intellectual positionings, makes the jibe into a particular Ho-Chunk case of a practice articulated by other Indigenous intellectual communities for centuries. This perspective, compellingly theorized in scholarship on Indigeneity as the culmination of a long tradition of Indigenous intellectual production in Native North America (e.g., Brooks 2008; Simpson 2014; Warrior 2005; Womack, Justice, and Teuton 2008), is a manifestation of what Elizabeth Povinelli (2012) has described as a “will to be otherwise” and that earlier anthropologists like Alexander Lesser, Sol Tax, Nancy Oestreich Lurie, and others also recognized as an expression of the choice to remain Indian (e.g., Lesser 1961; Lurie 1961). As this article has argued, it is a choice based not on a rejection of reason but rather on an insistence on remaining reasonable in terms of the ends and values threatened by colonial encounters and the repeated experience of the unreasonable behavior of others. In other words, what we see in Yellow Thunder’s jibe is Indigenous knowledge premised not on residence in a radically distinct cosmos requiring others to suspend their ability to reason in order to adequately appreciate it but rather knowledge born of efforts to survive in a world beset by unreason but remaining accessible to anyone willing to engage the claims of other rational beings.

Ho-Chunk knowledge of white people can be taken as essentially pragmatist in nature. Its propositions about the world, such as “white people are thunderbirds,” are developed, tested, and revised in particular processes “of inquiry, reason-giving, and deliberation” (Misak 2010:76). As the originator of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce (1958), put it, knowledge begins not with “pure ideas—vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads without any human habitation” but with “men and their conversation” (112, as cited by Misak 2010:80). In such conversations (with others and with the world), people have experiences that are “compelling, surprising, unchosen, brute, involuntary, or forceful” and that lead to conclusions that can be stated, “subject[ed] to reason and scrutiny,” and, when necessary, adjusted (Misak 2010:83). The space of reason requires that we appraise and revise our commitments in the face of experience but does not require that we somehow step out of our existing commitments in order to encounter things as they are. Misak (2010) quotes philosopher Dorothy Emmet’s observation that “there is a difference between [an experience] being brute and stubborn on the one hand and being bare and naked on the other” (83). Experience of the world may be brute and stubborn in demanding rectification of our commitments, but it is not, for that matter, taken up, somehow, outside them. Reason works on and within the framework of our existing commitments; it works against our commitments only in particular cases.

This space of reason and reasoning exists within and across the sort of collective bodies of commitment we call “cultures” (cosmologies, ontologies, philosophies, worldviews). Situations like settler colonialism bring together peoples with different ancestral or contemporary practices of encountering the world and of knowing and sanctioning each other. Yet Indigenous belief can (and should) have potential truth value for other beings in such encounters, even in power-laden encounters of trade, military conflict, treaty negotiations, labor relations, and legal activism, just as in contemporary ethnographic collaborations. Such encounters create situations in which beliefs are subjected to the test of experience and in which rational subjects can be expected to reflect on them and to change or update their understanding of what is going on, not just in questions of perception but also in terms of moral and ethical considerations of reasonable forms of conduct. In these situations, the normative relations expected of beings capable of reason will be accompanied by other objects and other expectations and by the desire to do things like rationalize conquest and legitimate inequality. But rather than these being examples of how reason is merely a mask for power, they illustrate efforts to evade reason and reasoning. The agendas behind such evasions are susceptible to being reasoned about, even if reason alone cannot defeat or reorient them.

Ho-Chunk people like Yellow Thunder had lived in engagement with white people for centuries and had developed and tested their knowledge of whites in the space of reason, a space that whites often avoided. Yet although whites as *maixede* were quite different from Ho-Chunk people in “provenance and demeanor,” Yellow Thunder still sought to reason with them, using his jibe to call them to reconsider their inherited commitments about whiteness and Indianness.¹⁴ Perhaps his thought was that by listening to a little of the knowledge Ho-Chunk people had acquired about whiteness from a long course of experience, white people might come to know themselves a bit better and thereby become, perhaps, a little more reasonable, if only for a few minutes in the Stand Rock arena that summer evening in 1941.

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tual contributions of individuals I know only through reading but who do not show up in my bibliography. Central among such individuals is, of course, Albert Yellow Thunder himself, one of a number of Ho-Chunk scholars and intellectuals whose contributions rarely made it to press during their lifetimes.

Comments

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In “The Indian's White Man,” Grant Arndt writes of Ho-Chunk discourses directed to whites between the early nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries that afford glimpses into a long-evolving body of Ho-Chunk cautionary knowledge about the ways of white settlers. In one of three texts Arndt analyzes, the Ho-Chunk leader Little Elk speaks to US whites at a treaty negotiation, reproaching them for pressing the Ho-Chunk Nation to cede further land using pretexts and threats: “Do you want our country? Yours is larger than ours. Do you want our wigwams? You live in palaces” (Atwater 1831:122). US negotiators had sought to dishearten him before the negotiation with displays of settler wealth and military power (during a tour of American cities, including a White House visit). Yet Little Elk nonetheless invited the negotiators to see their wealth anew from a Ho-Chunk moral perspective, in which one who is wealthy must behave with generosity toward those who have less. As in so many similar instances, this invitation was rebuffed. The whites, unable to hear Indigenous criticism of their insatiable greed, disparaged Little Elk's rhetoric, thereby silencing his perspective.

A lot has been written about how whites have unjustly silenced voices like Little Elk's. But Arndt aspires to a different project: he wants to restore a focus on the Indigenous knowledge about white settlers that Little Elk expressed so diplomatically in his words. In what follows I summarize the two reasons Arndt gives for undertaking this project: it overcomes a limitation of the ontological turn, and it defends that Indigenous people have reason. I then offer another argument for why this project of revisiting Indigenous other-directed discourse has value.

Arndt recommends the anthropological project of understanding Indian knowledge about whites as a way of overcoming ontological separatism. Some ontological turn theorists have sought to defend Indigenous knowledge from disparagement by Western science's epistemic imperialism by positing a Herderian “pluriverse” of Indigenous worlds, each a cosmos unto itself with distinct realities of experience that Indigenous people's knowledge encodes—realities radically different from those represented by Western science. As a heuristic, there is

14. In *Aloha Betrayed*, Noenoe Silva (2004) quotes James Baldwin regarding the importance of the eruption of silenced knowledge of whiteness, colonialism, and racism: “If I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that you're not what you thought you were either!” (4). As she notes, Baldwin thus saw such knowledge as liberating white people from their ignorance “about their own history” (178).

much to like about this everyone-in-their-own-lane ontology. But we should not confuse difference with separation, as if people do not interact across the thresholds of different cultural worlds (Bashkow 2004). As Arndt explains, keeping everyone in their own ontological lane prevents the Western view from being challenged and improved by Indigenous knowers like Little Elk.

Arndt's project also encourages us to reevaluate the rejection of reason by anthropological critics of settler colonialism. Critics point out that reason is often misused to justify white settler-colonial projects and racial oppression. But should a principle be abandoned because it is misapplied? (Should we reject all food because some food is harmfully processed?) The real problem is not reason *per se*, Arndt points out, but whites' frequent failure to act in a reasonable way toward others. What actually should be rejected is the idea that reason is distinctively Western. Indigenous people, too, employ reason in their own discourse. They discuss claims, change views, correct errors. This is what Little Elk was trying to do with those white treaty negotiators: he was trying to get them to recognize the error and injustice of their demands and act reasonably.

There is another reason I can offer in addition to the ones Arndt gives for focusing on Indigenous people's knowledge about whites: it addresses current critiques of anthropology that lamentably link it with settler-colonial dispossession and silencing. Implicit in these critiques is the positive alternative vision that what anthropology should offer instead is a space of ethical relationships and genuine reciprocity of perspectives. But achieving this necessarily requires coming to terms with the discipline's whiteness as known by nonwhites. What this means in practice is attending to Indigenous (and other) people's knowledge about whites in order that whites might learn something important about themselves.

Anthropology has long promised that its students can see their own lives afresh through the defamiliarizing insight afforded by cross-cultural comparison. It is usually presumed that the students are the ones developing the insights, but it is worth drawing on others' insights, too—their own comparisons between themselves and others representing whiteness or "settlerness." Doing this is not the same as scholars critiquing themselves from a scholarly point of view. Those critiques contribute to the vast library of works devoted to what white Western observers have thought and written about other peoples (including works that subject these thoughts and writings to criticism). Meanwhile, only a mere handful of works express what these peoples have thought and written about whites, notwithstanding that whites have long been scrutinized and discussed in every corner of the world they have explored and exploited. We should work to redress this imbalance in order to realize a greater reciprocity of perspectives.

Others' views can be uncomfortable for whites to contemplate, as they are often negative, but I do not think that this is the full explanation for why they are so rarely discussed. As Arndt's article illustrates, it takes considerable effort to excavate past Indigenous views of whites from a white-dominated

historical record in which they are often submerged under layers of white derision, as happened to Little Elk's words. It takes effort to recenter them, contextualize them, and recover their meaning. This is something I myself found as I attempted to make a Papua New Guinean community's discourse about whites intelligible to a readership beyond that community, whose culture and ways of categorizing whites differ significantly from US academia's (Bashkow 2006).

So the project Arndt advocates is not an easy one. But it may help build a restorative anthropology that brings long-overdue attention and understanding to voices obscured by colonialism and its legacies. It may help provide a "space of reason and morality" in their engagement with whites that, as Arndt shows, was sought by Little Elk and other Ho-Chunk speakers for centuries.

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I wish to thank Grant Arndt for this valuable and, for me, personal article. As a child growing up in suburban Chicago, I traveled to the Wisconsin Dells dozens of times. I even watched the ceremony at Standing Rock, site of Albert Yellow Thunder's speech. Consequently, Arndt's paper brought on a troubling sense of nostalgia: our quaint family vacations were unknowing forays into a landscape of intense Indigenous contestation. Rather than leave me in a newly disturbed past, though, Arndt propelled me toward novel insights, even as a scholar who has published multiple works critical of the ontological turn.

Arndt outlines "an approach to decolonizing Indigenous knowledge that does not depend on postulating a pluriverse." The "pluriverse" in question is that proposed by ontologically inclined anthropologists committed to the concept of "cosmopolitics," a perspective that emphasizes struggles between worlds rather than conflicts within one. Focusing on three moments in Ho-Chunk history, Arndt argues that a monolithic form of "reason" is not the central threat to Indigenous epistemological self-determination; rather, it is the refusal of white settler society to engage in rational dialogue with Indigenous subjects—that is, to listen openly and self-critically to their entreaties. Accordingly, suggests Arndt, the real issue is not the difficulty of negotiating the incommensurability of modern and Indigenous ontologies; it is colonial agents' refusal to let Indigenous people speak, let alone make any serious effort to hear them. Instead, they portray such peoples as the Ho-Chunk as incapable of achieving mutual understanding.

Initially, I read Arndt's paper with skepticism. Is he asking us to celebrate the vision of reason that Nietzsche, Weber, and Foucault have warned us about for so long? Is he right to join Ho-Chunk history, culture, and mythology under the banner "Indigenous knowledge"? And is his description of the

ontological turn correct? Many of its proponents speak in terms quite similar to Arndt's. They ask us to take Indigenous discourse seriously. They urge us to be ruthlessly "reflexive" so that Indigenous thought can trouble our foundational concepts. Only through ethnographically initiated self-critique, the ontologists tell us, can we transform ourselves enough to understand what our others say. Is their argument that distinct from Arndt's demand that we, as a still overwhelmingly white discipline, acknowledge and engage "Indigenous reason"?

As I pondered Arndt's paper, I realized that he is doing something different. And partially, he is able to do so because he is at least somewhat mistaken about the "pragmatist" approach of ontological turn-aligned anthropologists. As I have argued elsewhere, many of these scholars fabricate their most important conceptual tools, including "perspectivism" and "multinaturalism," with structuralist rather than pragmatist techniques. They isolate pieces of Indigenous culture(s)—found in rituals, myths, cosmologies, and so on—from the occasions and contexts of their use and melt them into abstract, homogenizing propositions. Arndt, in contrast, engages Ho-Chunk individuals who make actual statements in concrete contexts composed of known (and unknown) others. Rather than reifying "Ho-Chunk theory," Arndt introduces us to "Ho-Chunk theoreticians," all of whom are equipped with a dynamic corpus of knowledge about white settler society. Arndt is a proud pragmatist, and he convinced me that the Ho-Chunk are, too. The same cannot be said of many of the authors and represented collectivities who populate ontological turn-aligned scholarship.

From one pragmatist to another, I have only two critical reflections for Arndt: (1) I wish that his reports of the three engagements would have included more examples of white reactions to Ho-Chunk arguments (the reader sees only the bulk of Atwater's response to Little Elk), and (2) I wish that he would have described his own reasoned debates with his Ho-Chunk collaborators regarding his interpretation of their ancestors' understandings of whiteness, including his own. No ethnographic account is ever complete, and the difficulties are multiplied for historical anthropologists. In my own work, which describes Indigenous Cofán people's intentional experiments with their social, political, and environmental relations, I make arguments similar to Arndt's. I highlight Cofán actors' critical consciousness of and reasoned engagements with an array of others: conservationists working to remake their environmental subjectivity (Cepek 2011), state agents questioning their leaders' Indigeneity (Cepek 2012), activists sacralizing their mythical beings (Cepek 2016), corporate officials ignoring their land rights (Cepek 2018), and anthropologists criticizing their openness to the oil industry (Cepek 2020). My accounts are filled with Cofán individuals, their verbatim statements, and, where possible, the responses of their non-Indigenous interlocutors, whether they were earnest listeners or not.

Over my 26 years of involvement with Cofán people, two of whom are now doctoral students in my department, I have worked to "stand with" them (TallBear 2014) as my teachers,

colleagues, and social intimates. The effort involves our co-construction of a shared collective in which I am perpetually prepared to alter my personal, political, and intellectual commitments. My Cofán collaborators have taught me not only about their culture and history but also about the wisdom of their political and environmental projects, into which they have recruited me. And by listening to them, I have learned why theoretical movements like the ontological turn are the wrong tools to understand who they are, what they want, and how any representative of a colonial order, including myself, should engage with and write about them.

On that last point, I am sure that Arndt and I agree. His article allowed me to understand exactly why that is the case. If it does the same for other anthropologists, it will have accomplished an extremely important mission.

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Accountable Reasoning

In his thoughtful reading of Ho-Chunk accounts of whiteness, Grant Arndt argues that Indigenous claims clarify the coloniality of white ways of knowing when they hold white settlers and anthropology accountable to relational knowing. Arndt engages with contributions to Indigenous research such as those by Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) and Zoe Todd (2016), which portray Indigenous ontologies from within the politics of decolonization and against those politics' backgrounding or erasure by the "ontological turn." Arndt's welcome corrective to "ontological anthropology" proceeds from his deeply anthropological engagement with the relational demands of Indigenous claims amid ongoing colonialism. The essay specifically addresses white settlers and non-Indigenous anthropologists who attend to Indigenous knowledges, but it may be read alongside broader efforts by writers who bridge differences of race, nation, and colonial history to counter the epistemic violences of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness, and empire (Brooks 2002; Goldstein, Pegues, and Karuka 2016; Shigematsu and Camacho 2010).

The interventions announced within Ho-Chunk accounts of whiteness resonate with Vine Deloria Jr.'s (1969) accounts of white ways of knowing. On observing that "the white man has the marvelous ability to conceptualize . . . [he] arbitrarily conceptualizes all things and understands none of them" (189), Deloria pointedly frames white epistemic authority as a racial and colonial project:

The white man is problem-solving. His conceptualizations merge into science and then emerge in his social life as problems, the solutions of which are the adjustment of his

social machine. Slavery, prohibition, Civil Rights, and social services are all important adjustments of the white man's social machine. No solution he has reached has proven adequate. Indeed, it has often proven demonic. (Deloria 1969: 189)

White knowing coalesces here within the structural machinations that subject Native and Black lives to the deadly controlling violences of white supremacy (see also Baker 2010). Arndt portrays Ho-Chunk speakers who expose white misperceptions as the epistemic fuel of persistently violent subjection.

This essay contributes significantly to long-standing discussions of anthropology's capacity to apprehend Indigenous thought. Herb Kawainui Kāne (1997) responded in this journal to the Sahlins-Obeyesekere debate by clarifying that such deliberations stall when their framing concepts prove to be untranslatable within Indigenous knowledge. Affirming Kāne, Moreton-Robinson (2015) argues that if it is "reasonable to assume that it is not Hawaiian epistemology informing the debate," then we see "the 'evidence' for how native Hawaiians thought about Cook's death illustrates how the 'native' is an epistemological possession who is already known first by the white sailors and now academics" (110). Advancing Moreton-Robinson's analysis, Audra Simpson (2016) asserts that "suddenly 'how 'Natives' think' is not a presumptive claim of interpretive ownership; it is a statement of theft, in raw form" (330). Indigenous scholars illustrate that anthropology can position Indigenous thought as an epistemic and political possession when anthropologists present it as a problem for study (McCarthy 2016; Simpson 2014). Arndt models a different method when he locates his engagements with Ho-Chunk knowers within the relational space of "settleness and Indigeneity." From this context, he can argue that the adaptive transformation of Ho-Chunk knowing was endangered not by its "experience of error" but "instead in the violent dispossession" of white settlers' refusals to engage with it as a means "to behave reasonably." Arndt pointedly calls us to view white settler claims that "rationalize conquest and legitimate inequality" less as "examples of how reason is merely a mask for power" and more as "efforts to evade reason and reasoning."

Arndt helpfully applies these arguments to illuminate the project of ontological anthropology, which he portrays as "unclear" with respect to "anthropology's response to the charge of epistemic injustice." Confronting this project's intention to "defend" Indigenous incommensurability, Arndt argues that it frames Indigenous knowers as "impervious to reasoned engagement (or especially vulnerable to it)" and in so doing evades how they "demand reasoned engagement from non-Indigenous interlocutors." Such demands appear, for instance, within Theresa McCarthy's account of Six Nations land reclamation at Kanonhstaton. McCarthy (2016:89, 123–124) argues that Haudenosaunee reclamations counter the "repressive authenticity" (Wolfe 1999:179) of Iroquoian anthropology and its violent invocations by white settlers who portray land defenders as unreasonable. For McCarthy, enactments of Hau-

denosaunee knowledge serve "not simply to incite confrontation over land rights and dispossession but also to compel a form of diplomacy": that is, a political relationship with Haudenosaunee law, which could advance both "the production of a different kind of knowledge about Six Nations people and the integrity of our rights to challenge the longstanding status quo" (13–14). Arndt asks whether anthropological desires for incommensurability represent efforts to "[understand] exotic ontologies without being forced to take them up and defend them as knowledge of one's own world." By way of contrast, he answers calls from within Indigenous knowledge "to navigate a social space organized by relational positions" and to welcome "the sense that Indigenous knowledge can demand reasoned engagement from non-Indigenous interlocutors."

If such reasoning arises, Arndt emphasizes (citing da Silva 2007), it will not repeat the Western modes of reason that create anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and colonial or imperial subjugations. We witness distinctive modes of reason/ing when Indigenous studies facilitates speech among and across Indigenous differences. The Native Critics Collective presents "reasoning together" (Acoose et al. 2008) as the work of interpretation in relation to varied Indigenous epistemologies, which then advance Indigenous intellectual histories (Warrior 1995) and invite comparative study (Andersen and O'Brien 2017b; Moreton-Robinson 2016). Chris Andersen and Jean O'Brien (2017a) argue that Indigenous studies is "different from—but . . . under the right conditions can be broadly allied with—Indigenous knowledge, particularly as situated and practiced outside of the academy" (4). By "acknowledging their differences without pronouncing their ontological discreteness" (4), Andersen and O'Brien present Indigenous ways of knowing as already articulating and transforming academic knowledge production. Scholars of ontology can follow Todd's (2016) exhortation to "heed the teachings of North American Indigenous scholars who engage similar issues . . . [and] Indigenous and racialised scholars from all around the globe" (18), which together clarify that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck and Yang 2012) but a political implication of Indigenous knowledges. When Arndt cites Ho-Chunk theories that epistemic whiteness is a colonial project, he learns from Ho-Chunk ways of knowing while becoming positioned methodologically as an accountable listener and respondent within ongoing colonial relations.

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Grant Arndt's intervention in debates about the status of traditional or Indigenous knowledge and the implications of the ontological turn is most welcome at this time of such pervasive uncertainty in so many domains of both ordinary and

academic life. It is interesting to me that he calls attention to W. E. B. Du Bois's (1920) question "What on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?" (30). James Baldwin's work takes up this theme and explores it in great detail. This is only to say that the groups that whites dominate have always had much invested in the accuracy of their own ethnographies of whites given the great disparity of power and the consequences of being oblivious to that reality.

His critique of the stunningly naive judgement made by D. Evans-Pritchard (1989)—that images of the white man do "not represent true Indian culture" (90)—is well taken. What could be more "true"—and by this I assume she meant "authentic" or "traditional"—than the ongoing collective representational processes of assessing the value of an external force that had to be reckoned with regularly, repeatedly, and for the indefinite future? Just because so many non-Indigenous people are fascinated by the Indigenous past certainly does not mean that they are. One would hope that this orientation was adequately dispensed with by the recently deceased Edward Bruner decades ago in his essay "Ethnography as Narrative" in *The Anthropology of Experience*, which he edited with Victor Turner in 1986 and published a few years before her paper was published.

In any event, Arndt locates culture "as active processes linked to the past but engaged in the present." Yes, probably by definition, and especially in the constant production and elaboration of an Indigenous antiseif against which a "we" is constituted. Here I am recalling the work of Fredrik Barth on ethnicity half a century ago. These processes of production are privileged and produced backstage, as it were, and not typically availed to the persons who instantiate the evolving category, as Arndt notes in his commentary on Keith Basso's *Portraits of the Whiteman*. Of course, this is the reason why it is difficult for ethnographers to get at them. There is too much at stake for the group that is producing them. Yet they were producing them all along in plain sight and presenting them in important forums.

I appreciate the critique of incommensurability and the ontological turn, if I understand the subtlety of his thought, as these efforts run the risk of exoticizing and can have the effect of depoliticizing to the point that Indigenous demand for reasoned engagement is preempted. Arndt offers a solution to this dilemma with his concept of "epistemological self-determination," an orientation that facilitates reasoned engagement between parties oriented rather differently toward a single shared world.

Ho-Chunk knowledge of whites is a "process of discovery" that includes an openness to falsification, as revealed in the narrative of the first encounter with whites, an event that took place about three centuries before. Here the reflexive inventory of Ho-Chunk categories of persons rehearses their ongoing utility in assessing the moral value of all manner of persons. Conceding an initial mistake is a measure of Ho-Chunk virtue. Later, when the stakes are higher, with a land cession sought by the Americans at issue, whites are first gendered female and dependent and then as ungrateful, if also redeemable, in the

moral appraisal of the interacting groups in the recitation of the history of relations, only to have the style of their appraisal become the subject of interest and not the substance. Here Anglo-Americans refuse an opportunity to engage in potentially consequential dialogue on a linguistic middle ground, a practice the French acquiesced in a century earlier, thus drawing an even sharper line between themselves as Americans and the Indigenous people.

The 1941 critique of whiteness and the implicit invitation to negotiate the terms of relationship between whites and Native people took place in a forum partially controlled by Native people. This forum was a site of autoexoticization, an Indigenously authored self-representation and appropriation of the colonial gaze and interest where the show was exchanged for a recognition of the common humanity of the producers and consumers of Native culture predicated on a mutual recognition of a capacity to reason. The fragility of the frame availed possibilities otherwise precluded in the mundane interactions between whites and Ho-Chunk people. Here and on these grounds, Albert Little Thunder would foreground their putative accidental differences and reverse the valence of those differences in a reasonable appeal for an alternative future. Calling out attention to the processual and reflexive quality of these three moments of encounter offers an admirable model for both scholarly comment on similar interactions between groups presumptively very different "in provenance and demeanor" and activist scholarly participation in such interactions.

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Arndt has produced an intriguing examination of how Indigenous Ho-Chunk people in the Great Lakes region of the United States developed and revised their knowledge of whiteness through their long history of experiences with agents of colonial projects. In the historical examples that Arndt analyzes, Ho-Chunk orators drew on this knowledge in public speech events to entreat white people to "reason with" them and reevaluate the symbolic and material bases of white privilege. By placing Indigenous accounts of whiteness at the forefront of his analysis, Arndt emphasizes that Indigenous peoples are producers of knowledge—not just of their own ontology—but knowledge that can be used to "convince others to understand reality differently." He argues that "reason" is not a threat to Indigenous self-determination, but rather it is whites' "rejection of reasoned engagement" with Indigenous peoples that undermines their autonomy.

At the center of Arndt's argument is a critical distinction between "the idea of reason" as a political claim and the practice of reason as a historically, materially, and socially grounded process of producing and revising knowledge about the world.

This distinction is critical for recognizing what numerous scholars have shown—that colonizers relied on an often decontextualized and dehistoricized idea of reason and its supposed contrast to an erroneous idea of “Indigenous beliefs” to claim that the latter were incommensurable with “modern” subjectivities and thus defend the privileges of whiteness. At the same time, Arndt’s focus on historically situated practices of reason—the processes through which Indigenous peoples drew on their experiences to formulate and later revise their knowledge about whiteness—makes it possible to defend Indigenous epistemologies against colonialist ideas of reason without having to fall back on a problematic opposition between reason and Indigenous knowledge. This has been a challenge for ontological approaches to Indigenous sovereignty that are grounded in the argument that Indigenous knowledge claims cannot be understood fully outside Indigenous ontological commitments and are untranslatable to Western reason, which represents a globally “hegemonic world” that “is imposed in myriad ways on other peoples’ worlds (as we know them)” (Viveiros de Castro 2015:10). Such approaches highlight the more-than-human commitments that make up life and the ways in which scientific reason and colonialist practices of knowing have been used to ignore, overlook, and denigrate these commitments. However, with their emphasis on the existence of separate worlds within a pluriverse, ontological theorists do so in a manner that potentially undermines Indigenous agency as a basis for knowing and contesting colonialist epistemologies. Drawing on Holbraad (2012), Arndt points out that the concept of ontological incommensurability potentially shields Indigenous knowledge from scientific reason, but the reverse is also true: scientific reason, then, is also left intact and protected from Indigenous critique.

And yet Ho-Chunk people have a long history of deftly and accurately knowing, understanding, and critiquing the social-material bases of whiteness in settler-colonial society and formulating a dynamic understanding of Indigeneity in relation to it. In short, Ho-Chunk epistemologies were shaped but not constrained by their ontological commitments. In his analysis, Arndt has done what so many of the ontologists have urged ethnographers to do—take seriously the explanations that Indigenous peoples offer of their lives and treat them as truthful understandings of reality. However, rather than treat them as understandings of a different world, Arndt has shown the historically situated nature of Ho-Chunk knowledge as an alternative epistemology of a shared—but contested—world riven with white privilege, colonial power, and violence.

Arndt convincingly argues that rather than a pluriverse, we live in a shared social, material, and historical world in which people establish provisional truths through pragmatist practices of creating knowledge, which can later be revised if new experiences unsettle these truths. Inequality, then, is the result of different knowers refusing to acknowledge the reasonableness of other forms of knowing as a basis for political reality. I find this to be an analytically more useful and politically more provocative account of inequality than the argument that in-

equality is the product of worlds at war, of relatively straightforward relationships of domination and subjection between ontological entities. As with the opposition between scientific reason and Indigenous knowledge, this formulation runs the risk of shielding colonial powers from critique as much as it highlights the radical alterity of Indigenous peoples. It makes it appear as though the crimes of colonialism and the ongoing violence of modern governance are agentless products of the domination of one world by another. In contrast, Ho-Chunk people actively constructed epistemologies of settler colonialism that revealed that white officials and settlers were the agents of colonial violence and could be held to account for it. I think that there are two crucial points to take away from this. First, Indigenous self-determination has been rooted in Indigenous peoples’ agency and their ability to challenge dominant epistemologies about a shared but unequal world without recourse to an ethnographic mediator. Second, epistemology and ontology are never separated in practice, and abandoning epistemology to focus on ontology does not resolve the challenges or politics of epistemology—indeed, it further complicates and leaves unanalyzed critical aspects of how knowledge and its production (as well as the production of ignorance) enable dispossession, enclosure, and racialized violence.

Reply

I am grateful for these supportive comments and recognize that this support is grounded in our shared commitment to the value and importance of Indigenous knowledge. One of the themes of my article is that this commitment has long been a tradition within anthropology and allied scholarly fields. That tradition is visible when we take the sort of generous view of the discipline’s history that Ira Bashkow (2019) has recently proposed.

Since the initial idea for this article originated with my discovery of the newspaper clipping that reported on the bizarre ceremony in the Wisconsin Dells with which the article opens, I am pleased that Larry Nesper applies his own deep insights into Indigenous activism and cultural performance in the region (see especially Nesper 2003) to provide us with a perspective on the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial in all its complexity. His description of the Ceremonial as a site of “Indigenously authored self-representation and appropriation of the colonial gaze and interest” that “availed possibilities otherwise precluded in the mundane interactions between whites and Ho-Chunk people” provides a succinct orientation to the setting in which my motivating example of Indigenous knowledge—Albert Yellow Thunder’s “jibe”—took place.

The Stand Rock event described in the clipping initially struck me as a marvelous parody of the social construction of whiteness, a real-world burlesque unwittingly revealing whiteness to be a status conferred by practices of community recognition

rather than by biology. Yellow Thunder's jibe, as reported in the clipping, came to serve the same role for me that I think he intended it to serve for the audience in the Stand Rock arena that evening in 1941: a provocation to think again, more complexly. He called his audience to reconsider the nature of their own whiteness and to recognize how it implicated them in the political organization of settler society. Yellow Thunder's remark similarly motivated me to deepen my inquiries into Indigeneity and whiteness. When I recognized the similarities between his message and recent academic theories of settler-ness as a node of political subjectivity, I felt that the jibe called for theorizing a dimension of Indigenous knowledge often overlooked in our traditional interest in the coherence of exotic ontologies. The dimension was a claim to contain a truth (however veiled or subtle) accessible to other reasonable creatures. This dimension gives such knowledge its capacity to move outside its original space(s) of reasoning to summon outsiders like the audience in the Stand Rock arena, not to a condescending charity, but rather to recognition of the demands of reason itself.

Since I was, no doubt, primed for this mode of reception by ongoing work in Indigenous studies, I appreciate that Scott Morgensen (like Nesper) reads the article "alongside . . . efforts by [Indigenous and non-Indigenous] writers" pursuing the relational knowledge that will "counter the epistemic violences of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness, and empire." Morgensen underscores the foundational work of Simpson, Mortenson-Robinson, and others who have done much to enrich the anthropology of Indigeneity in recent decades and whom I drew on in my article. Morgensen draws attention to the way this work identifies the problems that arise when Indigenous knowledge is treated as an object to be analyzed rather than as a claim to be engaged. These theorists call for us to enter into the space of reasons and reasoning for which Indigenous knowledge acts as a summons. All the commentators here recognize the need to heed that summons. In doing so, we can see the sort of knowledge contained in Yellow Thunder's jibe as relevant not just in coming to better appreciate how Ho-Chunk people like him saw their world but also for learning more about the world in which he and his audience all lived.

As I emphasize in the article, such an approach to Indigenous knowledge differs from the approach characteristic of the ontological turn, even though both approaches share a similar goal, finding the meaning and reason in what people do, including what they say about what they are doing. Max Viatori and Michael Cepek both chart the point of divergence; as Viatori puts it, while "ontological approaches to Indigenous sovereignty" take Indigenous thought seriously and offer critiques of "colonialist epistemologies," their conceptualization of these issues in terms of a pluriverse, or "a world of many worlds," blunts the force of Indigenous thought. The ontological turn approach obstructs the power of Indigenous knowledge as a way of knowing "a shared—but contested—world," emerging from its own self-determined historical trajectory that calls interlocutors to engage the force of Indigenous reason.

Bashkow succinctly states the problematic nature of the pluriverse in his reading of my second example: "Keeping everyone in their own ontological lane prevents the Western view from being challenged and improved by Indigenous knowers like Little Elk." Beyond that, Cepek and others, including scholars in Indigenous studies such as Todd (2016), have critiqued the conceptual foundations and analytic tools of the ontological turn with great insight, helping us better understand the pitfalls of the approach, for which Nesper provides succinct labels: "exoticization" and "depoliticization."

Beneath the pressing political issues of colonial thought and Indigenous critique lurk fundamental questions for anthropology, particularly with regard to the complex task of developing the sort of "semiotic realism" about knowledge as a process—whether Indigenous, settler, or otherwise—of coming to conceptual grips with the world in inescapably socio-centric ways (Silverstein 2004). My presentation in the article largely glosses over these complicated issues, so I will emphasize here that they point to a project of vital theoretical significance. That project is the articulation of anthropological pragmatics, with its attentiveness to core processes of mutual alignment in the production of social reality (e.g., Agha 2007), and philosophical pragmatism (represented by Robert Brandom in my article), focused (more naively, perhaps, from an empirical point of view) on normative issues of truth seeking of the sort central to pragmatism in its Peircean mode.

I am indebted to many scholars who have helped to blaze the path I am pursuing, including Bashkow, whose comments I am honored to receive. We both share an intellectual debt, as Bashkow notes, to Keith Basso's *Portraits of the Whiteman*. Although I describe Basso's contributions in my article and only mention Bashkow's, I thought of Bashkow's writings on the knowledge about "whitemen" developed in the Orokaivan community in Papua New Guinea repeatedly in developing this article. In that work, Bashkow (2000) shows that Orokaivans portray white men as morally superior beings, possessed of a capacity for "social harmony and a lack of inclination toward unbridled desire, jealousy, sorcery, and crime" (321). Their portrait lacks the visceral shock of critical self-recognition that readers like me may experience in the jokes made by Basso's Western Apache interlocutors. Bashkow shows, however, that this is because Orokaivans do not live in a settler colony, and so their inquiries into whiteness are not directed by or at the problems presented by settlers and their ideological delusions. Rather, their understanding of whiteness is oriented to the problems they face in dealing with each other in the context of contemporary global conditions. Bashkow thus demonstrates an alternative to the ontological turn's pluriverse-based analysis, locating Indigenous ways of knowing within a world that is interconnected and unequal even while recognizing their self-determination as collective practices of knowledge production.

While most of the commentators frame the article's project in terms of the disciplinary self-reflexivity spurred by the ongoing crisis of anthropological ways of knowing, Viatori expresses the more general stakes of engagement with Indigenous

knowledge in his comment. He characterizes the challenge as one of knowing a “shared—but contested—world riven with white privilege, colonial power, and violence.” Drawing on his own work on issues of Indigenous politics and representational struggles, Viatori (2014, 2016) brings attention to the ways the refusal to acknowledge the reasonableness of others sustains inequality. He calls on us to recognize that Indigenous activism in recent decades seeks to provoke and reason with interlocutors in contexts beyond the academic. Indeed, Yellow Thunder’s jibe regarding whites did not thematize the (mis)representation of Indigenous people in the popular or scholarly imaginary (although this was one of his concerns on other occasions). Instead, he focused on the connection between whiteness and laws and regulation more broadly. His jibe focused attention on what we now more readily recognize as the structures of settler-colonial governance. Understanding the jibe requires the sort of attentiveness to politics and language in the work of Indigenous activists that Viatori’s work exemplifies and that we share with the other respondents and many other scholars, especially in recent years (e.g., Graham 2020).

Given the largely supportive comments, all of which provide encouragement for continued engagement with these issues, I want to close with a consideration of Cepek’s useful indications of some of the limits of my account. The first of these limits is what he sees as a lack of attentiveness to and engagement with white reactions to the sort of representations I focus on here. While I feel that issues of space and the particularities of my approach make the limits of the account here legitimate, I also acknowledge the value of excavating the discursive context out of which my examples emerged. This would allow me to develop a parallel account of the development of the epistemological modes of what, on recollective reconstruction, turned out to be the settler whiteness Yellow Thunder critiqued in his jibe. I analyzed a mode of settler whiteness contemporary with Yellow Thunder’s jibe in some detail in my 2016 article on “Settler Agnosia” (Arndt 2016*b*; originally, the two articles were halves of a single draft). Rejoining the two projects would make it possible to use Yellow Thunder’s jibe to link the current article’s focus on Indigenous knowledge to that article’s account of what philosophers have dubbed “racial epistemologies of ignorance” (Mills 2007; Sullivan and Tuana 2007).

The second limit Cepek suggests is the apparent absence in the article of an account of reasoned debates with contemporary Ho-Chunk people over the interpretations I offer. Although I do cite and situate my work with respect to the work of leading Ho-Chunk scholars (Lonetree 2019; Ramirez 2018), using my historical research to open a space for contemporary discussions, Cepek’s suggestion provoked a deeper reflection. I recalled how in the early days of my research, I was struck by the way numerous Ho-Chunk people emphasized the complexity of Ho-Chunk perspectives, warning me not to expect unanimity or consensus, even while acknowledging individuals whose social roles gave their understandings authority. Considering how Ho-Chunk people now would respond to my account of the knowledge of whites articulated by Little Elk,

Yellow Thunder, and others thus raises questions about the ways in which Ho-Chunk people in the past might have responded to such knowledge claims at the time. This points to issues of Indigenous epistemological self-determination that I do not address in my article. For example, it suggests possibilities for debate and disagreement, as well as structuring divisions of epistemic labor and authority within the space of reason that transcend and complicate the sort of binary schema of Indigenous and settler on which my account is built. This is something I engage with at an empirical level in my current book project on Ho-Chunk media activism in the 1930s and 1940s, but it calls for more adequate theoretical investigation.

More directly (and obviously), this second critique points to the possibility of bringing my historical engagement with Ho-Chunk knowledge of whiteness in the article into the present by linking it to an ethnographic effort to seek out contemporary Indigenous calls to reason about forms of whiteness that may have changed in the years since Yellow Thunder offered his jibe. As I noted at the beginning of this reply, early on I recognized the obvious constructionist message about whiteness illustrated by the Stand Rock ceremony that conferred “honorary” whiteness on Yellow Thunder. I felt that the point was well established for contemporary readers and audiences. Now, however, I am less convinced that it remains so, given current tendencies to reify whiteness in both defensively racist and confessionally/confrontationally “antiracist” forms (however unequal these are in the menace they pose). Thus, a vital question for the sort of “restorative anthropology” that serves as “a space of ethical relationships and genuine reciprocity of perspectives” envisioned by Bashkow in his comment would be to ask how Indigenous knowers beyond the academy are seeking to provoke contemporary interlocutors to reason with them about whiteness today. It is thus reasonable, given my arguments in the article, to seek out the ongoing production of Indigenous knowledge as we confront the metastasizing struggles over whiteness and racism growing now (as I write these words) in the summer of 2021, exactly 80 years after Albert Yellow Thunder delivered his jibe in the Stand Rock arena.

—Grant Arndt

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