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## **Trickster Discourse in *Narrative Chance*: How Gerald Vizenor Helped Shape My Life in Academia**

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On February 4, 2014, midway through another cold, Canadian winter, I received an unexpected, and heartwarming introductory email from Professor Dr. Birgit Däwes.<sup>1</sup> She was writing to tell me that in two weeks time she would be leaving Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, in Germany, to become Chair of American Studies at the University of Vienna. What’s more, she was already planning, “with her team”, an international conference on, and with, the eminent Native American writer, Gerald Vizenor, that would take place in a little over four months at the University of Vienna, an institution where she was not yet even employed! I was impressed. Clearly, Dr. Däwes had enviable organizational skills and leadership qualities. Not to mention confidence. She went on to say—and this was the most unexpected part—that, at Gerald’s suggestion, she was inviting me to participate in the conference, saying that I could speak to any aspect of his work, be it his literary texts or his theory. (It seems that he had told her I was an expert on his work and on Native Studies in general.) While refuting any notion of expertise with regard to Gerald’s work, I said what I would like to do is speak to the profound influence his work has had on mine. To my delight, Dr. Däwes approved. I then set about putting together an audio-visual PowerPoint presentation that utilized fifty-six images to be screened over a period of twenty-minutes. In my brief introduction to the presentation, I said, “I’m going to tell you a story. It will be the illustrated condensed version of a story that will be expanded for later publication.”<sup>2</sup>

This is that expanded story.

In the summer of 2001, my family and I moved from British Columbia, on Canada’s west coast, to Ottawa, Ontario, and to Carleton University, where I took up the position of New Sun Chair in Aboriginal Art and Culture, the first of its kind in Canada. Here, I have a split appointment as associate professor, teaching courses in the School of Indigenous and Canadian Studies, and the Department of Art History in the School for Studies in Art and Culture. I also host the annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts, now in its sixteenth year. From the beginning, the job has been rich with promise and possibility.

Carleton University is located in the heart of Ottawa at the confluence of the Rideau

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River and the Rideau Canal, a World Heritage site. I have an office on the twelfth floor of Dunton Tower, the tallest building on campus, which offers a spectacular panoramic view, facing west, of the adjacent federal government experimental farm. From planting to harvest, in sunlight and shadow, I watch the seasons change, the world renew and the land regenerate. The view is most enchanting in winter when the farm's red barn is piled high with snow, and the scene is reminiscent of a Currier and Ives picture postcard.<sup>3</sup>

My office door boasts an assortment of personal photos, cartoons and pithy cultural commentary for the reading and viewing pleasure of students waiting to see me, or visitors just passing by. For some time, this has included a brief excerpt from a 2003 letter from Gerald Vizenor, in response to my expressed hope in earlier correspondence to enlighten students through conversations with members of the local Aboriginal community invited into the classroom. Gerald's considered, yet cautious, reply was: "The thought of enlightenment by lecture and discussion is always a long shot even under the best of circumstances."<sup>4</sup> It is a sobering thought, and a personal reminder of the limitations of conventional academic practice, and the need for more creative pedagogical strategies that engage students more directly, and resonate more fully with their own experience. The point here is that Gerald Vizenor's wise counsel and critical reflection constitute a profound presence before you even enter my office. Even if you *never* enter my office.

If you do enter, Gerald Vizenor's presence is further affirmed. As is the value of good stories. One whole shelf on my bookcase is devoted to Gerald's various writings, from novels to memoir, to haiku and beyond. I have more than forty books by or about Gerald Vizenor. Have I read them all? Not entirely. Have I understood all the ones I have read? Again, not entirely. But I do have in my collection several books on how to read Gerald Vizenor, some written by other presenters at the Vienna conference, so I'm optimistic.<sup>5</sup> These books are all part of my lived environment. They are warm and welcoming, even in their occasional darkness. Through them, the presence and creative mind and values and ethics of their author, and his sense of subversive play, ground what I do and how I think about what I do. They keep me focussed... *just by being there*.<sup>6</sup>

I was a PhD student at the University of British Columbia in 1988 when I discovered the work of Gerald Vizenor, and recognized the centrality of the trickster to my research on humor and irony in the work of Native American and First Nations artists. The book, *Narrative Chance*:

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*Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (1989), which Gerald edited, and which contains his essay, “Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games,” (187-211) introduced me to the critical concepts of “trickster discourse,” “compassionate tricksters,” and “terminal creeds.” My dissertation was thereafter envisioned as a trickster discourse, a conversation among compassionate trickster artists creating subversive trickster narratives, in studios and galleries on the world stage. Completed in 1995, the dissertation was titled, *The Trickster Shift: A New Paradigm in Contemporary Canadian Native Art*.<sup>7</sup> “The trickster shift” was a term coined by Carl Beam, an Ojibway artist included in the study, who used it to describe his own artistic practice.<sup>8</sup>

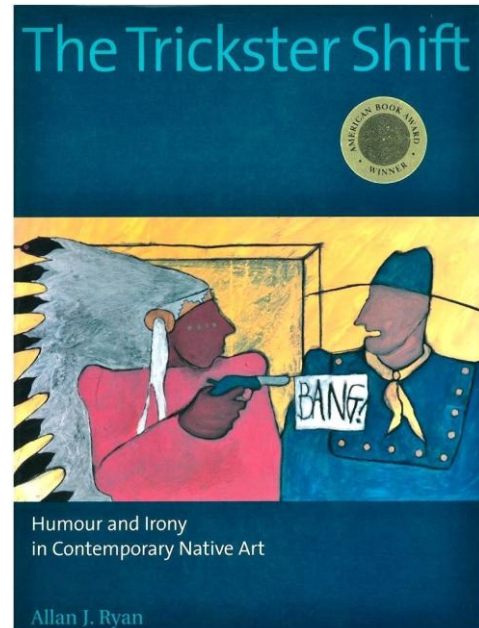
Soon after, Jean Wilson, Senior Editor at the University of British Columbia Press, expressed interest in publishing the dissertation, and unbeknownst to me, sent a copy of the manuscript to Gerald Vizenor for evaluation. It was not something I would have dared to do, but in the end I had no cause to worry. While bound by protocol and precedent to conceal the evaluator’s name from the author, Jean was eager to share with me the reader’s favorable assessment, which described the work as “an outstanding study of the trickster in the consciousness of Native artists and their visual art” and praised it for being “the first formal book-length study of the traces and figurative treasons of tricksters in contemporary Native visual arts.” (So much for anonymity!) For me, such an endorsement validated all the research and writing I had done over the previous seven years.

In 1997, I finally got to meet Gerald and his wife Laura Hall when I gave a presentation at a meeting of the Native American Art Studies Association in Berkeley, California. I must admit to being a little star struck at the time, a feeling that has not completely dissipated with the years. They treated me to dinner and we discussed the financial difficulties associated with publishing a book with so many color plates.<sup>9</sup> A year later, we dined out again when I returned to California to interview Native cartoonists for a post-doctoral research project.<sup>10</sup> By then, we had the finances in place to publish *The Trickster Shift*. On one of those two occasions during dinner, Gerald confided with great delight and detail, that he had just killed off a university provost with a bow and arrow. In print of course! While admittedly captivated by such a wicked scenario, in hindsight, I wish he hadn’t told me. Over the next two years, with the release of each of Gerald’s new books, I quickly scoured the pages to see if this might be where the hapless administrator met his untimely demise. That’s the danger of dining with an author who can’t resist sharing the

results of a satisfying day at the office.

From conception to completion, *The Trickster Shift* took twelve years.<sup>11</sup> In 1999, it was published as an elegant book that defied easy categorization and garnered a number of favorable reviews in several countries.<sup>12</sup> It contained one hundred and sixty images, a hundred of them in color. Plains Cree artist, Gerald McMaster's painting, *Counting Coup* (1990),<sup>13</sup> was featured on the front of the dustjacket, and Gerald Vizenor's generous assessment was the lead endorsement quoted on the back. The book was co-published by the University of British Columbia Press (UBC Press) in Canada and the University of Washington Press in the United States. Just prior to its release, a minor concession was made to the American publisher whose director felt the book would be easier to distribute in the United States if the word "Canadian" were removed from the book's subtitle. While annoyed, I agreed to the change, on the understanding that there would be no further tampering with the text.<sup>14</sup>

Again, without my knowledge, Gerald Vizenor brought *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in*



*Contemporary Native Art* to the attention of the Before Columbus Foundation who recognized it with an American Book Award in 2000 for its contribution to multicultural literature.<sup>15</sup> I was deeply honored by this award since Gerald's novel, *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, had received that same recognition in 1988. The award was definitely instrumental in my being offered the position of New Sun Chair at Carleton University a few months later.

In 2004, in the opening lines to a nomination letter for the prestigious Canadian Governor General's Visual and Media Arts award, I wrote that Ojibway artist, Carl Beam, "like Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor, possesses an ironic imagination that flows from a worried heart." When Beam was presented with the award in March, 2005, I adapted the nomination letter for inclusion in the accompanying publication.<sup>16</sup> Sadly, the artist passed away four months later. In 2010, the National Gallery of Canada mounted *Carl Beam: A Poetics of Being*, a solo exhibition of fifty art works by Beam curated by Greg Hill, Audain Curator of Indigenous Art. A new documentary film, *Aakideh: The Legacy & Art of Carl Beam* (2010), by Robert Waldeck

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and Paul Eichhorn, was screened at the gallery in conjunction with the show.

One of Beam's etchings, *Self portrait as John Wayne, Probably* (1990), from his *Columbus Suite* series, was included in the exhibition, *About Face: Self-Portraits by Native American, First Nations and Inuit Artists*, at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I co-curated the exhibition with University of California art history professor, Zena Pearlstone, and it opened in the fall of 2005 for a six month run.

Despite gallery director Jonathan Batkin's initial apprehension, because the works were not what visitors had come to expect from Indian artists in Santa Fe, the show was an unqualified success. Comments in the visitors guest book expressed appreciation for the personal commentaries by the show's forty-seven artists that were posted on the wall beside each piece and included in the sumptuous catalogue. Affirming the fluid nature of Indigenous identity, and executed in a variety of media—from painting and sculpture to photo collage—the exuberant artworks expanded the notion of self-portraiture beyond the narrow confines of the Euro-American mimetic tradition. Alter egos abounded, as did figures without faces and faces without figures. Gerald and Laura, who were then living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, attended the opening, along with several of the artists, Zena Pearlstone and myself.

I have since used the exhibition catalogue as a text for a course on Indigenous self-portraiture that has become increasingly interactive and experiential, focussing less on the works of art as “artworks” and more on the life stories that the images reveal for both the artists and the students, who now create their own self-portraits that they share with each other at the end of the term. One of the students recently wrote, “I'm not entirely certain the point of the class was to teach us about art, but to function as a Trickster manoeuvre which utilized the power of Aboriginal self-portraiture as a medium to teach us how to connect to others.”<sup>17</sup> It was a perceptive insight for which the student was duly rewarded.

One of the most memorable, if emotionally unsettling, pieces in *About Face* was the pastel drawing, *Artist Not Happy* (2001) by the late California Yurok painter, Rick Bartow, who often portrayed animal/human figures in a state of physical and spiritual transformation, where the psychological tension is both terrifying and palpable. Since Bartow's artwork has been featured on the dustjacket of four of Gerald Vizenor's recent books, as well as a study of his poetry and poetics by Deborah Madsen,<sup>18</sup> it seemed fitting to screen for the class the illuminating video biography of Gerald by Matteo Bellinelli (1994), and then consider the disquieting themes

and imagery shared by both artists. As expected, the pairing prompted a lively discussion. What I recall most vividly, however, was the startled response from students when, early on in the film, Gerald thoroughly trashes the notion and usefulness of theory. “Who could ever think of the world theoretically?,” he asks. “‘Theoretically’ is a stupid word.” It was a moment to savor.

But I am getting ahead of myself. On the Easter weekend of 2006, my wife Rae and I travelled to New Mexico to see the *About Face* exhibition before it closed, and to have dinner with Gerald and Laura, and artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and her husband, Andy Ambrose, in Albuquerque. One of Jaune’s mixed media paintings, *The Red Mean: Self-Portrait* (1992), was in the show, and we stayed with Jaune and Andy at their rustic home on the outskirts of the city before venturing on to Santa Fe. Gerald and Laura drove up to Santa Fe Sunday morning and took us to breakfast in the splendid courtyard of La Fonda On the Plaza, a wonderful old Spanish colonial-style hotel. It was on this visit that I gave Gerald a copy of *Three Day Road* (2006), the recently released first novel by Métis writer, Joseph Boyden, which traces the exploits of two young men from a Cree community in northern Ontario, who enlist in the Canadian army and become celebrated snipers in the First World War. The novel had just won the Writers’ Trust award, a major Canadian literary prize, and Joseph read from the book at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: *Interweaving Communities* a few days after collecting the award in Toronto. Later that year, after Gerald invited me to contribute an essay to the book, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008), I travelled to the Boyden family retreat on Sandy Island, near Parry Sound in northern Ontario, to interview Joseph about writing *Three Day Road*. I was pleased to provide a Canadian Native presence for Gerald’s expansive collection of essays on survivance.<sup>19</sup>

Presenting at the same New Sun Conference as Boyden was Riel Benn, a young Dakota Sioux painter from western Canada who had created a fascinating trickster alter ego he calls “the Best Man,” and whose appearance was inspired in part by the titular character in the 1992 film, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, played by Gary Oldman.<sup>20</sup> That summer, I went to Riel’s home on the Birdtail Sioux Reserve in southern Manitoba to view the Best Man paintings and speak to the artist about the series. One of the works, a full frontal self-portrait split down the middle, with a naked Riel (on the left) and the Best Man, decked out in a lavender tuxedo (on the right), was one of the great discoveries in our search for works to include in the *About Face* exhibition.<sup>21</sup>

In 2007, I showed some of the self-portraits in *About Face* to students and faculty at three

universities in China, where I also screened several documentary films made by Canadian Indigenous film makers, that had been subtitled in Mandarin.<sup>22</sup> It was my first visit to China, a truly wondrous experience and not a little surreal. I mention this because I took with me Gerald’s book, *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, however, I did not have an opportunity to read it until the flight home. Had I read it beforehand, I might have been better prepared for all the new situations and sensations I encountered. On the other hand, I was then able to relate the stories in the book to my own lived experiences.

That same year, I organized the 6<sup>th</sup> *Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: Survivance—More than Mere Survival*.<sup>23</sup> While I was hoping that Gerald would be able to attend, his prior commitments precluded that possibility. Nevertheless, Gerald was seldom out of mind. A major reason was that I was supervising the PhD dissertation of Molly Blyth, a doctoral candidate in Canadian Studies at Trent University, in Peterborough, Ontario, who was applying Gerald’s concept of trickster hermeneutics to a variety of works by Canadian Native authors.<sup>24</sup> In spring, 2009, I attended the convocation ceremonies at Trent where Dr. Blyth received her degree. Her dissertation, titled, “*Tricky Stories Are the Cure*”: *Contemporary Indigenous Writing in Canada*, was a masterful piece of trickster scholarship.

In 2010, all the stars aligned and I was finally able to bring Gerald to the 9<sup>th</sup> *Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: Something Else Again!*<sup>25</sup> In a wide-ranging presentation that



addressed the state of Indigenous writing today, he discussed the works of Stephen Graham Jones and Diane Glancy, whom he characterized as innovative Native authors with an avant-garde sense of survivance, and whose works were to be included in a new series of books called *Native Storiers: A Series of American Narratives*, that he and Glancy were

co-editing for the University of Nebraska Press. As one of the contributors to the series himself, Gerald read from the manuscript of a new novel, *Chair of Tears*, describing, in part, how the recently appointed head of a university Native Studies program forced the faculty to return to a more communal way of life by revoking their treaty rights to private offices which were converted to casinos and healing centers. He later recounted how reservation mongrel dogs had

been trained to dance and bark in the presence of those with no sense of irony. With a lilting cadence in his voice and a glint in his eye, Gerald was in his element, at once erudite, ironic, droll, cerebral, charming, amusing and thoroughly entertaining. Throughout his presentation, in a parallel tease of academia, and to the delight of those present, he carried on a playful (if one sided) banter with the Dean of Arts and Social Sciences, a long time supporter of the conference who was sitting nearby.

In a telling question and answer session that followed, Gerald spoke of his fondness for “modified” tricksters, that is “transformational tricksters,” or “compassionate tricksters,” viewing them as profound and rich visionary figures in a story, and much more than simple conmen or deceivers. When asked about the word, “survivance,” he said, “I wanted to have a word to say and write that had the power of ‘dominance,’ to challenge the notion of tragic victimry.” Gerald’s engaging presentation remains a high point in the history of the New Sun Conference.<sup>26</sup>

At the close of the conference, Gerald was invited back to the podium for a special presentation by Carleton’s Word Warrior Society, a group of Native and non-Native students whose name derives from a chapter title and uncited quotation from Gerald Vizenor in Dale Turner’s book, *This Is Not A Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical*



*Indigenous Philosophy* (2006). The quotation reads: “We are more than a curious medicine bundle on a museum rack... We are tricksters in the blood, natural mixedblood tricksters, word warriors in that silent space between bodies, and we bear our best medicine on our voices, in our stories.”<sup>27</sup> On this occasion, the students gifted Gerald with a beautiful Pendleton *Shared Spirits* blanket to recognize his pivotal contribution to the field of Indigenous literature. The blanket is inscribed with the words, “To Gerald Vizenor, Chi miigwetch, The Word Warriors.”<sup>28</sup> In a spirit of creative wordplay and imagination, Word Warrior spokesman Rodney Nelson said that “honoring” Gerald’s career was not enough, and that their presentation was, in fact, an act of “honorance.” Engaging with the same spirit, Gerald immediately replied, “I accept with honorance!”



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In the spring of 2010, I was invited to help mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Anthropology Department at the University of British Columbia (UBC). As a PhD graduate of their program in 1995, I was both honored and amused. Clearly the concept of illustrious alumni had changed! Not one to pass on a complimentary trip back to the west coast, I took the opportunity to encourage graduate students to think outside the box, create a new box, or discard the idea of a box altogether. I titled my presentation, *Coyote was walking along: following the Trickster on a journey through academia*. Gerald Vizenor has been my guide and constant companion on this journey...which continues to this day.

Later that summer, I adapted the title of the UBC presentation for a lecture I gave on trickster mischief in Native American art at the Idyllwild Arts Academy, located in the mountains above Palm Springs, California, in the San Bernardino National Forest.<sup>29</sup> I am again indebted to Gerald for suggesting they invite me when he was unable to accept their invitation. In keeping with the spirit of trickster mischief, all but one of the images I showed were created by Native Canadian (not Native American) artists which, I was sure, most of those in attendance had never seen before. These included: digital self-portraits by Rosalie Favell, in the guise of Xena, the Warrior Princess, from her *Plain(s) Warrior Artist* series;<sup>30</sup> acrylic paintings by Jim Logan, whose impudent *Classical Aboriginal Series* dares to imagine Native inclusion in the European art history canon; several hyper-glamorized photo portraits from KC Adams's wonderful *Cyborg Hybrid* series;<sup>31</sup> and a few carefully selected PG-rated images of Cree artist Kent Monkman's hilarious alter ego, the *post-indian* diva warrior, Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle, clad in signature pink satin pumps, diaphanous breach clout and flowing feather headdress.<sup>32</sup>

Monkman's giant mural, *The Triumph of Mischief* (2007), with its cast of ribald revellers and numerous art historical luminaries, was a highlight of the exhibition, *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art*, that opened at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa in the spring of 2013. In “Native Cosmototemic Art,” the essay Gerald contributed to the exhibition catalogue, he quotes from the White Earth Reservation constitution which he co-authored, noting that it is probably the only constitution, tribal or otherwise, that guarantees the protection of artistic irony. Trust Gerald Vizenor to include that! In May of that year, Gerald returned to Ottawa to discuss some of the key ideas in that essay, at a symposium held in conjunction with the exhibition.<sup>33</sup>

This brings me back to the quotation on my office door that I cited at the top of this



essay, and which is taped below a photograph taken on the morning after the *Sakahàn* symposium. In the photo, Gerald and I are seated in the lobby of the Fairmont Chateau Laurier Hotel where he was staying, along with Charlotte Hoelke, a Carleton PhD student of mixed Algonquin heritage, who was researching the concept of queer Native survivance. Later

that summer, Gerald kindly sent us the manuscripts to his two recent books, *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel* and *Favor of Crows: New and Collected Haiku*, and we became part of the privileged few who were able to read them far ahead of the spring 2014 publication date.<sup>34</sup> I bought copies of both books for Charlotte when they became available, and a few more—actually, sixteen more—copies of *Blue Ravens* to give to other people whose lives I thought would be enriched by reading the book. Many of these were students. For those graduating from Carleton University just prior to the Vienna conference, I had copies bound in red leatherette with the student's name stamped on the front in gold leaf.<sup>35</sup> One of the recipients, eager to begin reading the book, wrote to say it would remain a treasured possession for the rest of her life.<sup>36</sup>

For me, the treasured possession has been the presence of Gerald Vizenor in *my* life for the past twenty-five years, and the opportunity to share his work with others. I'm indebted to Dr. Birgit Däwes and Gerald Vizenor himself for inviting me to participate in this very special celebration of the most compassionate trickster I know, and to honor *Blue Ravens*.<sup>37</sup>



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#### Afterword – Aftermath

As befits an event organized in his honor, Gerald Vizenor delivered a keynote address at the University of Vienna on the opening morning of the conference, and closed the proceedings a

few days later with an evening reading from *Blue Ravens*, hosted by the American Embassy at



the nearby Amerika Haus. And then, apart from the dining, and laughter, and conversations that extended well into the warm summer night, the conference was over, and immediately consigned to memory. As if by magic, or mere design. But for an event dedicated, in part, to foregrounding the importance of personal and communal memory, this was not necessarily a bad thing. For those of us privileged to play a part in this extraordinary weekend—as presenters, organizers, or attendees—our memories have been greatly enriched, and our sense of community, both personal and professional, has been greatly expanded. As if by magic, or mere design, and possibly by trickster manoeuvre.<sup>38</sup>

As is frequently the case, the summer of 2014 flew by far too quickly, and disappeared into autumn with insufficient warning. Too soon, the new academic year, with its attendant responsibilities and incremental time commitments, was the new reality. I subsequently added a new photo from Vienna to my office door, and bought four more copies of *Blue Ravens*, bringing the cumulative total to twenty. One of the books was intended for Richard Blackwolf, President of the Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association of Canada, who had offered to speak to my graduate students while in town to attend the national Remembrance Day ceremonies in the nation’s capital on November 11. But this year’s commemoration would be like no other. Only days earlier, on October 22, a crazed gunman fatally shot Corporal Nathan Cirillo, a reservist with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada regiment, as he stood sentry at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the National War Memorial.<sup>39</sup> It was a cowardly act that shocked the whole country, and prompted an unprecedented outpouring of emotion across Canada. It also made the Remembrance Day ceremonies especially poignant.

A few short blocks from the National War Memorial stands the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument, or Aboriginal War Memorial, as it is sometimes called.<sup>40</sup> Located in Confederation Park,<sup>41</sup> on Elgin Street, it is a massive bronze sculpture set on a high stone base, depicting four warriors (two men and two women) facing the four directions, and representing the diversity of Canada’s Indigenous peoples. The figures are flanked by four animals—a bear,

wolf, bison and elk—representing their spiritual helpers. Soaring above them all, and representing the Creator, is a majestic eagle with outstretched wings.<sup>42</sup>

It is customary for those wishing to honor Aboriginal veterans to gather at this memorial a few hours prior to the annual national ceremony of remembrance. On the morning of November 11, 2014, with sunlight playing across the surface of the eagle's broad wings, and the scent of sage and sweetgrass comingling in the air, and carrying prayers and prayer songs up to the Creator, it was not hard to imagine a giant blue raven, with a touch of rouge on its beak, hovering just above the bronze eagle, with all those assembled below safe in its warm, protective, and healing embrace. I may well have been the only one there able to imagine that wondrous blue raven. I have Gerald Vizenor to thank for that.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Professor Dr. Brigit Däwes. Personal communication, February 4, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> The challenge of conversion was formidable, not unlike transforming a film into a book.

The international conference, *Native North American Survivance and Memory: Celebrating Gerald Vizenor*, took place June 20-23, 2014, at the University of Vienna. Also on the program were: Gerald Vizenor, Kimberly Blaeser, David L. Moore, A. Robert Lee, Alexandra Ganser, Karsten Fitz, Wanda Nanibush, Kathryn Shanley, Chris LaLonde, Sabine N. Meyer, Kristina Baudemann, Klaus Löch, Billy Stratton and Cathy Waegner. See [www.nativestudies@univie.ac.at](http://www.nativestudies@univie.ac.at).

<sup>3</sup> Currier and Ives was a successful 19<sup>th</sup> century printmaking firm based in New York City that specialized in producing inexpensive black and white lithographic prints based on paintings of historic and everyday activities. The prints were then hand-colored. Among the most popular subjects were winter scenes that were often reproduced on postcards and Christmas greeting cards.

<sup>4</sup> Without a doubt, the proposed strategy of enlightenment through close conversation has proven immensely successful, with guest speakers offering to return year after year. Still, a decade later, Gerald remained cautiously optimistic about the viability of Indigenous pedagogy in academia, as reflected in this email from May 24, 2013: "Narrative chance moves in the creases of pedagogy, always ready to be perceived in a trickster story. I worry, though, that the nationalists have abused the original thoughts of native pedagogy with predatory academic ideology."

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Blaeser (1996), Lee (2000), Madsen (2009), and Madsen and Lee (2011).

<sup>6</sup> Having realized the critical relevance of Vizenor's work to my research, I systematically set out to acquire as complete a library of his writing as possible. *The Trickster of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild Baronage* (1988) confirmed the playful connection and *Matsushima: Pine Islands* (1984), the poetic.

<sup>7</sup> Among the artists interviewed, and whose works were analysed, were: Carl Beam, Rebecca Belmore, Bob Boyer, Joan Cardinal-Schubert, Tom Hill, George Littlechild, Jim Logan, Gerald

McMaster, Shelley Niro, Ron Noganosh, Edward Poitras, Jane Ash Poitras, Bill Powless and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun.

<sup>8</sup> “What Beam calls the ‘Trickster shift’ is perhaps best understood as serious play, the ultimate goal of which is a radical shift in viewer perspective and even political positioning by imagining and imaging alternative perspectives” (Ryan, 1999, p. 5).

<sup>9</sup> To do justice to the artworks and the artists, I felt that at least half of the one hundred and sixty images needed to be reproduced in color. In the end we got one hundred.

<sup>10</sup> From 1997-1999 I held a post-doctoral fellowship at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, researching the work of Indigenous artists who employed the same critical wit and self-deprecating humor in their cartoons for tribal newspapers as that employed by Native fine artists working in mainstream galleries. A memorable moment in the research was conducting a well-attended workshop with three Navajo cartoonists—Jack Ahasteen, Vincent Craig and Carl Terry—at the 1998 meeting of the Native American Journalists Association in Tempe, Arizona. The following year, the association introduced four new awards for cartoonists.

<sup>11</sup> That circuitous journey was documented in “Trickster Treatise Traces Humour in Native Art,” a story by Robin Laurence that ran in *The Georgia Straight*, October 21-28, 1999. It is archived with the other book reviews at [www.trickstershift.com](http://www.trickstershift.com).

<sup>12</sup> Among the more memorable reviewer comments: “This is no stodgy history or ethnographic monograph, but a book about art so grandly conceived and executed as to constitute a work of art in itself” (Margaret Dubin in *American Indian Art Magazine*, Vol. 27, #4, 2002); and “*The Trickster Shift* is a visually stunning combination of cultural philosophy, social commentary and art criticism. Nowhere else is the subject of Native humour in art explored in such depth by the very people who employ it” (Cheryl Isaacs in *Aboriginal Voices*, Vol. 6, #3, 1999). In 2012, *The Trickster Shift* was the focus of the essay, “Merely Conventional Signs: The Editor and the Illustrated Scholarly Book,” written by the book’s editor, Camilla Blakeley, for *Editors, Scholars and the Social Text*, Darcy Cullen, editor, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>13</sup> This image of a befeathered Indian chief confounding a startled cavalry officer was the signature image for *The cowboy/Indian Show*, McMaster’s 1991 exhibition at the McMichael Gallery in Kleinberg, Ontario. Several pieces from the show were included in *The Trickster Shift*.

<sup>14</sup> By downplaying the Canadian focus, the revised title implied that the book was broader in scope than it actually is. Only one reviewer (a Canadian Indigenous academic) took exception to the lack of American content, in particular, the absence of the controversial “Cherokee/not-Cherokee” artist, Jimmie Durham, the subject of the reviewer’s own research, while another (a German academic) criticized the omission of Inuit art and humor. Overall, the majority of reviewers had no problem with the focus.

<sup>15</sup> Along with several other recipients, I accepted the award at a reception in Chicago in the summer of 2000, that was timed to coincide with the *BookExpo America* convention where I picked up a pre-publication copy of Gerald’s latest novel, *Chancers*. Set on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley, the story opens with the introduction of a hapless university provost...

<sup>16</sup> The resultant essay can be found at

<http://ggavma.canadacouncil.ca/archive/2005/winners>

<sup>17</sup> Amy Prouty. Personal communication, April, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *Chair of Tears: Driving Lesson*, acrylic on panel, 2010; *Blue Ravens: Raven’s Dream*, pastel on paper, 2012; *Favor of Crows, New and Collected Haiku: Crow’s Mortality Tale*, pastel on

paper, 2001; *Treaty Shirts: Voices II*, acrylic on canvas, 2015; Deborah L. Madsen, *The Poetry and Poetics of Gerald Vizenor: Mask Holding* (detail), 2011, pastel, graphite, spray paint on paper. All images courtesy of the artist and the Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR. In 2015, the University of Oregon's Gordon Schnitzer Museum of Art organized the appropriately titled exhibition, *Things You Know But Cannot Explain*, a forty year retrospective of Bartow's work.

<sup>19</sup> I was pleased to read Joseph Boyden's enthusiastic endorsement of *Blue Ravens* on the dustjacket of the novel.

<sup>20</sup> *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Francis Ford Coppola, director. USA, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> The painting later became the signature image for my essay, "Riel Benn's 'Best Man': An Unlikely Successor to Iktomi's Trickster Legacy," in the Spring, 2010, issue of *American Indian Art Magazine*.

<sup>22</sup> Under contract to the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), I selected thirteen NFB films by Canadian Aboriginal film makers for inclusion in the six-DVD collection, *Visual Voices: A Festival of Canadian Aboriginal Film and Video*. Subtitled in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese, the collection was supplemented with an online film guide available in the same four languages. Several of the films were later subtitled in Mandarin, with sections of the guide translated into Mandarin for booklets published in conjunction with the March, 2007 *Canada-China Forums on Aboriginal (Ethnic) Identity: Cultural Preservation*, held at the Northwest University for Nationalities in Lanzhou, China, and Qinghai Nationalities University in Xining, China. Further screenings took place at Guanxi University for Nationalities in Nanning, China.

<sup>23</sup> Presenters included Cree film maker Ernest Webb, poet and playwright, Daniel David Moses, Barry Ace and Ryan Rice, co-founders of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, and the musical group, Taima, featuring Inuit singer/songwriter Elisapie Isaac.

<sup>24</sup> Carleton University and Trent University share a joint PhD program in Canadian Studies, and Molly Blyth was my first PhD supervision.

<sup>25</sup> Wanda Nanibush, who videotaped the proceedings in Vienna and presented at the conference, arranged for Gerald and Laura to visit Trent University prior to travelling by train to Ottawa. In Ottawa, they saw the Indigenous artworks in the Parliament buildings and the Canadian Museum of History (formerly the Canadian Museum of Civilization), and toured the Indigenous holdings at the National Gallery of Canada with the Audain Curator of Indigenous Art, Greg Hill. Due to the unusually mild weather, I was not able to deliver on my promise of ice skaters on the Rideau Canal. While at Carleton, Gerald kindly made time to meet with students and faculty on the afternoon preceding the conference.

Also on the program were Métis painter and author, Christi Belcourt, whose stunning beadwork-inspired mural, *My Heart (Is Beautiful)*, was featured on the conference publicity, and served as the visual backdrop for the day's presentations; Manon Barbeau, Directrice of the Wapikoni Mobile Indigenous film training program in Quebec; Marwin Begay, Navajo printmaker and diabetes awareness advocate; and Tanya Tagaq, Inuit throat singer extraordinaire who both presented and performed. See [www.trickstershift.com](http://www.trickstershift.com) for photos and feedback.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald's presentation, like those of all the other New Sun Conference presenters since 2002, was videotaped and archived on DVD, and can be borrowed from Carleton's MacOdrum Library.

<sup>27</sup> The Word Warriors have endowed a bursary supporting research and conference presentations that benefit Indigenous people. It is a bursary that I continue to support through payroll

deduction.

<sup>28</sup> See [www.pendleton-usa.com](http://www.pendleton-usa.com). Following the conference, Gerald and Laura kindly sent me a jacket made at the same Pendleton Woolen Mills in Pendleton, Oregon, as the *Shared Spirits* blanket.

<sup>29</sup> See [www.idyllwildarts.org](http://www.idyllwildarts.org).

<sup>30</sup> See Favell (2003) and [www.rosaliefavell.com](http://www.rosaliefavell.com).

<sup>31</sup> See [www.kcadams.com](http://www.kcadams.com).

<sup>32</sup> See Monkman (2007) and [www.kentmonkman.com](http://www.kentmonkman.com). Monkman/Mischief is adept at deploying sexual play as a powerful metaphor for political play in a series of post-colonial narratives that re-imagine historic intercultural relationships on stage, screen and canvas.

<sup>33</sup> In a brief message sent from his iPhone May 18, 2013, while enjoying a glass of wine in the Newark airport, en route home to Florida from Ottawa, Gerald invited my wife and I to visit him and Laura in Naples, Florida or Paris. But especially Paris! Who knew the next time we met we'd raise a glass of wine together in Vienna!

<sup>34</sup> *Blue Ravens* is an historical novel that tells the story of two brothers from the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota who see action in France in the First World War, come home to Minnesota, then return to Paris where they lead successful lives, one as a writer (and the narrator of this novel), and the other as a visual artist with a talent for painting spectacular blue ravens. *Favor of Crows* brings together new and previously published haiku poems written by Gerald Vizenor over the past forty years.

<sup>35</sup> In this, I am honoring the memory of Dr. Samuel Corrigan, who presented me with a red leather-bound monograph with my name stamped on the cover in gold leaf, when I received my Bachelor's degree from Brandon University in 1975. It was an act of generosity and personal affirmation that I have sought to continue. See: “Dr. Sam Corrigan: A Personal Remembrance.” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Vol. 29, 1/2, 2009, 283-285.

In addition to *Blue Ravens*, I have gifted students with several other Vizenor books, namely, *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57*, *Landfill Meditation: Crossblood Stories*, *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, *Almost Ashore*, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*, and *Favor of Crows: New and Collected Haiku*.

<sup>36</sup> This is the same student, mentioned earlier, who detected a trickster maneuver in the structure of the Indigenous self-portraiture class. She has recently employed Gerald's concept of survivance to frame a study of cultural resistance in contemporary Inuit art.

<sup>37</sup> Wanting to celebrate the publication of *Blue Ravens* in appropriate fashion, I asked my long time friend and batik artist, Sarah Hale, to create an art card for Gerald, displaying the words, “To honor Blue Ravens.” In keeping with the avian imagery described in the novel, I asked that it be rendered in various blue hues with a faint touch of rouge. The night before the conference, I inscribed the pertinent passages from the book inside the card. See [www.ardenbatik.com](http://www.ardenbatik.com).

<sup>38</sup> Among the most vivid memories that will remain from this, my first, but hopefully not my last, visit to Vienna are: hearing Gerald Vizenor quote me in his keynote address—that was definitely a surreal moment; lunching in sunny street cafés with fellow Vizenor scholars who were all well versed in Gerald's unique lexicon and literary tease; and with my wife Rae, cruising the river Danube that snakes through the city; attending a spirited performance by the Vienna Mozart Orchestra; enjoying apple strudel at Café Sperl, where a pivotal scene in the 1995 film, *Before Sunrise*, was filmed; and willingly succumbing to the commercial mystique of Gustav Klimt and Empress Elizabeth—admittedly a guilty pleasure on both counts—acquiring assorted, but

“tasteful” (and even tasty) mementos, as we made our way from gallery to museum and palatial residence on Vienna’s superbly interconnected transit system.

<sup>39</sup> The National War Memorial is steps from the Fairmont Chateau Laurier Hotel where Gerald stayed during his visit to Ottawa for the *Sakahàn* symposium in 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Designed by Lloyd Noel Pinay, the monument was unveiled by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, former Governor General of Canada and Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Forces on June 21, 2001, National Aboriginal Day.

<sup>41</sup> Confederation Park is located on Elgin Street directly across from the Lord Elgin Hotel where Gerald and Laura stayed in 2010, along with the other presenters at the *9<sup>th</sup> Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: Something Else Again!*

<sup>42</sup> See [www.canadianaboriginalveterans.ca](http://www.canadianaboriginalveterans.ca).

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