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Review of *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* by Gerald Vizenor

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*Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance.* By Gerald Vizenor. University of Nebraska Press, 2009. ix + 321 pp. \$30.00 paper.

Poet, novelist, and critic Gerald Vizenor is arguably the most accomplished and prolific intellectual in the field of Native American studies. His new collection of cultural criticism includes four original essays and nine expanded revisions of uncollected published pieces. "Ontic Images," perhaps the finest selection, applies his concept of Native *transmotion* to representations of Natives in photography. Two perceptive pieces of art criticism discuss the aesthetics and contributions of Anishinaabe artists George Morrison and David Bradley. On the whole, this work serves as a useful introduction to the theory and criticism of this brilliant Anishinaabe (aka Ojibwe, Chippewa) writer.

For those who have read the majority of his prose, however, some of the material can at times seem

redundant (Ishi again?). Vizenor's crucial and liberating theories on Survivance, natural reason, the Postindian, and other matters are highly influential in the field and therefore at times certain phrases and discussions sound overly familiar. Throughout his career, Vizenor reworks earlier material, placing anecdotes or intellectual riffs in differing contexts; perhaps this is commensurate with an Indigenous sense of time as cyclical or recurring. But the repetition can vex. On page 93, a sentence on Louise Erdrich's deficient sense of metaphor is repeated almost word for word from a sentence eighty pages earlier. I fear that Vizenor's legendary status may have impeded incisive editing. The repetition of material, mostly published previously, keeps *Native Liberty* from being a great book. It serves more as a compendium joining various loose texts, rather than a unified monograph.

One notable and welcome change is that Vizenor allows his anger to be felt; in the essay "Genocide Tribunals," for instance, we actually feel his indignation, whereas in the past he created (in the 1970s) a more journalistic voice or (in the 1990s) a somewhat detached, Postmodern critical one. Although this emotion may be felt, Vizenor never loses control or loses sight of the historical record, unlike the untrustworthy Ward Churchill, whose unsubstantiated claims about "smallpox blankets" being used intentionally as weapons have been repeated as fact. "Direct evidence that diseases were widely used as a weapon is unresolved, neither persuasive or conclusive," Vizenor writes. Plagiarist and poseur Churchill is thus charged with creating "tenet piques of historical revisionism." This is the sort of thing Vizenor excels at—calling out writers and critics for their presumptions and follies, but doing it in the most intellectual, measured way. The world needs more independent minds of Vizenor's caliber.

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