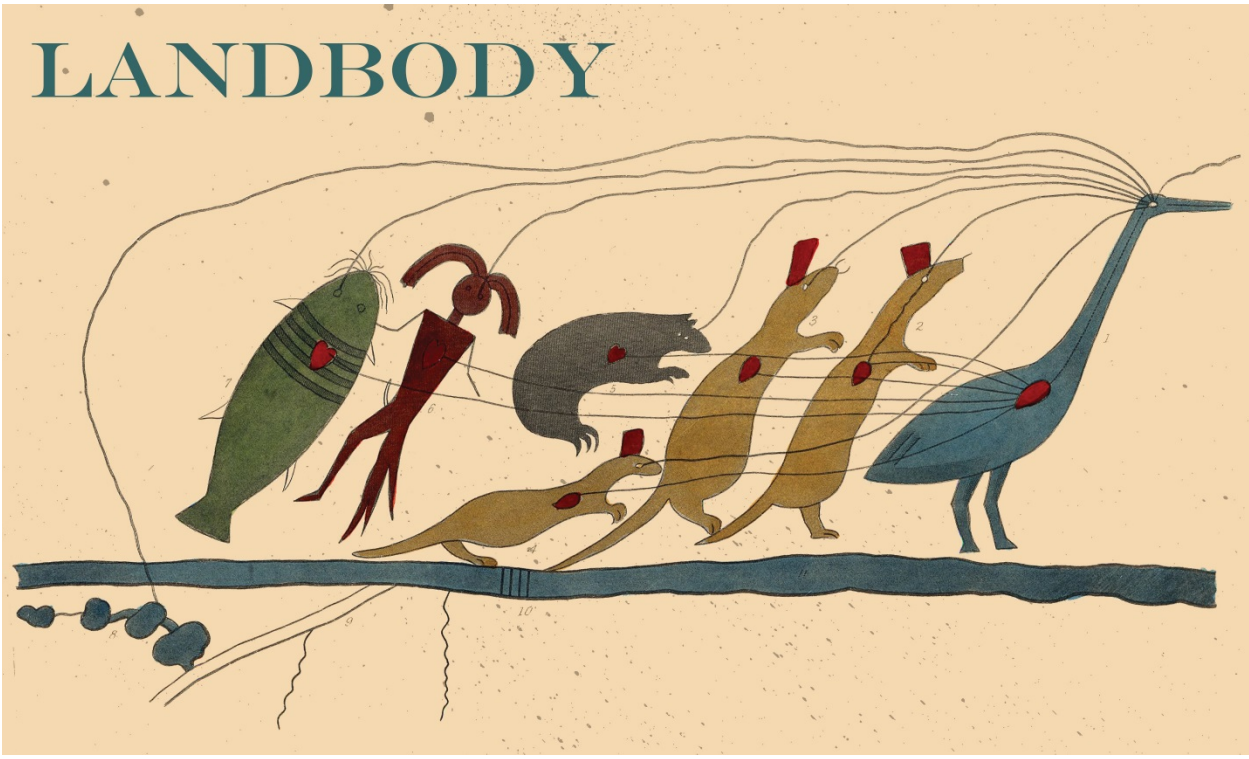

Landbody: Indigeneity's Radical Commitments
May 5 - 7, 2016
Center for 21st Century Studies | University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Plenary Abstracts

Jennifer Nez Denetdale
(Diné | University of New Mexico)
"Refusing the Gift of Democracy and Embracing Diné Concepts of Kinship—Navajo LGBTQ, Nation, and Citizenship"

This proposed presentation is based upon my foray into queer and Navajo studies in an effort to challenge modern Navajo nation formations that privilege patriarchy and male authority.

Drawing upon archival sources such as photographs and oral histories, I argue that a critical engagement with modern native nationhood and concepts of sovereignty and self-determination requires thinking through what "refusing the gift of Democracy," as proposed by Native scholars Glen Coultard and Audra Simpson, means to unsettling White settler colonialism and second, how Navajo principles of K'é, or kinship, provide the means through which the Diné have always included and invited Navajo LGBTQ into their nation, communities, and families.

Some of the questions I raise include attention to the workings of heterosexual patriarchy and its consequences—which we resist and struggle against, and how, when we reveal how it works, opens up space for critical thinking about the past, the present, and the future—and then move to how Navajos who embrace principles of K'é actually reaffirm Diné-based notions of nation and citizenship. I will also share the work I have conducted with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission on the introduction to the status of Navajo women and gender violence.

Jolene Rickard
(Tuscarora | Cornell University)
"Decolonizing the Arts of Dispossession"

Indigenous peoples are the guardians of all lands in the Americas, and, after five centuries of settler occupation, we continue to resist colonization. Critical to this stewardship is the awareness that Indigenous frameworks of life are based on intimate relationships with place and, specifically, land. From an Indigenous perspective, the genre of landscape painting is one of the conceptual and visceral tools of colonization.

The metaphor of the Americas as "Turtle Island" is representative of the understanding that land is a living being rendering the representation of land as a central trope in Indigenous thought and visual culture. Yet, historically, this creative work does not conform to the conventions of art historic painterly or sculptural representations of the landscape. Historically, Indigenous art and visual culture expressed a very different temporal and philosophical relationship to place than

most landscape paintings of the Americas. If the genre of landscape paintings mark a nation's relationship to place, I argue that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas have the deepest understandings of this space, as molded in clay, carved in stone, stitched in animal skins, woven in fibers, etched on our bodies and embedded in the environment as mounds or digital wampum. Further, a direct comparison to a nineteenth-century notion of "landscape" is not representative of what is really being engaged with Indigenous thought. Rather, the twenty-first-century idea of a biome is closer to the Indigenous people's relationship to land or place, which is synchronistical, visualized in quintessential material culture, oral narratives and art.

Audra Simpson
(Mohawk | Columbia University)
"'We are Not Red Indians' (We Might All Be Red Indians): The Gender of Anticolonial Sovereignty across the Borders of Time, Place, and Sentiment"

In a 2004 interview, Yasser Arafat, in a state of near confinement and exhaustion, reflected upon his incapacity to move without the immediate threat of assassination, about the Palestinean right of return, about American elections, and his achievements. Among these achievements was the fact that "the Palestine case was the biggest problem in the world" and that Israel had "failed to wipe us out." As a final mark of that success, he added the declarative and comparative and final point of distinction, "we are not red Indians."

This paper uses this point of comparison as a departure point to reflect upon the deep specificity and global illegibility of Indigenous struggle and life in the face of death and dispossession in North America. In order to do so I will choose a series of historical assemblages—of sociality; treaty-making; militarized pushbacks upon encroachment; spatial confinement ("reservationization"); and pushback for land, for life, and for dignity within occupation—to amend Arafat's statement and reimagine "success."

I argue that these assemblages are themselves a structure of political life that stand alongside and push against a "logic of elimination"—a logic that authorizes the removal, the attacking and "assimilating" of indigenous peoples for land. I consider these tangled processes in order to re-narrate the seemingly negligible political and corporeal life of Indigenous sovereignty within dispossession and settler occupation. This is an occupation that naturalizes itself through law and narrates itself as new, as beneficent and democratic atop the lands and lives of Indigenous peoples who persist, with sovereignties intact, in spite of this grinding historical and political process of settler colonialism.

In order to put this point of comparison and sentiment of Arafat's achievement in relief, the paper examines how is it that the very techniques of force, of pushback, of sociality, and of outright resistance receive the writ of dismissal within a global and comparative frame of resistance and (political life). At the end of the paper it is asked how these processes may be re-narrated and comprehended in a global, comparative frame of not only analysis, but struggles for justice.

Kim TallBear
(Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate | University of Alberta)
"Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sexualities"

We live in an era of decimation dubbed by some the Anthropocene. Settler-colonial states such as the United States and Canada disproportionately consume the world. As we reconsider violent human practices and conceive of new ways of living with Earth, we must interrogate settler sexuality and family constructs that have made both land and humans effectively (women, children, lovers) into property. Yet it is indigenous family that is characterized as dysfunctional. Indigenous peoples have been disciplined by the state according to a monogamist, heteronormative, marriage-focused, nuclear family ideal, which has been central to the colonial project. Settler sexualities and their unsustainable kin forms do not only harm humans, but they harm the earth. I consider how expansive indigenous kin relations, including with nonhumans, can be more emotionally, economically, and environmentally just.

Recommended reading: Scott Lauria Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 105-31.

Gerald Vizenor
(The White Earth Nation | UC-Berkeley)
Conversation, Reading, Book Signing

Gerald Vizenor will be in conversation with UWM's Kimberly Blaeser, Wisconsin's current poet laureate, and will read from his most recent work of fiction, *Treaty Shirts: October 2034--A Familiar Treatise on the White Earth Nation* (Wesleyan University Press). A book signing will follow.

From the publisher: Gerald Vizenor creates masterful, truthful, surreal, and satirical fiction similar to the speculative fiction of Margaret Atwood and Neil Gaiman. In [the] imagined future [of Treaty Shirts], seven natives are exiled from federal sectors that have replaced federal reservations; they pursue the liberty of an egalitarian government on an island in Lake of the Woods. These seven narrators, known only by native nicknames, are related to characters in Vizenor's other novels and stories. Vizenor was the principal writer of the Constitution of the White Earth Nation, and this novel is a rich and critical commentary on the abrogation of the treaty that established the White Earth Reservation in 1867, and a vivid visualization of the futuristic continuation of the Constitution of the White Earth Nation, in 2034.