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Introduction: Editors' Video Conversation and Conversation Transcript

Jenn Cole et Melissa Poll

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Introduction: Transcript of Editors' Video Conversation

Jenn Cole and Melissa Poll

Jenn Cole:

Should we introduce ourselves and say who we are?

Melissa Poll:

Yes, you go first, please.

Jenn:

Okay. Aanii, boozhoo, nice to see you, Melissa. I'm Jenn Cole and I'm mixed ancestry Algonquin from Kiji Sibi territory, which is a big, big territory of the Ottawa River watershed. My grandparents are, well, I'm not sure exactly where they're from, but at least my grandparents and my great-grandparents settled around Mattawa and Bissetts Creek. Before that, I think we might've been more mobile. And that's something I'm interested in learning more about . . . our migration routes and our camps here. I would imagine that they had sugar camps and fish camps and stuff like that. So yeah. What else to say? I'm in Michi Saagiig territory. You can hear traffic. Some of those folks might be Michi Saagiig. I don't know. Where I'm situated right now actually is like right between the River Otonabee, which is the river that bubbles like a beating heart, and the Canal Otonabee where she's been shunted off for the Trent Severn lift lock system. So, it's like being held between two aspects of her body in a way. And in Michi Saagiig territory, there's lots of cedar, some cedar over there and yeah, and it smells like a death fungus, and I've never met that relative before. I don't know how I feel about them, but I accidentally grew something in one of my child's toys. That's enough about me for now.

Melissa:

I'm Melissa Poll (pronounced Paul). I sometimes wish it was "Poll" so we could be Cole and Poll but it's Poll (pronounced Paul). I'm a settler and I'm currently on the land that historically was inhabited by the Kaw, the Osage, and the Pawnee. And now it's home to the Iowa, Kickapoo, Prairie Band Potawatomi, and the Sac and Fox Nations. I was born in the country colonially named Canada and grew up on Treaty 1 territory. I am here now because my partner works at Kansas State University which is a land grant university or what is known in other circles as a "land grab" university. So, it's a university that lives off stolen Indigenous land. I'm negotiating all of that. What it means to be here, what it means to respect this land, to support this land, to live, you know, in a sustainable fashion.

You've made me think a lot about the water here. I'm learning about the water. And, as a woman, what does it mean to live in relation to the water? I'm not a keeper of water, but I keep thinking of

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myself in relation to the water. As we talked about, Dylan Robinson says that land acknowledgment is all about situatedness and relationality. So that's what I'm working through right now, and that's kind of how we came together to these questions about land acknowledgment and how sometimes, especially when delivered by settlers, they can feel a bit perfunctory. What does it mean to live beyond the land acknowledgments that are spoken at the beginning of gatherings, and what does it mean to live in relation to the land and develop your relationship with the land? I walk on this land every day. I try to get my kids out, walking on this land. We look at everything. We're learning about the animals that are Indigenous to Kansas, the plants. I haven't done that work before and I want to do it for my kids because they were born here. What does that mean to be responsible to these nations and to be living off the theft of their land?

Jenn:

Yeah. I'm thinking about responsibility to the lands and where we are. I think about responsibility to all the relationships that have come before that are part of the story of the place and then all the relationships that are the ones to come. And then of course there are people who hold those stories, and I'm just learning some of them mostly because we have a lot of really cool, great storytellers and communicators come out of Michi Saagiig territory. There are so many beautiful artists here. Kerry Beebe and Olivia Whetung and William Kingfisher from Rama First Nation. I already talk about some of this in the podcast, but I think it's just good to name some of the people who carry out and communicate intellectual traditions and artistic traditions of the place since we're working in performance scholarship. So, Leanne Simpson, for sure. Such a big influential and magnificent writer . . . we'll just let that siren go by Main Street on the other side of the hedges there. We're thinking about land and place and all of the relationships that make up place.

Melissa:

And thinking about, like for me, just learning the history, knowing that Kansas was a place that a lot of people were moved through as part of the Indian Removal Act. Just the kind of the sadness around that, people being moved to Oklahoma. Kansas was the hunting ground for lots of different nations. There is this profound sadness around this thinking of it as part of the Removal Act. But, I have some friends that are Osage and I have yet to go to Oklahoma, but there are some strong Osage people there and here too that I'd like to get to know better and learn more about. A lot of the Indigenous people that I know and work with here are from all over, which has been really enriching, learning about their traditions. But it's humbling yourself. Right? And being a person who's pursued higher education, it's great to be in a position where you don't know anything and you need to be humble and gracious and, as a settler, listen, you know?

Jenn:

Yeah. Maybe that's something worth noting in our editorial, in our co-editing relationship . . . that you're really enacting settler allyship, I think, and support.

Melissa:

I'm stumbling through it.

Jenn:

Yeah. I'm Indigenous and I'm mixed, so I have settler ancestry as well. And that means when I'm learning my own cultural histories, sometimes they're in conflict. I would say it's my responsibility as an Indigenous woman to listen. That's like one of the teachings. Well, you can learn from so many.

Melissa:

I think it's been a theme in this work. When did we record the podcast in 2020? Did we start talking about it in 2018 or 19? And just going, well, not going through it, I didn't live it personally, but you know, George Floyd, COVID, and putting this journal issue together and having . . . almost losing some contributors, and I watched you listen and respond and be gracious with people and that there's sort of a gentleness that has defined our approach during this time that we've talked about before. Why couldn't it be this way all the time, where we're just a little bit more gentle and we listen to what people have to say about their kids or how their kids feel about masking and every conversation has that element of connection and listening? I'm really glad that we were able to keep everyone on board.

Jenn:

Yeah. Me too, and nourish up their work. And yeah, I've been thinking about . . . I want to go in two directions. I want to say that I think the first time I met you, Melissa, was when we were doing the Canadian Association for Theatre Research practices for being in territory, part of the conference, thinking about how we often arrive as uninvited guests and my status is really problematic, and of course we've lost lots of nation-to-nation protocols and our own cultures too. But I had been part of some walks where I had more connection to place but we were in Musqueam territory, which is far from home. So not my nations, not my protocols. It was so weird to host that walk, which we had done with Jordan Wilson and his house posts. Because I was like, I can't lead the tour. I can't even offer welcome. It's not culturally appropriate to do that. Quelemia Sparrow was present. She offered welcome, which was so generous and not really necessary. But she extended that for us. But I think I met you taking turns walking your baby stroller. I was thinking about COVID and how we'd been walking for a while and then you were nursing and every time I nursed my baby, I was so thirsty. I needed to be drinking in one hand and then holding with other. And so, I offered you some water from my water bottle and you took it . . . remember when we used to share?

Melissa:

Yeah. Wasn't that just lovely? I mean, that's my first memory of you.

Jenn:

Yeah, that's a really a really beautiful foundation for a relationship.

Melissa:

And for me, I have spent ten years of my life on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh land. I'd gone off to the UK, done my graduate work and came back, and UBC had totally changed place names. They were in the Indigenous languages. I should have known all of that and I was learning it from you, which I think is kind of heartbreaking but beautiful that you were the one who hosted that walk. That was a place I did consider one of my homes. That's kind of the memory of it now, I think, and an issue that keeps coming up in the journal is people are talking about what does it mean to unsettle colonial notions of what a place is? Then for me, Vancouver is now always walking around the UBC campus when I was thirty-eight years old, twenty years after the first time I walked onto that campus. And that's what my first walk onto that campus should have been: learning those words, knowing the place names, looking at the house posts.

Jenn:

I think we know this because of colonialism, cultural loss, colonization of narrative which comes up in the issue a lot. Even those of us who are Indigenous to place don't always get to know the stories of those places. Like my high school sat on top of the burned out remains of an Algonquin family. I only found that out two years ago.

Melissa:

Oh my gosh.

Jenn:

Yeah. By meeting the grandson of a woman who used to peel potatoes with her uncle in that house telling stories. Wow. So that's weird, right? Like, it's weird to be a child and go every day to a place that has this untold but present story, like a living story. But that's been really held under erasure. I think that comes through in the issue . . . a lot people looking for new relationships to places that preexist them. To tap into and attune to the relationships that preexist them.

Melissa:

What it has meant, in the last few months, I'm not going to say revelations about unmarked graves, because I think for lots of people it was not at all a surprise. I can't say that I was surprised, but what does it mean to people who have occupied that land or been near that land to know that and negotiate it? I remember getting the text from you two days before we were supposed to meet for CATR 2021 and you just saying we can't, we can't do this. Marrie was going to acknowledge the land, and how could we ask her or anyone else at that time to do it? Yeah. I saved that text. I still have that text. And you wrote something like "Melissa, 700+ babies. Can we do this?" It was shattering.

Jenn:

Yeah, it did feel like to carry on with business as usual, it didn't feel like the right moment to do that. There are so many different embodied responses that are called upon by different moments in time and places. I mean, you're still going right now. It's still going. So, we do have to carry on, I guess, at some point and take care of one another.

Melissa:

Absolutely.

Jenn:

Yeah. Also, the stories of places are so full of so many bits, the hard bits and also the beautiful living bits. I think one thing that our circle of contributors has offered is a celebration of Indigenous presence and a reckoning with Indigenous self-determination and nation specific sovereignties, and that is a conversation I'm so happy to be having. I feel really lucky to be able to curate and nurture it.

Melissa:

Yeah.

Jenn:

I've been thinking . . . I'm going to segue, unless you don't want to. I think I've been thinking about the issue as a collection of all these people who are entering into relationships with the places they inhabit or their own ancestral lands and/or the places that they're visiting, and they're trying to build more responsible connections and really thoughtful connections. And then they show us that thinking, which is a really big gift. I think it's important for us to say *chi-miigwech* and thank you to all of the contributors. I've been thinking of us as a circle. In the Anishinaabe protocol of the circle, everyone is there because they have something to offer upon which each of us depends. So, you bring your giftings as co-editor and I bring my giftings, and the authors and performers bring their giftings, and we need each other. And I'm so happy that this isn't like talking heads offering best practices for how to enter into responsible relationship with territory, like universally, all responsible relationships to territory will work like blank.

Melissa:

It's not a "How to."

Jenn:

Yeah. And that doesn't even make sense because everyone's contacts are so distinctive. I think that's something really beautiful that's come out of the writing for me is all these models and modes, offerings for stuff people try.

Melissa:

Things I've never dreamed of.

Jenn:

And their practices, the people they work with, the thinkers they work with, the knowledge holders they lean on. We get all those folks in the room.

Melissa:

Yeah. And they keep coming back. You know, there are certain people that just keep coming back. Dylan (Robinson) is one. Leanne (Simpson) is another. Jill (Carter) speaks on our podcasts, but her voice comes in a lot. And I do have to say how grateful I am to Peter (Dickinson) for affording us this opportunity. Because you know, Peter was my postdoc supervisor when I was just beginning to explore some of this stuff. I never dreamed that someone would trust me to go forward, and I would never have done it on my own. Doing it with you has meant the world. When I was thinking about what our relationship is and you, all I could write was, well, Jenn is my partner. And you'll always be my partner. It's, it's just how it is. It is such a partnership. I'm glad that he's trusted us with this, and everyone else has too. I'm sure we'll make mistakes, and we certainly aren't trying to say we want to replace land acknowledgments or anything like that, but I think we're looking at how do you live in acknowledgment of the land in your daily life? And, like you said, the wealth of responses that we got to that question . . . should we talk about some of them?

Jenn:

We should. Is this the part where we just say our favourite things?

Melissa:

Yeah. That's what I've got.

Jenn:

So, we had this practice, for those who are listening, of noting two things that we felt that each piece offered up, but probably that's like four things about each piece and that might take us hours. I think we can just feel free to see how the conversation goes and maybe the authors and the readership can know that there's more great stuff.

Melissa:

Yeah. Well, I think they have to begin with you talking about Cara Mumford's short film "Sing Them Home," which she writes about because you're featured in it. Yeah?

Jenn:

I think it's something so special that Cara has. She has this way of living and a way of thinking and a way of creating that just honours the future. She has faith in the future possibility and works that way. For me, that's like magic. It's so beautiful. It's like she asks us to imagine that the film is prayer for Salmon Nation to return to the Michi Saagiig watershed. And that was certainly our practice. I think I was calling it salmon-road-trip-prayer-dance or something.

She shows us her thinking around that way of working. For me, that's hugely valuable. It's like native people are in the past and now we're moving on. This story is so common, and I'm so tired. But not just we're here and we survived and we're living and present and enjoying ourselves and making stuff and doing stuff and reclaiming our ancestral practices, but also we have more stuff to do. I really loved that being present. I think it's a really good way to begin.

Melissa:

Well, what I wanted to ask you about, because you were in the film, she talks in her piece about how dances enact survivance, Gerald Vizenor's idea of this combination of survival and resistance. I just love that. Was there a feeling of that when you approached the adventures of the different waters and the conversations you were having with the water? It was fascinating to me how certain sites were . . . I don't know if resistance is what you would say, but it was, there were . . . I love the part where she talks about rushing to a site before the sunset. You have these beautiful images at dusk.

Jenn:

I do live out of a gratitude for dancing and for being able to dance after our dancing practices were held under erasure, like we could be killed or go to jail or lose our kids for doing that. So, for sure, there's something beautiful about just being able to move my body in a self-determining and sovereign way. I love that, but mostly when we were going out, I was just thinking we get to do the poem, we get to do Leanne Simpson's poem, and we get to start at Chi'nibiish where Salmon Nation enters into the watershed and then we just got to follow with them. I was just wanting to see in the way that I can, as my human self, with very limited relationship to Salmon Nation, because they're not here and they aren't from the home territory, we have more eel and stuff. I wanted to see what it was like for them, just to imagine with them for a little while and to feel what it will feel like when they're back, that feels really powerful to be able to do that. Yeah. Miigwech for asking that question.

Melissa:

Elan (Marchinko). I love this idea of what it might mean, I'm quoting her, "to refuse to settle into my new home." She's talking about being in Bellingham, and "with Bellingham's Whatcom Falls

Park as my performance space, I present a score for unsettling into the Pacific Northwest.” That jumped out at me. Also, she talks about Bethany Hughes’s proposal of settlers engaging in a mindful practice of guesting on land, built on these relationships of humility, reciprocity, and nurturing. That really jumped out at me, and her work exploring that space when she was almost transient during COVID and moving around different places.

Jenn:

Yeah, I think Elan offers this open-ended score for moving and body relating and guesting in relation to place. I didn’t know guesting and hosting were leaving such an impression on me. But then, when I was teaching yesterday, I found that language just coming out, and it was really helpful. I love that she suggests that we can be hosted by lichen. I mean, what does it mean to be hosted by lichen? I loved that, and it just offers the sense that we’re asking not just permission of land-owning nations, which is problematic, like all of that anyway but asking permission to be in place and saying hello to all the relations who are there. I really appreciate that.

Melissa:

Well, there’s a section about an oak tree. She says something about worlding with an oak tree. That’s just beautiful and her consideration of those things.

Jenn:

And so many of the prompts for our own movement are offered as questions. Questions about our relationships. The openness and the invitation of that is really generous. And she’s “stumbling towards decolonization.” I appreciate when no one thinks they’ve done it all perfectly, there’s more to do.

Melissa:

Well, the images that she’s chosen to feature, she’s not in those images, and that’s a choice that she made. I think there’s a real responsibility reflected in that. Leah (Decter).

Jenn:

Leah’s so good at sticking it to the nation states. Such good work.

Melissa:

Yeah. She just had me thinking a lot about monuments and the narratives they put out there and what it means to do the work, to embed a different narrative. And these pictures of her out in Manitoba, in the winter, doing this performance work. It’s so moving. This tiny figure in this parka. The work she does, there’s a hugeness to it and to her heart.

Jenn:

Her work is also connecting to her own ancestors, and that’s a response to so many calls that I’ve heard from Indigenous scholars working on settler colonialism and settler Indigenous relationships to say, think about where you come from and where your ancestral lands are and who your ancestors are and what your teachings and cultural practices are. I think Leah does that in a very beautiful way. And you have several pieces in the issue from diasporic communities or people from diasporic communities then thinking through what it means to be on stolen lands and welcomed into the nation state. I wasn’t thinking so much about monuments in Leah’s piece, but I think it’s because I go to this provincial park and I harvest medicine, and I’m drinking some tea from that

place right now. And then I steal the medicines. I think it's in my home territory. I make offerings. I asked them, the plants, that they're okay to come. But then I hide them in my winter jacket, or I hide them in my backpack, and then I hope that doesn't get me in trouble or make me give it back. You know, it's a way of connecting to my ancestors who were chased out of parks for sure. But I was there on the long weekend and there were all these people, all these people, it's not really what I go for, but they were saying like, oh, this is Canadian wilderness. Like, this is Canadian. It's so weird to eavesdrop on that, but I also love how Leah writes about that, the insidious affirmation of Canadianness and Canadian sovereignty that is connected to those places.

Melissa:

Well, I'm talking about her grandfather; he's a presence in the essay because her work is sort of inspired by him. He's very present in the piece.

Jenn:

That's right. Yeah. I think also I wanted to mention one thing that I got excited about Leah's work. I really appreciate her call to practise remembering otherwise. And then I was thinking, oh, people Indigenous to that territory do that anyway. We remember other stuff already; we're already doing it. Remembering otherwise is a project that we're all involved with, but I think we're differently involved with.

Melissa:

Oh, definitely. Yeah, no, that's something I had highlighted . . . a process for remembering otherwise and rejecting colonial narratives.

We want to talk about Nazli (Akhtari).

Jenn:

Oh yeah. This walking practice, walking is commonplace. And being something shared between human and nonhuman beings, it is this ideal site for disruption. I think this is a really exciting idea. Walking out, walking off, walking backwards against dominant narratives of colonial progress, giving yourself space. There are so many complex and nuanced investments in what appears on the surface to be simple.

Melissa:

Yeah. I took away from it this idea of walking as lessons in unlearning what she calls Canada's pedagogies of citizenships and modalities of settlement. And where she talks about the guide she had to read about citizenship and her indoctrination and walking out of . . . or backing out of the citizenship ceremony, just a kind of a refusal of that very closed packaging of a narrative. There's some inclusion of Indigenous people, but settler colonialism certainly isn't part of the conversation, it's ongoing, you know? Yeah, how unsettling that whole process was for her.

Jenn:

It's such a strong perspective to have. Oh yeah. Okay. Here's where it happens for me, where Nazli says "to embody diasporic experiences and conditions on Indigenous lands invites a reterritorialization of our imaginations." There's so much destabilization about easy relationships to place.

Melissa:

And Jimena (Ortuzar).

Jenn:

Another landed immigrant story. I can't stop thinking about this practice about Jimena returning to her childhood home in Toronto, where she arrived, via St John's and Mexico and Argentina. I've worked with Jimena, we were in the same PhD cohort, so I worked with her since 2011. She always knows what to do. She just knows what to do in performance so that all of the elements are there. And often it's not simple, but it's not too complicated, just like on the surface, the mechanics of the thing seemed to really address the thing. I love both of the practices that she offers in this work, so walking on edges and trying to remain unsettled, and that comes out of all of this hemispheric thinking and cartography and disruption of cartographic processes, which are so colonial and classist, and keeping that all in mind by walking the edges of things a little bit precariously. I want to do it, you know? I just want to engage in the practice and see where it sits for me with my own situations and contexts.

Yeah. Then, as she re-walks this route from school, she walks this child path, and I'm really happy that children are a part of our special issue. I think if it's not intergenerational then it's not really making sense and not as true as it could be. I appreciate her childhood self being brought into the practice and being given a gift of new knowledge layered in about relation to place but also a kind of . . . I don't even know if it's an empathy, but like a solidarity with experiences of shame around poverty and well, that's so cool. Like myself, my grownup self, having solidarity with my childhood self and then taking her for a walk again.

Melissa:

Taking care of her.

Jenn:

Yeah.

Melissa:

In both Jimena's and Nazli's pieces, I did connect to this idea of the feeling of being uprooted and disoriented, out of place when you're somewhere new. I mean being here, sort of being force-fed the narrative of America and its discovery and what it means to resist that and to know the true story of what happened here. Feeling unsettled and uprooted when you arrive and then always knowing. Just knowing that you're living amidst this fiction . . . and what are you doing to resist it?

Jenn:

It's really, I'm thinking about this, living in the fictions, and something I love is that her own personal story is about the fictions of each of the places that she lived and how from her childhood perspective that was world-making; all of the ways that she thought things and interpreted them and created the world in which she lived. That is very helpful for us to know . . . that as grown people we're also making the story of the world that we live in, and it can be informed by all kinds of stuff. It's cautionary in a way, and it's also always already what we're doing.

Melissa:

Yeah.

Jenn:

So, yeah. How do we do that?

Melissa:

And how do we do it for our kids?

Jenn:

Yes. How do we support an honest and honest approach or . . .

Melissa:

Oh! Manifest Destiny!

Jenn:

A research practice that like helps little ones research who they are.

Melissa:

Sorry. I said Manifest Destiny because that was the expression I was thinking of when I talked about the American narrative. I'm actually glad that I couldn't remember it because that means I've been doing some good work!

Jenn:

It's not just on the tip of your tongue.

Melissa:

On the tip of my tongue!

Jenn:

Terra Nullius!

Melissa:

What do they call that big lie?

Jenn:

Very good.

Melissa:

Ken (Wilson).

Jenn:

Would you like to go first, or would you like me to jump in?

Melissa:

I met Ken at a PSi (Performance Studies international) conference and I saw him give a paper that talked about his walking practice in Saskatchewan. I can't remember if I saw him first or he saw me first and then we talked after and then went and saw each other's papers. Ken works with the idea of unsettling these notions through an embodied walking practice. What does it mean? He says, "Might embodied land acknowledgment enable settlers to come into a noncolonial and nonextractive

relationship with the land where they are walking?” He comes back to this thing that Dylan (Robinson) talks about through Sara Ahmed of the performative and the nonperformative. I really think that the walking work is a performative whereas the land acknowledgment can be so much of a nonperformative and, you know, I’ve said it, so I’ve done it, so I’m done. There’s Ken on the side of the road in Saskatchewan working it out in the heat. Ken’s doing work. That is exciting. And he’s in it, you know, he’s really in it. I think those photos that he shows, those images from the side of the road and what it is and the conversations he’s having with the people he meets, but also with himself and with the land. I’m really looking forward to reading his dissertation and seeing where this journey takes him.

Jenn:

Yeah. There is something lonely about the Ken figure on the road under the sky, just continuing. I was talking to Marrie about when you’re taking a drive in the rain, and everything is all lush. She was like, oh my gosh, in Saskatchewan, it took us two hours to walk to the tree. Totally different context in that Treaty 4 territory. Ken, first of all, does a bunch of work for us that we were going to do as part of our editorial, outlining histories around how land acknowledgments came up or came about in institutions and some critiques of land acknowledgments. Really valuable. I love that he doesn’t know, you know, he knows he can’t switch paradigms. He’s like, okay, I’ve got this. I’m learning the paradigm from these scholars and folks that I know. And I see the paradigm, like, can I, how close can I get to that paradigm? They don’t think it’s even necessarily ethical for me to appropriate a cosmology or a way of being. I think that’s great. I think he doesn’t resolve very many of the questions that he asks about what he needs to do, the thing that he’s doing, or how effective or extractive it might possibly be. I think that’s great. That’s the place where he is, living with the questions. Like you say, he’s on this road, and he’s just trying it out with a lot of dedication. Something that reminds me of is just how each contributor is entering from a different place. There are lots of roads up the mountain, and they’re just showing us where they’re at with the questions, and it’s a big mess. Settler colonialism is like, oh man. And we’re in it. So now what? And Ken’s like, I’m not sure, but also this thinking about it.

Melissa:

And the honesty, I mean, there’s something really bald about Ken’s approach to all of it that I really appreciated when I saw him give his paper. There is a humility there that I think is, I don’t know. It was one of those moments, you know what they’re like when you see a paper and you go, I want to know more, and I want to follow this.

Jenn:

Yeah. The honesty, and especially thinking about acknowledgment as arising partly out of protocols of arrival and coming into someone’s territory or staying on the edge and then lighting a fire and saying, I’m here and then waiting to be invited in, but like, you’re not invited in, if you say, this is who I am, these are my ancestors and my family members. These are my intentions. And if you’re like, well, my intention is to just come in and take everything that you have. Don’t . . .

Melissa:

Think you’re . . .

Jenn:

Permitted. You should go back and think about that.

Melissa:

Yeah. Well, that's something else that all of this has really made me think about. We've talked a lot about sort of exploding the scholarly framework and pushing outside of the way you're supposed to do a journal issue. I mean, that's why we're having a conversation right now, to supplement the way we were looking at the sounds of walking and now we want to see the worlds we're in and connect. But this idea that all the work should start with who you are and how you're doing it in relationship to the land you're doing it on. It almost seems nonsensical to me now not to do that, to just appear into work . . . no, it's happening somewhere. And that is informing the work and giving thanks to the land that's allowing you to work from that place.

Jenn:

Yeah. You've got to give back.

Melissa:

You do, plus it . . .

Jenn:

Feels good. It feels . . .

Melissa:

It does.

Jenn:

Yeah. I want to bring my relatives' presence, you know?

Melissa:

Yeah, yeah. Emma (Morgan-Thorp).

Jenn:

Emma.

Melissa:

VR (virtual reality). What can VR do for us? This became a really important question during COVID, you know, because yes, we could all get outside, well, depending on weather and that, but we could get out on the land that we were on, but there were lots of places no one could go or be, and what does it (VR) mean? But is VR also sort of a completing thing; when you experience something through VR, do you feel empathy, and then does it end, and do you not care about the land or the animals? I think that's a really fascinating question. I'm often asking that of performance. Dylan (Robinson) talks about settlers' tears and then do they walk away and pat themselves on the back and go, "Well, that's done now. Let's go get supper."

Jenn:

Actually, Emma's staying with this question without answering it reminded me a little bit of Ken's hesitancy to make a declaration about what that experience can be for different people to experience a forest in space or in a place, a space under threat of logging pipelines. What that can mean for different people. So, this autoethnographic approach feels really right for this piece. That's really smart. I love these moments of missing some of the sounds. That really does set apart the VR

experience as a particular experience, but not *the* experience. Yeah, I don't think it's really promising to be the experience either.

Melissa:

No.

Jenn:

There was one other thing . . . this idea that being observed in place, being witnessed in place by the many relations who are in that place is different than being a spectator. That feels very important to keep in conversation. I think being witnessed by lands and watersheds and plants and animals puts us in a different position than when we're just trying to look at them differently, you know?

Melissa:

Well, and is VR nonperformative in that, in that way? I mean because you are "doing" but you're not doing and being witnessed. Yeah. I don't have an answer.

Jenn:

I'm really happy to have this in the issue. I'm also happy to see the question of the consequences, the affect, and the affective power to see it actually tracked in progress in land protection. To see this kind of reporting and what the conflicts are and what the different bodies are doing to conserve the lands or to work with who has title, who has the right to determine what happens with that land. And then we get this kind of report at the end, which is rather positive. No conclusions drawn, but yeah. I think it's delightful to see the speculation and the artful moment, and then the kind of real-world reporting going on.

Melissa:

Yeah. It's a lovely combination and that's happening in a lot of this work. We have reflective parts of it and then different forms, and I'm really glad that we're breaking out of the prescribed ways of writing papers. And as you know, word count and things like that, we kind of threw them out the window, and I'm really happy.

Jenn:

Yeah. I guess we did do that.

Melissa:

And there were things that were said, and when you have more questions than answers and the questions are really thoughtful . . .

Jenn:

Yeah. It felt important also at this time where there are so many different stresses, which is maybe all the time, and we're just becoming more deeply aware of that. But to let authors and performers have the space to do what they felt that they could offer. I'm thinking about Ashley McAskill's relaxed conferencing videos that she offered, or maybe they offered, I'm not sure of their pronouns. But Ash offered these protocols for relaxed conferencing as part of where our podcast arose out of. And they were like, do less, do less. If you want to do more, then do more, but there's a prescription that we've adopted, but we haven't necessarily finished questioning. I liked that. I loved that we did a

podcast for that conference. I love that the podcast is part of this special issue and that we have many voices and many sounds of place.

Melissa:

Yeah. And just the way they're curated and brought together in a time when that was physically impossible for any of us. I've told people who listen to it, do so while you're walking, and they've really enjoyed that. Everyone needs an hour walk, and it's a perfect hour, 59 minutes.

Jenn:

It's lovely too, because we all would have brought the places that we were coming from into our gathering if we had gathered in Montreal on Mohawk territory. But instead, we got these deeper presencings of many territories across Turtle Island, and that was great. I liked meeting people in connection to the relationships they have with other beings.

Melissa:

I really liked it because oftentimes I feel like being down here, I should be extricating myself from the conversations in Canada. But no. We're all on Turtle Island. It was nice not to make rules about who's allowed in, and who's not because of settler-imposed borders.

Jenn:

Great. Yeah. Completely. We have one last contributor to talk about. Really not one, like six!

Melissa:

There's just so much great stuff in Alana's (Gerecke) piece and the work she did. There are so many artists in the piece and their thoughtfulness. I think of Lee Su-Feh writing out her land acknowledgment on a napkin and writing it thousands of times. And Alana's thinking about how place colours or changes, what it does for process and situatedness, and seeing some of the really evocative work, the art that's coming out of it is so exciting. Even the weather! Alana's podcast piece really shows that; the idea of talking about rain and the rain dancing on her body and the senses and everything.

Jenn:

Yeah. There's big presencing of dancers and movement practitioners in this piece, speaking to how their processes, their performance processes and then also their performances that they share publicly connect to their understanding of their responsibilities to place. The knowledge that comes through the body is so vividly presented in the work, like when we move our bodies, even breathing is like a movement of the body. We understand things differently, and that helps us to know who we are more. There are so many beautiful moments in the piece, and maybe I'll just do a quick shout out to Liv Davies, who's Algonquin Anishinaabe. I got to see as part of this piece for the first time this dance that she did for the river that I belong to. That's so special seeing her in my home territory when she's been on the West Coast for so long. I think Alana did so much work foregrounding and amplifying so many voices. But she asked people who were really smart about the work that they do. I really appreciate this piece.

Melissa:

And her stewardship over the piece. I found that she was really responsible to the artists she was working with and appreciating their time and their labour in a way that is so often overlooked, especially during a time where a lot of artists were facing real financial peril.

Jenn:

Yes. That's true. We should probably say thank you to the Gatherings: Archival and Oral Histories of Performance partnership development grant/Stephen Johnson for giving us some money to help pay artists. We will keep having the conversation. Maybe that's what I want to say. This is like an offering of who was in the circle at the time and what they were bringing in that moment in a very honest way. There's so much more to be done and we'll keep doing it.

Melissa:

And it's not ever going to be complete, which is the most exciting part of it.

Jenn:

As long as the land's here and as long as we're here.

Melissa:

And our kids, I hope, I hope they're going to keep walking.

The video cuts to footage of the ancestral lands of the Kaw, Osage, and Pawnee, which Melissa currently occupies. The video closes with footage of ancestral Michi Saagiig territory, which Jenn inhabits.